

A ROSE IN JUNE.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD,”

“OMBRA,” “MAY,”

&c. &c.

“Rose, thou hast thorns,” said I,
“That prick who toucheth thee.”
“Yea, passer-by,
The unwary hand that plucks at me.
But I, although to sweetness born,
Whene’er the wild wind blows,”
(Thus breathed the Rose)
“Feel in my heart the angry thorn.”
Song.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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A ROSE IN JUNE.

CHAPTER I.

“**M**ARTHA, Martha, thou art careful
and troubled about many things.
Let the child alone—she will never be
young again if she should live a hundred
years!”

These words were spoken in the garden
of Dinglefield Rectory on a very fine sum-
mer day a few years ago. The speaker
was Mr. Damerel, the Rector, a middle-
aged man with very fine, somewhat worn
features, a soft benignant smile, and, as

everybody said who knew him, the most charming manners in the world. He was a man of very elegant mind as well as manners. He did not preach often, but when he did preach all the educated persons in his congregation felt that they had very choice fare indeed set before them. I am afraid the poor folk liked the Curate best, but then the Curate liked them best, and it mattered very little to any man or woman of refinement what sentiment existed between the cottagers and the Curate. Mr. Damerel was perfectly kind and courteous to everybody, gentle and simple, who came in his way, but he was not fond of poor people in the abstract. He disliked everything that was unlovely, and alas ! there are a great many unlovely things in poverty.

The Rectory garden at Dinglefield is a delightful place. The house is on the summit of a little hill, or rather table-land, for in the front, towards the Green, all is level and soft as becomes an English village; but on the other side the descent begins towards the lower country, and from the drawing-room windows and the lawn, where Mr. Damerel now sat, the view extended over a great plain, lighted up with links of the river, and fading into unspeakable hazes of distance, such as were the despair of every artist, and the delight of the fortunate people who lived there, and were entertained day by day with the sight of all the sunsets, the mid-day splendours, the flying shadows, and soft prolonged twilights. Mr. Damerel was fond of saying that no place he knew

so lent itself to idleness as this. "Idleness! I speak as the foolish ones speak," he would say, "for what occupation could be more ennobling than to watch those gleams and shadows—all nature spread out before you, and demanding attention, though so softly that only they who have ears hear? I allow, my gentle Nature here does not shout at you, and compel your regard, like her who dwells among the Alps, for instance. My dear, you are always practical—but so long as you leave me my landscape I want little more."

Thus the Rector would discourse. It was very little more he wanted—only to have his garden and lawn in perfect order, swept and trimmed every morning like a lady's boudoir, and refreshed with every variety of flower: to have his table not

heavily loaded with vulgar English joints, but daintily covered, and oh ! so daintily served ; the linen always fresh, the crystal always fine, the ladies dressed as ladies should be : to have his wine, of which he said he took very little, always fine, of choice vintage, and with a bouquet which rejoiced the heart : to have plenty of new books : to have quiet, undisturbed by the noise of the children, or any other troublesome noise such as broke the harmony of nature : and especially undisturbed by bills and cares, such as, he declared, at once shorten the life and take all pleasure out of it. This was all he required : and surely never man had tastes more moderate, more innocent, more virtuous and refined.

The little scene to which I have thus abruptly introduced the reader took place

in the most delicious part of the garden. The deep stillness of noon was over the sunshiny world; part of the lawn was brilliant in light; the very insects were subdued out of their buzz of activity by the spell of the sunshine; but here, under the lime-tree, there was grateful shade, where everything took breath. Mr. Damerel was seated in a chair which had been made expressly for him, and which combined the comfort of soft cushions with such a rustic appearance as became its habitation out of doors; under his feet was a soft Persian rug in colours blended with all the harmony which belongs to the Eastern loom; at his side a pretty carved table, with a raised rim, with books upon it, and a thin Venice glass containing a rose.

Another Rose, the Rose of my story, was half-sitting, half-reclining on the grass at his feet—a pretty light figure in a soft muslin dress, almost white, with bits of soft rose-coloured ribbon here and there. She was the eldest child of the house. Her features I do not think were at all remarkable, but she had a bloom so soft, so delicate, so sweet, that her father's fond title for her, "a Rose in June," was everywhere acknowledged as appropriate. A rose of the very season of roses was this Rose. Her very smile, which came and went like breath, never away for two minutes together, yet never lasting beyond the time you took to look at her, was flowery too, I can scarcely tell why. For my own part, she always reminded me not so much of a garden-rose in its glory, as of

a branch of wild roses all blooming and smiling from the bough, here pink, here white, here with a dozen ineffable tints. Her hair was light-brown, with the least little curl in the world just about her forehead, but shining like satin on her pretty head; her eyes, too, were brown, with a dancing gleam of light in each; the delicate eyebrows curved, the eyelashes curved, the lips curved, all wavy and rounded. Life and light shone out of the girl, and sweet, unconscious happiness. In all her life she had never had any occasion to ask herself was she happy. Of course she was happy! Did not she live, and was not that enough?

Rose Damerel was the last dainty ornament of his house in which her father delighted most. He had spoiled her

lessons when she was younger because of his pleasure in her and her pretty looks, and he interfered now almost altogether with that usefulness in a house which is demanded by every principle of duty from the eldest daughter of a large family; for alas! there was a large family, a thing which was the cause of all trouble to the Damerels. Had there been only Rose, and perhaps one brother, how much more pleasantly would everything have gone! In that case there might have been fewer lines in the brow of the third person whom Mr. Damerel spoke to, but whom the reader has not yet seen.

What Mrs. Damerel was like in her June of life, when she married her husband, and was a Rose too, like her daughter, it is difficult to tell. Life, which

often makes so little real change, brings out much that is latent both of good and evil. I have said she was a Rose, like her daughter—and so, indeed, she was still, so far as formal documents went; but, somehow or other, the name had gone from her. She had acquired from her husband, at first in joke and loving banter of her early cares of housekeeping, while they were still no more than married lovers, the name of Martha, and by degrees that name had so fastened to her, that no one recognised her by any other. Nobody out of her own family knew that it was not her name, and of course the children, some of whom were indignant at the change, could not set it right. In her letters she signed herself “R. M. Damerel”—never Rose; and her corre-

spondents took it for granted that the "M" stood for Martha.

That she was careful and troubled about many things was the Rector's favourite joke. "My careful wife—my anxious wife," he called her, and, poor soul, not without a cause. For it stands to reason that when a man must not be disturbed about bills, for example, his wife must be, and doubly; when a man cannot bear the noise of children, his wife must, and doubly; and even when a clergyman dislikes poverty, and unlovely cottages, and poor rooms, which are less sweet than the lawn and the roses, why his wife must, and make up for his fastidiousness. She had eight children, and a husband of the most refined tastes of any clergyman in England, and an income—not so much as

might have been desired. Alas ! how few of us have so much as might be desired ! Good rich people, you who have more money than you want, how good you ought to be to us, out of pure gratitude to heaven for the fact that you can pay your bills when you like, and never need to draw lines on your forehead with thinking which is imperative, and which will wait !

Mrs. Damerel was welldressed—she could not help it—for that was one of the Rector's simple luxuries. Fortunately, in summer it is not so difficult to be well-dressed at a small cost. She had on (if anyone cares to know) a dress of that light brown linen which everybody has taken to wearing of late, over an old black silk petticoat, which, having been

good once, looked good even when tottering on the brink of the grave. She was no more than forty, and but for her cares, would have looked younger; but June was long over for this Rose, and the lines in her forehead contradicted the softness of the natural curves in her features. Those lines were well ruled in, with rigid straightening, by an artist who is very indifferent to curves and prettiness, and had given a certain closeness, and almost sternness, to the firm-shutting of her mouth.

I am afraid, though she had great command of herself, that Mr. Damerel's delightful and unbroken serenity had an irritating effect on his wife, in addition to the effects produced by her burden of care; and irritation works with a finer

and more delicate pencil than even anxiety. She had come out this morning to ask Rose's help with the children, to whom, among her other fatigues, she had lately begun to give lessons, finding the daily governess from the village impracticable. She had been called away to other duties, and the children were alone in the schoolroom. She had just asked her daughter to go in and take charge of them, and I scarcely think—let alone the answer she had just received from her husband—that the sight of this cool, fresh, delightful leisure in direct contrast with the hot house, and the schoolroom, where all the children were more tiresome than usual by reason of the heat, had any agreeable effect upon Mrs. Damerel's nerves. Such a contrast to one's own

frets and annoyances seldom is deeply consolatory.

“Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things—let the child alone!”

The Rector smiled, yet his tone was one of playful reproof. His was the superior position. With the soft air fanning him, and the shade refreshing him, and the beautiful landscape displaying itself for him, and all the flowers blooming, the leaves waving, the butterflies fluttering, the pretty daughter prattling, all for his pleasure, master of the creation as he was, he was in a position to reprove any harsh and hasty intruder who brought into this Paradise a discordant note.

“I do not want to burden her youth,” said Mrs. Damerel, with a resolute quiet

in her voice, which her children knew the sound of, and which they all learned to recognise as the tone of suppressed irritation, "but I think it would do Rose no harm, Herbert, to make herself useful a little and help me."

"Useful!" he said, with a half-pitying smile—"the other roses are still less useful. What would you have the child do? Let her get the good of this beautiful morning. Besides, she is useful to me."

"Ah," said Mrs. Damerel, faltering slightly, "if she is doing anything for you, Herbert!"

"My dear," said the Rector, with a gentle elevation of his eyebrows, "don't confound things which are different. Doing something is your sole idea of human

use, I know. No, Rose is doing nothing—it helps me to have her there. She is part of the landscape. Suppose you sit down yourself, instead of fretting, and enjoy it.”

“Enjoy it!” Mrs. Damerel echoed, with faint irony. She heard already the noise of the schoolroom growing louder and louder, and Mary, the housemaid, stood at the door, looking out anxiously, shading her eyes from the sun, for the mistress. Some one was waiting, she knew, in the hall, to see her; pray heaven not some one with a bill! “I am afraid I must go back to my work,” she said, “and I hope you will come to me, Rose, as soon as your papa can spare you. I have no more time now.”

Rose stirred uneasily, half-rising, and,

with a prick of conscience, made a feeble attempt to detain her. "But, mamma—" she began, as her mother moved away, crossing the broad sunshine of the lawn with hasty steps. Mrs. Damerel did not or would not hear, but went swiftly into the house as they watched her, meeting Mary, who was coming with a message. Her light dress shone out for a moment in the fierce blaze of the sunshine, and then disappeared.

When she was out of sight the Rector, changing his position with the leisureliness of extreme comfort, putting undermost the leg which had been uppermost, said softly,

"What a pity that your mother does not see the beauty of repose more than she does! If I had not learnt long ago

to take no notice, I don't know what I might not have been worried into by now."

"Mamma never worries any one," said Rose, flushing at once with instantaneous opposition. The more she felt guilty towards her mother, the less she would hear a word to her discredit. She blazed up quite hot and fiery, with a loyalty which was a very good quality in its way, though not so good as helping in the schoolroom. The father put forth his fine ivory hand, and patted her pretty head.

"Quite right, dear, quite right," he said; "always stand up for your mother. And it is true, she never worries anybody; but I wish she had more perception of the excellence of repose."

"Perhaps if she had we should not be

able to enjoy it so much," said the girl, still giving expression to a slight compunction.

"Very well said, Rose; and it is quite possible you are right again. We should not be so comfortable, and the house would not go on wheels as it does, if she thought more of her own ease. One star differeth from another star in glory," said Mr. Damerel, who was fond of quoting Scripture, almost the only point in him which savoured slightly of the Church. "At the same time, my Rose in June, when you marry yourself—as I suppose you will one day—remember that there is nothing that worries a man like being too constantly reminded of the struggle and wear and tear that life demands. He has enough of that outside in the world," said the

Rector, gazing out over the fair prospect before him, and again changing the position of his legs, "without having it thrust upon him in what ought to be the sanctity of his home."

Rose looked at her father with a little dawning wonder mingled with the admiration she felt for him. As a picture, Mr. Damerel was perfect. He had a fine head, with beautiful and refined features, and that paleness which has always been found to be so much more interesting than brighter colouring. He lay half-reclined in his easy-chair, with his eyes dreamily regarding the landscape, and the book he had been reading closed over his hand. That hand was in itself a patent of gentility, and his whole appearance confirmed the title.

Somewhat fragile—a piece of delicate porcelain among the rough delft of this world—not able to endure much knocking about; fastidious, loving everything that was beautiful, and supporting with difficulty that which was not, the Rector looked like a choice example of the very height of civilization and refinement. And everything around him was in harmony. The velvet lawn, on which no fallen leaf was allowed to lie for an hour; the pretty house behind, perfection of English comfort and daintiness; the loose morning clothes, not more than half clerical, and perfectly unpretending, yet somehow more fine, better cut, and better fitting than other people's clothes.

Rose had for him that enthusiasm of admiration which a girl often enter-

tains for a handsome and gentle-minded father, who takes the trouble to enter into her feelings, and make her his companion. I do not know any more exquisite sentiment in humanity. She loved him entirely, and he was to her a very model of everything that was most delightful, kind, tender, and beautiful. But as she looked at this model of man, his words somehow struck and vibrated upon a new chord in the girl's mind.

“The struggle and wear and tear that life demands.” Did Mr. Damerel have much of that “outside,” as he said? He resumed his reading, but his daughter did not look again at the book of poetry which lay open on her knee. Somehow a reflection of the pucker on her mother's brow had got into her heart—her mother,

whom Rose loved, but who was not an idol and model of excellence, like the gentle and graceful being at her side. The contrast struck her for perhaps the first time in her life. What was the meaning of it? Was it because Mrs. Damerel did not understand the beauty of repose, or because a woman's business in this world is more detailed and engrossing than a man's?

“Fancy mamma spending the whole morning out of doors, reading poetry!” Rose said to herself, with an involuntary silent laugh over the absurdity of the notion. No doubt it was because of the difference between man and woman; one of those disabilities which people talked about; and perhaps (Rose went on philosophising) women are wrong to absorb them-

selves in this way in the management of their houses, and ought to rule their domestic affairs with a lighter hand, not interfering with all the little minutiae, and making slaves of themselves.

She looked towards the house as she mused, and the vague compunction which had been in her mind sharpened into something like a prick of conscience. It was delightful being out here, in the soft shade of the lime-trees, watching when she liked the flitting shadows over the plain below, and the gleam of the river here and there among the trees—reading when she liked “Balaustion’s Adventure,” which was the book on her knee.

The significance of the old story embedded in that book did not for the moment strike her. I think she was, on the whole,

rather annoyed with Mr. Browning for having brought down the story of a woman's sacrifice, all for love, into the region of even poetic reason. To Rose, at that period of her development, it seemed the most ideal climax of life to die for the man she loved. What could be more beautiful, more satisfactory? Such an ending would reconcile one, she thought, to any suffering; it gave her heart a thrill of high sensation indescribable in words. How sweet the air was, how lovely all the lights!

Rose was just enough of an artist to be able to talk about "the lights" with some faint understanding of what she meant. She was in a kind of soft Elysium, penetrated by the thousand sensations of the morning, the quiet, the flattering soft air

that caressed her, the poetry, the society, the beauty all around. But then there came that sharp little prick of conscience. Perhaps she ought to go in and offer the help her mother wanted. Rose did not jump up to do this, as she would have done at once (she felt sure) had she been required to die, like Iphigenia, for her country, or, like Alcestis, for her husband. The smaller sacrifice was somehow less easy; but it disturbed her a little in the perfection of her gentle enjoyment, and dictated a few restless movements which caught her father's eye. He turned and looked at her, asking fretfully with a look, what was the matter, for he did not like to be disturbed.

“Perhaps,” said Rose, inquiringly, and

appealing to him with another look, "I ought to go in and see what is wanted. Perhaps I could be of some use to mamma."

Mr. Damerel smiled. "Use?" he said. "Has your mother bitten you with her passion for use? You are not of the useful kind, take my word for it; and make yourself happy, like your namesakes, who toil not, neither do they spin."

"But perhaps—" said Rose softly to herself—her father gave her a friendly little nod and returned to his book—and she had to solve her problem without his assistance. She tried to do it, sitting on the grass, and it was a long and rather troublesome process. It would have been much more easily and briefly settled, had

she gone into the schoolroom; but then I am afraid Rose did not wish it to be solved that way.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. Damerel went back into the house with a countenance much less placid than that of her husband. I scarcely know why it is that the contrast of perfect repose and enjoyment with anxiety, work, and care should irritate the worker as it invariably does; but here indeed there was reason enough; for Mrs. Damerel felt that the two people luxuriating in total absence of care on this delightful morning ought to have taken a considerable share

with her in her labours and lighten the burden she was now obliged to bear alone. This mingled a sharpness of feeling with her toils. People who interpret human nature coarsely—and they are, perhaps, the majority—would have said that Mrs. Damerel was jealous of her husband's preference for Rose's society, and this would have been a total and vulgar mistake; but she had in her mind a feeling which it is difficult to explain, which for the moment made her irritation with Rose more strong than her irritation with Rose's father. He was, in the first place, a man—grand distinction, half contemptuous, half respectful, with which women of Mrs. Damerel's age (I don't say young women often do it, at least consciously—except in the case of their fathers and brothers) account for and

make up their minds to so many things. I am not attempting to account for this sentiment, which is so similar to that with which men in their turn regard women; I only acknowledge its existence. He was a man, brought up as all men are (I still quote Mrs. Damerel's thoughts, to which she seldom or never gave expression), to think of themselves first, and expect everything to give in to them. But Rose had none of these privileges. What her mother as a woman had to take upon her, Rose had an equal right to take too. Mrs. Damerel herself could not forget, though everybody else did, that she had been a Rose too, in her proper person; the time even since that miraculous period was not so far off to her as to the others; but before she was Rose's age she had been mar-

ried, and had already become, to some extent, Mr. Damerel's shield and buckler against the world and its annoyances.

And here was Rose growing up as if she, instead of being a woman as nature made her, was herself one of the privileged class, to whom women are the ministers. This annoyed Mrs. Damerel more, perhaps, than the facts justified; it gave her a sense of injured virtue as well as feeling. It would be the ruin of the girl—it was wrong to let her get into such ways. The mother was angry, which is always painful and aggravates everything. She was too proud to struggle with her daughter, or to exact help which was not freely given; for Rose was no longer a child to be sent hither and thither and directed what to do. And Mrs. Damerel was no more perfect than Rose

was—she had her own difficulties of temper like other people. This was one of them—that she drew back within herself when she felt her appeal refused or even left without response. She went in with a little scorn, a little pride, a good deal of anger and more of mortification. “I must do everything myself, it appears,” she said, with a swelling of the heart which was very natural, I think.

After the sun on the lawn, it was very warm indoors, and the schoolroom was very noisy indeed by the time she had got rid of the applicants in the hall, one of whom (most respectful and indeed obsequious, and perfectly willing to accept her excuses, but yet a dun notwithstanding) had come to say that he had many heavy payments to make up, &c.—and if Mrs. Damerel

could oblige him—? Mrs. Damerel could not oblige him, but he was very civil and full of apologies for troubling her.

I do not by any means intend to say that the Rector's wife was tortured by perpetual struggling with her creditors. It was not so bad as that. The difficulty was rather to keep going, to be not too much in debt to anyone, to pay soon enough to preserve her credit, and yet get as long a day as possible. Mrs. Damerel had come by long practice to have the finest intuition in such matters. She knew exactly how long a tailor or a wine-merchant would wait for his money without acerbation of temper, and would seize that crowning moment to have him paid by hook or by crook. But by thus making a fine art of her bills, she added infinitely to

her mental burdens—for a woman must never forget anything or neglect anything when she holds her tradespeople so very delicately in hand.

The schoolroom, as I have just said, was very noisy, not to say uproarious, when she got back to it, and it was hard not to remember that Rose ought to have been there. There were five children in it, of various ages and sizes. The two big boys were both at Eton. The eldest, Bertie, who was bright and clever, was “on the foundation,” and therefore did not cost his parents much; the second had his expenses paid by a relation—thus these two were off their mother’s hands. The eldest in the schoolroom was Agatha, aged fourteen, who taught the two little ones, but who, during her mother’s absence, ought

to have been playing "her scales," and had conscientiously tried to do so for ten minutes, at the end of which time she had been obliged to resign the music in order to rescue these same two little ones, her special charge, from the hands of Dick, aged ten, who was subjecting them to unknown tortures, which caused the babes to howl unmercifully.

Patty, the next girl to Agatha, aided and abetted Dick; and what with the laughter of these two pickles, and the screams of the small ones, and poor Agatha's remonstrances, the scene was Pandemonium itself, and almost as hot; for the room was on the sunny side of the house, and blazing, notwithstanding the drawn blinds. The children were all languid and irritable with the heat, hating

their confinement indoors; and, indeed, if Rose had come, she would have made a very poor exchange.

Agatha's music had tumbled down from the piano, the old red cover was half drawn off the table, and threatened at any moment a clean sweep of copybooks, ink-bottles, and slates. Dick stood among his books, all tumbled on the floor, his heels crushing the cover of one, while Patty sat upon the open dictionary, doubling down half the leaves with her weight. Such a scene for a bothered mother to come into!

