BROWNLOWS

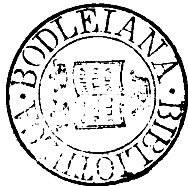
BY

MRS OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.



WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXVIII

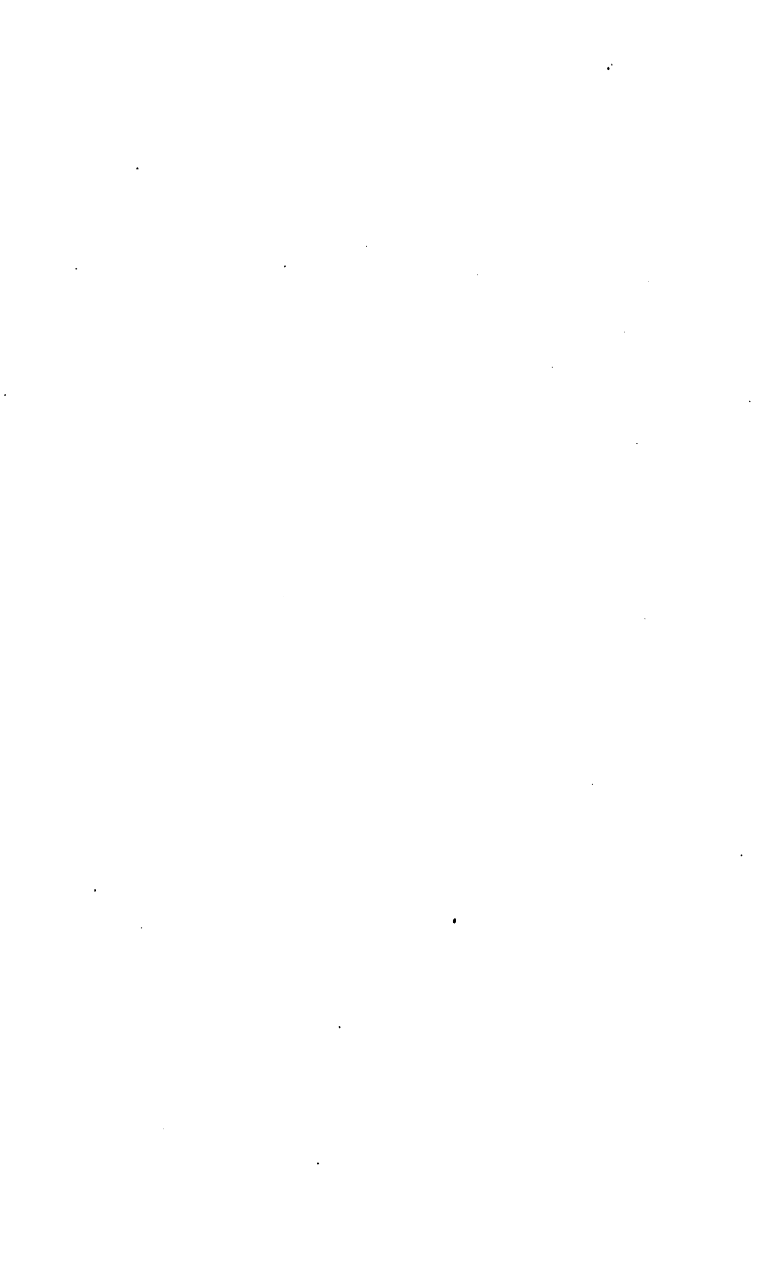
250. v. 4.

The Right of Translation is reserved

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE

CONTENTS OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	MR BROWNLOW'S MONEY,	1
II.	SARA,	14
III.	A SUDDEN ALARM,	37
IV.	A LITTLE DINNER,	50
V.	SARA'S SPECULATIONS,	64
VI.	AN ADVENTURE,	81
VII.	THE FATHER'S DAY AT THE OFFICE,	97
VIII.	YOUNG POWYS,	117
IX.	NEW NEIGHBOURS,	133
X.	AT THE GATE,	151
XI.	THE YOUNG PEOPLE,	172
XII.	NEWS OF FRIENDS,	197
XIII.	A CRISIS,	216
XIV.		238
XV.	LUNCHEON,	261
XVI.	A PROMISE,	280



BROWNLOWS.

CHAPTER I.

MR BROWNLOW'S MONEY.

Everybody in the neighbourhood was perfectly aware what was the origin of John Brownlow's fortune. There was no possibility of any mistake about it. When people are very well known and respectable, and inspire their neighbours with a hearty interest, some little penalty must be paid for that pleasant state of affairs. It is only when nobody cares for you, when you are of no importance to the world in general, that you can shroud your concerns in mystery; but the Brownlows were very well known, much respected, and quite unable to hide themselves in a corner. In all Dartfordshire there was no family better known; not that they were county people, or had any pretensions to high

connection, but then there was not one family in the county of whom John Brownlow did not know more than they knew themselves, and in his hands, and in the hands of his fathers before him, had reposed the papers and affairs of all the squires about, titled or otherwise, for more years than could be counted. It was clever of the Brownlows to have had so much business in their hands and yet not to be rich; but virtue, when it is exceptional, is perhaps always a little extreme, and so it is probable that an honest lawyer is honester than most honest men who have no particular temptation. They were not rich, and yet, of course, they were far from being poor. They had the kind of substantial old brick house, standing close up to the pavement in the best end of the High Street of Masterton, which would be described as a mansion in an auctioneer's advertisement. It was very red and infinitely clean, and had a multitude of windows all blinking in the sun, and lighting up into impromptu illuminations every winter afternoon, when that blazing red luminary went down, not over the river and the open country, as he ought to have done, but into the Rectory garden, which happened to lie in his way as he halted along towards the west. The Brownlows for generations back had lived very comfortably in this red house. It had a great, rich, luxuriant, warm garden behind, with all sorts of

comforts attached to it, and the rooms were handsome and old-fashioned, as became a house that had served generations; and once upon a time many good dinners, and much good wine, and the most beautiful stores of fine linen, and crystal, and silver were in the house, for comfort, and not for show. All this was very well, and John Brownlow was born to the possession of it; but there can be no doubt that the house in the High Street was very different from the house he now inhabited and the establishment he kept up in the country. Even the house in the High Street had been more burdened than was usual in the family when it came to his turn to be its master. Arthur, the younger brother, who was never good for much, had just had his debts paid for the second time before his father died. It was not considered by many people as quite fair to John, though some did say that it was he above all who urged the step upon old Mr Brownlow. Persons who professed to know, even asserted that the elder son, in his generosity, had quite a struggle with his father, and that his argument was always "for my mother's sake." If this was true, it was all the more generous of him, because his mother was well known to have thought nothing of John in comparison with the handsome Arthur, whom she spoiled as long as she lived. Anyhow, the result was that

John inherited the house and the business, the furniture and old crystal and silver, and a very comfortable income, but nothing that could be called a fortune, or that would in any way have justified him in launching out into a more expensive description of life.

At this time he was thirty at least, and not of a speculative turn of mind; and when old Mrs Thomson's will—a will not even drawn up in his office, which would have been a kind of preparation—was read to him, it is said that he lost his temper on the occasion, and used very unbecoming language to the poor woman in her coffin. "What had he to do with the old hag? What did she mean by bothering him with her filthy money?" he said, and did not show at all the frame of mind that might have been expected under the circumstances. Mrs Thomson was an old woman, who had lived in a very miserly sort of way, with an old servant, in a little house in the outskirts of the town. Nobody could ever tell what attracted her towards John Brownlow, who never, as he himself said, had anything to do with her; and she had relations of her own in Masterton, the Fennells, who always knew she had money, and counted upon being her heirs. But they were distant relations, and perhaps they did not know all her story. What petrified the town, however, was, when it was

found out that old Mrs Thomson had left a fortune, not of a few hundreds, as people supposed, but of more than fifty thousand pounds, behind her, and that it was all left in a way to John Brownlow. It was left to him in trust for Mrs Thomson's daughter Phœbe, a person whose existence no one in Masterton had ever dreamt of, but who, it appeared, had married a common soldier, and gone off with him ages before, and had been cursed and cast off by her hard-hearted mother. That was long, long ago, and perhaps the solitary old creature's heart, if she had a heart, had relented to her only child; perhaps, as John Brownlow thought, it was a mere suggestion of Satan to trouble and annoy him, a man who had nothing to do with Phœbe Thomson. Anyhow, this was the substance of the will. The money was all left to John Brownlow in trust for this woman, who had gone nobody knew where, and whose very name by marriage her mother did not state, and nobody could tell. If Phœbe Thomson did not make her appearance within the next twenty-five years, then the money was to pass to John Brownlow and his heirs in perpetuity beyond all power of reclamation. This was the strange event which fell like a shell into the young lawyer's quiet life, and brought revolution and change to everything around.