Mr. Damerel himself heard some faint rumour of the noise, and his fine brow had begun to draw itself into lines, and a resolution to "speak to their mother" formed itself within his mind.

Poor mother! She could have cried when she went in out of all her other troubles; but that was a mere momentary weakness, and the rebels were soon reduced to order, Agatha sent back to her scales, and Dick and Patty to their copy-books. "You two little ones may go," Mrs. Damerel said, and with a shriek of delight the babies toddled out and made their way to the hayfield behind the house, where they were perfectly happy, and liable to no more danger than that of being carried off in a load of fragrant hay.

When Mr. Nolan, the Curate, came in to talk about parish business, Agatha's scales, not badly played, were trilling through the place, and Patty and Dick, very deep in ink, and leaning all their weight upon their respective pens, were busy with their writ-

ing ; and calm, the calm of deep awe, prevailed.

“ Shall I disturb you if I come in here ? ” asked the Curate, with a mellow sound in his voice which was not brogue—or at least he thought it was not, and was ingenuously surprised when he was recognised as an Irishman. (“ It will be my name, to be sure,” he would say on such occasions, somewhat puzzled.) He was a bony man, loosely put together, in a long coat, with rather a wisp of a white tie ; for, indeed, it was very hot and dusty on the roads, and where the Rector is an elegant man of very refined mind, the Curate, like the wife, has generally a good deal to do.

“ Indeed the lessons have been so much disturbed as it is, that it does not much

matter," said Mrs. Damerel. "On Monday morning there are so many things to call me away."

"How selfish of me!" said the Curate. "Monday morning is just the time I've little or nothing to do, except when there's sickness. What a brute I was not to offer meself,—and, indeed, that's just what I've come to speak about."

"No, no, you are too kind, and do too much already," said Mrs. Damerel, looking at him with a grateful smile, but shaking her head. "And, indeed," she added, the cloud coming over her face again, "Rose ought to come and relieve me; but her father has to be attended to, and that takes up so much of her time."

"To be sure," said the Curate cheerily, "and reason good. Besides, it would be

wearing work for one like her ; whereas the like o' me is made for it. Look here, Dick, my boy, will you promise to learn your lessons like a brick to-morrow, if I ask the mother for a holiday to-day ?”

“ Oh, hurrah !” cried Dick, delighted.

“ Oh, mamma, like twenty bricks !” cried Patty, “ though how a brick can learn lessons——. It's so hot, and one keeps thinking of the hayfield.”

“ Then be off wi' you all,” cried the Curate. “ Don't you see the mother smile ? and Agatha too ? I'm going to talk business. Sure you don't mind for one day ?”

“ Oh, mind !” said poor Mrs. Damerel, with a half smile ; then, waiting till they were all out of hearing, an exit speedily accomplished, “ if it were not for duty, how glad I should be to give it up altogether !—

but they could not go on with Miss Hunt," she added, with a quick glance at the Curate, to see whether by chance he understood her.

Good Curate, he could be very stolid on occasion, though I hope he was not fool enough to be taken in by Mrs. Damerel's pretences; though it was true enough that Miss Hunt was impracticable. She could not afford a better; this was what she really meant.

"Out of the question," said Mr. Nolan; "and I'm no scholar myself to speak of, notwithstanding what I'm going to have the presumption to say to you. It's just this—I don't do much visiting of mornings; they don't like it. It takes them all in a mess as it were before they've had time to get tidy, and these mornings hang heavy

on my hands. I want you to let me have the three big ones. I might get them on a bit; and time, as I tell you, my dear lady, hangs heavy on my hands."

"How can you tell me such a fib?" said Mrs. Damerel, half crying, half laughing. "Oh, you are too good, too good; but, Mr. Nolan, I can't take anything more from you. Rose must help me, it is her duty; it is bad for her to be left so much to herself; why, I was married and had all the troubles of life on my head at her age."

"And so she'll have, before you know where you are," said the good Curate, which will show the reader at once that he entertained no absorbing passion for Miss Rose, though I am aware it is a Curate's duty so to do. "So she'll have; she'll be marrying some great grandee or other.

She looks like a princess, and that's what she'll be."

"She has no right to be a princess," said the mother, overwrought and irritable, "and duty is better than ease, surely. You, I know, think so."

"For the like of me, yes," said the Curate; "for her, I don't know."

"I was once very much like her, though you would not think it," said the mother, with the slightest tinge of bitterness, "but that is not the question—no, no, we must not trouble you."

"When I tell you the mornings hang on my hand! I don't know what to do with my mornings. There's Tuesday I'm due at the schools, but the rest of the week I do nothing but idle. And idling's a great temptation. A cigar comes natural when

you've nothing to do. You don't like a man smoking in the morning; I've heard you say so. So you see the young ones will save me from a——no, I won't say cigar——worse than that——cigars are too dear for a Curate, me dear lady; from a pipe."

"Mr. Nolan, you are too good for this world," said poor Mrs. Damerel, affected to tears; "but I must first try what can be done at home," she added, after a pause——no, no, you weigh me down under your kindness. What would the parish be but for you?"

"It would be just the same if I were dead and buried," said the Curate, shrugging his shoulders. "Ah, that's the worst of it; try for a little bit of a corner of work like a child's lessons, and you may be of service; but try to mend the world, even a

bit of a parish, and you're nowhere. They don't think half as much of me as they do of the Rector," he added, with a curious smile, which the Rector's wife only half understood. Was it satirical? or could it be possible that the Curate was surprised that the people thought more of the Rector than of himself? Mrs. Damerel was aware, no one better, of her husband's faults. Many a time she was ready to say in bitterness (to herself) that he was wearing her to death; but nevertheless she looked at long, loosely-built, snub-nosed Mr. Nolan, with mingled amusement and surprise. Was it possible that he could entertain any hopes of rivalling her husband? Of course a visit from the Rector was an honour to anyone, for Mr. Damerel was a man who, notwithstanding a little

human weakness, was the very picture and model of a gentleman; and the idea of comparing him with good Mr. Nolan was too absurd. "Yes, no doubt they are pleased to see him," she said: "poor people are very quick to recognize high breeding; but I am sure, my dear Mr. Nolan, that they are all very fond of you."

The Curate made no immediate answer. I am not sure that he had not in his private heart something of the same feeling with which his present companion had been thinking of her daughter, a feeling less intense, in so far as it was much more indifferent to him, yet in a way stronger, because untempered by affection.

The Rector was of his own kind, the ornamental and useless specimen, while he

was the worker whom nobody thought of ; but these secret feelings neither of the two confided to the other. Mr. Nolan would have been horrified had he detected in Mrs. Damerel that slight bitterness about Rose, which indeed would have shocked herself as deeply had she paused to identify the sentiment, and she would have been, and was, to some slight extent—suspecting the existence of the feeling—contemptuous and indignant of Nolan's "jealousy," as I fear she would have called it.

They returned, however, to the educational question, which did not involve anything painful, and after considerable discussion it was settled that he should give the elder children lessons in the morning, "if their papa approved." It is impossible to

say what a relief this decision was to the mother, who had felt these lessons to be the last straw which proverbially breaks the camel's back. She was glad of the chat with a sympathizing friend, who understood, without saying anything about, her troubles—and doubly glad of the holiday exacted from her by his means—and gladder still to get rid of him and return to her many other occupations ; for it was Monday, as has already been mentioned, and there was the laundress to look after, and a thousand other things awaiting her.

The Curate went out by the garden door when he left her, out upon the lawn, where he paused to look at as charming a scene as could be found in England : a fair country spreading out for miles, its trees and fields

and soft undulations under a summer sky, which was pale with access of light, and ran into faint lines of misty distance almost colourless in heat and haze. Here and there the sunshine caught in a bend of the river, and brought out a startling gleam as from a piece of silver. The world was still with noon and distance, no sound in the air but the rustle of the leaves, the hum of insects; the landscape was all the sweeter that there was no remarkable feature in it, nothing but breadth and space, and undulating lines, and light, everywhere light; and to make up for its broad soft vagueness, how distinct, like a picture, was the little group in the foreground—the lime trees in their silken green, the soft rippling shadows on the grass, the pictur-

esque figure in the chair, and the beautiful girl! The beauty of the sight charmed good Mr. Nolan. Had it been put to him at that moment, I believe he would have protested that his Rector should never do anything in his life except recline with languid limbs outstretched, and his poetical head bent over his book, under the sweet shadow of the trees. And if this was true even in respect to Mr. Damerel, how much more true was it with Rose?

“Well, Nolan,” said Mr. Damerel, suavely, as the bony Curate and his shadow came stalking across the sunshine; “well: worrying yourself to death as usual in this hot weather? My wife and you are congenial souls.”

“That is true, and it’s a great honour

for me," said Nolan. "*She* is worrying herself to death with the children, and one thing and another. As for me, in the mornings, as I tell her, I've next to nothing to do."

Rose looked up hastily as he spoke. How angry she felt! If her mother chose to worry herself to death, who had anything to do with that? Was it not her own pleasure? A hot flush came over the girl's face. Mr. Nolan thought it was the quick, ingenuous shame which is so beautiful in youth; but it was a totally different sentiment.

"Mamma does nothing she does not choose to do," she cried; then blushed more hotly, perceiving vaguely that there was something of self-defence in the heat with which she spoke.

Mr. Nolan was not graceful in his manners, like Mr. Damerel, but he had that good breeding which comes from the heart, and he changed the subject instantly, and began to talk to the Rector of parish business, over which Mr. Damerel yawned with evident weariness.

“Excuse me—the heat makes one languid,” he said; “you have my full sanction, Nolan. You know how entirely I trust to your discretion; indeed I feel that you understand the people in some respects better than I do. Don’t trouble yourself to enter into details.”

Mr. Nolan withdrew from these refined precincts with an odd smile upon his face, which was not half so handsome as Mr. Damerel’s. He had the parish in his

hands, and the Rector did not care to be troubled with details; but the Rector had all the advantages of the position, all the income, and even so much the moral superiority over his Curate, that even *they* (by which pronoun Mr. Nolan indicated his poorer parishioners) felt much more deeply honoured by a chance word from the Rector than they did by his constant ministrations and kindness.

What an odd, unequal world this is! he was thinking to himself; not ruled by justice, or even a pretence at justice, but by circumstances alone, and external appearances.

This did not make him bitter, for he had a kind of placid philosophy in him, and was of the kind of man who takes

things very easily, as people say ; but the curious force of the contrast made him smile.

CHAPTER III.

ROSE DAMEREL'S life had, up to this time, been spent altogether in the sunshine. She had been too young when she went to school to ponder much over anything that went on at home, and had concluded during her holidays that home, which was so dainty, so pleasant, so sweet, was a kind of Paradise on earth, infinitely more delightful than any of the other homes of which she heard from her schoolfellows. None of them had a father so delightful, a mother so kind; and in

these holiday times, as everybody indulged and petted her, the private shadows—I will not say skeletons—in the house were never divined by her. She had, as sometimes happens to the eldest of a large family, much more care taken of her education and training than her sisters were likely to meet with. The burden had not begun to be so heavily felt when the eldest girl grew into bright intelligence, to her parents' pride. The others were still too young to demand, or even to suggest, the expense that would be involved in their education, and nothing was spared upon Rose.

She had returned from school not much more than a year before the time of which I treat, and had gone on for some time in her delightful youthful confidence that

everything around her was exactly as it ought to be. But shadows had begun to flit vaguely across the picture before that memorable day in the garden, which henceforward became a turning-point in her thoughts. This was the first moment at which she fully identified the occasional clouds upon her mother's face, and learned that Mrs. Damerel was not merely a little cross—that easy and rapid solution with which a child settles all problems concerning its parents—but had a distinct cause for the little irritabilities which she tried so carefully to restrain. Perhaps it was in the very nature of things that Rose should be more attracted by the gentle indulgence and indolent perfection of her father, than by her mother's stronger character.

Mr. Damerel, had he been very rich, and free of all occasion to think of his children's future, would have been a model father to grown-up and well-behaved sons and daughters. He could not bear any roughness, coarseness, or disorderliness; therefore the schoolboys were but little congenial to him, and he was never sorry when the holidays were over. And the little children were too troublesome and too noisy to please him; but Rose was the perfection of a child to such a man, and to her he was the perfection of a father. Everything in her pleased and gratified him. She was pretty, gentle, full of intelligence, eager to read with him if he would, still more eager to hear him talk, yet quick to perceive when he was disinclined to talk, and regard-

ing all his moods with religious respect.

She would sit by him for hours together, like a charming piece of still life, when he pleased, and was ready to converse or to listen, to walk, to sing, to follow his lead in everything, as only a woman-child, full of the beautiful enthusiasm of youthful admiration, can do. Nothing, except perhaps the devotion of a young wife, when she really loves the man much older than herself, whom she has married, can equal the devotion of a girl to her father. She admired everything about him—his beautiful refined head, his fine voice, his grace and high-breeding, his sermons, and what she called his genius. To find this faultless father to be anything less than a demi-god was terrible to Rose. I do not mean to say that she got within a hundred

miles of this discovery all at once ; nay, the first result of the vague and dreamy doubts that stole into her mind was rather an increase of enthusiasm for her father, an instinctive making-up to her own ideal for the sense of failure in him, of which she was vaguely conscious. Rose loved her mother after a totally different fashion, in an ordinary and matter-of-fact way, but she had no romance of feeling towards her ; and when her whole little world began, as it were, to sway upon its axis, to yield beneath her feet, as if it might swing round altogether in space, turning what she had supposed the brighter side into shadow, and elevating that which she had held lowly enough, she, poor girl, grew giddy with this strange and sickening sensation. She was at the age, too, when everything is

apt to reel about the young experimentalist taking her first steps in life. She was vaguely conscious of being now a free agent, consulted as to her own movements, no longer told curtly to do this and that, but exercising personal choice as to what she should do. This change is of itself sufficiently bewildering. Nature makes, as it were, a pause at this first crisis of personal life. The child, wondering, half-delighted and half-troubled to have no longer its duties clearly and sharply indicated, falls into a partial trance, and neglects many things for sheer want of use and knowledge how to act for itself.

This was Rose's position. Between the mother, who, a little mortified and hurt at her child's want of sympathy with her, did not give her orders, but only suggested

employment, and the father who said, "Never mind, let her alone," she stood, not knowing how to settle the question, but inclining naturally to the side on which she was most indulged and smiled upon, though with a secret uneasiness which she could not shake off, and moral sense of a false situation which grew upon her day by day.

Rose had lovers, too, in this new miraculous life upon which she had entered—two lovers, not yet declared, but very evident to all knowing eyes; and in the village there were many keen observers. One of these suitors was the most wealthy proprietor in the neighbourhood—a man much above her own age, yet not old, and perfectly qualified to please a lady's eye; and the other, a young naval lieutenant without

a penny, the son of Mrs. Wodehouse, who lived on the Green, and had nothing in the world but her pension as an officer's widow. Of course I do not need to say that it was the poor man whom Rose preferred. She was not in love with him—far from it; but she was so completely on the verge of universal awakening, that a word or touch might be enough to arouse her whole being at any moment—might open her eyes to her own position and that of her parents, and show her the nature of her individual sentiments, as by a sudden gleam of light. Rose, however, was not the least in the world aware of this; and at the present moment she was no further advanced than was consistent with saying frankly that she liked Wodehouse very much—and feeling (but of this she said nothing) more

glad when she saw him coming than about any other event in her simple days.

Dinglefield is a sociable place, and there is something in a soft summer evening, after a very hot, blazing summer day, which fosters a disposition to stroll about and interchange greetings with your neighbours. As it began to darken upon the evening of this particular day, various people in the houses about stepped out of their wide-open windows after dinner, and, tempted by the beauty of twilight, strayed along the road or over the Green, to the Rectory garden, which was, by universal acknowledgment, "the most perfect spot" in the village.

Much has been said about the charms of twilight, but little, I think, of its peculiar English beauty, which is not so magical

as the momentary interval between light and dark in the south, or the lingering, prolonged, silvery, and ineffable dimness of those northern twilights, which last half the night ; but has a dusky softness altogether peculiar to itself, like the shadowing of downy wings. The air was delicious, fresh after the hot day, yet so warm as to make wrappings quite unnecessary. The sky, still somewhat pale in its blue, after the languor of the heat, looked down faint yet friendly, as if glad to see again a little movement and sense of life. A few subdued stars peeped out here and there, and the wide stretch of country lay dim underneath, revealing itself in long soft lines of grey, till it struck into a higher tone of blue on the horizon where earth and heaven met. All the Damerels who were out of

bed were in the garden, and the neighbours, who had made this pleasant terrace the end of their walk, were scattered about in various groups. Mr. Incledon, who was Rose's wealthy lover, came late, and stood talking with Mrs. Damerel, watching with wistful eyes her appropriation by his rival, young Wodehouse—whose mother, hooded in the white Shetland shawl, which she had thrown over her cap to come out, sat on a garden-chair with her feet upon the Rector's Persian rug, listening to him while he talked, with the devout admiration which became a member of his flock. The Rector was talking politics with General Peronnet, and Mrs. Wodehouse thought it was beautiful to see how thoroughly he understood a subject which was so much out of his way as the abolition of purchase in the army.

“ If he had been in Parliament, now !” she said to the General’s wife, who thought her husband was the object of the eulogy.

There were two or three other members of this group listening to the Rector’s brilliant talk, saying a few words, wise or foolish, as occasion served. Others were walking about upon the lawn, and one lady, with her dress lifted, was hastening off the grass, which she had just discovered to be wet with dew. Upon none of them, however, did Mr. Incledon’s attention turn. He followed with his eyes a pair whose young figures grew less and less in the distance, half lost in the darkness. The persistence with which he watched them seemed a reproach to the mother, with whom he talked by fits and starts, and whose anxiety was not at all awakened by

the fact that Rose was almost out of sight.

“I am afraid Rose is not so careful as she ought to be about the dew on the grass,” she said, half apologetically, half-smiling, in reply to his look.

“Shall I go and tell her you think so?” said Mr. Incledon hastily. He was a man of about five-and-thirty, good-looking, sensible, and well dispositioned—a personage thoroughly *comme il faut*. He was the sort of suitor whom proper parents love to see approaching a favourite child. He could give a wife everything a woman could desire—provide for her handsomely, surround her with luxury, fill her life with pleasures and prettinesses, and give her an excellent position. And the man himself was free of cranks and crotchets, full

of good sense, well educated, good-tempered. Where are girls' eyes, that they do not perceive such advantages ?

Mrs. Damerel hesitated a moment between sympathy with her child and sympathy with this admirable man. There was a struggle in her mind which was to have the predominance. At length some gleam of recollection or association struck her, and moved the balance in Rose's favour, who, she felt sure, did not want Mr. Incledon just at that moment.

"Never mind," she said, tranquilly, "it will not hurt her," and resumed a conversation about the music in the church, which was poor. Mr. Incledon was very musical, but he had no more heart for anthems at that moment than had he never sung a note.

Rose had strayed a little way down the slope with Edward Wodehouse. They were not talking much, and what they did say was about nothing in particular—the garden, the wild flowers among the grass on this less polished and less cultured lawn which sloped down the little hill. At the moment when the elder suitor's glances had directed Mrs. Damerel's attention towards them, they were standing under a gnarled old hawthorn tree, round which was a little platform of soft turf.

“We lose the view lower down,” said Rose; and there they stopped accordingly, neither of them caring to turn back. The soft plain stretched away in long lines before them into the haze and distance like the sea. And as they stood there, the young moon, which had been hidden

behind a clump of high trees, suddenly glinted out upon them with that soft dewy glimmer which makes the growing crescent so doubly sweet. They were both a little taken aback, as if they had been surprised by some one suddenly meeting and looking at them—though, indeed, there was not a syllable of their simple talk that all the world might not have heard. Both made a step on, as if to return again after this surprise, and then they both laughed, with a little innocent embarrassment, and turned back to the view.

“What a lovely night!” said Rose, with a faint little sigh. She had already said these not remarkable words two or three times at least, and she had nothing in the world to sigh about, but was in fact hap-

pier than usual, though a little sad, she knew not why.

“Look at those lights down below there,” said young Wodehouse; “how they shine out among the trees!”

“Yes, that is from Ankermead,” said Rose; “you know it?—the prettiest little house.”

“When we are away, we poor mariners,” he said, with a little laugh, which was more affected than real; “that is, I think, the thing that goes to our hearts most.”

“What?”

“The lights in the windows—of course I don’t mean at sea,” said young Wodehouse; “but when we are cruising about a strange coast, for instance, just one of those twinkles shining out of the darkness

—you can see lights a long way off—gives a fellow a stab, and makes him think of home.”

“But it is pleasant to think of home,” said Rose. “Oh, what am I saying? I beg your pardon, Mr. Wodehouse. To be sure, I know what you mean. When I was at school, something used to come in my throat when I remembered——Many a time I have stood at the window, and pretended I was looking out, and cried.”

“Ah!” said Wodehouse, half sympathetic, half smiling, “but then you know it would not do if I looked over the ship’s side and cried—though I have had a great mind to do it sometimes in my midshipman days.”

“To cry is a comfort,” said Rose: “what do you men do instead?”

“We smoke, Miss Damerel, and think. How often I shall think of this night, and of the lights yonder, and mix up this sweet evening with an interior, perhaps, sweeter still !”

“I don’t think so,” said Rose, with a soft laugh, in which there was, however, a shade of embarrassment which somewhat surprised herself. “The room is rather stuffy, and the lamps not bright, if you were near enough ; and two old people half dozing over the tea-table, one with the newspaper, one with her worsted-work. It is very humdrum, and not sweet at all inside.”

“Well, perhaps they are all the fonder of each other for being humdrum ; and it must have been sweet when they were young.”

“They were never young,” said Rose, with a silvery peal of laughter, turning to go back to the lawn. “See what tricks imagination plays! You would not like to spend an evening there, though the lights are so pretty outside.”

“Imagination will play many a trick with me before I forget it,” said young Wodehouse in subdued tones.

Rose's heart fluttered a little—a very little—with the softest preliminary sensations of mingled happiness and alarm. She did not understand the flutter, but somehow felt it right to fly from it, tripping back to the serenity of society on the lawn. As for the young man, he had a great longing to say something more, but a feeling which was mingled of reverence for her youth and dread of frighten-

ing her by a premature declaration kept him silent. He followed her into the hum of friendly talk, and then across the lawn to the house, where the neighbours streamed in for tea. The bright lights in the Rectory drawing-room dazzled them both—the windows were wide open; crowds of moths were flickering in and out, dashing themselves, poor suicides, against the circle of light; and all the charmed dimness grew more magical as the sky deepened into night, and the moon rose higher and began to throw long shadows across the lawn.

“On such a night” lovers once prattled in Shakespeare’s sweetest vein. All that they said, and a great deal more, came into young Wodehouse’s charmed heart and stole it away. He heard himself say-

ing the words, and wondered how it was that he himself was so entirely happy and sad, and thought how he might perhaps soon say them to himself as his ship rustled through the water, and the moonlight slept broad and level, and uninterrupted by any poetry of shadows upon the sea. To think of that filled his heart with a soft, unspeakable pang; and yet the very pain had a sweetness in it, and sense of exaltation.

“There are the lights still,” he said, standing over her where she had seated herself near the window. “I shall always remember them, though you will not allow of any romance——”

“Romance! oh no,” said Rose lightly; “only two old people. We have not any romance here.”

Mr. Incledon, who had been watching his opportunity so long, now came forward with a cup of tea. Poor Edward was too much abstracted in his thoughts and in her, and with the confusion of a little crisis of sentiment, to think of the usual attentions of society which he owed to her. He started and blushed when he saw how negligent he had been, and almost stumbled over her chair in his anxiety to retrieve his carelessness.

“My dear Wodehouse, Miss Damerel cannot drink more than one cup of tea at a time,” said the elder suitor, with that air of indulgent pity for his vagaries which so irritates a young man: and he mounted guard over Rose for the rest of the evening.

The good neighbours began to go home

when they had taken their tea, and the Rector and his daughter went with them to the gate, when there was a soft babble and commotion of good-nights, and every two people repeated to each other, "What a lovely moon!" and "What a glorious night!"

As for poor Wodehouse, in his climax of youth and love, his very heart was melted within him. Twice he turned back, murmuring to his mother some inarticulate explanation that he had forgotten something—that he wanted to speak to the Rector—and twice went back to her solemnly saying it did not matter. No, no, he said to himself, he must not be premature.

Rose took another turn round the lawn

with her father before they went in. Mrs. Damerel was visible inside, sending the tray away, putting stray books in their places, and stray bits of work in the work-basket, before the bell should ring for prayers. Mr. Damerel looked in as he passed with an indulgent smile.

"She calleth her maidens about her," he said, "though it is not to spin, Rose, but to pray. Somehow it enhances the luxury of our stroll to see your mother there, putting everything in order with that careful and troubled face—eh, child, don't you think with me?"

"But does it enhance her luxury to have us walking and talking while she has everything to lay by?" said Rose, with an uncomfortable sense that her own work and several books which she had left about

were among those which her mother was putting away.

“Ah, you have found out there are two sides to a question,” said her father, patting her on the cheek, with his gentle habitual smile ; but he gave no answer to her question ; and then the maids became visible, trooping in, in their white caps and aprons, and the Rector, with a sigh and a last look at the ~~midnight~~ and the dim dewy landscape, went in to domesticity and duty, which he did not like so well.

Rose went to her room that night with a thrill of all her gentle being which she could not explain. She looked out from her window among the honeysuckles, and was so disappointed as almost to cry when

she found the lights out, and the little cottage on Ankermead lost in the darkness. She could have cried, and yet but for that fanciful trouble, how happy the child was! Everything embraced her—the clinging tendrils of the honeysuckle, so laden with dew and sweetness; the shadows of the trees, which held out their arms to her; the soft caressing moon which touched her face and surrounded it with a pale glory. Nothing but good and happiness was around, behind, before her, and a trembling of happiness to come, even sweeter than anything she had ever known, whispered over her in soft indefinite murmurs, like the summer air in the petals of a flower. She opened her bosom to it, with a delicious half-consciousness fresh as any rose that lets its leaves be

touched by the sweet south. This Rose in June expanded, grew richer, and of a more damask rosiness, but could not tell why.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. DAMEREL thought it her duty, a few nights after this, to speak to her husband of Rose's suitors.

"Mr. Incledon has spoken so plainly to me that I can't mistake him," she said; "and in case you should not have noticed it yourself, Herbert——"

"I notice it!" he said, with a smile; "what chance is there that I should notice it? So my Rose in June is woman enough to have lovers of her own!"

"I was married before I was Rose's age," said Mrs. Damerel.

"So you were, Martha. I had forgotten the progress of time, and that summer once attained is a long step towards autumn. Well, if it must be, it must be. Incledon is not a bad fellow, as men go."

"But, I think—there is another, Herbert."

"Another!" said the Rector, leaning back in his chair with gentle laughter. "Why, this is too good; and who may he be, the No. 2?"

"It is young Wodehouse, the sailor——"

"The widow's son on the Green! Come, now, Martha, once for all this is absurd," said Mr. Damerel, suddenly rousing himself up. "This is out of the question. I say

nothing against Incledon ; but if you have been so foolishly romantic as to encourage a beggar like young Wodehouse——”

“ I have not encouraged him. I disapprove of it as much as you can do,” said Mrs. Damerel, with a flush on her cheek ; “ but whether Rose will agree with us I dare not say.”

“ Oh, Rose !” said her husband, dropping into his easy tone. “ Rose is a child ; she will follow whatever lead is given to her. I am not afraid of Rose. You must speak to her, and show her which way you intend her mind to go ; be very plain and unequivocal ; an unawakened mind always should be treated in the plainest and most distinct way.”

“ But, Herbert, you have more influence than I have ever had over her. Rose is

more your companion than mine. I am not sure that it is the best thing for her, as far as practical life is concerned——”

“My dear,” said Mr. Damerel, benignly, “Rose has nothing to do with practical life. You women are always excessive, even in your virtues. I do not mean to throw any doubt upon your qualities as the most excellent of wives, but you have not the discrimination to perceive that duties which suit you admirably would be quite out of place in her. It is a matter of natural fitness. The practical is adapted to forty, but not to nineteen. Let the child alone, my love, to enjoy her youth.”

“I think you argue like a ^{Anglican} Jesuit, Herbert,” said Mrs. Damerel; “but whether you are right or wrong on this point does not affect what I ask—which is, that you

would speak to her. She is much more likely to attend to you than to me."

"Who—I?" said Mr. Damerel, with a fretful line in his fine forehead. "It is totally out of the question, Martha. *I* speak to Rose about her lovers! It would be quite indelicate, in the first place; and in the second, it would be most disagreeable to me."

"But, still, we have a duty to our child, even if it is disagreeable," said his wife, not willing to give up her object without a struggle.

"My dear Martha, spare me! I knew you would say something about duty. You are very didactic, my love, by nature; but this, you must remember, is rather a reversal of positions between you and me. Let Rose see," he continued, once more

relaxing in tone, "that her path is quite clear before her. Incledon is a very good fellow; he will be of use to me in many ways. Nothing could be more desirable. There is a new box of books which I must look over, Martha; do not let me detain you. You will manage the matter admirably, I am sure, in your own sensible way."

And the Rector lighted his wife's candle, and opened the door for her with a suavity and almost gallantry which would have brought tears to the eyes of the parish had they been there to see.

"How perfect Mr. Damerel's behaviour is to that rather commonplace wife of his!" Such was the kind of thing people said.

He went to look over his box of books

from the London library after his talk, with much amusement in his mind as to Rose's lovers. He thought his child perfect as a child; but the idea that a serious man like Incledon should think of her in the serious position of a wife, tickled the Rector's fancy. He thought over the matter as he glanced at the books which had been unpacked for him, leaving nothing for his delicate ivory hands to do but turn the volumes over. There was an agreeable and a disagreeable side to it. Incledon, for one thing, would be a capable referee in all money matters, and would help to arrange about the boys, and get them on in the world, which was a great relief to think of; for ere now Mr. Damerel had felt the painful reflection thrust upon him that some time or other he must do some-

thing about the boys. The other side of the question was, that he would lose the society of his Rose in June, his pretty companion, whose ornamental presence lent a new charm to his pretty house. He shrugged his shoulders a little over this, saying to himself that it must be sooner or later, and that, after all, he had done without Rose for many years, and had been much of a sufferer in consequence. It was the way of the world ; and then he smiled again at the thought of Rose in the serious position of Mr. Incledon's wife.

Mrs. Damerel had very different feelings on the subject, as she went upstairs with the candle he had so politely lighted for her in her hand. I am afraid she was not so softened as she ought to have been by his charming politeness, which made

her slightly angry, and she was deeply disturbed by the task he had thrown back upon her. Mrs. Damerel knew that girls were not so easily moulded as their fathers sometimes think. She felt by instinct that, according to all precedent, Wodehouse, who was young, and gay, and penniless, must be the favourite. She knew, too, that to endeavour to turn the current in favour of the other was almost enough to decide matters against him; and, beyond all this, Mrs. Damerel felt it hard that everything that was painful and disagreeable should be left on her shoulders. Rose was separated from her; she was her father's companion; she was being trained to prefer refined but useless leisure with him, to the aid and sympathy which her mother had a right to look for; yet, when

it came to be needful to do any disagreeable duty for Rose, it was the mother who had to put herself in the breach. It was hard upon Mrs. Damerel. All the reproof, the unpleasant suggestions of duty, the disagreeable advice, the apparent exactions to come from her side ; while nothing but indulgence, petting, and fondness, and unlimited compliance with every desire she had, should be apparent on the side of the father. I think Mrs. Damerel was right, and that hers was a very hard case indeed.

The Wodehouses came hastily to the Rectory the very next day to intimate the sad news of Edward's approaching departure. His mother fairly broke down, and cried bitterly.

“I hoped to have had him with me so

much longer," she said; "and now he must go off about this slave trade. Oh! why should we take it upon us to look after everybody, when they don't want to be looked after? If those poor African wretches cared as much for it as we suppose, wouldn't they take better care of themselves? What have we to do, always interfering? When I think of my boy, who is all I have in the world, going out to that dreadful coast to risk his life, for the sake of some one he never saw or heard of——"

"My dear lady, we cannot be altogether guided by private motives," said the Rector; "we must take principle for something. Were we to permit the slave trade, we should depart from all our traditions.

England has always been the guardian of freedom."

"Oh! Mr. Damerel," said the poor lady, with tears in her eyes, "freedom is all very well to talk about, and I suppose it's a great thing to have; but what is freedom to these poor savages, that it should cost me and other women our boys?"

"It will not cost you your boy," said Mrs. Damerel; "he will come back. Don't take the gloomiest view of the question. He has been there before, and it did not hurt him; why should it now?"

"Ah! who can tell that?" said poor Mrs. Wodehouse, drying her eyes. She was a woman who liked the darker side of all human affairs, and she felt it almost an insult to her when anyone prognosticated happiness. Her son was doing all he could to bear up

under the depressing influence of her predictions, and his regret at leaving her, and disappointment in having his holiday shortened—along with a deeper reason still, which he had said nothing about. He tried to be as cheerful as he could; but when he turned to Rose, and met the one piteous look the girl gave him, and saw her lip quiver—though he did not know whether it was out of sympathy with his mother, or from any personal feeling of her own—he very nearly broke down. He had still ten days to make his preparations for leaving, and before that time, he thought to himself, he must surely find out whether Rose cared anything for him more than she did for the others whom she had known, like him, almost all her life. He

looked anxiously into her face when he shook hands with her; but Rose, feeling, she could not tell why, more inclined to cry than she had ever been before, without any reason, as she said, would not meet his looks.

“This is not my farewell visit,” he said, with an attempt at a laugh. “I don’t know why I should feel so dismal about it; I shall see you all again.”

“Oh! many times, I hope!” said Mrs. Damerel, who could not help feeling kindly towards the poor young fellow, notwithstanding her conspiracy against his interests. The Rector did not commit himself in this foolish way, but took leave of the young sailor solemnly.

“However that may be,” he said, “God

bless you, Edward! I am sure you will do your duty, and be a credit to all that wish you well."

This address chilled poor Wodehouse more and more. Was it his dismissal? He tried to bear up against that too, talking of the garden-party he was coming to on Wednesday, and of the repeated visits he still hoped for; but, somehow, from the moment he received the Rector's blessing, he believed in these farewell visits, and the explanations they might give rise to, no more. When he went away with his mother, Rose ran upstairs on some pretext, and her father and mother were left alone.

"Martha" said the Rector, "your usual careful solicitude failed you just now. You as good as asked him to come back;

and what could possibly be so bad for Rose?"

"How could I help it?" she said. "Poor boy, he must come again, at least to say good-bye."

"I don't see the necessity. It will only make mischief. Rose is quite cast down, whether from sympathy or from feeling. We should take care [not to be at home when he calls again."

Mr. Damerel said this in so even a voice that it was delightful to hear him speak, and he went out and took his seat under the lime-trees, as a man should who has discharged all his duties and is at peace and in favour with both God and man. Rose did not venture to face her mother with eyes which she felt were heavy, and therefore stole out of doors direct and

went to her father, who was always indulgent. How good and tender he was, never finding fault! If perhaps, as Rose was beginning to fear, it must be confessed that he was deficient in energy—a gentle accusation which the fondest partisan might allow—yet, to balance this, how good he was, how feeling, how tender! No one need be afraid to go to him. He was always ready to hear one's story, to forgive one's mistakes. Rose, who did not want to be catechised, stole across the lawn and sat down on the grass without a word. She did not care to meet anybody's look just at that moment. She had not cried; but the tears were so very near the surface, that any chance encounter of looks might have been more than she could bear.

Mr. Damerel did not speak all at once. He took time, the more cunningly to betray her ; and then he entered upon one of his usual conversations, to which poor Rose gave but little heed. After a while her monosyllabic answers seemed to attract his curiosity all at once.

“You are not well,” he said ; “or sorry, is it? Sorry for poor Mrs. Wodehouse, who is going to lose her son?”

“Oh! yes, papa. Poor old lady—she will be so lonely when he is away.”

“She is not so very old,” he said, amused ; “not so old as I am, and I don’t feel myself a Methuselah. It is very good of you to be so sympathising, my dear.”

“Oh! papa, who could help it?” said Rose, almost feeling as if her father would approve the shedding of those tears which

made her eyes so hot and heavy. She plucked a handful of grass and played with it, her head held down, and the large drops gathering ; and her heart, poor child, for the moment, in the fulness of this first trouble, felt more heavy than her eyes.

“ Yes, it is a pity for Mrs. Wodehouse,” said Mr. Damerel, reflectively ; “ but, on the other hand, it would be very selfish to regret it for Edward. He has not a penny, poor fellow, and not much influence that I know of. He can only get his promotion by service, and in this point of view his friends ought to be glad he is going. Look across Ankermead, Rose ; how soft the shadows are !—the most delicate grey with silvery lights. If you were a little more ambitious as an artist, you might get your sketch-book and try that effect.”

Rose smiled a wan little smile in answer to this invitation, and looking down upon the landscape, as he told her to do, saw nothing but a bluish-green and yellow mist through the prismatic medium of the big tear, which next moment, to her terror and misery, came down, a huge unconcealable wet blot, upon her light summer dress. She was herself so struck by consternation at the sight, that, instead of making any attempt to conceal it, she looked up at him, her lips falling apart, her eyes growing larger and larger with fright and wonder, half appealing to him to know what it could mean, half defying observation. Mr. Damerel saw that it was necessary to abandon his usual rule of indulgence.

“You are too sympathetic, my dear,” he said. “If any one but me saw this, they

might say such feeling was too strong to be lavished on Mrs. Wodehouse. Don't let us hear any more of it. Have you finished 'Balaustion?' You have no book with you to-day."

"No, papa—I came out—the other way——"

"What does that mean? Not through the drawing-room, where you left it, and where your mother was? I think you were right, Rose," said Mr. Damerel, dropping back in his chair with his easy smile; "your mother has little patience with Mrs. Wodehouse's despairs and miseries. You had better keep your sympathy to yourself in her presence. Look here; I want this read aloud. My eyes ache; I was up late last night."

Rose took the book obediently, and read.

She saw the white page and letters clear without any prismatic lights. Her tears were all driven away, forced back upon her heart as if by a strong wind. She read, as Milton's daughters might have read his Latin, if they did not understand it, as some people say—not missing a word nor seeing any meaning in one; going on as in a dream, with a consciousness of herself, and the scene, and her father's look, and not a notion what she was reading about. It was very good mental discipline, but so sharp that this poor soft child, utterly unused to it, not knowing why she should suddenly be subjected to such fierce repression, wretched and sick at heart, and sorry and ashamed, never forgot it all her life.

She read thus for about an hour, till

her father stopped her to make some notes upon the margin of the book ; for he was one of those elegantly studious persons who weave themselves through the books they read, and leave volumes of notes on every possible subject behind them. He had been entering into every word, though Rose had not understood a syllable ; and he smiled and discoursed to her about it, while she kept silent, terrified lest he should ask some question which would betray her inattention.

Rose had been learning smilingly, with happy bewilderment, for some months back, to consider herself an independent individual. She felt and realised it without any difficulty to-day. She stood quite alone in all that bright scene, apart from the real world and the ideal both—neither

the lawn, nor the book, nor the landscape, nor her father's talk having power to move her; frightened at herself—still more frightened for him, and for the tone half sarcastic, half reproving, which for the first time in her life she had heard in his voice; and without even the satisfaction of realising the new sentiment which had come into her mind. She realised nothing except that sudden dismay had come over her; that it had been checked summarily; that her tears, driven back, were filling her head and her heart with confusing pain; that there was something wrong in the strange new motion that was at work within her—and this without even the melancholy sweetness of knowing what it was.

Poor Rose in June! It was the first storm that had ever disturbed her perfect

blossom. She began to get better after a while, as at her age it is easy to do, and gradually came out of her mist and was restored to partial consciousness.

By the evening of that day she was nearly herself again, though much subdued, remembering that she had been very unhappy, as she might have remembered a very bad headache, with great content, yet wonder, that it should be gone or almost gone. The cessation of the active pain gave her a kind of subdued happiness once more, as relief always does—which the heart never feels to be negative, but positive. What a thing case is, after we are once conscious of having lost it even for an hour! This brought Rose's colour back, and her smile. All mental pain, I suppose, is spasmodic; and the first fit,

when not too well defined nor hopeless in character, is often as brief as it is violent. Rose got better ; her mind accustomed itself to the shadow which for one short interval had covered it with blackness. She began to perceive that it did not fill all earth and heaven, as she had at first supposed.

CHAPTER V.

ROSE grew very much better, almost quite well, next day. There was still a little thrill about her of the pain past, but in the meantime nothing had yet happened, no blank had been made in the circle of neighbours; and though she was still as sorry as ever, she said to herself, for poor Mrs. Wodehouse (which was the only reason she had ever given to herself for that *serrement de cœur*), yet there were evident consolations in that poor lady's lot if she could but see them. Edward would come

back again ; she would get letters from him ; she would have him still, though he was away. She was his inalienably, whatever distance there might be between them. This seemed a strong argument to Rose in favour of a brighter view of the subject, though I do not think it would have assisted Mrs. Wodehouse ; and, besides, there were still ten days, which—as a day is eternity to a child—was as good as a year at least to Rose. So she took comfort, and preened herself like a bird, and came again forth to the day in all her sweet bloom, her tears got rid of in the natural way, her eyes no longer hot and heavy. She scarcely observed even, or at least did not make any mental note of the fact, that she did not see Edward Wodehouse for some days thereafter.

“How sorry I am to have missed them!” her mother said, on hearing that the young man and his mother had called in her absence; and Rose was sorry too, but honestly took the fact for an accident. During the ensuing days there was little doubt that an unusual amount of occupation poured upon her. She went with her father to town one morning to see the pictures in the exhibition. Another day she was taken by the same delightful companion to the other side of the county to a garden party, which was the most beautiful vision of fine dresses and fine people Rose had ever seen. I cannot quite describe what the girl’s feelings were while she was going through these unexpected pleasures. She liked them, and was pleased and flattered; but at the same time a kind of giddy sense of

something being done to her which she could not make out—some force being put upon her, she could not tell what, or why, was in her mind. For the first time in her life she was jealous and curious, suspecting some unseen motive, though she could not tell what it might be.