He was very much annoyed and put out about it

at first; and the Fennells, who had expected to be Mrs Thomson's heirs, were furious, and not disinclined to turn upon him, blameless as he was. To tell the truth, theirs was a very hard case. They were very poor. Good-for-nothing sons are not exclusively reserved for the well-to-do portion of the community; and poor Mrs Fennell, as well as the Brownlow family, had a good-for-nothing son, upon whom she had spent all her living. He had disappeared at this time into the darkness, as such people do by times, but of course it was always on the cards that he might come back and be a burden upon his people again. And the father was paralytic and helpless, not only incapable of doing anything, but requiring to have everything done for him, that last aggravation of poverty. Mrs Fennell herself was not a prepossessing woman. She had a high temper and an eloquent tongue, and her disappointment was tragic and desperate. Poor soul! it was not much to be wondered at—she was so poor and so helpless and burdened; and this money would have made them all so comfortable. It was not that she thought of herself, the poor woman said, but there was Fennell, who was cousin to the Thomsons, and there was Tom out in the world toiling for his bread, and killing himself with work. And then there was Bessie and her prospects. When she had talked it all over

at the highest pitch of her voice, and stormed at everybody, and made poor Fennell shake worse than ever in his paralytic chair, and overwhelmed Bessie with confusion and misery, the poor woman would sit down and cry. Only one thousand pounds of it would have done them such a great deal of good; and there was fifty thousand, and it was all going to be tied up and given to John Brownlow. It was hard upon a woman with a hot head and a warm heart, and no temper or sense to speak of; and to storm at it was the only thing she took any comfort from, or that did her any good.

This money which Mrs Fennell regretted so bitterly for a long time was nothing but a nuisance to John Brownlow. He advertised and employed detectives, and did everything a man could do to find Phœbe Thomson and relieve himself of the burden. But Phœbe Thomson was not to be found. He sought her far and near, but no such person was to be heard of—for, to be sure, a poor soldier's wife was not very likely to be in the way of seeing the second column of the 'Times;' and if she should happen to be Mrs Smith or Mrs Doherty by marriage, nobody but herself and her husband might be aware that she had ever been Phœbe Thomson. Anyhow, all the advertisements and all the detectives failed; and after working very hard at it for a year or more,

John Brownlow very quietly, and to his own consciousness alone, d—d Phœbe Thomson, and gave up the useless investigation.

But he was a man who had eyes, and a strong sense of justice. When he thought of the poor Fennells, his anger rose against the wretched old woman who had laid on him the burden of her money. Poor Mrs Fennell's son was good for nothing, but she had a daughter who was good for much; and Bessie had a lover who would gladly have married her, had that wicked old miser, as John Brownlow in his indignation said, left only a thousand pounds out of her fifty to help the paralytic father and passionate mother. Bessie's lover was not mercenary—he was not covetous of a fortune with his wife; but he could not marry all the family, or work for the old people, as their daughter had to do. This was what Mrs Fennell meant when she raved of poor Bessie and her prospects. But Bessie herself said nothing. The lover went very sorrowfully away, and Bessie was silent and went on with her work, and made no show of her trouble. John Brownlow, without knowing it, got to watch her. He was not aware for a long time why it was that, though he always had so much to do, he never missed seeing Bessie when by chance she passed his windows. As luck would have it, it

was always at that moment he raised his eyes; and he did his best to get pupils for her, "taking an interest" in her which was quite unusual in so quiet a man. But it was not probable that Bessie could have had much of an education herself, much less was qualified to give it to others. And whether it was her want of skill, or the poverty of her surroundings, her poor dress, or her mother's aspect and temper, it is certain that, diligent and patient and "nice" as she was, pupils failed her. She did not get on; yet she kept struggling on, and toiling, keeping a smile in her eyes for everybody that looked friendly on her, whatever sinking there might be in her heart. And she was a slight fragile little creature to bear all that weight on her shoulders. John Brownlow, without knowing it, watched her little figure about the streets all the year through, marvelling at that "soft invincibility," that steady standing up against defeat and every kind of ill which the gentle soul was capable of. And as he watched her, he had many thoughts in his mind. He was not rich, as we have said; on the contrary, it would have been his bounden duty, had he done his duty, to have married somebody with a modest little fortune, who would have helped him to keep up the house in the High Street, and give the traditionary dinners; and to maintain his wife's

family, if he were to marry, was something out of the question. But then that fifty thousand pounds —this money which did not belong to him, but to Phœbe Thomson, whosoever she was, and wheresoever she might be. All this produced a confusion of thought which was of very strange occurrence in Mr Brownlow's office, where his ancestors for generations had pondered over other people's difficulties —a more pleasing operation than attending to one's own. Gradually, as time wore on, Phœbe Thomson grew into a more and more mythical figure to Mr Brownlow's mind, and Bessie Fennell became more and more real. When he looked up one winter's afternoon and saw her passing the office window in the glow of the frosty sunset, which pointed at her in its clear-sighted way, and made thrice visible the thinness of her cheek and the shabbiness of her dress, Mr Brownlow's pen fell from his fingers in amaze and self-reproach. She was wearing herself out, and he had permitted her to do so, and had sat at his window thinking about it for two whole years. Two years had passed since Mrs Thomson's death. All the investigations in the world had not been able to find Phœbe; and John Brownlow was master of the old woman's fifty thousand pounds; and the Fennells might be starving for anything he could tell. The result was, that he proposed to

Bessie, to the unbounded amazement not only of the town of Masterton, but even of the county people, who all knew Mr Brownlow. Probably Bessie was as much surprised as anybody; but she married him after a while, and made him a very good wife. And he pensioned her father and mother in the most liberal way, and saw as little of them as possible. And for a few years, though they did not give many dinners, everything went on very well in the brick house.

I tell the story thus briefly, instead of introducing these people to show their existence for themselves, because all this is much prior to the real date of this history. Mrs Brownlow made a very good and sweet wife; and my own opinion is that she was fond of her husband in a quiet way. But, of course, people said she had married him for his money, and Bessie was one of those veiled souls who go through the world without much faculty of revealing themselves even to their nearest and dearest. When she died, nobody could make quite sure whether she had enjoyed her life or merely supported it. She had fulfilled all her duties, been very kind to everybody, very faithful and tender to her husband, very devoted to her family; but she died, and carried away a heart within her of which no man seemed ever to have found the key. Sara and Jack were very little at

the time of her death—so little, that they scarcely remembered their mother. And they were not like her. Little Jack, for his part, was like big John, as he had a right to be; and Sara was like nobody else that ever had been seen in Masterton. But that is a subject which demands fuller exposition. Mr Brownlow lived very quietly for some years after he lost his wife; but then, as was natural, the ordinary course of affairs was resumed. And then it was that the change in his fortunes became fully evident. His little daughter was delicate, and he got a carriage for her. He got ponies for her, and costly governesses, and masters down from town at the wildest expense; and then he bought that place in the country which had once been Something Hall or Manor, but which Dartfordshire, in its consternation, henceforward called Brownlow's. Brownlow's it was, without a doubt; and Brownlows it became—without the apostrophe—in the most natural way, when things settled down. It was, as old Lady Motherwell said, "quite a *place*, my dear; not one of your little bits of villas, you know." And though it was so near Masterton that Mr Brownlow drove or rode in every day to his office, its grounds and gardens and park were equal to those of any nobleman in the county. Old Mrs Thomson's fifty thousand pounds had doubled themselves, as money skilfully managed has a way of

doing. It had got for her executor everything a man could desire. First, the wife of his choice—though that gift had been taken from him—and every other worldly good which the man wished or could wish for. He was able to surround the daughter, who was everything to him—who was more to him, perhaps, than even his wife had ever been—with every kind of delightsome thing; and to provide for his son, and establish him in the world according to his inclinations; and to assume, without departing from his own place, such a position as no former Brownlow had ever occupied in the county. All this came to John Brownlow through old Mrs Thomson; and Phœbe Thomson, to whom the money in reality belonged, had never turned up to claim it; and now there was but one year to run of the five-and-twenty which limited his responsibilities. All this being made apparent, it is the history of this one year that I have now to tell.

CHAPTER II.

SARA.

MR BROWNLOW had one son and one daughter—the boy, a very good-natured, easy-minded, honest sort of young fellow, approaching twenty-one, and not made much account of either at home or abroad. The daughter was Sara. For people who know her, or indeed who are at all acquainted with society in Dartfordshire, it is unnecessary to say more; but perhaps the general public may prefer a clearer description. She was the queen of John Brownlow's house, and the apple of his eye. At the period of which we speak she was between nineteen and twenty, just emerging from what had always been considered a delicate girlhood, into the full early bloom of woman. She had too much character, too much nonsense, too many wiles, and too much simplicity in her, to be, strictly speaking, beautiful; and she was not good enough or gentle

enough to be lovely. And neither was she beloved by all, as a heroine ought to be. There were some people who did not like her, as well as some who did, and there were a great many who fluctuated between love and dislike, and were sometimes fond of her, and sometimes affronted with her; which, indeed, was a very common state of mind with herself. Sara was so much a girl of her age that she had even the hair of the period, as the spring-flowers have the colours of spring. It was light-brown, with a golden tint, and abundant as locks of that colour generally are; but it cannot be denied that it was darker than the fashionable shade, and that Sara was not above being annoyed by this fact, nor even above a vague and shadowy idea of doing something to it to bring it to the correct tint; which may rank as one of the constantly recurring proofs that young women are in fact the least vain portion of the creation, and have less faith in the efficacy of their natural charms than any other section of the race. She had a little rosebud mouth, dewy and pearly, and full eyes, which were blue, or grey, or hazel, according as you looked at them, and according to the sentiment which they might happen to express. She was very tall, very slight and flexible, and wavy like a tall lily, with the slightest variable stoop in her pretty shoulders, for which

her life had been rendered miserable by many well-meaning persons, but which, in reality, was one of her charms. To say that she stooped, is an ugly expression, and there was nothing ugly about Sara. It was rather that by times her head drooped a little, like the aforesaid lily swayed by the softest of visionary breezes. This, however, was the only thing lily-like or angelic about her. She was not a model of anything, nor noted for any special virtues. She was Sara. That was about all that could be said for her; and it is to be hoped that she may be able to evidence what little bits of good there were in her during the course of this history, for herself.

"Papa," she said, as they sat together at the breakfast-table, "I will call for you this afternoon, and bring you home. I have something to do in Masterton."

"Something to do in Masterton?" said Mr Brownlow; "I thought you had got everything you could possibly want for three months at least when you were in town."

"Yes," said Sara, "everything one wants for one's bodily necessities—pins and needles and music, and all that sort of thing—but one has a heart, though you might not think it, papa; and I have an idea that one has a soul."

"Do you think so?" said her father, with a smile; "but I can't imagine what your soul can have to do in Masterton. We don't cultivate such superfluities there."

"I am going to see grandmamma," said Sara. "I think it is my duty. I am not fond of her, and I ought to be. I think if I went to see her oftener perhaps it might do me good."

"Oh! if it's only for grandmamma," said young John, "I go to see her often enough. I don't think you need take any particular trouble to do her good."

Upon which Sara sighed, and drooped a little upon its long stem her lily head. "I hope I am not so stupid and conceited as to think I can do anybody good," she said. "I may be silly enough, but I am not like that; but I am going to see grandmamma. It is my duty to be fond of her, and see after her; and I know I never go except when I can't help it. I am going to turn over a new leaf."

Mr Brownlow's face had been overshadowed at the first mention of the grandmother, as by a faint mist of annoyance. It did not go so far as to be a cloud. It was not positive displeasure or dislike, but only a shade of dissatisfaction, which he expressed by his silence. Sara's resolutions to turn over a new leaf were not rare, and her father was

generally much amused and interested by her good intentions; but at present he only went on with his breakfast and said nothing. Like his daughter, he was not fond of the grandmamma, and perhaps her sympathy with his own sentiments in this respect was satisfactory to him at the bottom of his heart; but it was not a thing he could talk about.

"There is a great deal in habit," said Sara, in that experienced way which belongs to the speculatist of nineteen. "I believe you can train yourself to anything, even to love people whom you don't love by nature. I think one could get to do even that if one was to try."

"I should not care much for your love if that was how it came," said young John.

"That would only show you did not understand," said Sara, mildly. "To like people for a good reason, is not that better than liking them merely because you can't help it? If there was anybody that it suited papa, for instance, to make me marry, don't you think I would be very foolish if I could not make myself fond of him?—and ungrateful too."

"Would you really do as much for me as that?" said Mr Brownlow, looking up at her with a glimmer of weakness in his eyes, half amused, and yet flattered; "but I hope I shall never require to put you to the test."

"Why not, papa?" said Sara, cheerfully. "I am sure it would be a much more sensible reason for being fond of anybody that you wished it, than just my own fancy. I should do it, and I would never hesitate about it," said the confident young woman; and the father, though he was a man of some experience, felt his heart melt and glow over this rash statement with a fond gratification, and really believed it, foolish as it was.

"And I shall drive down," said Sara, "and look as fine as possible; though, of course, I would far rather have Meg out, and ride home with you in the afternoon. And it would do Meg a world of good," she added, pathetically. "But you know if one goes in for pleasing one's grandmamma, one ought to be content to please her in her own way. *She* likes to see the carriage and the greys, and a great noise and fuss. If it is worth taking the trouble for at all, it is worth doing it in her own way."

"*I* walk, and she is always very glad to see me," said John, in what it must be allowed was an unpleasant manner.

"Ah! you are different," said Sara, with a momentary bend of her graceful head. And, of course, he was very different. He was a mere man or boy —whichever you prefer—not in the least ornamen-

tal, nor of very much use to anybody — whereas Sara!—— But it is not a difference that could be described or argued about; it was a thing which could be perceived with half an eye. When breakfast was over, the two gentlemen went off to Masterton to their business; for young John had gone into his father's office, and was preparing to take up in his turn the hereditary profession. Indeed, it is not clear that Mr Brownlow ever intended poor Jack to profit at all by his wealth, or the additional state and grandeur the family had taken upon itself. To his eyes, so far as it appeared, Sara alone was the centre of all his magnificence; whereas Jack was simply the heir and successor of the Brownlows, who had been time out of mind the solicitors of Masterton. For Jack, the brick house in the High Street waited with all its old stores; and the fairy accessories of their present existence, all the luxury and grace and beauty—the greys—the conservatories —the park—the place in the country—seemed a kind of natural appanage to the fair creature in whom the race of Brownlow had come to flower, the father could not tell how; for it seemed strange to think that he himself, who was but a homely individual, should have been the means of bringing anything so fair and fine into the world. Probably Mr Brownlow, when it came to making his will, would

be strictly just to his two children; but in the mean time, in his thoughts, that was, no doubt, how things stood; and Jack accordingly was brought up as he himself had been, rather as the heir of the Brownlows' business, their excellent connection and long-established practice, than as the heir of Brownlows —two very different things, as will be perceived.

When they went away Sara betook herself to her own business. She saw the cook in the most correct and exemplary way. Fortunately the cook was also the housekeeper, and a very good-tempered woman, who received all her young mistress's suggestions with amiability, and only complained sometimes that Miss Brownlow would order everything that was out of season. "Not for the sake of extravagance," Mrs Stock said, in answer to Sara's maid, who had made that impertinent suggestion; "oh, no, nothin' of the sort—only out of always forgettin', poor dear, and always wantin' me to believe as she knows." But as Sara fortunately paid but little attention to the dinner when produced, making no particular criticism—not for want of will, but for want of knowledge—her interview with the cook at least did no harm. And then she went into many small matters which she thought were of importance. She had an hour's talk, for instance, with the gardener, who was, like most gardeners, a little pig-

headed, and fond of having his own way; and Sara was rather of opinion that some of her hints had done him good; and she made him, very unwillingly, cut some flowers for her to take to her grandmother. Mrs Fennell was not a woman to care for flowers if she could have got them for the plucking; but expensive hothouse flowers in the depth of winter were a different matter. Thus Sara reasoned as she carried them in her basket, with a groundwork of moss beneath to keep them fresh, and left them in the hall till the carriage should come round. And she went to the stables, and looked at everything in a dainty way—not like your true enthusiast in such matters, but with a certain gentle grandeur, as of a creature to whom satin-skinned cattle and busy grooms were vulgar essentials of life, equally necessary, but equally far off from her supreme altitude. She cared no more for the greys in themselves than she did for Dick and Tom, which will be sufficient to prove to anybody learned in such matters how imperfect her development was in this respect. All these little occupations were very different from the occupations of her father and brother, who were both of them in the office all day busy with other people's wills and marriage-settlements and conveyances. Thus it would have been as evident to any impartial looker-on as it was to Mr Brownlow, that

the fortune which had so much changed his position in the county, and given him such very different surroundings, all centred in, and was appropriated to, his daughter, while his old life, his hereditary business, the prose and plain part of his existence, was to be carried out in his son.