On the fourth day her father and mother both together took her with them to Mr. Incledon's, to see, they said, a new picture which he had just bought—a Perugino, or, it might be, an early Raphael. "He wants my opinion—and I want yours, Rose," said her father, flattering, as he always did, his favourite child.

"And Mr. Incledon wants hers too," said Mrs. Damerel. "I don't know what has made him think you a judge, Rose."

"Oh ! how can I give an opinion—what

do I know?" said Rose, bewildered; but she was pleased, as what girl would not be pleased? To have her opinion prized was pleasant, even though she felt that it was a subject upon which she could give no opinion. "I have never seen any but the Raphaels in the National Gallery," she said, with alarmed youthful conscientiousness, as they went along, "and what can I know?"

"You can tell him if you like it; and that will please him as much as if you were the first art critic in England," said the Rector. These words gave Rose a little thrill of suspicion—for why should Mr. Incledon care for her opinion?—and perplexed her thoughts much as she walked up the leafy road to the gate of Whitton Park, which was Mr. Incledon's grand house. Her father expatiated upon the

beauty of the place as they went in; her mother looked pre-occupied and anxious; and Rose herself grew more and more suspicious, though she was surprised into some exclamations of pleasure at the beauty and greenness of the park.

“I wonder I have never been here before,” she said; “how could it be? I thought we had been everywhere when we were children, the boys and I.”

“Mr. Incledon did not care for children’s visits,” said her mother.

“And he was in the right, my dear. Children have no eye for beauty; what they want is space to tumble about in, and trees to climb. This lovely bit of woodland would be lost on boys and girls. Be thankful you did not see it when you were incapable of appreciating it, Rose.”

“It is very odd, though,” she said. “Do you think it is nice of Mr. Incledon to shut up so pretty a place from his neighbours—from his friends?—for, as we have always lived so near, we are his friends, I suppose.”

“Undoubtedly,” said the Rector; but his wife said nothing. I do not think her directer mind cared for this way of influencing her daughter. She was anxious for the same object, but she would have attained it in a different way.

Here, however, Mr. Incledon himself appeared with as much demonstration of delight to see them as was compatible with the supposed accidental character of the visit. Mr. Incledon was one of those men of whom you feel infallibly certain that they must have been “good,” even in their

nurse's arms. He was slim and tall, and looked younger than he really was. He had a good expression, dark eyes, and his features, though not at all remarkable, were good enough to give him the general aspect of a handsome man. Whether he was strictly handsome or not was a frequent subject of discussion on the Green, where unpleasant things had been said about his chin and his eyebrows, but where the majority was distinctly in his favour. His face was long, his complexion rather dark, and his general appearance "interesting." Nobody that I know of had ever called him common-place. He was interesting—a word which often stands high in the rank of descriptive adjectives. He was the sort of man of whom imaginative persons might suppose that he had been the hero of a

story. Indeed there were many theories on the subject; and ingenious observers, chiefly ladies, found a great many symptoms of this in his appearance and demeanour, and concluded that a man so well-off and so well-looking would not have remained unmarried so long had there not been some reason for it.

But this phase of his existence was over, so far as his own will was concerned. If he had ever had any reason for remaining unmarried, that obstacle must have been removed; for he was now anxious to marry, and had fully made up his mind to do so at as early a date as possible. I do not know whether it could be truly said that he was what foolish young people call "very much in love" with Rose Damerel; but he had decided that she was the wife

for him, and meant to spare neither pains nor patience in winning her. He had haunted the Rectory for some time, with a readiness to accept all invitations, which was entirely unlike his former habits ; for up to the time when he had seen and made up his mind about Rose, Mr. Incledon had been almost a recluse, appearing little in the tranquil society of the Green, spending much of his time abroad, and when at home holding only a reserved and distant intercourse with his neighbours. He gave them a handsome heavy dinner two or three times a year, and accepted the solemn return which society requires ; but no one at Dinglefield had seen more of his house than the reception-rooms, or of himself than those grave festivities exhibited. The change upon him now was marked enough to

enlighten the most careless looker-on ; and the Perugino, which they were invited to see, was in fact a pretence which the Rector and his wife saw through very easily, to make them acquainted with his handsome house and all its advantages. He took them all over it and showed the glory of it with mingled complacency and submission to their opinion.

Rose had never been within its walls before. She had never sat down familiarly in rooms so splendid. The master of the house had given himself up to furniture and decorations as only a rich man can do ; and the subdued grace of everything about them, the wealth of artistic ornament, the size and space which always impress people who are accustomed to small houses, had no inconsiderable effect at least upon the ladies

of the party. Mr. Damerel was not awed, but he enjoyed the largeness and the luxury with the satisfaction of a man who feels every luxurious place to be his right sphere ; and Mr. Incledon showed himself, as well as his house, at his best, and, conscious that he was doing so, looked, Mrs. Damerel thought, younger, handsomer, and more attractive than he had ever looked before. Rose felt it too, vaguely. She felt that she was herself somehow the centre of all—the centre, perhaps, of a plot, the nature of which perplexed and confused her ; but the plot was not yet sufficiently advanced to give her any strong sensation of discomfort or fear. All that it did up to the present moment was to convey that sense of importance and pleasant consciousness of being the first and most flatteringly

considered, which is always sweet to youth. Thus they were all pleased, and, being pleased, became more and more pleasant to each other. Rose, I think, forgot poor Mrs. Wodehouse altogether for the moment, and was as gay as if she had never been sad.

The house was a handsome house, raised on a slightly higher elevation than the Rectory, surrounded by a pretty though not very extensive park, and commanding the same landscape as that which it was the pride of the Damerels to possess from their windows. It was the same, but with a difference; or, rather, it was like a view of the same subject painted by a different artist, dashed in in bolder lines, with heavier massing of foliage, and one broad reach of the river giving a great centre of

light and shadow, instead of the dreamy revelations here and there of the winding water as seen from the Rectory. Rose gave an involuntary cry of delight when she was taken out to the green terrace before the house, and first saw the landscape from it; though she never would confess afterwards that she liked it half so well as the shadowy distance and softer sweep of country visible from her old home.

Mr. Incedon was as grateful to her for her admiration as if the Thames and the trees had been of his making, and ventured to draw near confidentially and say how much he hoped she would like his Perugino, or, perhaps, Raphael.

“You must give me your opinion frankly,” he said.

“But I never saw any Raphaels except

those in the National Gallery," said Rose, blushing with pleasure, and shamefacedness, and conscientious difficulty. It did not occur to the girl that her opinion could be thus gravely asked for by a man fully aware of its complete worthlessness as criticism. She thought he must have formed some mistaken idea of her knowledge or power. "And I don't—love them—very much," she added, with a little hesitation and a deeper blush, feeling that his momentary good opinion of her must now perish for ever.

"What does that mean?" said Mr. Inledon. He was walking on with her through, as she thought, an interminable vista of rooms, one opening into the other, towards the shrine in which he had placed his picture. "There is something more in it

than meets the ear. It does not mean that you don't like them——”

“It means—that I love the photograph of the San Sisto, that papa gave me on my birthday,” said Rose.

“Ah! I perceive; you are a young critic to judge so closely. We have nothing like that, have we? How I should like to show you the San Sisto picture! Photographs and engravings give no idea of the original.”

“Oh, please don't say so!” said Rose; “for so many people never can see the original. I wish I might, some time. The pictures in the National Gallery do not give me at all the same feeling; and, of course, never having seen but these, I cannot be a judge; indeed, I should not dare to say anything at all. Ah,—ah!——”

Rose stopped and put her hands together, as she suddenly perceived before her, hung upon a modest grey-green wall, with no other ornament near, one of those very youthful, heavenly faces, surrounded by tints as softly bright as their own looks, which belong to that place and period in which Perugino taught and Raphael learnt—an ineffable sweet ideal of holiness, tenderness, simplicity, and youth. The girl stood motionless, subdued by it, conscious of nothing but the picture. It was doubly framed by the doorway of the little room in which it kept court. Before even she entered that sacred chamber the young worshipper was struck dumb with adoration. The doorway was hung with silken curtains of the same grey-green as the wall, and there

was not visible, either in this soft surrounding framework, or in the picture itself, any impertinent accessory to distract the attention. The face so tenderly abstract, so heavenly human, looked at Rose as at the world, but with a deeper, stronger appeal; for was not Mary such a one as she? The girl could not explain the emotion which seized her. She felt disposed to kneel down, and she felt disposed to weep; but did neither, only stood there, with her lips apart, her eyes abstract yet wistful, like those in the picture, and her soft hands clasped and held unconsciously, with that dramatic instinct common to all emotion, somewhere near her heart.

“You *have* said something,” said Mr. Inledon, softly, in her ear, “more eloquent

than I ever heard before. I am satisfied that it is a Raphael now."

"Why?" said Rose, awakening with great surprise out of her momentary trance, and shrinking back, her face covered with blushes, to let the others pass who were behind.

He did not answer her, except by a look, which troubled the poor girl mightily, suddenly revealing to her the meaning of it all.

When the rest of the party went into the room, Rose shrank behind her mother, cowed and ashamed, and, instead of looking at the picture, stole aside to the window and looked out mechanically to conceal her troubled countenance. As it happened, the first spot on which her eye fell was the little cottage at Ankermead, upon

which, just the other evening, she had looked with Edward Wodehouse. All he said came back to her, and the evening scene in which he said it, and the soft, indescribable happiness and sweetness that had dropped upon her like the falling dew. Rose had not time to make any question with herself as to what it meant ; but her heart jumped up in her bosom and began to beat, and a sudden momentary perception of how it all was flashed over her. Such gleams of consciousness come and go when the soul is making its first experiences of life. For one second she seemed to see everything clearly as a landscape is seen when the sun suddenly breaks out ; and then the light disappeared, and the clouds re-descended, and all was blurred again. Nevertheless, this

strange momentary revelation agitated Rose almost more than anything that had ever happened to her before ; and everything that was said after it came to her with a muffled sound, as we hear voices in a dream. A longing to get home and to be able to think took possession of her. This seemed for the moment the thing she most wanted in the world.

“If ever I have a wife,” Mr. Incledon said, some time after, “this shall be her boudoir. I have always intended so ; unless, indeed, she is perverse, as my mother was, who disliked this side of the house altogether, and chose rooms which looked out on nothing but the park and the trees.”


“I hope, as everything is ready for her, the lady will soon appear,” said Mrs.

Damerel; while poor little Rose suddenly felt her heart stop in its beating, and flutter and grow faint.

“Ah!” said Incledon, shaking his head, “it is easier to gild the cage than to secure the bird.”


How glad she was when they were out again in the open air, walking home! How delightful it was to be going home, to get off this dangerous ground, to feel that there was a safe corner to fly to! Nobody said anything to her, fortunately for Rose, but let her walk off her excitement and the flutter of terror and dismay which had come over her. “Easier to gild the cage than to secure the bird.” The poor little bird felt already as if she had been caught in some snare; as if the fowler had got his hand upon her, and all

her flutterings would be of no avail. How little she had thought that this was what was meant by their flattering eagerness to have her opinion about the Perugino! She kept close to her mother till they got safely out of the park, for Mr. Incledon attended them as far as the gates, and Rose was so much startled that she did not feel safe near him. It seemed to her that the plot must be brought to perfection at once, and that there was no escape except in keeping as far off as possible. She resolved to herself as she went along that she would never approach him, if she could help it, or let him speak to her. Her sensations were something like those with which a startled hare might, I suppose, contemplate from beneath her couch of fern the huntsman gathering the hounds

which were to run her down. Rose had no sense of satisfaction such as an older woman might have felt, in the love of so important a personage as Mr. Incledon. She was neither flattered nor tempted by the thought of all the good things she might have at her disposal as his wife—his beautiful house, his wealth, his consequence, even his Perugino, though that had drawn the very heart out of her breast—none of these things moved her. She was neither d of his choice, nor dazzled by his wealth. She was simply frightened, neither more nor less—dead frightened, and eager to escape for ever out of his way.

It was now afternoon, the most languid hour of the day, and the village roads were very hot, blazing, and dusty, after

the soft shade of Whitton Park. Mr. Damerel, who was not much of a pedestrian, and hated dust, and abhorred all the irritations and weariness of excessive heat, came along somewhat slowly, skirting the houses to get every scrap of shade which was possible. They were thus quite close to a row of cottages when Mr. Nolan came out from the door of one so suddenly as almost to stumble over his Rector.

"Just like a shot from a cannon is an Irishman's—exit from a ,

" said Mr. Damerel, peevishly, though playfully. "Nolan, you salamander, you who never feel heat, you may at least have some pity upon me."

"You are the very man I want," said the Curate, whose brow was clouded with care. "The poor creature's dying. You'll go

and say a word to her? I was going to your house, wondering would I find ye, and lo ! Providence puts ye here."

"I hope I shall feel as much obliged to Providence as you do," said the Rector, still more peevishly. "What is it? Who is it? What do you want?"

"Sure it's only a poor creature dying—nothing to speak about in this dreary world," said good Mr. Nolan; "but she has a fancy to see you. I have done all I could to pacify her, but she says she knew you in her better days."

"It is old Susan Aikin," said Mrs. Damerel, in answer to her husband's inquiring look. "She has always wanted to see you; but what good could you do her? And she has had a bad fever, and it is a miserable place."

“Not that you’ll think twice of that,” said Nolan hurriedly, “when it’s to give a bit of comfort to a dying creature that longs to see you;” though indeed it would puzzle the world to tell why, he added in his heart.

“Certainly not,” said the Rector—a quantity of fine wrinkles, unseen on ordinary occasions, suddenly appearing like a network on his forehead. His voice took a slightly querulous tone, in spite of the readiness with which he replied. “You need not wait,” he said, turning to his wife and daughter. “Go on gently, and perhaps I may overtake you if it is nothing important. What is it, Nolan—a case of troubled conscience? Something on her mind?”

“Nothing but a dyin’ fancy,” said Mr.

Nolan. "She's harped on it these three days. No, she's a good soul enough; there's no story to tell; and all her duties done, and life closing as it ought. It's but a whim; but they will all take it as a great favour," said the Curate, seeing that his superior officer looked very much in the mind to turn and fly.

"A whim!" he said querulously. "You know I am not careless of other people's feelings—far from it, I hope; but my own organisation is peculiar, and to undergo this misery for a whim—you said a whim——"

"But the creature's dying!"

"Pah! what has dying to do with it? Death is a natural accident. It is not meritorious to die, or a thing to which every other interest should yield and bow.

But never mind," the Rector added, after this little outbreak; "it is not your fault—come, I'll go."

Rose and her mother had lingered to hear the end of this discussion; and just as the Rector yielded thus, and, putting as good a grace as possible on the unwillingly performed duty, entered, led by Mr. Nolan, the poor little cottage, the ladies were joined by Mrs. Wodehouse and her son, who had hurried up at sight of them. Mrs. Wodehouse had that reserved and solemn air which is usual to ladies who are somewhat out of temper with their friends. She was offended, and she meant to show it. She said "Good morning" to Mrs. Damerel, instead of "How do you do?" and spoke with melancholy grandeur of the weather, and the extreme heat, and

how a thunderstorm must be on its way. They stood talking on these interesting topics, while Rose and Edward found themselves suddenly together. It seemed to Rose as if she were seeing him for the first time after a long absence or some great event. The colour rushed to her face in an overwhelming flood, and a tide of emotions as warm, as tumultuous, as bewildering, rushed into her heart. She scarcely ventured to lift her eyes when she spoke to him. It seemed to her that she understood now every glance he gave her, every tone of his voice.

“I almost feared we were not to meet again,” he said hurriedly; “and these last days run through one’s fingers so fast. Are you going out to-night?”

“I do not think so,” said Rose, half

afraid to pledge herself, and still more afraid lest her mother should hear and interpose, saying, Yes, they were engaged.

“Then let me come to-night. I have only four days more. You will not refuse to bid a poor sailor good-bye, Miss Damerel? You will not let them shut me out to-night?”

“No one can wish to shut you out,” said Rose, raising her eyes to his face for one brief second.

I do not think Edward Wodehouse was so handsome as Mr. Incledon. His manners were not nearly so perfect; he could not have stood comparison with him in any respect except youth, in which he had the better of his rival; but oh, how different

he seemed to Rose ! She could not look full at him ; only cast a momentary glance at his honest, eager eyes, his face, which glowed and shone with meaning. And now she knew what the meaning was.

“So long as *you* don’t!—” he said, eagerly, yet below his breath ; and just at this moment Mrs. Damerel put forth her hand and took her daughter by the arm.

“We have had a long walk, and I am tired,” she said. “We have been to Whitton to see a new picture, and Mr. Incledon has so many beautiful things. Come, Rose. Mr. Wodehouse, I hope we shall see you before you go away.”

“Oh, yes, I hope so,” the young sailor faltered, feeling himself suddenly cast down from heaven to earth. He said no-

thing to her about that evening; but I suppose Mrs. Damerel's ears were quick enough to hear the important appointment that had been made.

“My dear Rose, girls do not give invitations to young men, nor make appointments with them, generally, in that way.”

“I, mamma?”

“Don't be frightened. I am not blaming you. It was merely an accident; but, my dear, it was not the right kind of thing to do.”

“Must I not speak to Mr. Wodehouse?” she asked, half tremblingly, half (as she meant it) satirically. But poor Rose's little effusion of (what she intended for) gall took no effect whatever. Mrs. Damerel did not perceive that any satire was meant.

“Oh, you may speak to him! You may bid him good-bye, certainly; but I—your papa—in short, we have heard something of Mr. Wodehouse which—we do not quite like. I do not wish for any more intimacy with them, especially just now.”

“Do you mean you have heard some harm of him?” said Rose, opening her eyes with a sudden start.

“Well, perhaps not any harm: I cannot quite tell what it was; but something which made your papa decide—in short, I don’t want to take too much notice of the Wodehouses as a family. They do not suit your papa.”

Rose walked on with her mother to the Rectory gate, silent, with her heart swelling full. She did not believe that her

father had anything to do with it. It was not he that was to blame, whatever Mrs. Damerel might say.

CHAPTER VI.

NATURE took sides against Love on that evening, and made Mrs. Damerel's warning unnecessary, and all the anticipations of these young persons of no avail. Instead of the evening stroll about the darkling garden which Wodehouse at least had proposed to himself, the party were shut up in the drawing-room by the sudden outbreak of that expected thunderstorm which Mrs. Wodehouse and Mrs. Damerel had discussed so earnestly. The

ladies had both felt that it must come, and the young sailor I suppose ought to have been still more clearly aware of what was impending ; but there are, no doubt, states of the mind which make a man totally indifferent to, and unobservant of, the changes of the atmosphere. Anyhow, though he arrived in the sweet beginning of the twilight, when all was still, poor Edward had not only to stay in-doors, but to take a seat next to Mrs. Damerel in the drawing-room ; while Rose, who was somewhat nervous about the thunder, retired into a dark corner to which he dared not follow her boldly under the very eyes of her father and her mother. He did what he could, poor fellow : he tried very hard to persuade her to come to the other end of the room and watch the storm which was

raging gloriously over the plain below, lighting up the whole landscape in sudden brilliant gleams ; for one of the windows had been left uncurtained, and Mr. Damerel himself placed his chair within reach of it to enjoy the wonderful spectacle. Rose at one time longed so much to venture that her desire overmastered her fears ; but the Rector, who was somewhat fretful that evening, presumably on account of the storm which affected his fine sensibilities, sent her away hurriedly.

“No, no, Rose—what have you to do with storms ?” he said ; “go back to your mother.”

When she obeyed, there was silence in the room ; and though the elders did not care very much for it, I think the sharp disappointment of these two—a pang,

perhaps, more keen and delicate than anything we can feel when the first freshness of youth is over—made itself spiritually felt somehow in the atmosphere of the place.

“Roses have nothing to do out of the rose garden,” said Mr. Damerel, with an attempt to overcome his own fretfulness, and perhaps a compunction over the suffering he caused. He was not in a humour for talking, and when this was the case he seldom gave himself the trouble to talk; but some covert feeling or other made him willing to attempt a diversion, for the moment at least. “I wish people had a more general conception of the fitness of things. Your namesakes out of doors take no pleasure in the storm. Poor roses, how it will batter and beat them down, and

strew their poor helpless petals about!"

"I do not find fault with Rose for being timid," said her mother; "but your craze about her name is fantastic, Herbert. She will have a good many storms to brave which she cannot escape from if she is to do her duty in life."

"Then I hope she will not do her duty," said the Rector—"don't, my Rose in June. I had rather see you sweet and fresh, with your rose heart unruffled, than dragged and battered with the rain. I'll take the moral risk upon my own head."

Mrs. Damerel uttered an impatient little exclamation under her breath. She turned to Wodehouse with an arbitrary and sudden change of the subject.

"Do you expect to be long away?" she said.

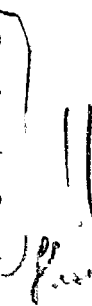
“Two years at the very least,” said the young man, piteously, looking at her with such imploring eyes that she felt his look, though her own eyes were fixed upon her work, and neither could nor would see. She felt it; and as she was but a woman, though stern in purpose, she winced a little and was sorry for him, though she would not help him. Her voice softened as she replied—

“I am very sorry for your poor mother. How she will miss you! We must do our best to keep her cheerful while you are away.”