When all the varieties of occupation in this useful day were about exhausted, Sara prepared for her drive. She wrapped herself up in fur and velvet, and everything that was warmest and softest and most luxurious; and with her basket of flowers and another little basket of game, which she did not take any personal charge of, rolled away out of the park-gates to Masterton. Brownlows had belonged to a very unsuccessful race before it came to be Brownlow's. It had been in the hands of poor, failing, incompetent people, which was, perhaps, the reason why its original name had dropped so completely out of recollection. Now, for the first time in its existence, it looked really like "a gentleman's place." But yet there were eyesores about. One of these was a block of red brick, which stood exactly opposite the park-gates, opposite the lodge which Mr Brownlow had made so pretty. There were only two cottages in the block, and they were very unpretending and very clean, and made the life of the woman in the lodge twice as lightsome

and agreeable; but to Sara's eyes at least, Swayne's Cottages, as they were called, were very objectionable. They were two-storeyed houses, with windows and doors very flush with the walls; as if, which indeed was the case, the walls themselves were of the slightest construction possible; and Swayne himself, or rather Mrs Swayne, who was the true head of the house, let a parlour and bedroom to lodgers who wanted country air and quiet at a cheap rate. "Anybody might come," Sara was in the habit of saying; "your worst enemy might come and sit down there at your very door, and spy upon everything you were doing. It makes me shudder when I think of it." Thus she had spoken ever since her father's entrance upon the glories of his "place," egging him up with all her might to attack this little Naboth's Vineyard. But there never was a Naboth more obstinate in his rights than Mr Swayne, who was a carpenter and builder, and had put the two houses together himself, and was proud of them; and Sara was then too young and too much under the sway of her feelings to take upon her in cold blood Jezebel's decisive part.

She could not help looking at them to-day as she swept out, with the two greys spurning the gravel under foot, and the lodge-woman at the gate looking up with awe while she made her curtsy as if to the

Queen. Mrs Swayne, too, was standing at her door, but she did not curtsy to Sara. She stood and looked as if she did not care—the splendour and the luxury were nothing to her. She looked out in a calm sort of indifferent way, which was to Sara what, to continue a scriptural symbolism, Mordecai was to another less fortunate personage. And Mrs Swayne had a ticket of "Lodgings" in her window. It could do her no good, for nobody ever passed along that road who could be desirous of country lodgings at a cheap rate, and this advertisement looked to Sara like an intentional insult. The wretched woman might get about eight shillings a-week for her lodgings, and for that paltry sum she could allow herself to post up bills opposite the very gate of Brownlows; but then some people have so little feeling. This trifling incident occupied Sara's mind during at least half her drive. The last lodger had been a consumptive patient, whose pale looks had filled her with compassionate impulses, against which her dislike of Mrs Swayne contended vainly. Who would it be next? Some other invalid most likely, as pale and as poor, to make one discontented with the world and ashamed of one's self the moment one issued forth from the park-gates, and all because of the determination of the Swaynes to annoy their wealthy neighbours. The thought made Sara angry as she

drove along; but it was a brisk winter afternoon, with frost in the air, and the hoofs of the greys rang on the road, and even the country waggons seemed to move along at an exhilarated pace. So Sara thought, who was young, and whose blood ran quickly in her veins, and who was wrapped up to the throat in velvet and fur. Now and then another carriage would roll past, in which there were people who nodded or kissed their hands to Sara as they rushed —with all that clang of hoofs and sweep of motion, merrily on over the hard road beneath the naked trees. And the people who were walking walked briskly, as if the blood was racing in their veins too, and rushing warm and vigorous to healthy cheeks. If any cheeks were blue rather than red, if any hearts were sick with the cold and the weary way, if anybody she met chanced to be going heavily home to a hearth where there was no fire, or a house from which love and light had gone, Sara, glowing to the wind, knew nothing of that; and that the thought never entered her mind was no fault of hers.

The winter sky was beginning to dress itself in all the glories of sunset when she got to Masterton. It had come to be the time of the year when the sun set in the Rectory garden, and John Brownlow's windows in the High Street got all aglow. Perhaps it brought associations to his mind as the dazzling

red radiance flashed in at the office window, and he laid down his pen. But the fact was that this pause was caused by a sound of wheels echoing along the market-place, which was close by. That must be Sara. Such was the thought that passed through Mr Brownlow's mind. He did not think, as the last gleam came over him, how he used to look up and see Bessie passing—that Bessie who had come to be his wife—nor of any other moving event that had happened to him when the sun was coming in at his windows aslant in that undeniable way. No; all that he thought was, There goes Sara; and his face softened, and he began to put his papers together. The child in her living importance, little lady and sovereign of all that surrounded her, triumphed thus even over the past and the dead.

Mrs Fennell had lodgings in a street which was very genteel, and opened off the market-place. The houses were not very large, but they had pillars to the doors and balconies to all the first-floor windows; and some very nice people lived there. Mrs Fennell was very old, and not able to manage a house for herself, so she had apartments, she and her maid—one of the first-floors with the balconies,—a very comfortable little drawing-room, which the care of her friends had filled with every description of comfortable articles. Her paralytic husband was dead

ages ago, and her daughter Bessie was dead, and her beloved but good-for-nothing son—and yet the old woman had lived on. Sometimes, when anything touched her heart, she would mourn over this, and ask why she had been left when everything was gone that made life sweet to her; but still she lived on; and at other times it must be confessed that she was not an amiable old woman. It is astonishing how often it happens that the sweet domestic qualities do not descend from mother to daughter, but leap a generation, as it were, interjecting a passionate, peevish mother to bring out in full relief the devotion of her child—or a selfish exacting child to show the mother's magnanimity. Such contrasts are very usual among women—I don't know if they are visible to the same extent as between father and son. Mrs Fennell was not amiable. She was proud and quarrelsome and bitter—exacting of every profit and every honour, and never contented. She was proud to think of her son-in-law's fine house and her granddaughter's girlish splendour; and yet it was the temptation of her life to rail at them, to tell how little he had done for her, and to reckon up all he ought to have done, and to declare if it had not been for the Fennells and their friends, it was little anybody would ever have heard of John Brownlow. All this gave her a certain pleasure; and at

the same time Sara's visit with the greys and the state equipage and the tall footman, and her entrance in her rich dress with her sables, which had cost nobody could tell how much, and her basket of flowers which could not have been bought in Dartfordshire for their weight in gold, was the triumph of her life. As soon as she heard the sound of the wheels in the street—which was not visited by many carriages—she would steal out into her bedroom and change her cap with her trembling hands. She never changed her cap for Jack, who came on foot, and brought every kind of homely present to please her and make her comfortable. But Sara was different—and Sara's presents added not to her comfort, but to her glory, which was quite another affair.

"Well, my dear," she said, with a mixture of peevishness and pleasure, as the girl came in, "so this is you. I thought you were never coming to see me any more."

"I beg your pardon, grandmamma," said Sara. "I know I have been neglecting my duty, but I mean to turn over a new leaf. There is some game down below that I thought you would like, and I have brought you some flowers. I will put them in your little vases if I may ring for Nancy to bring water. I made Pitt cut me this daphne, though I

think he would rather have cut off my head. It will perfume the whole room."

"My dear, you know I don't like strong smells," said Mrs Fennell. "I never could bear scents—a little whiff of musk, and that was all I ever cared for—though your poor mamma was such a one for violets and trash. And I haven't got servants to be running up and down stairs as you have at your fine place. One maid for everything is considered quite enough for me."

"Well, grandmamma," said Sara, "you have not very much to do, you know. If I were you, I would have a nice *young* maid that would look pleasant and cheerful instead of that cross old Nancy, who never looks pleased at anything."

"What good do you think I could have of a young maid?" said Mrs Fennell—"nasty gossiping tittering things, that are twenty times more bother than they're worth. I have Nancy because she suits me, and because she was poor old Mrs Thomson's maid, as everybody has forgotten but her and me. The dead are soon out of mind, especially when they've got a claim on living folks' gratitude. If it wasn't for poor Mrs Thomson where would your grand carriage have been, and your daphnes, and your tall footmen, and all your papa's grandeur? But there's nobody that thinks on her but me."

"I am sure *I* have not forgotten her," said Sara. "I wish I could. She must have been a horrible old wretch, and I wish she had left papa alone. I'd rather not have Brownlows if I am always to hear of that wretched old woman. I suppose Nancy is her ghost, and haunts you. I hate to hear her horrid old name."

"You are just like all the rest," said the grandmother—"ashamed of your relations because you are so fine; and if it had not been for your relations—she was your poor mamma's cousin, Miss Sairah—if it was only that, and out of respect to me——"

"Don't call me Sairah, please," said the indignant little visitor. "I do hate it so; and I have not done anything that I know of to be called Miss for. What is the use of quarrelling, grandmamma? Do let us be comfortable a little. You can't think how cold it is out of doors. Don't you think it is rather nice to be an old lady and sit by the fire and have everybody come to see you, and no need to take any trouble with making calls or anything? I think it must be one of the nicest things in the world."

"Do you think *you* would like it?" the old woman said grimly from the other side of the fire.

"It is different, you know," said Sara, drooping her pretty head as she sat before the fire with the red light gleaming in her hair. "You were once as

young as me, and you can go back to that in your mind; and then mamma was once as young as me, and you can go back to that. I should think it must feel like walking out in a garden all your own, that nobody else has any right to; while the rest of us, you know——"

"Ah!" said the old woman with a cry; "but a garden that you once tripped about, and once saw your children tripping about, and now you have to hobble through it all alone. Oh child, child! and never a sound in it, but all the voices gone and all the steps that you would give the world to hear!"

Sara roused herself up out of her meditation, and gave a startled astonished look into the corner where the cross old grandmother was sobbing in the darkness. The child stumbled to her feet, startled and frightened and ashamed of what she had done, and went and threw herself upon the old woman's neck. And poor old Mrs Fennell sobbed and pushed her granddaughter away, and then hugged and kissed her, and stroked her pretty hair and the feather in her hat and her soft velvet and fur. The thoughtless girl had given her a stab, and yet it was such a stab as soothes while it wounds. She sobbed, but a touch of sweetness came along with the pain, and for the moment she loved again, and grew human

and motherlike, warming out of the chills of her hard old age.

"*You* need not talk of cold, at least," she said when the little *accès* was over, and when Sara, having bestowed upon her the first real affectionate kiss she had given her since she came to woman's estate, had dropped again into the low chair before the fire, feeling a little astonished, yet rather pleased with herself for having proved equal to the occasion—"You need not talk of cold with all that beautiful fur. It must have cost a fortune. Mrs Lyon next door will come to see me to-morrow, and she will take you all to pieces, and say it isn't real. And such a pretty feather! I like you in that kind of hat—it is very becoming; and you look like a little princess just now as you sit before the fire."

"Do I?" said Sara. "I am very glad you are pleased, grandmamma. I put on my very best to please you. Do you remember the little cape you made for me, when I was a tiny baby, out of your great old muff? I have got it still. But oh listen to that daphne how it tells it is here! It is all through the room, as I said it would be. I must ring for some water, and your people, when they come to call, will never say the daphne is not real. It will contradict them to their face. Please, Nancy, some water for the flowers."

"Thomas says it's time for you to be agoing, Miss," said Nancy, grimly.

"Oh, Thomas can say what he pleases; papa will wait for me," cried Sara; "and grandmamma and I are such friends this time. There is some cream in the basket, Nancy, for tea; for you know our country cream is the best; and some of the grapes of my pet vine; don't look sulky, there's an old dear. I am coming every week. And grandmamma and I are such friends——"

"Anyhow, she's my poor Bessie's own child," said Mrs Fennell, with a little deprecation; for Nancy, who had been old Mrs Thomson's servant, was stronger even than herself upon the presumption of Brownlows, and how, but for them as was dead and gone and forgotten, such splendour could never have been.

"Sure enough," said Nancy, "and more people's child as well," which was the sole but pregnant comment she permitted herself to make. Sara, however, got her will, as she usually did. She took off her warm cloak, which the two old women examined curiously, and scorned Thomas's recommendations, and made and shared her grandmother's tea, while the greys drove up and down the narrow street, dazzling the entire neighbourhood, and driving the coachman desperate. Mr Brownlow, too, sat waiting

and wondering in his office, thinking weakly that every cab that passed must be Sara's carriage. The young lady did not hurry herself. "It was to please grandmamma," as she said; certainly it was not to please herself, for there could not be much pleasure for Sara in the society of those two old women, who were not sweet-tempered, and who were quite as like, according to the mood they might happen to be in, to take the presents for insults as for tokens of love. But, then, there was always a pleasure in having her own way, and one of which Sara was keenly susceptible. When she called for her father eventually, she complained to him that her head ached a little, and that she felt very tired. "The daphne got to be a little overpowering in grandmamma's small room," she said; "I daresay they would put it out of window as soon as I was gone; and, besides, it *is* a little tiring, to tell the truth. But grandmamma was quite pleased," said the disinterested girl. And John Brownlow took great care of his Sara as they drove out together, and felt his heart grow lighter in his breast when she recovered from her momentary languor, and looked up at the frosty twinkling in the skies above, and chattered and laughed as the carriage rolled along, lighting up the road with its two lamps, and dispersing the silence with a brisk commotion. He was prouder of his child than if

she had been his bride—more happy in the possession of her than a young man with his love. And yet John Brownlow was becoming an old man, and had not been without cares and uncomfortable suggestions even on that very day.

CHAPTER III.

A SUDDEN ALARM.

THE unpleasant suggestion which had been brought before Mr Brownlow's mind that day, while Sara accomplished her visit to her grandmother, came after this wise:—

His mind had been going leisurely over his affairs in general, as he went down to his office; for naturally, now that he was so rich, he had many concerns of his own beside that placid attention to other people's affairs which was his actual trade; and it had occurred to him that at one point there was a weakness in his armour. One of his investments had not been so skilful or so prudent as the rest, and it looked as if it might call for further and further outlay before it could be made profitable, if indeed it were ever made profitable. When he got to the office, Mr Brownlow, like a prudent man, looked into the papers connected with this affair,

and took pains to understand exactly how he stood, and what further claims might be made upon him. And while he was doing this, certain questions of date arose which set clearly before him, what he had for the moment forgotten, that the time of his responsibility to Phœbe Thomson was very nearly over, and that in a year no claim could be made against him for Mrs Thomson's fifty thousand pounds. The mere realisation of this fact gave him a certain thrill of uncertainty and agitation. He had not troubled himself about it for years, and during that time he had felt perfectly safe and comfortable in his possessions; but to look upon it in actual black and white, and to see how near he was to complete freedom, gave him a sudden sense of his present risk, such as he had never felt before. To repay the fifty thousand pounds would have been no such difficult matter, for Mrs Thomson's money had been lucky money, and had, as we have said, doubled and trebled itself; but there was interest for five-and-twenty years to be reckoned; and there was no telling what other claims the heir, if an heir should yet turn up, might bring against the old woman's executor. Mr Brownlow felt for one sharp moment as if Sara's splendour and her happiness were at the power of some unknown vagabond who might make a sudden claim any moment when he was unprepared

upon the inheritance which for all these years had appeared to him as his own. It was a sort of danger which could not be guarded against, but rather, indeed, ought to be invited; though it would be hard —no doubt it would be hard, after all this interval —to give up the fortune which he had accepted with reluctance, and which had cost him, as he felt, a hundred times more trouble than it had ever given him pleasure. Now that he had begun to get a little good out of it, to think of some stealthy vagrant coming in and calling suddenly for his rights, and laying claim perhaps to all the increase which Mr Brownlow's careful management had made of the original, was an irritating idea. He tried to put it away, and perhaps he might have been successful in banishing it from his mind, but for another circumstance that fixed it there, and gave, as it seemed, consistency and force to the thought.

The height of the day was over, and the sun was veering towards that point of the compass from which its rays shone in at John Brownlow's windows, when he was asked if he would see a young man who came about the junior clerk's place. Mr Brownlow had very nearly made up his mind as to who should fill this junior clerk's place; but he was kind-hearted, and sent no one disconsolate away if it was possible to help it. After a moment's hesitation, he gave

orders for the admission of the young man. "If he does not do for that, he may be good for something else," was what John Brownlow said; for it was one of his crotchets, that to help men to work was better than almsgiving. The young man in question had nothing very remarkable in his appearance. He had a frank, straightforward, simple sort of air, which partly, perhaps, arose from the great defect in his face—the projection of the upper jaw, which was well garnished with large white teeth. He had, however, merry eyes, of the kind that smile without knowing it whenever they accost another countenance; but his other features were all homely —expressive, but not remarkable. He came in modestly, but he was not afraid; and he stood respectfully and listened to Mr Brownlow, but there was no servility in his attitude. He had come about the clerk's place, and he was quite ready to give an account of himself. His father had been a non-commissioned officer, but was dead; and his mother wanted his help badly enough.

"But you are strangers in Masterton," said Mr Brownlow, attracted by his frank looks. "Had you any special inducement to come here?"

"Nothing of any importance," said the youth, and he coloured a little. "The fact is, sir, my mother came of richer people than we are now,

and they cast her off; and some of them once lived in Masterton. She came to see if she could hear anything of her friends."

"And did she?" said John Brownlow, feeling his breath come a little quick.

"They are all dead long ago," said the young man. "We have all been born in Canada, and we never heard what had happened. Her moth—I mean her friends, are all dead, I suppose; and Masterton is just as good as any other place to make a beginning in. I should not be afraid if I could get anything to do."

"Clerks' salaries are very small," said Mr Brownlow, without knowing what it was he said.

"Yes, but they improve," said his visitor, cheerfully; "and I don't mind what I do. I could make up books or do anything at night, or even have pupils—I have done that before. But I beg your pardon for troubling you with all this. If the place is filled up——"

"Nay, stop—sit down—you interest me," said Mr Brownlow. "I like a young fellow who is not easily cast down. Your mother—belongs—to Masterton, I suppose," he added, with a little hesitation; he, that gave way to no man in Dartfordshire for courage and coolness, he was afraid. He confessed it to himself, and felt all the shame of the new sensation, but it had possession of him all the same.