“The storm is going off,” said the Rector; “did you ever remark, Wodehouse, how seldom we have a complete thunder-storm to ourselves here? There have been three going on to-night—one towards Lon-

don, one northwards, the other east. We never have more than the tail of a storm; which is somewhat humbling when you come to think of it. I suppose it has something to do with the *lie* of the ground, as you call it—eh?”

Edward answered something, he did not know what, while his opponent regarded him with amused observation. Now that the matter was tolerably safe in his own hands, Mr. Damerel was not without a certain enjoyment in the study of character thus afforded him. It was to him like what I suppose vivisection is to an enterprising physiologist. He had just enough realisation of the pain he was inflicting to give interest to the throbbing nerves upon which he experimented. He was not old enough to have quite forgotten some few



pangs of a similar kind which he had experienced in his day; but he was old enough to regard the recollection with some degree of amusement and a sense of the absolute folly of the whole which neutralised that sense of pain. He liked, rather, to hold Wodehouse in talk about scientific facts, while he knew that the young man was longing to escape, and watching, with dismay and despair, every hope disappearing of another kind of conversation which seemed like the balance of life and death to the foolish youth. Mr. Damerel saw all these symptoms of torture, and his sense of humour was tickled. He was almost sorry when at length, the rain still continuing to fall in torrents, and the storm roaring and groaning in the distance, young Wodehouse rose to go away.

“I will not give you my blessing again,” he said, smiling, “as I was rash enough to do before; for I daresay we shall meet again, one way or another, before you go away.”

“Oh! I shall call when the last moment, the absolute good-bye, comes!” said poor Edward, trying to smile.

Rose put out a timid little hand to him, rising from her chair when he came up to her. She had grown bewildered again, and disconcerted, and had fallen far from the light and illumination which had flashed over her in the afternoon. The storm had frightened her; something malign seemed in the air; and she was disappointed and mortified, she scarcely could have told why. Was this to be the end of the evening to which they had both looked

forward! Alas! such clouds will drop over even the brightest skies. I think both of the young people could have wept with sheer misery, disappointment, and despite, when they realised that it was over, and could not now be mended, whatever might happen. He went home, and she stole up to her room, enveloped by the mists of a suppressed excitement which seemed to wrap them round and round, and afforded no way of escape.

That, however, was the last bright day known in the Rectory for a very long time. The Rector had not been quite himself that night. His very pleasure in the torture of the poor young lovers was perhaps a sign that the fine organization upon which he prided himself was somehow out of gear. I do not believe, though many

people were of that opinion, that his hurried visit to the poor woman who was dying of fever was the reason why Mr. Damerel took the fever, and of all that followed. He could not have fallen ill so immediately if poor Susan Aikin's death-chamber had been the cause of his malady. Next day he was ill, feverish, and wretched, and was reported to have a bad cold. The next after that the village and all the houses on the Green were struck dumb by the information that the Rector had caught the same fever of which Susan Aikin died.

The news caused such a sensation as few warnings of mortality produce. The whole neighbourhood was hushed and held its breath, and felt a shiver of dismay run through it. It was not because Mr.

Damerel was deeply beloved. Mr. Nolan, for example, was infinitely more friendly and dear to the population generally ; yet had he encountered the same fate, people would have grieved, but would not have been surprised. But the Rector ! that he should fall under such a disease—that the plague which is born of squalor, and dirt, and ill-nourishment, and bad air, should seize upon him, the very impersonation of everything that was opposite and antagonistic to those causes which brought it forth !—this confused everybody, great and small. Comfortable people shuddered, asking themselves who was safe ? and began to think of the drainage of their houses, and to ask whether any one knew if the Rectory was quite right in that respect. There was an anxious little pause of fright

in the place, every one wondering whether it was likely to prove an epidemic, and neighbour inquiring of neighbour each time they met whether "more cases" had occurred; but this phase passed over, and the general security came back. The disease must "take its course," the doctor said, and nothing could be prognosticated at so early a stage. The patient was still in middle age, of unbroken constitution, and had everything in his favour—good air, good nursing, good means—so that nothing need be spared.

With such words as these the anxieties of the neighbourhood were relieved—something unwillingly, it must be allowed, for the world is very exigent in this as in many other respects, and, when it is interested in an illness, likes it to run a

rapid course, and come to an issue one way or other without delay. It was therefore with reluctance that the Green permitted itself to be convinced that no "change" could be looked for in the Rector's illness for some time to come. Weeks even might be consumed ere the climax, the crisis, the real dramatic point at which the patient's fate would be concluded, should come.

This chilling fact composed the mind of the neighbourhood, and stilled it back into the calm of indifference after a while. I am not sure now that there was not a little adverse feeling towards the Rector, in that he left everybody in suspense, and having, as it were, invited the world to behold the always interesting spectacle of a dangerous illness, put off from week to

week the *dénouement*. Such a barbarous suggestion would have been repelled with scorn and horror had it been put into words, but that was the feeling in most people's hearts.

Indoors, however, Mr. Damerel's illness was a very terrible matter, and affected every member of the household. Mrs. Damerel gave up everything to nurse him. There was no hesitation with her as to whether she should or should not postpone her family and cares to her husband. From the moment that the dreadful word "fever" crossed the doctor's lips she put aside the house and the schoolroom and every other interest, and took her place by the sick-bed. I do not know whether any foreboding was in her mind from the first, but she never paused to think. She went to the children

and spoke to them, appealing to their honour and affection. She gave Dick and Patty permission to roam as they liked, and to enjoy perfect immunity from lessons and routine, so long as they would be quiet indoors, and respect the stillness that was necessary in the house ; and to Agatha she gave the charge of the infants, exacting quiet only, nothing but quiet. “ The house must be kept quiet,” she said to them all imperatively. “ The child who makes a noise I shall think no child of mine. Your papa’s life may depend upon it. It will be Rose’s part to see that you all do what I tell you. No noise ! that is the chief thing. There must be no noise !”

The children all promised very solemnly, and even closed round her with great eyes uplifted to ask in hushed tones of awe, as

if he had been dead, how papa was? The house altogether was strangely subdued all at once, as if the illness had already lasted for weeks. The drawing-room became a shut up, uninhabited place, where Rose only entered now and then to answer the enquiries of some anxious parishioners not too frightened to come and ask how the Rector was. The tide of life, of interest, of occupation, all flowed towards the sick-room—everything centred in it. After a few days it would have seemed as unnatural to Rose to have gone out to the lawn, as it was at first to sit in the little ante-room, into which her father's room opened, waiting to receive her mother's commissions, to do anything she might want of her. A few days sufficed to make established habits of all these new circumstances of life. Mr.

Damerel was not a bad patient. He was a little angry and annoyed when he found what his illness was, taking it for granted, as so many people did, that he had taken it from Susan Aikin. "I wish Providence had directed me anywhere else than to that cottage door at that particular moment," he said, half ruefully, half indignantly, "and put me in the way of that fanatic Nolan, who can stand everything. I knew my constitution was very different. Never mind, it was not *your* fault, Martha; and he is a good fellow. I must try to push him on. I will write to the Bishop about him when I get well."

These were heavenly dispositions, as the reader will perceive. He was a very good patient, grateful to his nurses, cheerful in his demeanour, making the best of the long

struggle he had embarked upon—indeed, few people could have rallied more bravely from the first shock and discouragement, or composed themselves more courageously to fill the difficult position which was forced upon him, and discharge all its duties such as they were. His illness came on not violently, but in the leisurely quiet way which so often distinguishes a disease which is meant to last long. He was ill, but not very ill, on the fourth day, descending into depths of it, but going very quietly, and retaining his self-command and cheerfulness. This particular day, on which he was a little worse than he had been before, was mild and rainy and warm, very unlike the wonderful blaze of summer which had preceded it. Rose sat by the open window of the little ante-room which was now her

usual position. The rain fell softly outside with a subdued perpetual sound, pattering upon the leaves. The whole atmosphere was full of this soft patter. The door of the sick-room was ajar, and now and then Rose heard her father move in the restlessness of his illness, or utter a low little moan of suffering, or speak to Mrs. Damerel, who was with him. Everything was hushed downstairs; and the subdued stirring of the rain outside, and the sounds of the sick-room within, were all that Rose could hear. She had a book in her hand, and read now and then; but she had come for the first time to that point in life when one's own musings are as interesting as any story, and often the book dropped on her lap, and she did nothing but think. She thought it was thinking, but I fancy that

dreaming was more like what it was. Poor Rose ! her very dreaming was run through by sombre threads, and there was in it one shadow of wondering doubt and suspicion about which she did not know what to think, and had no desire to dream.

As she sat thus, one of the maids came softly to the door to say that Mrs. Wodehouse and her son were in the drawing-room, and would she tell Mrs. Damerel ? Rose's heart gave a sudden leap ; she hesitated a moment whether she should not run down without saying anything to her mother, as it was she, up to this moment, who had answered all enquiries ; but the habit of dependence prevailed over this one eager throb of nature. She stole into the sick-room under shade of the curtains, and gave her message.

The answer had invariably been, "Go you, Rose, and tell them I am very sorry, but I cannot leave your papa." She expected to hear the same words again, and stood, half-turned to the door, ready, when authorised, to rush down stairs, with her heart already throbbing, and nature preparing in her for a crisis.

"What is it?" said the patient, drowsily.

"It is Edward Wodehouse come to say good-bye," answered his wife. "Herbert, can you do without me for a moment? I ought to go."

"Yes; go, go; Rose will stay with me instead," said Mr. Damerel. He put out his hot hand and drew the girl towards him, who almost resisted, so stupefied was she. "Do not be long, Martha," he said to his wife; and before Rose could realise

what had happened she found herself in her mother's chair, seated in the shaded stillness near the sick-bed, while Mrs. Damerel's step going softly along the passage outside testified to the bewildering fact that it was she who was to receive the visitors. It was so sudden, so totally different from her expectations, so cruel a disappointment to her, that the girl sat motionless, struck dumb, counting the soft fall of her mother's steps, in the stupor that fell upon her. Her father said something, but she had not the heart to answer. It seemed incredible, impossible. After ten minutes or so, which seemed to Rose so many hours, during which she continued to sit dumb, listening to her father's stirrings in his restless bed, and the pattering of the rain, the same maid came to the door again, and handed in a little scrap

of paper folded like a note. She opened it mechanically. It was from Mrs. Wodehouse. "Dear Rose, dearest Rose, come and bid my boy good-bye, if it is only for a moment," it said. She put it down on the table, and rose up and looked at her father. "If only for a moment,"—he was not so ill that any harm could happen to him if he were left for a moment. He did not look ill at all, as he lay there with his eyes closed. Was he asleep?—and surely, surely for that moment she might go!

While she looked at him, her heart beating wildly, and something singing and throbbing in her ears, he opened his eyes.

"What is it?" he said.

"It is—oh, papa! may I go for a moment—only for a moment—I should come

back directly; to bid—poor—Mr. Wodehouse good-bye?”

“What! could ye not watch with me one hour?” said the Rector, with perhaps unintentional profaneness, smiling at her a smile which seemed to make Rose wild. He put out his hand again and took hers. “Never mind poor Mr. Wodehouse,” he said; “he will get on very well without you. Stay with me, my Rose in June; to see you there does me good.”

“I should only stay one moment.” Her heart beat so that it almost stifled her voice.

“No, my darling,” he said, coaxingly; “stay with me.”

And he held her hand fast. Rose stood gazing at him with a kind of desperation till he closed his eyes again, holding her

tightly by the wrist. I think even then she made a little movement to get free—a movement balked by the closer clasping of his feverish fingers. Then she sat down suddenly on her mother's chair. The pulsations were in her ears like great roars of sound coming and going.

“Very well, papa,” she said, with a stifled voice.

I do not know how long it was before she heard steps below, for her senses were preternaturally quickened—and then the sound of the hall door closed, and then the rain again, as if nothing had happened. What had happened? Nothing, indeed, except that Mrs. Damerel herself had seen the visitors, which was a great compliment to them, as she never left her husband's side. By-and-by her

soft steps came back again, approaching gradually up the stairs and the long corridor. The sound of them fell upon Rose's heart—was it all over then?—ended for ever? Then her mother came in, calm and composed, and relieved her. She did not even look at Rose, as if there were anything out of the ordinary in this very simple proceeding. She told her husband quietly that she had said good-bye to young Wodehouse; that he was going early next morning; that she was very sorry for his poor mother.

“Yes, my dear; but if mothers were always to be considered, sons would never do anything. Mayn't I have something to drink?” said the patient: and thus the subject was dismissed at once and for ever.

“Go and see if Mary has made some fresh lemonade,” said Mrs. Damerel.

Rose obeyed mechanically. Her pulses were still beating so that her blood seemed like the tide at sea, beating upon a broad beach, echoing hollow and wild in huge rolling waves. She went downstairs like one in a dream, and got the lemonade, and carried it back again, hearing her own steps as she had heard her mother’s, sounding strangely through all the hushed and silent house.

When this piece of business was over, and Rose found herself again in the little ante-room, all alone, with nothing but the sound of the rain to fill up the silence, and the great waves of sound in her ears beginning to die into moans and dreary sobbing echoes, what can I say of her feelings? Was it possible that all was

over and ended—that she would never see him again—that he was gone without even a good-bye? It was not only incredible to her, but it was intolerable—must she bear it? She could not bear it; yet she must. She stood at the window and looked out, and the bluish-grey world and the falling rain looked in at Rose, and no other sound came to console the aching in her heart. He was gone, and there was no hope that he would come back; and she could not, dared not, go to him.

The evening went on while she sat, in this train of excited feelings, wondering whether the anguish in her heart would not call for an answer somehow, and unable to believe that neither God nor man would interfere. When it was dark she broke forth from all control, and left her post, as she could not do when leaving it

was of any use ; but there is a point at which the intolerable cannot be borne any longer. She put a blue waterproof cloak on her, and went out into the rain and the dark ; but what was poor Rose to do, even when her pain became past bearing ? She strayed round the dark lawn, and looked, but in vain, for the lights of the cottage at Ankermead ; and then she ventured to the gate, and stood there looking out helpless and wistful. But no good angel whispered to Edward Wodehouse, heartsore and wounded, what poor little watcher there was looking helplessly, piteously out upon the little gulf of distance which separated them as much as continents and oceans could have done. He was packing for his early journey, and she, poor maiden soul, could not go to him, nor could the cry of

her heart reach him. When she had waited there awhile, she went in again, speechless and heartbroken, feeling, indeed, that all was over, and that neither light nor happiness would ever return to her more.

Poor child ! I don't think it occurred to her to blame those who had done it, or even to ask herself whether they knew what they were doing. Perhaps she did not believe that they had done it willingly. I do not think she asked herself any question on the subject. She had to bear it, and she could not bear it. Her mind was capable of little more.

CHAPTER VII.

“IT does not seem possible,” said the Rector, slowly, “and yet somehow I cannot help thinking sometimes that I must be going to die.”

“Herbert !”

“It is very curious—very curious—my reason tells me so, not feeling. I myself am just what I always was ; but I think the symptoms are against me, and I see it in Marsden’s looks. Doesn’t he say so to you ?”

“Dear,” said Mrs. Damerel, with a

trembling voice, "he does not conceal from me that it is very serious; but oh, Herbert, how often have we seen even the children at death's door, and yet brought back!"

"At death's door," he said, reflectively; "yes, that's a good expression—at the door of something unknown. Somehow it does not seem possible. One can believe it for others, not for one's self. The idea is very strange."

Mrs. Damerel was a good, religious woman, and her husband was a clergyman. She did not feel that this was how he ought to speak at such a moment, and the thought wrung her heart.

"Dearest," she said, growing more tender in her grief and pity, "it is a thing we must all think of one time or another;

and to you, who have served God faithfully, it must be something else than 'strange.'"

"What else?" he said, looking up at her. "I might say confusing, bewildering. To think that I am going I know not where, with no certainty of feeling that I shall ever know anything about it—that I am no longer a free agent, but helpless, like a leaf blown into a corner by the wind—I who for very nearly fifty years have had a voice in all that was done to me. My dear, I don't know that I ever realised before how strange it was."

"But—you are—happy, Herbert?" she said, in a low, imploring voice.

"Happy, am I? I don't know—why should I be happy? I know what I am

leaving, but I don't know what I am going to. I don't know anything about it. Something is going to happen to me, of which I have not the least conception what it is. I am not afraid, my dear, if that is what you mean," he said, after a momentary pause.

This conversation took place weeks after the departure of Edward Wodehouse, and the end of that first flowery chapter of Rose's life. Her parents had not thought very much of her feelings, being concerned with much weightier matters. It had been a very long, lingering illness, not so violent as some fevers, but less hopeful; and the crisis was over, but the patient did not mend. He was dying, and his wife knew it; and, though no one as yet had made the solemn announcement

to him, he had found it out. He was very weak, but his mind was not at all impaired, and he could talk, with only a pause now and then for breath, as calmly as ever.

It was a curious spectacle. He was gathering his cloak round him like Cæsar, but with sensations less satisfied and consciously heroic. Mr. Damerel was not a man to be indifferent to the necessity of dying fitly, with dignity and grace, but he had confidence in himself that nothing would disturb the folds of his robes at that supreme moment; he knew that no spiritual dread or cowardice would impair his fortitude; it was not necessary for him to make any effort to meet with dignity the unknown which was approaching, and his mind was at leisure to survey the

strange, unexpected situation in which he found himself—going to dië, without knowing what dying was, or how it would affect him, or where it would place him. I do not know, though he was a clergyman, that there was anything religious in the organization of his mind, and he had never come under any of those vivid influences which make men religious—or, at least, which make them fervent religionists—whatever may be the constitution of their mind. Mr. Damerel was no sceptic. He believed what he had been taught, and what he had taught in turn to others. His mind was not doctrinal or dogmatic, any more than it was devout; but he believed in the broad truths of Christianity, in some sort of a heaven, and some sort of

a hell. These beliefs, however, had no effect upon his present state of feeling. He was not afraid of the hereafter, but his mind was bewildered and confounded by the contemplation of something close at hand which he did not know, and could not know so long as he retained consciousness of this only world with which he was acquainted. He was absorbed by the contemplation of this mystery. He was not thinking of his sins, nor of reward, nor of punishment, nor of rest from his labours (which had not been many). In short, he did not consider the great change that was about to take place upon him from a religious point of view at all, but rather from one which was at once natural and philosophical. I should not like to blame him for this, as, per-

haps, some people will do. When we have lost much that made life sweet—when our friends, our children, have gone before us into the unseen country—then, indeed, the heart learns many longings for that world in which alone there can be reunion and explanation of life's sore and weary mysteries. But this was not Mr. Damerel's case. There was no one waiting for him at the golden gates; except, perhaps, those whom he had long forgotten, and who had gone out of his life. He was departing alone, the first of his generation; curious and solitary, not knowing where he was going. To God's presence; ah, yes! but what did that mean?

“All the same, my dear,” he said, cheerfully, rousing himself, “we must not make ourselves wretched about it. A

thing that happens to every man cannot be so very bad ; and, in the meantime, we must make the best of it. I ought to have thought of it, perhaps, more than I have done."

"Oh, Herbert ! God is very merciful," said his wife, who was crying softly by his side.

"Yes, yes, that is quite true ; but that is not what I was thinking of. I ought to have thought of what would follow in case of this happening which is about to happen. I ought to have tried to save ; but how could I have saved out of the little pittance we had ?"

"Dear, don't think of such things now."

"But I must think upon them. I have never had any extravagant tastes, and we have always lived very quietly ; but I fear

you will find a difference. What a blessed thing that you are the sort of woman you are ! The struggle will not fall so heavily upon you as upon most people. Incledon, of course, will marry Rose——”

“ Oh, Herbert ! what does all this matter ? Do not think of it. I would so much rather hear you speak of yourself.”

“ There is nothing to say about myself ; and, perhaps, the less one thinks, in the circumstances, the better ; it is a curious position to be in—that is all that one can say. Yes, Incledon will marry Rose ; he will make her a very good husband. Do not let it be put off from any regard to me. He will be a great help to you ; and you may trust him, I should think, to settle about the boys. Lay as much upon him as you can ; he is quite

able to bear it. If one had foreseen this, you know, there are many things that one might have done; but—curious!” said the Rector, with a smile, “I can’t believe in it, even now.”

“Oh, Herbert! it is never too late for God! Perhaps your feeling is the right one. If He would but give you back to us now!”

“No, no; don’t think there is anything prophetic in my feelings, my dear. You may be sure every man is like me, more or less,” said Mr. Damerel. “We know we must all die; only it is impossible in respect to one’s self. I am myself, you perceive, just as much as ever; and yet to-morrow, perhaps, or next day—there’s the wonder. It makes one feel giddy now and then. About the boys;

I have always felt that, one time or other, we should have to decide something for the boys. Leave it to Incledon; he is a practical man, and will know what to advise."

"Dear Herbert, if you can talk of it—oh, how much better it would be to tell me what *you* wish, that I might be guided by your own feeling—than to refer me to any one else!" said Mrs. Damerel, crying, kissing his hand, and gazing with wet eyes into his calm face.

"Oh, talk!—yes, I can talk, but for a little catching of the breath, the same as ever, I think; but the boys are a troublesome subject. Leave it to Incledon; he knows all about that sort of thing. I think now, perhaps, that I might sleep."

And then the curtains were dropped,

the watcher retired a little out of sight, and everything was subdued into absolute stillness.