"She belongs to the Isle of Man," said the young man, with his frank straightforward look and the smile in his eyes. He answered quite simply and point-blank, having no thought that there was any second meaning in his words; but it was otherwise with him who heard. John Brownlow sat silent, utterly confounded. He stared at the young stranger in a blank way, not knowing how to answer or how to conceal or account for the tremendous impression which these simple words made on him. He sat and stared, and his lower lip fell a little, and his eyes grew fixed, so that the youth was terrified, and did not know what to make of it. Of course he seized upon the usual resource of the disconcerted —"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I am afraid you are ill."

"No, no; it is nothing," said Mr Brownlow. "I knew some people once who came from the Isle of Man. But that is a long time ago. I am sorry she has not found the people she sought for. But, as you say, there is nothing like work. If you can engross well—though how you should know how to engross after taking pupils and keeping books——"

"We have to do a great many things in the colony," said his young visitor. "If a man wants to live, he must not be particular about what he does. I was two years in a lawyer's office in Paris——"

"In Paris?" said Mr Brownlow, with amazement.

"I mean in Paris, Canada West," said the youth, with a touch of momentary defiance, as who would say, "And a very much better Paris than any you can boast of here!"

This little accident did so much good that it enabled Mr Brownlow to smile, and to shake off the oppression that weighed upon him. It was a relief to be able to question the applicant as to his capabilities, while secretly and rapidly in his own mind he turned over the matter, and asked himself what he should do. Discourage the young man and direct him elsewhere, and gently push him out of Masterton—or take him in and be kind to him, and trust in Providence? The panic of the moment suggested the first course, but a better impulse followed. In the first place, it was not easy to discourage a young fellow with those sanguine brown eyes, and blood that ran so quickly in his veins; and if any danger was at hand, it was best to have it near, and be able to study it, and be warned at once how and when it might approach. All this passed rapidly, like an under-current, through John Brownlow's mind, as he sat and asked innumerable questions about the young applicant's capabilities and antecedents. He did it to gain time, though all young Powys thought was that he had never gone through so severe an examin-

ation. The young fellow smiled within himself at the wonderful precision and caution of the old man, with a kind of transatlantic freedom—not that he was republican, but only colonial; not irritated by his employer's superiority, but regarding it as an affair of perhaps only a few days or years.

"I will think it over," said Mr Brownlow at last. "I cannot decide upon anything all at once. If you settle quietly down and get a situation, I think you may do very well here. It is not a dear place, and if your mother has friends——"

"But she has no friends now that we know of," said the young man, with the unnecessary and persistent explanatoriness of youth.

"If she has friends here," persisted Mr Brownlow, "you may be sure they will turn up. Come back to me to-morrow. I will think it all over in the mean time, and give you my answer then. Powys—that is a very good name—there was a Lady Powys here some time ago, who was a very odd sort of woman. Perhaps it was she whom you sought——"

"Oh, no," said the young man, eagerly; "it was my mother's people—a family called——"

"I am afraid I have an engagement now," said Mr Brownlow; and then young Powys withdrew, with that quick sense of shame and compunction which belongs only to his years. He, of course, as was

natural, could see nothing of the tragic under-current. It appeared to him only that he was intruding his private affairs, in an unjustifiable way, on his probable patron—on the man who had been kind to him, and given him hope. "What an ass I am!" he said to himself, as he went away—"as if he could take any interest in my mother's friends." And it troubled the youth all day to think that he had possibly wearied Mr Brownlow by his explanations and iteration—an idea as mistaken as it was possible to conceive.

When he had left the office, the lawyer fell back in his chair, and for a long time neither moved nor spoke. Probably it was the nature of his previous reflections which gave this strange visit so overwhelming an effect. He sat in a kind of stupor, seeing before him, as it appeared in actual bodily presence, the danger which it had startled him this same morning to realise as merely possible. If it had been any other day, he might have heard, without much remarking, all those singular coincidences which now appeared so startling; but they chimed in so naturally, or rather so unnaturally, with the tenor of his thoughts, that his panic was superstitious and overwhelming. He sat a long time without moving, almost without breathing, feeling as if it was some kind of fate that approached him. After

so many years that he had not thought of this danger, it seemed to him at last that the thoughts which had entered his mind in the morning must have been premonitions sent by Providence ; and at a glance he went over the whole position—the new claimant, the gradually-expanding claim, the conflict over it, the money he had locked up in that one doubtful speculation, the sudden diminution of his resources, perhaps the necessity of selling Brownlows and bringing Sara back to the old house in the High Street where she was born. Such a downfall would have been nothing for himself: for him the old wainscot dining-parlour and all the well-known rooms were agreeable and full of pleasant associations; but Sara—— Then John Brownlow gave another wide glance over his social firmament, asking himself if there was any one whom, between this time and that, Sara's heart might perhaps incline to, whom she might marry, and solve the difficulty. A few days before he used to dread and avoid the idea of her marriage. Now all this rushed upon him in a moment, with the violent impulse of his awakened fears. By-and-by, however, he came to himself. A woman might be a soldier's wife, and might come from the Isle of Man, and might have had friends in Masterton who were dead, without being Phœbe Thomson. Perhaps if he had been bold, and listened

to the name which was on his young visitor's lips, it might have reassured him, and settled the question; but he had been afraid to do it. At this early stage of the question he had not a moment's doubt as to what he would do—what he must do—at once and without delay, if Phœbe Thomson really presented herself before him. But it was not his business to seek her out. And who could say that this was she? The Isle of Man, after all, was not so small a place, and any one who had come to Masterton to ask after old Mrs Thomson would have been referred at once to her executor. This conviction came slowly upon Mr Brownlow's mind as he got over the first wild thrill of fear. He put his terror away from him gradually and slowly. When a thought has burst upon the mind at once, and taken possession of it at a stroke, it is seldom dislodged in the same complete way. It may cease to be a conviction, but it never ceases to be an impression. To this state, by degrees, his panic subsided. He no longer thought it certain that young Powys was Phœbe Thomson's representative; but only that such a thing was possible—that he had something tangible to guard against and watch over. In place of his quiet everyday life, with all its comforts, an exciting future, a sudden whirl of possibilities, opened before him. But in one year all this would

be over. One year would see him, would see his children, safe in the fortune they had grown used to, and come to feel their own. Only one year! There are moments when men are fain to clog the wheels of time and retard its progress; but there are also moments when, to set the great clock forward arbitrarily and to hasten the measured beating of that ceaseless leisurely pendulum, is the desire that goes nearest the heart. Thus it came to appear to Mr Brownlow as if it was now a kind of race between time and fate; for as yet it had not occurred to him to think of abstract justice nor of natural rights higher than those of any legal testament. He was thinking only of the letter, of the stipulated year. He was thinking if that time were past that he would feel himself his own master. And this sentiment grew and settled in his mind as he sat alone, and waited for Sara's carriage—for his child, whom in all this matter he thought of the most. He was disturbed in the present, and eager with the eagerness of a boy for the future. It did not even occur to him that ghosts would arise in that future even more difficult to exorcise. All his desire in the mean time was, If only this year were over!—if only anyhow a leap could be made through this one interval of danger. And the sharp and sudden pain he had come through gave him at the same time a sense of lassitude and

exhaustion. Thus Sara's headache and her fatigue and fanciful little indisposition were very lucky accidents for her father. They gave him an excuse for the deeper compunctious tenderness with which he longed to make up to her for a possible loss, and occupied both of them, and hid his disturbed air, and gave him a little stimulus of pleasure when she mended and resumed her natural chatter. Thus reflection and the fresh evening air, and Sara's headache and company, ended by almost curing Mr Brownlow before he reached home.

CHAPTER IV.

A LITTLE DINNER.