Mrs. Damerel sat down noiselessly in the background, and covered her face with her hands, and wept silent tears, few and bitter. Shd had felt him to be hard upon her many a day; she had seen what was wanting in him; but he was her husband, the first love of her youth, and her heart was rent asunder by this separation. She had enough to think of besides, had she been able; she had poverty to face, and to bring up her children as best she could in a world which, henceforward, would not be kind and soft to them as it had been hitherto. Her soul was heavy with a consciousness of all that was before her; but,

in the meantime, she had room for no distinct feeling except one—that her husband, her love, was going to be taken from her. This tremendous parting, rending asunder of two lives that had been one, was more than enough to fill all her mind; she had room for nothing more.

And he slept, or thought he slept, floating out of the vague pain and wonder of his waking thoughts into strange, vague visions, dimmer still, and then back again to the fancies which were waking and not sleeping. There was a dim impression of painfulness in them, rather than pain itself; wonder, curiosity, and that strange sense of an absolute blank which makes the soul giddy and the brain swim. Sometimes his mind seemed to himself

to wander, and he got astray somehow, and felt himself sinking in an unfathomable sea, or striving to make his way through some blackness of night, some thorny wood in which there was no path. I suppose he was asleep then, but even he himself scarcely knew.

When he woke it was evening, and the lamp, carefully shaded, had been lit at the other end of the room. He liked the light, and, when he stirred and spoke, the watchers made haste to draw back the curtains. The serene evening sky, full of soft tints of reflection from the sunset, with breaks of daffodil light melting into ineffable soft greenness and blueness, shone in through the uncurtained window, which he liked to have left so, that he might see the sky. Rose

and her mother, close by the bright circle made by the lamp, were, one of them preparing some drink for him, the other opening a new bottle of medicine which had just been sent. Though it was all so familiar to him, the fact that he was to go away so soon seemed to throw a strangeness over everything, and gave a bewildering novelty even to the figures he knew so well.

“More of Marsden’s stuff,” he said, with a low laugh; and his own voice sounded far off to him, as he lay looking at that strange little picture—a distant view of the two women against the light, with the sky and the window behind; somebody’s wife and daughter—his own—his very Rose, and she who had been his companion since his youth. Strange that he

should look at them so quietly, almost with an amused sense of novelty, without any tragic feeling or even pain to speak of, in the thought that he was going away shortly and would see them no more. He fell to thinking of a thousand things as he lay there watching them, yet not watching them. Not the things, perhaps, that a dying man ought to think of; little nothings, chance words that he had forgotten for years, lines of poetry, somehow connected with his present condition, though he did not remember the links of connection.

“The casement slowly grows, a glittering square,” he said to himself, and made an effort to think whence the line came, and why it should have at this moment thrust itself into his mind.

Then he fell altogether into a poetic

mood, and one disconnected line followed another into his mind, giving him a vague sense of melancholy pleasure. He said one or two of them aloud, calling the attention of his nurses—but it was not to them he was speaking. Finally, his mind centred on one which first of all seemed to strike him for its melody alone—

“ . . . Who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing, anxious being e’er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind ?”

He said this aloud once or twice over. “To dumb forgetfulness a prey;” that is not my feeling—not my feeling; the rest is very true. Gray does not get half justice now-a-days. How it satisfies the ear, flowing round and soft! ‘To dumb forgetfulness.’ Now, I wonder what he meant by that?”

“You are better, papa,” said Rose softly. Her mother stayed behind, not able to speak; but the girl, in her simplicity, thought the poetry “a good sign.”

“No, Rose. ‘Dumb forgetfulness,’—it is not that, child; that is not what one fears; to be sure there is a coldness and blackness that might chime in with the words. But the rest is true, ‘The warm precincts of the cheerful day’; warm is a living word altogether; it is not warm out here.”

“I will put the quilt on the bed,” said wistful Rose, thinking he complained of cold.

“No,” he said, roused, with a gentle laugh; “the quilt will do nothing for me; I am not cold—not yet; I suppose I shall be presently. Is your mother there? My

dear, help me with your experience. I dislike cold so much; does one feel it creeping up before one dies?"

"Oh, Herbert, dearest!" said his wife, heart-broken.

What could she answer to such a question?

"Nay, I don't want to make an unnecessary fuss," he said; "it is only a curiosity I have. Cold creeping up—it is disagreeable to think of it. What! have I more medicine to take? What does Marsden mean by sending me his detestable compounds still? It will only make your bill the larger, and me the less comfortable. I will not have it; take it away."

"It is something different," said Mrs. Damerel. "The doctor thought, perhaps, it might be worth trying."

“Is it the elixir of life?” said the patient smiling; “nothing short of that would be worth trying; even that would be too much trouble for the good. It would be folly to come back now when one has got over all the worst of the way.”

“You do not feel worse, Herbert?”

“Oh, no; when I tell you the worst is over, my anxious Martha! I am curious—curious—nothing more. I wish I could but tell you after what sort of a thing it was. Sit down by me, and give me your hand. Rose, you will be good; you will do everything your mother says?”

“Oh, Herbert!” said his wife, “do not think of us—if it has come to this; think of yourself, think where you are going—to God, Herbert, dearest, to be happy beyond anything we can think.”

“Is it so?” he said, still smiling. “I don’t know where I am going, my dear, and that is the only thing that gives me a little trouble. I should like to know. I am not afraid of God, who has always been far better to me than I deserved; and I hope I know the way of life.”

This he said with a momentary seriousness which was quite exceptional. Then he added, in the musing tone which to his anxious watchers seemed almost a gentle delirium, “But think, my dear! to be sent even into a new place, a strange town, in the dark—without any direction—without knowing where to go, right hand or left!” He gave a little, soft, broken laugh. “It is the strangest way of dealing with curious, inquisitive creatures like men. I never realised it before.”

Here some one appeared, beckoning behind the curtains, to say that Mr. Nolan was in the next room. The Curate came daily, and was always admitted. Rose went softly out to meet him, and almost dropped into the kind man's arms in her exhaustion and excitement.

"He is talking so very strangely," she said, the tears running down her pale cheeks. "Oh, Mr. Nolan, I think he is wandering in his mind! Should I send for the doctor? To hear him speak is enough to break one's heart."

The good Curate put her in a chair and soothed her, smoothing her pretty hair, with unconscious tenderness, as if she had been a child.

"Don't cry, dear," he said; "or rather,

do cry, poor child, it will do you good ; and stay quiet till I come back."

Rose did what she was told with the docility of helplessness. She lay back in the chair, and cried softly. In this new strait she was as a child, and all the child's overwhelming sense of desolation and half-superstitious awe of the terrible event which was coming weighed down her heart. Pity, and terror, and grief mingled in her mind, till it seemed unable to contain so much emotion. She sat and listened to the low voices in the next room, and watched the side gleam of light which came from the half-open door. The very world seemed hushed while this drama came to its conclusion, and there was not a sound without or within but the soft

movements in the sick-room, and the low voices. How many new experiences had come into her simple life in so short a time ! Darkness overshadowed the earth already, so that her pleasant pathway in it seemed lost ; and now here was Death, that visitor who is always so doubly appalling the first time he enters a peaceful house.

“ Well, Nolan, you have come in time, for I am just setting out,” said the Rector, in a voice stronger than it had been, his anxious wife thought. “ Why, man, don’t look so grave ; and you, my dear, don’t cry, to discourage me. Set me out on my journey a little more cheerily ! I never thought much about dying people before ; and mind what I say, Nolan, because it is your work. Of course, to those who have

never thought about such matters before, religion is all-important; but there's more in it than that. When a man's dying he wants humouring. Such strange fancies come into one's head. I am not at all troubled or serious to speak of; but it is a very odd thing, if you think of it, to set out on such a journey without the least notion where you are to go!"

And he laughed again. It was not harsh nor profane, but a soft laugh, as easy as a child's. I do not know why it should have horrified the attendants so, or what there is wrong in a laugh so gentle from a death-bed; but the hearers both shivered with natural pain and almost terror. They tried to lead him to more serious thoughts, but in vain. His mind, which had been serious enough before, had got somehow

dissipated, intoxicated by the approach of the unknown. He could think of nothing else. A certain levity even mingled in his excitement. He asked questions almost with eagerness—questions no one could answer—about the accessories of death. He was curious beyond description about all that he would have to go through.

“What a pity that I shall never be able to tell you what it is, and how I like it!” he said, reflectively; “at least until you know all about it too—we can compare notes then.”

He would not give up this kind of talk. After the prayers for the sick, which Mr. Nolan read, he resumed the same subject; and if it is possible to imagine anything that could have made this terrible moment of her life more bitter to poor Mrs. Dame-

rel, I think this would have been the one thing.

“Are his affairs in order, do you know?” said the doctor, after paying his late visit, as the Curate accompanied him to the door. He had just given it as his opinion that his patient could not see another morning; and Mr. Nolan had made up his mind to remain at the Rectory all night.

“I shouldn’t think it. He has never taken much trouble with his affairs.”

“Then don’t you think you could speak to him even now? I never saw a man so clear headed, and in such possession of his faculties, so near——Speak to him, Nolan. He knows exactly how things are, and no agitation can harm him now. He must have some wishes about his family—some arrangements to make.”

Mr. Nolan restrained with difficulty an exclamation that rose to his lips, and which might have sounded unkind to a dying man ; and then he asked abruptly,

“Do you find, in your experience, that people who are dying are much concerned about those they leave behind?”

“Well, no,” said the doctor, doubtfully ; “I don’t think they are. Self gets the upper hand. It is all Nature can do at that moment to think how she is to get through——”

“I suppose so,” said the Curate, with that seriousness which naturally accompanies such a speculation. He walked with the doctor to the gate, and came back across the plot of shrubbery, musing, with a heavy heart, on the living and on the dying. It was a lovely starlight night,

soft and shadowy, but with a brisk little questioning air which kept the leaves a-rustle. Mr. Nolan shivered with something like cold, as he looked up at the stars. "I wonder, after all, where he is going?" he said to himself, with a sympathetic ache of human curiosity in his heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. DAMEREL did not die for twenty-four hours after this. People do not get out of the world so easily. He was not to escape the mortal restlessness, "the fog in his throat," any more than others; and the hours were slow and long, and lingered like years. But at last the Rector came to an end of his wondering, and knew, like all the *illuminati* before him who have learned too, but are hushed and make no sign. It is a strange thought for mortals to take in, that almost every death is,

for the moment at least, a relief to those who surround the dying. The most intolerable moment is that which precedes the end, and most of us are thankful when it is over.

I need not enter into the dismal hush that fell upon the pleasant Rectory, nor say how the curious sun besieged the closed windows to get into the house once so freely open to the light; nor how, notwithstanding the long interval of illness which had banished him from common view, the shady corner under the lime-trees, where Mr. Damerel's chair and round table still stood, wore a look of piteous desolation, as if he had left them but yesterday. All this is easily comprehensible. The servants cried a little, and were consoled by their new mourning; the children

wept bitterly, then began to smile again ; and two poor clergymen, with large families, grew sick with anxiety as to who should have Dinglefield before our Rector had been dead a day (Neither of them had it, you may be sure, they wanted it so much). When the news was known in the parish, and especially on the Green, there was a moment of awe and emotion very real in its way. Most people heard of it when they were first called, and thought of it with varying degrees of impression till breakfast, to which they all came down looking very serious, and told each other the details, and remarked to each other what an inscrutable thing it was, and yet that it was wonderful he had lasted so long.

Breakfast broke in upon this universal

seriousness ; for when it is not any connection, as Mrs. Perronet well remarked, you cannot be expected to remain under the impression like those who are relatives ; and after breakfast the Green with one consent turned from the dead to the living, and began to ask what Mrs. Damerel would do, how she would be “left,” what change it would make in her circumstances ? Many shook their heads and feared that it would make a very great change. They calculated what he had had, and what she had had, when they were married, which was an event within the recollection of many ; and what the income of the Rectory was, after deducting the Curate’s salary and other necessary expenses ; and how much Bertie cost at Eton ;

and many other questions which only an intimate knowledge of their neighbours' affairs could have warranted them in discussing. General Perronet knew for certain that Mr. Damerel's life was insured in at least two offices; and though they could not, everybody agreed, have saved anything, yet there arose after a while a general hope that the family would not be so very badly off. Some of the ladies had quite decided before luncheon that the best thing Mrs. Damerel could do would be to take the White House, which happened to be empty, and which contained a number of little rooms just suitable for a large family. To be sure it was possible that she might prefer to go back to her own county, where her brothers still lived, one of whom was a squire of small property, and the

other the parson of the hereditary parish ; but the Dinglefield people scarcely thought she would take this step, considering how many friends she had on the Green, and how much better it was to stay where you are known, than to go back to the place where people have forgotten you.

“ And then there is Mr. Incledon,” said Mrs. Wodehouse, who felt that her son had been slighted, and may be excused perhaps for being a little spiteful. “ The mother has always had her eye upon him since he came back to Whitton. You will see that will be a match, if she can manage it ; and of course it will be a great match for Miss Rose.”

I think if an angel from heaven came down into a country parish, and a good woman with daughters entertained him un-

awares, her neighbours would decide at once which of the girls she meant to marry Gabriel to. But Mrs. Wodehouse had more justification than most gossips have. She could not forget the little pleading note which her Edward had made her write, entreating Rose to come down if only for one moment, and that the girl had taken no notice of it; though before that expedition to Whitton to see the Perugino, and Mr. Incledon's great house, Rose had been very well satisfied to have the young sailor at her feet. Mrs. Wodehouse had met the mother and daughter but seldom since, for they had been absorbed in attendance upon the Rector; but when by chance she did encounter them, she felt proud to think that she had never said anything but "Good-morning." No enquiries after their

health had come from her lips. She had retired into polite indifference ; though sometimes her heart had been touched by poor Rose's pale cheek, and her wistful look, which seemed to ask pardon. "I do not mind what is done to me," Mrs. Wodehouse said to her dear friend and confidant, Mrs. Musgrove ; "but those who slight my son I will never forgive. I do not see that it is unchristian. It is unchristian not to forgive what is done to yourself ; and I am sure no one is less ready to take personal offence than I am." She was resolved therefore, that, whatever happened, "Good morning" was all the greeting she would give to the Damerels ; though of course she was very sorry indeed for them, and as anxious as other people as to how they

would be left, and where they would go.

Mrs. Damerel herself was overwhelmed by her grief in a way which could scarcely have been expected from a woman who had so many other considerations to rouse her out of its indulgence, and who had not been for a long time a very happy wife. But when man and wife have been partially separated as these two had been, and have ceased to feel the sympathy for each other which such a close relationship requires, a long illness has a wonderful effect often in bringing back to the survivor the early image of the being he or she has loved. Perhaps I ought to say she ; I do not know if a sick wife is so touching to a husband's imagination as a sick man is to his wife's.

And then a little thing had occurred before the end which had gone to Mrs. Damerel's heart more than matters of much greater moment. Her husband had called Rose, and on Rose going to him had waved her away, saying, "No, no," and holding out his feeble hands to her mother. This insignificant little incident had stolen away everything but tenderness from the woman's mind, and she wept for her husband as she might have wept for him had he died in the earlier years of their marriage, with an absorbing grief that drove everything else out of her thoughts. This, however, could not last. When the blinds were drawn up from the Rectory windows, and the brisk sunshine shone in again, and the family looked with unveiled faces upon the lawn, where every one still expected to

see him, so full was it of his memory, the common cares of life came back and had to be thought of.

Mrs. Damerel's brothers had both come to the funeral. One of them, the Squire, was the trustee under her marriage settlement, and one of the executors of Mr. Damerel's will; so he remained along with the lawyer and the doctor and Mr. Nolan, and listened to all the provisions of that will, which were extremely reasonable, but of a far back date, and which the lawyer read with an occasional shake of his head, which at the moment no one could understand. Unfortunately, however, it was but too easy to understand. The Rector, with the wisest care, had appropriated the money he had to the various members of his family. The life

interest of the greater part was to be the mother's ; a small portion was to be given to the girls on their marriage, and to the boys on their outset in life, and the capital to be divided among them at Mrs. Damerel's death. Nothing could be more sensible or properly arranged. Mr. Hunsdon, Mrs. Damerel's brother, cleared his ruffled brow as he heard it. He had been possessed by an alarmed sense of danger—a feeling that his sister and her family were likely to come upon him—which weighed very heavily upon the good man's mind ; but now his brow cleared.

Further revelations, however, took away this serenity. The money which Mr. Damerel had divided so judiciously was almost all spent, either in unsuccessful speculations of which he had made several with a view

to increased dividends; or by repeated encroachments on the capital, made to pay debts; or for one plausible reason after another. Of the insurances on his life only one had been kept up, and that chiefly because his bankers held it as security for some advance, and had consequently seen that the premium was regularly paid.

These discoveries fell like so many thunderbolts upon the little party. I don't think Mrs. Damerel was surprised. She sat with her eyes cast down and her hands clasped, with a flush of shame and trouble on her face.

"Did you know of this, Rose?" her brother asked sternly, anxious to find some one to blame.

"I feared it," she said, slowly, not lift-

ing her eyes. The flush on her cheek dried up all her tears.

Mr. Hunsdon, for one, believed that she was ashamed—not for the dead man's sake—but because she had shared in the doing of it, and was confounded to find her ill doings brought into the light of day.

“But, good heavens!” he said in her ear, “did you know you were defrauding your children when you wasted your substance like this? I could not have believed it. Was my brother-in-law aware of the state of the affairs?—and what did he intend his family to do?”

“Mr. Damerel was not a business man,” said the lawyer. “He ought to have left the management in our hands. That mining investment was a thing we never

would have recommended, and the neglect of the insurance is most unfortunate. Mr. Damerel was never a man of business."

In the presence of his wife it was difficult to say more.

"A man may not be a man of business, and yet not be a fool," said Squire Hunsdon, hastily. "I beg your pardon, Rose; I don't want to be unkind."

"Let me go, before you use such language," she said, rising hastily. "I cannot bear it. Whatever he has done that is amiss, he is not standing here to answer before us now."

"I mean no offence, Rose. Nay, sit down; don't go away. You can't imagine—a man I had so much respect for—that I mean to cast any reflections. We'll

enter into that afterwards," said Mr. Hunsdon. "Let us know at least what they will have to depend on, or if anything is left."

"There is very little left," said Mrs. Damerel, facing the men who gazed at her wondering, with her pale face and widow's cap. "We had not very much at first, and it is gone; and you must blame me, if anyone is to blame. I was not, perhaps, a good manager. I was careless. I did not calculate as I ought to have done. But, if the blame is mine, the punishment will also be mine. Do not say anything more about it, for no one here will suffer but my children and me."

"I don't know about that. You must be patient, and you must not be unreason-

able," said her brother. "Of course we cannot see you want; though neither George nor I have much to spare—and it is our duty to inquire."

"Will inquiring bring back the money that is lost?" she said. "No, no; you shall not suffer by me. However little it is, we will manage to live on it; we will never be a burden upon anyone. I don't think I can bear any more."

And the judges before whom she stood (and not only she, but one who could not answer for himself) were very compassionate to the widow, though Mr. Hunsdon was still curious and much disturbed in his mind. They slurred over the rest, and allowed Mrs. Damerel and her son and daughter to go, and broke up the gloomy little assembly. Mr. Hunsdon

took Mr. Nolan by the arm, and went out with him, leading him on to the lawn, without any thought how the sound of his steps would echo upon the hearts of the mourners. He would have seated himself in the chair which still stood under the lime-trees, had not Mr. Nolan managed to sway his steps away from it, and lead him down' the slope to the little platform round the old thorn-tree, which was invisible from the windows. The good Curate was deeply moved both for the living and the dead.

“I don't mind speaking to you,” said the anxious brother; “I have heard so much of you as an attached friend. You must have known them thoroughly, and their way of living. I can't think it was my sister's fault.”

“And I know,” said Mr. Nolan, with energy, “it was not her fault. It was not anyone’s fault. He had a generous, liberal way with him——”

“Had he?” said the Squire, doubtfully. “He had a costly, expensive way with him—is that what you mean? I am not saying anything against my late brother-in-law. We got on very well, for we saw very little of each other. He had a fine mind, and that sort of thing. I suppose they have kept an extravagant house.”

“No, I assure you——”

“Entertained a good deal. Kept a good table, I am certain; good wine—I never drank better claret than that we had last night—the sort of wine *I* should keep for company, and bring up only on grand occasions. If there is much of it

remaining, I don't mind buying a few dozen at their own price," Mr. Hunsdon said, parenthetically. "I see; fine cookery, good wine, all the luxuries of the season, and the place kept up like a duke's—an expensive house."

"No," said the Curate, reiterating an obstinate negative; and then he said, hotly, "She did herself a great deal of injustice. She is the best of managers—the most careful—making everything go twice as far and look twice as well as anybody else."

Mr. Hunsdon looked at him curiously, for he was one of those people who think a man must be "in love with" any woman whose partisan he makes himself. He made a private note of the Curate's enthusiasm, and concluded it was best that his

sister and her daughter should be warned of his sentiments.

“I have not seen very much of my poor brother-in-law for some time,” he said, disguising his scrutiny, “so that I have no way of judging for myself. I don’t know which is most to blame. In such cases the wife can generally stop the extravagances if she likes. Two boys at Eton, for example—I can’t afford so much.”

“Bertie is on the foundation, and costs very little. He is a boy who will do something in the world yet; and I ought to know, for I taught him his first Greek. As for Reginald, his godfather pays his expenses, as I suppose you know?”

“You have been here for a long time, I perceive,” said the Squire, “if you taught the boy his first Greek, as you say.”

“Eight years,” said Mr. Nolan, with a shrug of his shoulders.

“And now?”

“Now? I’ll go off again, I suppose, like a rollin’ stone, unless the new Rector will have me. God help us, what heartless brutes we are!” said the Curate, with fiery heat. “I’ve just laid my old Rector in the grave, and I think of the new one before the day’s gone. God forgive me; it’s the way of the world.”

“And why shouldn’t you be Rector yourself? No one would be so good for the parish, I am sure.”

“Me!” said Mr. Nolan, his face lighting up with a broad gleam of humour, which he quenched next moment in the half-conventional gravity which he felt to be befitting to the occasion. “The days

of miracles are over, and I don't expect to be made an exception. No; I'll get a district church, maybe, some time, with plenty of hard work and little pay; but I am not the kind that are made to be Rectors. There is no chance for me."

"The people would like it," said Mr. Hunsdon, who was fishing for information; "it would be a popular appointment, and my sister and I would do anything that might lie in our power."

Mr. Nolan shook his head.

"Not they," he said; "they have a kindness for me in my humble condition. They know I'm a friend when they want one; but they want something more to look at for their Rector—and so do I too."

"You are not ambitious?" said Mr. Hunsdon, perplexed by his new acquaint-

ance, who shrugged his shoulders again, and rose hastily from the seat under the thorn-tree where they had been sitting.

“That depends,” he said, with impatient vagueness; “but I have my work waiting, if I can be of no more use here. For whatever I can do, Mrs. Damerel knows I am at her orders. And you won’t let her be worried just yet awhile?” he added, with a pleading tone, to which his mellow brogue lent an insinuating force which few people could resist. “You’ll not go till it’s fixed what they are to do?”

“You may be sure I shall do my duty by my sister,” said the Squire, who, though he had been willing to take the Curate’s evidence about the most intimate details of his sister’s life, instantly resented Mr.

Nolan's "interference" when it came on his side.

"He is in love with one or the other, or perhaps with both," said the man of the world to himself; "I must put Rose on her guard." Which accordingly he tried to do, but quite ineffectually, Mrs. Damerel's mind being totally unable to take in the insinuation which he scarcely ventured to put in plain words. But, with the exception of this foolish mistake, and of a great deal of implied blame which it was not in the nature of the man to keep to himself, he did try to do his duty as became a man with a certain amount of ordinary affection for his sister, and a strong sense of what society required from him as head of his family. However he might disapprove of her, and the extravagance in

which she had undeniably been art and part, yet he could not abandon so near a relation.

I should not like to decide whether benefits conferred thus from a strong sense of duty have more or less merit than those which flow from an affectionate heart and generous nature, but certainly they have less reward of gratitude. The Green was very much impressed by Mr. Hunsdon's goodness to his sister, but I fear that to her his goodness was a burden more painful than her poverty. And yet he was very good. He undertook, in his brother's name and his own, to pay Bertie's expenses at Eton, where the boy was doing so well; and when it was decided, as the Green by infallible instinct had felt it must be, that the White House was the natural refuge

for Mrs. Damerel, when the time came to leave the Rectory, Mr. Hunsdon made himself responsible for the rent, and put it in order for her with sufficient liberality. The whole parish admired and praised him for this, and said how fortunate Mrs. Damerel was to have so good a brother. And she tried herself to feel it, and to be grateful as he deserved. But gratitude, which springs spontaneous for the simplest of gifts, and exults over a nothing, is often very slow to follow great benefits.

Poor Mrs. Damerel thought it was the deadness of her grief which made her so insensible to her brother's kindness. She thought she had grown incapable of feeling; and she had so much to realize, so much to accustom herself to. A change so great and fundamental confuses the mind. So

far as she could see before her, she had nothing now to look forward to in life but an endless, humiliating struggle ; and she forgot, in the softening of her heart, that for years past she had been struggling scarcely less hardly. When she looked back she seemed to see only happiness in comparison with this dull deprivation of all light and hope in which she was left now. But the reader knows that she had not been happy, and that this was but, as it were, a prismatic reflection from her tears, a fiction of imagination and sorrow ; and by-and-by she began to see more clearly the true state of affairs.

They stayed at the Rectory till Christmas, by grace of the new Rector, who unfortunately, however, could not keep on Mr. Nolan—of whose preferment there never

had been a glimmer of hope—beyond that period. Christmas is a dreary time to go into a new home; though I don't think the Rector of Dinglefield thought so, who brought home his bride to the pretty Rectory, and thought no life could begin more pleasantly than by those cheerful Christmas services in the church, which was all embowered in holly and laurel, in honour of the great English festival and in honour of him; for the Green had of course taken special pains with the decorations on account of the new-comer. The long and dreary autumn which lay between their bereavement and their removal was, however, very heavy and terrible for the Damerels. Its rains, and fogs, and dreary days seemed to echo and increase their own heaviness of heart; and autumn, as it

sinks into winter, is all the more depressing in a leafy woodland country, as it has been beautiful in its earlier stages. Even the little children were subdued, they knew not why, and felt the change in the house; though it procured them many privileges, and they might now even play in the drawing-room unreprieved, and were never sent away hurriedly lest they should disturb papa, as had been the case of old when sometimes they would snatch a fearful joy by a romp in the twilight corners; but even the babies felt that this new privilege was somehow a symptom of some falling off and diminution in the family life.

But no one felt it as Rose did, who had been shaken out of all the habits of her existence, without having as yet found anything to take their place. She had not

even entered upon the idea of duty when her secret romance was brought to a sudden close, and that charmed region of imagination in which youth so readily finds a refuge, and which gilds the homeliest present with dreams of that which may be hereafter, had been arbitrarily closed to the girl. Had her little romance been permitted to her, she would have had a secret spring of hope and content to fall back upon, and would have faced her new life bravely with a sense of her own individuality, such as seemed now to have faded altogether out of her mind.

Her very appearance changed, as was inevitable. Instead of the blooming maiden we have known, it was the whitest of Roses that went about the melancholy house in her black dress, with all the colour and

life gone out of her, doing whatever she was told with a docility which was sad to see. When she was left to herself she would sit idle or drop absorbed into a book ; but everything that was suggested to her she did, without hesitation and without energy. The whole world had become confined to her within these oppressive walls, within this sorrowful house.

The people on the Green looked at her with a kind of wondering reverence, saying how she must have loved her father, and how she looked as if she would never get over it. But grief was not all of the weight which crushed her. She was for the moment bound as by some frost, paralysed in all the springs of her interrupted being. She had no natural force of activity in her to neutralise the chill her soul had

taken. She did all that she was told to do, and took every suggestion gratefully; but she had not yet learned to see for herself with her own eyes what had to be done, nor did she realise all the changes that were involved in the one great change which had come upon them. Misfortune had fallen upon her while she was still in the dreamy vagueness of her youth, when the within is more important than the without, and the real and imaginary are so intermingled that it is hard to tell where one ends and another begins. Necessity laid no wholesome vigour-giving hand upon her, because she was pre-occupied with fancies which seemed more important than the reality. Agatha, all alert and alive in her practical matter-of-fact girlhood, was of more value in the house than poor Rose,

who was like a creature in a dream, not seeing anything till it was pointed out to her; obeying always and humbly, but never doing or originating anything from her own mind. Nobody understood her, not even herself; and sometimes she would sit down and cry for her father, thinking he would have known what it meant, without any recollection of the share her father had in thus paralysing her young life. This strange condition of affairs was unknown, however, to anyone out of doors except Mr. Nolan, who, good fellow, took it upon him once to say a few coaxing, admonishing words to her.

“You’ll ease the mother when you can, Miss Rose, dear,” he said, taking her soft, passive hands between his own. “You don’t mind me saying so—an old fellow

and an old friend like me, that loves every one of you, one better than another? I'll hang on if I can, if the new man will have me, and be of use—what's the good of me else?—and you'll put your shoulder to the wheel with a good heart like the darling girl that you are?"

"My shoulder to the wheel," said Rose, with a half-smile, "and with a good heart! when I feel as if I had no heart at all?" and the girl began to cry, as she did now for any reason, if she was startled, or any one spoke to her suddenly. What could poor Mr. Nolan do but soothe and comfort her? Poor child! They had taken away all the inner strength from her before the time of trial came, and no better influence had yet roused her from the shock, or made her feel that she had something in her

which was not to be crushed by any storm. Mr. Nolan knew as little what to make of her 'as her mother did, who was slowly coming back to her old use and wont, and beginning to feel the sharpness of hardship, and to realise once more how it was and why it was that this hardship came.

CHAPTER IX.

THE White House did not stand on the Green, but on one of the roads leading out of it, at a short distance from that centre of the world. It looked large from outside—something between a mansion and a cottage—and within was full of useless passages, confused little rooms, and bits of staircase on which the unaccustomed passenger might break his neck with ease, and a general waste of space and disorder of arrangement which pleased the antiquary as quaint, but was much less desirable

practically than artistically. There were two sitting-rooms, which were large and low, with raftered roofs, and small deep-set windows overgrown with creepers ; and there was a garden, almost as rambling as the house itself, and surrounded by old walls and hedges which effectually shut out every view, except into its own grassy, mossy depths. Some former enterprising inhabitant had introduced into the drawing-room one long French window, by which there was a practicable exit into the garden ; and this was the only modern point in the house. Some people said it spoilt the room, which otherwise would have been perfect ; but it was a great convenience and comfort to the Damerels, in summer, at least.

The house was somewhat damp,

somewhat weedy, rather dark ; but it was roomy, and more like a house in which gentlefolks could melt away into penury than a pert little new brick house in a street. It was very cheap ; for it had various disadvantages, into which I am not called upon to enter. Mrs. Damerel, whose house had always been the perfection of houses, with every new sanitary invention, was glad to put up with these drawbacks for the sake of the low rent—so vast and so many are the changes which absence of money makes.

Before Christmas Day they had all the old furniture—save some special pieces of *virtu*, graceful old cabinets, mirrors, and ornamental things, which were sold—arranged and adapted, and settled down in tolerable comfort. The boys,

when they came from school, looked with doubtful faces at the change, especially Reginald, who was humiliated by it, and found fault with the room allotted to him, and with the deficiencies of service. "Poor! why are we poor? It must be some one's fault," said the boy to his sister Agatha, who cried and declared passionately that she wished he had not come back, but had gone to his fine godfather, whom he was always talking of. When an invitation arrived for him from his godfather some days later, I think they were all glad; for Reginald was very like his father, and could not bear anything mean or poor.

The number of servants had dwindled to one, who made-believe to be of all work, and did a little of everything.

Except in the case of those lucky families who abound in fiction, and now and then, *par exception*, are to be found in ordinary life, who possess a faithful and devoted and all-accomplished woman, who, for love of them, forsakes all hopes of bettering herself, and applies at once genius and knowledge to the multifarious duties of maid-of-all-work—this functionary is as great a trouble to her employers as to herself; and to fall back upon attendance so uninstructed and indifferent is one of the hardest consequences of social downfall.

The girls had to make up Mary Jane's deficiencies in the White House; and at first, as they were not used to it, the results were but little consolatory. Even Bertie, perhaps, though a good son and a

good boy, was not sorry to get back to school, and to the society of his friends, after these first holidays, which had not been happy ones. Poor children! none of them had ever known before what it was to do without what they wanted, and to be content with the bare necessities of life.

All the same, a shower of cards from all the best people about came pouring down upon the new dwellers in the White House, and were taken in by Mary Jane between a grimy finger and thumb to the drawing-room where the rumble of the departing carriages excited Agatha and Patty, at least, if no one else. And all the people on the Green made haste to call to express their sympathy and friendliness. Mrs. Wodehouse was the only one who did not

ask to see Mrs. Damerel ; but even she did not lose a day in calling ; and, indeed, it was while on her way from the White House that for the first time she met Rose, who had been out about some business for her mother, and who, with her black veil over her face, was straying slowly home. Mrs. Wodehouse said “ Good morning,” with a determination to hold by her formula and not be tempted into kindness ; but when the girl put back her veil and showed her pale face, the good woman’s heart melted in spite of herself.

“ How pale you are !” she said. “ Oh, Rose !—And how is your mother ?” she added hastily, trying to save herself from the overflowing of tenderness which came upon her unawares.

“Are you going to see her?” said Rose.

“I have been to call; I did not, of course, expect she would see me. And how do you like the White House? I hope you have not been ill; you do not look so fresh as when I saw you last.”

“It is very nice,” said Rose, answering the first question; “though it feels damp just at first; we all think we shall soon get used to it. It is a long time since I saw you last.”

This was said with a little piteous smile, which made Mrs. Wodehouse’s resolution “never to forgive” become more and more hard to keep.

“I could not think I was wanted,” she said, with an effort to appear short and

stern ; “or I should have gone to your mother before now.”

“Why?” asked Rose, with a wondering glance ; and then, as there was a dead pause, which was awkward, she said, softly : “I hope you have news from—your son ?”

“Oh, yes ; I have news from him. He is always very good in writing. There never was a kinder boy to his mother. He never forgets me ; though there are many people who would fain get his attention. Edward is always finding friends wherever he goes.”

“I am glad,” said poor Rose.

“Plenty of friends ! I hear nothing but good news of him. He writes in the best of spirits. Oh, Rose !” cried Mrs. Wodehouse, hurriedly running one subject

into another with breathless precipitancy, "how could you be so heartless—so unkind—as not to come down stairs when I asked you to bid my poor boy good-bye?"

A flush of colour came upon Rose's pale face; it made her look like herself again. "I could not," she said; "do not be angry. I have so wanted to tell you. There was nobody there but me, and he held my hand, and would not let me leave him. I could not. Oh! how glad I am that you have asked me! It was not my fault." Her father's name brought the big tears to her eyes. "Poor papa!" she added, softly, with an instinctive sense that he needed defence.

Whether Mrs. Wodehouse would have taken her to her arms forthwith on the open Green in the wintry afternoon light,

if no one had disturbed them, I cannot tell ; but, just as she was putting out her hands to the girl, they were interrupted by a third person, who had been coming along the road unnoticed, and who now came forward, with his hat in his hand, and with the usual inquiry about her mother to which Rose was accustomed. The sound of his voice made Mrs. Wodehouse start with suppressed anger and dismay, and Rose looked out from the heavy shadow of the crape veil, which showed the paleness of her young face, as if under a penthouse or heavy-shaded cavern. But she was not pale at that moment ; a light of emotion was in her face. The tears were hanging on her eyelashes ; her soft lip was quivering. Mr. Incledon thought that grief and downfall had done all that

the severest critic could have desired for her young beauty. It had given tenderness, expression, feeling to the blooming rose face, such as is almost incompatible with the first radiance of youth.

“Would Mrs. Damerel see me, do you think?” he asked; “or is it too early to intrude upon her? It is about business I want to speak.”

“I will ask,” said Rose. “But if it is about business, she will be sure to see you. She says she is always able for that.”

“Then I will say good-bye,” said Mrs. Wodehouse, unreasonably excited and angry, she could scarcely tell why. She made a step forward, and then came back again with a little compunction, to add, in an undertone: “I am glad we have had

this little explanation. I will tell him when I write, and it will please him, too."

"You have not been quarrelling with Mrs. Wodehouse, that you should have little explanations?" said Mr. Incledon, as he walked along to the White House by Rose's side.

"Oh, no, it was nothing;" but he saw the old rose flush sweep over the cheeks which had half relapsed into paleness. What was it? and whom did Mrs. Wodehouse mean to write to? and what was she glad about? These foolish questions got into the man's head, though they were too frivolous to be thought of. She took him into the drawing-room at the White House, which was almost dark by this time, it was so low, and where the cheery glimmer of the fire made the room look

much more cheerful than it ever was in the short daylight, through the many branches that surrounded the house. Mrs. Damerel was sitting alone there over the fire, and Rose left him with her mother, and went away, bidding Agatha watch over the children, that no one might disturb mamma.

“She is talking to Mr. Incledon about business,” said Rose, passing on to her own room; and Agatha, who was sharp of wit, could not help wondering what pleasant thing had happened to her sister to make her voice so soft and thrilling.

“I almost expected to hear her sing,” Agatha said afterwards; though indeed a voice breaking forth in a song, as all their voices used to do six months ago, would have seemed something impious at this

moment, in the shadow that lay over the house.

Mr. Incledon was nearly an hour "talking business" with Mrs. Damerel, during which time they sat in the firelight and had no candles, being too much interested in their conversation to note how time passed. Mrs. Damerel said nothing about the business when the children came in to tea—the homely and inexpensive meal which had replaced dinner in the White House. Her eyes showed signs of tears, and she was very quiet, and let the younger ones do and say almost what they pleased. But if the mother was quiescent, Rose, too, had changed in a different way. Instead of sitting passive, as she usually did, it was she who directed Agatha and Patty about their lessons, and helped

Dick, and sent the little ones off at their proper hour to bed. There was a little glimmer of light in her eyes, a little dawn of colour in her cheek. The reason was nothing that could have been put into words—a something perfectly baseless, visionary, and unreasonable. It was not the hope of being reconciled to Edward Wodehouse, for she had never quarrelled with him; nor the hope of seeing him again, for he was gone for years. It was merely that she had recovered her future, her imagination, her land of promise. The visionary barrier which had shut her out from that country of dreams had been removed—it would be hard to say how; for good Mrs. Wodehouse certainly was not the doorkeeper of Rose's imagination, nor had it in her power to shut and open

at her pleasure. But what does how and why matter in that visionary region? It was so, which is all that need be said. She was not less sorrowful, but she had recovered herself. She was not less lonely, nor did she feel less the change in her position; but she was once more Rose, an individual creature, feeling the blood run in her veins, and the light lighten upon her, and the world spread open before her.

“If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free”—

I suppose this was how she felt. She had got back that consciousness which is sometimes bitter and sometimes sad, but without which we cannot live—the consciousness that she was no shadow in the world, but herself—no reflection of an-

other's will and feelings, but possessor of her own.

When her mother and she were left alone, Rose got up from where she was sitting and drew a low chair, which belonged to one of the children, to her mother's knee. Mrs. Damerel, too, had watched Agatha's lingering exit with some signs of impatience, as if she, too, had something to say ; but Rose had not noticed this, any more than her mother had noticed the new impulse which was visible in her child. The girl was so full of it, that she began to speak instantly, without waiting for any question.

"Mamma," she said softly, "I have not been a good daughter to you ; I have left you to take all the trouble, and I have not tried to be of use. I want to tell you that

I have found it out, and that I will try with all my heart to be different from to-day."

"Rose, my dear child!" Mrs. Damerel was surprised and troubled. The tears, which rose so easily now, came with a sudden rush to her eyes. She put her arms round the girl, and drew her close, and kissed her. "I have never found fault with you, my darling," she said.

"No, mamma; and that makes me feel it more. But it shall be different; I am sorry, more sorry than I can tell you; but it shall be different from to-day."

"But, Rose, what has put this into your head to-day?"

A wavering blush came and went upon Rose's face. She had it almost in her heart to tell her mother; but yet there was

nothing to tell, and what could she say ?

“I—can’t tell, mamma. It is mild and like spring. I think it was being out, and hearing people speak—kindly——”

Here Rose paused, and, in her turn, let fall a few soft tears. She had gone out very little, scarcely stirring beyond the garden, since her father’s death, and Mrs. Damerel thought it was the mere impulse of reviving life ; unless indeed——

“My dear, did Mr. Incledon say anything to you ?” she asked, with a vague hope.

“Mr. Incledon ? Oh, no ! except to ask me if you would see him—on business. What was his business ?” said innocent Rose, looking up into her mother’s face.

“Rose,” said Mrs. Damerel, “I was just about to speak to you on a very important

matter when you began. My dear, I must tell you at once what Mr. Incledon's business was. It was about you."

"About me?"

All the colour went out of Rose's face in a moment; she recollected the visit to Whitton, and the sudden light that had flashed upon her as he and she looked at the picture together. She had forgotten all about it months ago, and indeed had never again thought of Mr. Incledon. But now in a moment her nerves began to thrill and her heart to beat; yet she herself, in whom the nerves vibrated and the heart throbbed, to turn to stone.

"Rose, you are not nervous or silly like many girls, and you know now what life is—not all a happy dream, as it sometimes seems at the beginning. My dear, I have

in my hand a brighter future than you ever could have hoped for, if you will have it. Mr. Incledon has asked my leave to ask you to be his wife. Rose——”

“Me! his wife!”

Rose clutched at her mother's hand and repeated these words with a pant of fright; though it seemed to her the moment they were said as if she had all her life known they were coming, and had heard them a hundred times before.

“That is what he wants, Rose. Don't tremble so, or look at me so wildly. It is a wonderful thing to happen to so young a girl as you. He is very good and very kind, and he would be, oh! of so much help to all your family; and he could give you everything that heart can desire, and restore you to far more than you have

lost; and he is very fond of you, and would make you an excellent husband. I promised to speak to you, dear. You must think it over. He does not wish you to give him an answer at once."