There was a very pleasant party that evening at Brownlows—the sort of thing of which people say, that it is not a party at all, you know, only ourselves and the Hardcastles, or whoever else it may happen to be. There was the clergyman of the parish, of course—who is always, if he happens to be at all agreeable, the very man for such little friendly dinners; and there was his daughter; for he was a widower, like Mr Brownlow—and his Fanny was half as much to him, to say the least, as Sara was to her admiring father. And there was just one guest besides—young Keppel to wit, the son of old Keppel of Ridley, and brother of the present Mr Keppel—a young fellow who was not just precisely what is called *eligible*, so far as the young ladies were concerned, but who did very well for all secondary purposes, and was a barrister with hopes of briefs,

and a flying connection with literature, which helped him to keep his affairs in order, and was rather of service to him than otherwise in society, as it sometimes is to a perfectly well-connected young man. Thus there were two girls and two young men, and two seniors to keep each other company; and there was a great deal of talk and very pleasant intercourse, enough to justify the Rector in the enthusiastic utterance of his favourite sentiment, that this was true society, and that he did not know what people meant by giving dinners at which there were more than six. Mr Hardcastle occasionally, it is true, expressed under other circumstances opinions which might be supposed a little at variance with this one; but then a man cannot always be in the same mind, and no doubt he was quite sincere in what he said. He was a sort of man that exists, but is not produced nowadays. He was neither High Church nor Low Church, so to speak. If you had offered to confess your sins to him he would have regarded you with as much terror and alarm as if you had presented a pistol at his head; and if you had attempted to confess your virtues under the form of spiritual experience, he would have turned from you with disgust. Neither was he in the least freethinking, but a most correct orthodox clergyman—a kind of man, as I have said, not much produced in these times. Besides

this indefinite clerical character he had a character of his own, which was not at all indefinite. He was a little red-faced, and sometimes almost jovial in his gaiety, and at the same time he was in possession of a large stock of personal griefs and losses, which had cost him many true tears and heartaches, poor man, but which were very useful to him in the way of his profession. And he had an easy way of turning from the one phase of life to the other, which had a curious effect sometimes upon impartial spectators. But all the same it was perfectly true and genuine. He made himself very agreeable that night at Brownlows, and was full of jest and frolic; but if he had been called to see somebody in trouble as he went home, he would have gone in and drawn forth from his own private stores of past pain, and manifested plainly to the present sufferer that he himself had suffered more bitterly still. He had "come through" all the pangs that a man can suffer in this world. He had lost his wife and his children, till nothing was left to him but this one little Fanny —and he loved to open his closed-up chambers to your eyes, and to meet your pitiful looks and faltering attempt at consolation; and yet at the same time you would find him very jolly in the evening at Mr Brownlow's, which hurt the feelings of some sensitive people. His daughter, little Fanny, was pretty

and nice, and nothing particular, which suited her position and prospects perfectly well. These were the two principal guests, young Keppel being only a man, as ladies who are in the habit of giving dinners are wont to describe such floating members of the community. And they all talked and made themselves pleasant, and it was as pretty and as lively a little party as you could well have seen. Quantities of flowers and lights, two very pretty girls, and two good-looking young men, were enough to guarantee its being a very pretty scene; and nobody was afraid of anybody, and everybody could talk, and did so, which answered for the latter part of the description. Such little parties were very frequent at Brownlows.

After dinner the two girls had a little talk by themselves. They came floating into the great drawing-room with those heaps of white drapery about them which made up for anything that might be intrinsically unamiable in crinoline. Before they went up-stairs, making it ready for them, a noble fire, all red, clear, and glowing, was in the room, and made it glorious; and the pretty things which glittered and reddened and softened in the bright warm atmosphere were countless. There was a bouquet of violets on the table, which was Mr Pitt the gardener's daily quit-rent to Sara for all

the honours and emoluments of his situation, so that every kind of ethereal sense was satisfied. Fanny Hardcastle dropped into a very low chair at one side, where she sat like a swan with her head and throat rising out of the white billowy waves which covered yards of space round about her. Sara, who was at home, drew a stool in front of the fire, and sat down there, heaping up in her turn snow-wreaths upon the rosy hearth. A sudden spark might have swallowed them both in fiery destruction. But the spark happily did not come; and they had their talk in great comfort and content. They touched upon a great many topics, skimming over them, and paying very little heed to logical sequences. And at last they stumbled into metaphysics, and had a curious little dive into the subject of love and love-making, as was not unnatural. It is to be regretted, however, that neither of these young women had very exalted ideas on this point. They were both girls of their period, who recognised the necessity of marriage, and that it was something likely to befall both of them, but had no exaggerated notions of its importance; and, indeed, so far from being utterly absorbed in the anticipation of it, were both far from clear whether they believed in such a thing as love.

"I don't think one ever could be so silly as they

say in books," said Fanny Hardcastle, "unless one was a great fool — feeling as if everything was changed, you know, as soon as *he* was out of the room, and feeling one's heart beat when he was coming, and all that stuff; I don't believe it, Sara; do you?"

"I don't know," said Sara, making a screen of her pretty laced handkerchief to protect her face from the firelight; "perhaps it is because one has never seen the right sort of man. The only man I have ever seen whom one could really love is papa."

"Papa!" echoed Fanny, faintly, and with surprise. Perhaps, after all, she had a lingering faith in ordinary delusions; at all events, there was nothing heroic connected in her mind with papas in general; and she could but sit still and gaze and wonder what next the spoiled child would say.

"I wonder if mamma was very fond of him," said Sara, meditatively. "She ought to have been, but I daresay she never knew him half as well as I do. That is the dreadful thing. You have to marry them before you know."

"Oh, Sara, don't you believe in love at first sight?" said Fanny, forgetting her previously expressed sentiments. "I do."

Sara threw up her drooping head into the air with

a little impatient motion. "I don't think I believe anything about it," she said.

"And yet there was once somebody that was fond of you," said little Fanny, breathlessly. "Poor Harry Mansfield, who was so nice—everybody knows about that—and, I do think, Mr Keppel, if you would not be so saucy to him——"

"Mr Keppel!" exclaimed Sara, with some scorn. "But I will tell you plainly what I mean to do. Mind it is in confidence between us two. You must never tell it to anybody. I have made up my mind to marry whoever papa wishes me to marry—I don't mind who it is. I shall do whatever he says."

"Oh, Sara!" said her young companion, with open eyes and mouth, "you will never go so far as that."

"Oh yes, I will," said Sara, with calm assurance. "He would not ask me to have anybody very old or very hideous; and if he lets it alone I shall never leave him at all, but stay still here."

"That might be all very well for a time," said the prudent Fanny; "but you would get old, and you couldn't stay here for ever. That is what I am afraid of. Things get so dull when one is old."

"Do you think so?" said Sara. "I don't think I should be dull—I have so many things to do."

"Oh, you are the luckiest girl in the whole world,"

said Fanny Hardcastle, with a little sigh. She, for her own part, would not have despised the reversion of Mr Keppel, and would have been charmed with Jack Brownlow. But such blessings were not for her. She was in no hurry about it; but still, as even now it was dull occasionally at the Rectory, she could not but feel that when she was old—say, seven-and-twenty or so—it would be duller still; and if accordingly, in the mean time, somebody "nice" would turn up—— Fanny's thoughts went no further than this. And as for Sara, she has already laid her own views on the subject before her friends.

It was just then that Jack Brownlow, leaving the dining-room, invited young Keppel to the great hall door to see what sort of a night it was. "It looked awfully like frost," Jack said; and they both went with serious countenances to look out, for the hounds were to meet next day.

"Smoke! not when we are going back to the ladies," said Keppel, with a reluctance which went far to prove the inclination which Fanny Hardcastle had read in his eyes.

"Put yourself into this overcoat," said Jack, "and I'll take you to my room, and perfume you after. The girls don't mind."

"Your sister must mind, I am sure," said Keppel. "One can't think of any coarse sort of gratification

like this—I suppose it is a gratification—in her presence."

"Hum," said Jack; "I have her presence every day, you know, and it does not fill me with awe."

"It is all very easy for you," said Keppel, as they went down the steps into the cold and darkness. Poor fellow! he had been a little thrown off his balance by the semi-intimacy and close contact of the little dinner. He had sat by Sara's side, and he had lost his head. He went along by Jack's side rather disconsolate, and not even attempting to light his cigar. "You don't know how well off you are," he said, in touching tones, "whereas another fellow would give his head——"

"Most fellows I know want their heads for their own affairs," said the unfeeling Jack. "Don't be an ass; you may talk nonsense as much as you like, but you know you never could be such an idiot as to marry at your age."

"Marry!" said Keppel, a little startled, and then he breathed forth a profound sigh. "If I had the ghost of a chance," he said, and stopped short, as if despair choked further utterance. As for Jack Brownlow, he was destitute of sensibility, as indeed was suitable to his trade.

"I shouldn't say you had in this case," he said, in his imperturbable way; "and all the better for you.

You've got to make your way in the world like the rest of us, and I don't think you're the sort of fellow to hang on to a girl with money. It's all very well after a bit, when you've made your way; but no fellow with the least respect for himself should think of such a thing before, say, five-and-thirty; unless, of course, he is a duke, and has a great family to keep up."

"I hope you'll keep to your own standard," said Keppel, with a little bitterness, "unless you think an only son and a duke on equal ground."

"Don't sneer," said Jack; "I'm young Brownlow the attorney; you know that as well as I do. I can't go visiting all over the country at my uncle's place, and my cousin's place, like you. Brownlows is a sort of a joke to most people, you know. Not that I haven't as much respect for my father and my family as if we were all princes; and I mean to stand by my order. If I ever marry it will be twenty years hence, when I can afford it; and you can't afford it any more than I can. A fellow might love a woman, and give up a great deal for her," Jack added, with a little excitement; "but, by Jove! I don't think he would be justified in giving up his life."