"Mamma," said Rose, hoarsely, with a sudden trembling which seemed to reach into her very heart, "is it not better to give an answer at once? Mamma, I am not fond of him. I think it would be best to say so now."

"You are not fond of him? Is that all the consideration you give such a question? You do not intend *that* for an answer, Rose?"

"Oh, mamma, is it not enough? What more answer could I give? I am not fond of him at all. I could not pretend to be. When it is an answer like that, surely it is best to give it now."

“And so,” said her mother, “you throw aside one of the best offers that ever a girl received with less thought on the subject than you would give to a cat or a dog! You decide your whole future without one thought. Rose, is this the helpfulness you have just promised me? Is this the thoughtfulness for yourself and all of us that I have a right to expect?”

Rose did not know what to reply. She looked at her mother with eyes suddenly hollowed out by fear and anxiety and trouble, and watched every movement of her lips and hands with a growing alarm which she could not control.

“You do not speak? Rose, Rose, you must see how wrong you would be to act so hastily. If it were a question of keeping or sending away a servant—nay, even

a dog, you would give more thought to it; and this is a man who loves you, who would make you happy. Oh, do not shake your head! How can a child of your age know? A man who, I am sure, would make you happy; a man who could give you everything, and more than everything, Rose. I cannot let you decide without thought."

"Does one need to think?" said Rose, slowly, after a pause. "I do not care for him, I cannot care for him. You would not have me tell a lie?"

"I would have you deny yourself," cried her mother; "I would have you think of some higher rule than your own pleasure. Is that the best thing in the world, to please yourself? Oh, I could tell you stories of that! Why are

we in this poor little house with nothing? why is my poor Bertie dependent upon my brother, and you girls forced to work like maid-servants, and our life all changed? Through self-indulgence, Rose. Oh! God forgive me for saying it, but I must tell the truth. Through choosing the pleasure of the moment rather than the duties that we cannot shake off; through deciding always to do what one liked rather than to do what was right. Here are eight of you children with your lives blighted, all that one might be pleasant and unburdened. I have suffered under it all my life. Not anything wrong, not anything wicked, but only, and always, and before everything what one liked oneself."

Mrs. Damerel spoke with a passion that was very unlike her usual calm. The

lines came into her brow which Rose remembered of old, but which the tranquillity of grief had smoothed out. A hot colour mounted to her cheeks, making a line beneath her eyes. The girl was struck dumb by this sudden vehemence. Her reason was confused by the mingled truth and sophistry, which she felt without knowing how to disentangle them, and she was shocked and wounded by the implied blame thus cast upon him who had been of late the idol of her thoughts, and whom, if she had once timidly begun to form a judgment on him, she had long ceased to think of as anything but perfect.

“ Oh ! stop, stop ! don’t say any more ! ” she cried, clasping her hands.

“ I cannot stop,” said Mrs. Damerel ;
“ not now, when I have begun. I never

thought to say as much to one of his children, and to no other could I ever speak, Rose. I see the same thing in Reginald, and it makes my heart sick; must I find it in you too? There are people who are so happy as to like what they have to do, what it is their duty to do; and these are the blessed ones. But it is not always, it is not often, so in this life. Dear, listen to what I say. Here is a way by which you may make up for much of the harm that has been done; you may help all that belong to you; you may put yourself in a position to be useful to many; you may gain what men only gain by the labour of their lives; and all this by marrying a good man, whom you will make happy. Will you throw it away because at the first glance it is not what your fancy

chooses? Will you set your own taste against everybody's advantage? Oh! my darling, think, think! Do not let your first motive in the first great thing you are called upon to do, be mere self!"

Mrs. Damerel stopped short, with a dry glitter in her eyes, and a voice which was choked and broken. She was moved to the extent of passion—she who in general was so self-restrained. A combination of many emotions worked within her. To her mind, every good thing for her child was contained in this proposal; and in Rose's opposition to it she saw the rising of the poisonous monster which had embittered her whole life. She did not pause to ask herself what there was in the nature of this sacrifice she demanded, which made it less lawful, less noble, than the other

sacrifices which are the Christian's highest ideal of duty. It was enough that by this step, which did not seem to Mrs. Damerel so very hard, Rose would do everything for herself and much for her family, and that she hesitated, declined to take it, because it was not pleasant, because she did not like it. Like it ! The words raised a perfect storm in the breast of the woman who had been made wretched all her life by her ineffectual struggle against the habitual decision of her husband for what he liked. She was too much excited to hear what Rose had to say ; if, indeed, poor Rose had anything to say after this sudden storm which had broken upon her.

“ We will speak of it to-morrow, when you have had time to think,” she said, kissing her daughter, and dismissing her hastily.

When Rose had gone, she fell back into her chair by the waning firelight, and thought over the many times in her own life when she had battled and had been worsted on this eternal point of difference between the two classes of humanity. She had struggled for self-denial against self-indulgence in a hundred different ways on a hundred fields of battle, and here was the end of it: a poor old house, tumbling to pieces about her ears, a poor little pittance, just enough to give her children bread; and for those children no prospect but toil for which they had not been trained, and which changed their whole conception of life. Bertie, her bright boy, for whom everything had been hoped, if her brother's precarious bounty should fail, what was there before him but a poor little clerkship

in some office from which he never could rise, and which, indeed, his uncle had suggested at first as a way of making him helpful to his family? God help her! This was what a virtuous and natural preference for the things one liked had brought Mrs. Damerel to; and if her mind took a confused and over-strained view of the subject, and of the lengths to which self-denial ought to be carried, was it any wonder? I think there is a great deal to be said on her side of the case.

Rose, for her part, lit her candle and went up the old stairs—which creaked under her light foot—with her head bent down, and her heart stifled under a weight that was too much for her. A cold, cold January night, the chill air coming in at the old casements, the dark skies without

lending no cheering influence, and no warmth of cheery fires within to neutralise Nature's heaviness ; an accusation thrown upon her under which her whole being ached and revolted ; a duty set before her which was terrible to think of ; and no one to advise, or comfort, or help. What was she to do ?

CHAPTER X.

MR. INCLEDON was a man of whom people said that any girl might be glad to marry him ; and considering marriage from an abstract point of view, as one naturally does when it does not concern one's self, this was entirely true. In position, in character, in appearance, and in principles, he was everything that could be desired : a good man, just, and never consciously unkind ; nay, capable of generosity when it was worth his while, and he

had sufficient inducement to be generous. A man well-educated, who had been much about the world, and had learned the toleration which comes by experience; whose opinions were worth hearing on almost every subject; who had read a great deal, and thought a little, and was as much superior to the ordinary young man of society in mind and judgment as he was in wealth.

That this kind of man often fails to captivate a foolish girl, when a partner in a valse, brainless, beardless, and penniless, succeeds without any trouble in doing so, is one of those mysteries of nature which nobody can penetrate, but which happens too often to be doubted. Even in this particular, however, Mr. Incledon had his advantages. He was not one of those who,

either by contempt for the occupations of youth or by the gravity natural to maturer years, allow themselves to be pushed aside from the lighter part of life—he still danced, though not with the absolute devotion of twenty, and retained his place on the side of youth, not permitting himself to be shelved. More than once, indeed, the young officers from the garrison near, and the young scions of the county families, had looked on with puzzled noncomprehension, when they found themselves altogether distanced in effect and popularity by a mature personage whom they would gladly have called an old fogie had they dared. These young gentlemen of course consoled their vanity by railing against the mercenary character of women who preferred wealth to everything. But it

was not only his wealth upon which Mr. Incledon stood. No girl who had married him need have felt herself withdrawn to the grave circle in which her elders had their place. He was able to hold his own in every pursuit with men ten years his juniors, and did so. Then, too, he had almost a romantic side to his character; for a man so well off does not put off marrying for so long without a reason, and though nobody knew of any previous story, any "entanglement," which would have restrained him, various picturesque suggestions were afloat; and even failing these, the object of his choice might have laid the flattering unction to her soul that his long waiting had been for the realisation of some perfect ideal which he found only in her.

This model of a marriageable man took his way from the White House in a state of mind less easily described than most of his mental processes. He was not excited to speak of, for an interview between a lover of thirty-five and the mother of the lady he loves is not generally exciting; but he was a little doubtful of his own perfect judiciousness in the step he had just taken. I can no more tell you why he had set his heart on Rose than I can say why she felt no answering inclination towards him—for there were many other girls in the neighbourhood who would in many ways have been more suitable to a man of his tastes and position. But Rose was the one woman in the world for him, by sheer caprice of nature; just as reasonable, and no more so, as that other caprice which

made him, with all his advantages and commendations, not the man for her.

If ever a man was in a position to make a deliberate choice, such as men are commonly supposed to make in matrimony, Mr. Incledon was the man; yet he chose just as much and as little as the rest of us do. He saw Rose, and some power which he knew nothing of decided the question at once for him. He had not been thinking of marriage, but then he made up his mind to marry; and whereas he had on various occasions weighed the qualities and the charms of this one and the other, he never asked himself a question about her, nor compared her with any other woman, nor considered whether she was suited for him, or anything else about her.

This was how he exercised that inestim-

able privilege of choice which women sometimes envy. But, having once received this conviction into his mind, he had never wavered in his determination to win her. The question in his mind now was, not whether his selection was the best he could have made, but whether it was wise of him to have entrusted his cause to the mother rather than to have spoken to Rose herself. He had remained in the background during those dreary months of sorrow. He had sent flowers and game and messages of enquiry; but he had not thrust himself upon the notice of the women, till their change of residence gave token that they must have begun to rouse themselves for fresh encounter with the world.

When he was on his way to the White House he had fully persuaded himself that

to speak to the mother first was the most delicate and the most wise thing he could do. For one thing, he could say so much more to her than he could to Rose; he could assure her of his goodwill and of his desire to be of use to the family, should he become a member of it. Mr. Incledon did not wish to bribe Mrs. Damerel to be on his side. He had indeed a reasonable assurance that no such bribe was necessary, and that a man like himself must always have a reasonable mother on his side. This he was perfectly aware of, as indeed any one in his senses would have been. But as soon as he had made his declaration to Mrs. Damerel, and had left the White House behind, his thoughts began to torment him with doubts of the wisdom of this proceeding. He saw very well that

there was no clinging of enthusiastic love, no absolute devotedness of union, between this mother and daughter, and he began to wonder whether he might not have done better had he run all the risks and broached the subject to Rose herself, shy and liable to be startled as she was. It was perhaps possible that his own avowal, which must have had a certain degree of emotion in it, would have found better acceptance with her than the passionless statement of his intentions which Mrs. Damerel would probably make. For it never dawned upon Mr. Incledon's imagination that Mrs. Damerel would support his suit not with calmness, but passionately—more passionately, perhaps, than would have been possible to himself. He could not have divined any reason why she should do so, and

naturally he had not the least idea of the tremendous weapons she was about to employ in his favour. I don't think, for very pride and shame, that he would have sanctioned the use of them had he known.

It happened, however, by chance that as he walked home in the wintry twilight he met Mrs. Wodehouse and her friend Mrs. Musgrove, who were going the same way as he was, on their way to see the Northcotes, who had lately come to the neighbourhood. He could not but join them so far in their walk, nor could he avoid the conversation which was inevitable. Mrs. Wodehouse indeed was very eager for it, and began almost before he could draw breath.

“Did you see Mrs. Damerel after all?” she asked. “You remember I met you

when you were on your way?"

"Yes; she was good enough to see me," said Mr. Incledon.

"And how do you think she is looking? I hear such different accounts; some people say very ill, some just as usual. I have not seen her myself," said Mrs. Wodehouse, slightly drawing herself up, "except in church."

"How was that?" he said, half amused. "I thought you had always been great friends."

Upon this he saw Mrs. Musgrove give a little jerk to her friend's cloak, in warning, and perceived that Mrs. Wodehouse wavered between a desire to tell a grievance and the more prudent habit of self-restraint.

"Oh!" she said, with a little hesitation; "yes, of course we were always good friends."

I had a great admiration for our late good Rector, Mr. Incledon. What a man he was ! Not to say a word against the new one, who is very nice, he will never be equal to Mr. Damerel. What a fine mind he had, and a style, I am told, equal to the very finest preachers ! We must never hope to hear such sermons in our little parish again. Mrs. Damerel is a very good woman, and I feel for her deeply ; but the attraction in that house, as I am sure you must have felt, was not her, but him."

"I have always had a great regard for Mrs. Damerel," said Mr. Incledon.

"Oh, yes, yes ! I am sure—a good wife and an excellent mother and all that ; but not the fine mind, not the intellectual conversation, one used to have with the dear

Rector," said good Mrs. Wodehouse, who had about as much intellect as would lie on a sixpence; and then she added, "Perhaps I am prejudiced; I never can get over a slight which I am sure she showed to my son."

"Ah! what was that?"

Mrs. Musgrove once more pulled her friend's cloak; and there was a great deal more eagerness and interest than the occasion deserved in Mr. Incledon's tone.

"Oh, nothing of any consequence! What do you say, dear?—a mistake? Well, I don't think it was a mistake. They thought Edward was going to——; yes, *that* was a mistake, if you please. I am sure he had many other things in his mind a great deal more important. But they thought——; and though common

civility demanded something different, and I took the trouble to write a note and ask it, I do think—— ; but, however, after the words I had with her to-day, I no longer blame Rose. Poor child ! I am always very sorry for poor Rose.”

“ Why should you be sorry for Miss Damerel ? Was she one of those who slighted your son ? I hope Mr. Edward Wodehouse is quite well ? ”

“ He is very well, I thank you, and getting on so satisfactorily ; nothing could be more pleasant. Oh, you must not think Edward cared ! He has seen a great deal of the world, and he did not come home to let himself be put down by the family of a country clergyman. That is not at all what I meant ; I am sorry for Rose, however, because of a great many things.

She ought to go out as a governess or companion, or something of that sort, poor child ! Mrs. Damerel may try, but I am sure they never can get on as they are doing. I hear that all they have to depend on is about a hundred and fifty a year. A family can never live upon that, not with their habits, Mr. Incledon ; and therefore I think I may well say *poor* Rose !”

“I don’t think Miss Damerel will ever require to make such a sacrifice,” he said, hurriedly.

“Well, I only hope you are right,” said Mrs. Wodehouse. “Of course you know a great deal more about business matters than I do, and perhaps their money is at higher interest than we think for ; but if I were Rose I almost think I should see it

to be my duty. Here we are at Mrs. Northcote's, dear. Mr. Incledon, I am afraid we must say good-bye."

Mr. Incledon went home very hot and fast after this conversation. It warmed him in the misty cold evening, and seemed to put so many weapons into his hand. Rose, his Rose, go out as a governess or companion! He looked at the shadow of his own great house standing out against the frosty sky, and laughed to himself as he crossed the park. She a dependant, who might to-morrow, if she pleased, be virtual mistress of Whitton and all its wealth! He would have liked to have said to these women, "In three months Rose will be the great lady of the parish, and lay down the law to you and the Green, and all your gossiping society."

He would even, in a rare fit of generosity, have liked to tell them on the spot that this blessedness was in Rose's power, to give her honour in their eyes whether she accepted him or not; which was a very generous impulse indeed, and one which few men would have been equal to—though, indeed, as a matter of fact, Mr. Incledon did not carry it out. But he went into the lonely house, where everything pleasant and luxurious, except the one crowning luxury of some one to share it with, awaited him, in a glow of energy and eagerness, resolved to go back again to-morrow and plead his cause with Rose herself, and win her, not prudentially through her mother, but by his own warmth of love and eloquence.

Poor Rose in June! In the wintry set-

ting of the White House, she was not much like the Rector's flower-maiden, in all her delicate perfection of bloom, "queen rose of the rosebud garden," impersonation of all the warmth, and sweetness, and fragrance, and exquisite simple profusion of summer and nature.

Mr. Incledon's heart swelled full of love and pity as he thought of the contrast—not with passion, but soft tenderness, and a delicious sense of what it was in his power to do for her, and to restore her to. He strayed over the rooms which he had once shown to her, with a natural pride in their beauty, and in all the delicate treasures he had accumulated there, until he came to the little inner room with its grey-green hangings, in which hung the Perugino, which, since Rose had seen it,

he had always called his Raphael. He seemed to see her too, standing there looking at it, a creature partaking something of that soft divinity, an enthusiast with sweet soul and looks congenial to that heavenly art. I do not know that his mind was of a poetical turn by nature, but there are moments when life makes a poet of the dullest, and on this evening the lonely quiet house within the parks and woods of Whitton, where there had been neither love, nor anything worth calling life, for years, except in the cheery company of the servants' hall, suddenly got itself lighted up with ethereal lights of tender imagination and feeling. The illumination did not show outwardly, or it might have alarmed the Green, which was still unaware that the queen of the house

had passed by there, and the place lighted itself up in prospect of her coming.

After dinner, however, Mr. Incledon descended from these regions of fancy, and took a step which seemed to himself a very clever as well as prudent, and at the same time a very friendly, one. He had not forgotten, any more than the others had, that summer evening on the lawn at the Rectory, when young Wodehouse had strayed down the hill with Rose, out of sight of the seniors of the party, and though all his active apprehensions on that score had been calmed down by Edward's departure, yet he was too wise not to perceive that there was something in Mrs. Wodehouse's disjointed talk more than met the eye at the first glance.

Mr. Incledon had a friend who was one

of the Lords of the Admiralty, and upon whom he could rely to do him a service; a friend whom he had never asked for anything—for what was official patronage to the master of Whitton? He wrote him a long and charming letter, which, if I had only room for it, or if it had anything to do except incidentally with this simple history, would give the reader a much better idea of his abilities and social charms than anything I can show of him here. In it he discussed the politics of the moment, and that gossip on a dignified scale about ministers and high officials of state which is half history—and he touched upon social events in a light and amusing strain, with that half cynicism which lends salt to correspondence; and he told his friend half-gaily, half-seriously, that he was beginning

to feel somewhat solitary, and that dreams of marrying, and marrying soon, were stealing into his mind. And he told him about his Perugino ("which I fondly hope may turn out an early Raphael"), and which it would delight him to show to a brother connoisseur.

"And, by-the-bye," he added, after all this, "I have a favour to ask of you which I have kept to the end like a lady's post^script. I want you to extend the ægis of your protection over a fine young fellow in whom I am considerably interested. His name is Wodehouse, and his ship is at present on that detestable slave-trade service which costs us so much money and does so little good. He has been a long time in the service, and I hear he is a very promising young officer. I should consider it a personal favour'

if you could do something for him ; and (N. B.) it would be a still greater service to combine promotion with as distant a post as possible. His friends are anxious to keep him out of the way for private reasons—the old ‘entanglement’ business, which, of course, you will understand ; but I think it hard that this sentence of banishment should be conjoined with such a disagreeable service. Give him a gunboat, and send him to look for the North-west passage, or anywhere else where my Lords have a whim for exploring ! I never thought to have paid such a tribute to your official dignity as to come, hat in hand, for a place, like the rest of the world. But no man, I suppose, can always resist the common impulse of his kind ; and I am happy in the persuasion

that to you I will not plead in vain."

I am afraid that nothing could have been more disingenuous than this letter. How it worked, the reader will see hereafter ; but, in the meantime, I cannot defend Mr. Incledon. He acted, I suppose, on the old and time-honoured sentiment that any stratagem is allowable in love and war, and consoled himself for the possible wrong he might be doing (only a possible wrong, for Wodehouse might be kept for years cruising after slaves for anything Mr. Incledon knew) by the unquestionable benefit which would accompany it. "A young fellow living by his wits will find a gunboat of infinitely more service to him than a foolish love affair, which never could come to anything," his rival said to himself.

And after having sealed this letter, he

returned into his fairy-land. He left the library where he had written it, and went to the drawing-room which he rarely used, but which was warm with a cheerful fire and lighted with soft wax-lights for his pleasure, should he care to enter.

He paused at the door a moment and looked at it. The wonders of upholstery in this carefully decorated room, every scrap of furniture in which had cost its master thought, would afford pages of description to a fashionable American novelist, or to the refined chronicles of the *Family Herald*; but I am not sufficiently learned to do them justice. The master of the house, however, looked at the vacant room with its softly burning lights, its luxurious vacant seats, its closely-drawn curtains, the books on the tables which no one ever opened,

the pictures on the walls which nobody looked at (except on great occasions), with a curious sense at once of desolation and of happiness. How dismal its silence was ! not a sound but the dropping of the ashes from the fire, or the movement of the burning fuel ; and he himself a ghost looking into a room which might be inhabited by ghosts for aught he knew. Here and there, indeed, a group of chairs had been arranged by accident so as to look as if they were occupied, as if one unseen being might be whispering to another, noiselessly smiling, and pointing at the solitary. But no, there was a pleasanter interpretation to be given to that soft, luxurious, brightly-coloured vacancy ; it was all prepared and waiting, ready for the gentle mistress who was to come, &c

How different from the low-roofed drawing-room at the White House, with the fireplace at one end of the long room, with the damp of ages in the old walls, with draughts from every door and window, and an indifferent lamp giving all the light they could afford !

Mr. Incledon, perhaps, thought of that, too, with an increased sense of the advantages he had to offer ; but lightly, not knowing all the discomforts of it. He went back to his library after this inspection, and the lights burned on, and the ghosts, if there were any, had the full enjoyment of it till the servants came to extinguish the candles and shut up everything for the night.