"It depends on what you call life," said Keppel. "I suppose you mean society, and that sort of

thing—a few stupid parties and club gossip, and worse."

"I don't mean anything of the sort," said Jack, tossing away his cigar; "I mean working out your own career, and making your way. When a fellow goes and marries and settles down, and cuts off all his chances, what use is his youth and his strength to him? It would be hard upon a poor girl to be expected to make up for all that."

"I did not know you were such a philosopher, Jack," said his companion, "nor so ambitious; but I suppose you're right, in a cold-blooded sort of way. Anyhow, if I were that duke——"

"You'd make an ass of yourself," said young Brownlow; and then the two congratulated each other that the skies were clouding over, and the dreaded frost dispersing into drizzle, and went in an dtoo k off their smoking-coats, and wasted a flask of eau-de-cologne, and went up-stairs; where there was an end of all philosophy, at least for that night.

And the seniors sat over their wine, drinking little, notwithstanding Mr Hardcastle's ruddy countenance, which was due rather to fresh air, taken in large and sometimes boisterous draughts, than to any stronger beverage. But they liked their talk, and they were, in a friendly way, opposed to each other on a great

many questions; the Rector, as in duty bound, being steadily Conservative, while the lawyer had crotchets in political matters. They were discussing the representatives of the county, and also those of some of the neighbouring boroughs, which was probably the reason why Mr Hardcastle gave a personal turn to the conversation as he suddenly did.

"If you will not stand for the borough yourself, you ought to put forward Jack," said the Rector. "I think he is sounder than you are. The best sign I know of the country is that all the young fellows are Tories, Brownlow. Ah! you may shake your head, but I have it on the best authority. Sir Robert would support him, of course; and with your influence at Masterton——"

"Jack must stick to his business," said Mr Brownlow; "neither he nor I have time for politics. Besides, we are not the sort of people—county families, you know——"

"Oh, bother county families!" said Mr Hardcastle. "You know there is not another place in the county kept up like Brownlows. If you will not stand yourself, you ought to push forward your boy."

"It is out of my way," said Mr Brownlow, shaking his head, and then a momentary smile passed over his face. It had occurred to him, by means of a trick of

thought he had got into unawares—if Sara could but do it! and then he smiled at himself. Even while he did so, the recollection of his disturbed day returned to him; and though he was a lawyer and a self-contained man, and not given to confidences, still something moved in his heart and compelled him, as it were, to speak.

"Besides," he went on, "we are only here on sufferance. You know all about my circumstances —everybody in Dartfordshire does, I believe; and Phœbe Thomson may turn up any day and make her claim."

"Nonsense," said the Rector; but there was something in John Brownlow's look which made him feel that it was not altogether nonsense. "But even if she were to turn up," he added, after a pause, "I suppose it would not ruin you to pay her her fifty thousand pounds."

"No, that is true enough," said Mr Brownlow. It was a kind of ease to him to give this hint that he was still human and fallible, and might have losses to undergo; but the same instinct which made him speak closed his lips as to any more disastrous consequences than the loss of the original legacy. "Sara will have some tea for us up-stairs," he said, after a pause. And then the two fathers went up to the

drawing-room in their turn, and nothing could be more cheerful than the rest of the evening, though there were a good many thoughts and speculations of various kinds going on under this lively flood of talk, as may be perceived.

CHAPTER V.

SARA'S SPECULATIONS.

THE next morning the frost had set in harder than before, contrary to all prognostications, to the great discomfiture of Jack Brownlow and of the Dartfordshire hounds. The world was white, glassy, and sparkling, when they all looked out upon it from the windows of the breakfast-room—another kind of world altogether from that dim and cloudy sphere upon which Jack and his companion had looked with hopes of thaw and an open country. These hopes being all abandoned, the only thing that remained to be thought of was, whether Dewsbury Mere might be "bearing," or when the ice would be thick enough for skaters—which were questions in which Sara, too, took a certain interest. It was the parish of Dewsbury in which Brownlows was situated, and of which Mr Hardcastle was the parish priest; and young Keppel, along with his brother

Mr Keppel of Ridley, and all the visitors he might happen to have, and Sir Charles Motherwell, from the other side, with anybody who might be staying in his house—not to speak of the curate and the doctor, and Captain Stanmore, who lived in the great house in Dewsbury village, and a number of other persons less known in the upper circles of the place, would crowd to the Mere as soon as it was known that it might yield some diversion, which was a scant commodity in the neighbourhood. Mr Brownlow scarcely listened to the talk of the young people as he ate his egg sedately. He was not thinking of the ice for one. He was thinking of something quite different—of what might be waiting him at his office, and of the changes which any moment, as he said to himself, might produce. He was not afraid, for daylight disperses many ghosts that are terrible by night; but still his fright seemed to have opened his eyes to all the advantages of his present position, and the vast difference there was between John Brownlow the attorney's children, and the two young people from Brownlows. If that change were ever to occur, it would make a mighty alteration. Lady Motherwell would still know Sara, no doubt, but in how different a way! and their presence at Dewsbury then would be of no more importance than that of Fanny Hardcastle or young Stanmore

in the village—whereas, now—— This was what their father was reflecting, not distinctly, but in a vague sort of way, as he ate his egg. He had once been fond of the ice himself, and was not so old but that he felt the wonted fires burn in his ashes; but the office had an attraction for him which it had never had before, and he drove down by himself in the dogcart with the vigour and eagerness of a young man, while his son got out his skates and set off to ascertain the prospects of the Mere. In short, at that moment Mr Brownlow rather preferred to go off to business alone.

As for Sara, she did not allow her head to be turned by the prospect of the new amusement; she went through her duties, as usual, with serene propriety—and then she put all sorts of coverings on her feet and her hands, and her person generally, and set out with a little basket to visit her "poor people." I cannot quite tell why she chose the worst weather to visit her poor people—perhaps it was for their sakes, to find out their wants at the worst; perhaps for her own, to feel a little meritorious. I do not pretend to be able to fathom Sara's motives; but this is undeniably what she did. When it rained torrents, she put on a large waterproof, which covered her from head to foot, and went off with drops of rain blown upon her

fair cheeks under her hood, on the same charitable mission. This time it was in a fur-trimmed mantle, which was the envy of half the parish. Her father spoiled her, it was easy to see, and gave her everything she could desire; but her poor people liked to see her in her expensive apparel, and admired and wondered what it might cost, and were all the better pleased with the tea and sugar. They were pleased that she should wear her fine things for them as well as for the fine people she went to visit. I do not attempt to state the reason why.

When she went out at the park-gates, Mrs Swayne was the first person who met Sara's eyes, standing at her door. The lines of the road were so lost in snow that it seemed an expanse of level white from the gate of Brownlows to the door-step, cleared and showing black over the whiteness, upon which Mrs Swayne stood. She was a stout woman, and the cold did not seem to affect her. She had a black gown on and a little scarlet shawl, as if she meant to make herself unusually apparent; and there she stood defiant as the young lady came out. Sara was courageous, and her spirit was roused by this visible opponent. She gave herself a little shake, and then she went straight over the road and offered battle. "Are you not afraid of freezing up," she said to

Mrs Swayne, with an abruptness which might have taken away anybody's breath—"or turning into Lot's wife, standing there at the open door?"

Mrs Swayne was a woman of strong nerves, and she was not frightened. She gave a little laugh to gain time, and then she retorted briskly, "No, Miss, no more nor you in all your wraps; poor folks can stand a deal that rich folks couldn't bear."

"It must be much better to be poor than to be rich, then," said Sara; "but I don't believe that, —your husband, for instance, is not half so strong as——; but I beg your pardon—I forgot he was ill," she cried with a compunction which covered her face with crimson, "I did not mean to say that; when one speaks without thinking, one says things one doesn't mean."

"It's a pity to speak without thinking," said Mrs Swayne; "if I did, I'd say a deal of unpleasant things; but, to be sure, you're but a bit of a girl. My man is independent, and it don't matter to nobody whether he is weakly or whether he is strong."

"I beg your pardon," said Sara, meekly; "I am very sorry he is not strong."

"My man," continued Mrs Swayne, "is well-to-do and comfortable, and don't want no pity: there's a plenty in the village to be sorry for—not them as

the ladies visit and get imposed upon. Poor folks understands poor folks—not as I mean to say we're poor."

"Then, if you are not poor you can't understand them any better than I do," said Sara, with returning courage. "I don't think they like well-to-do people like you; you are always the most hard upon them. If *we* were never to get anything we did not deserve, I wonder what would become of us; and besides, I am sure they don't impose upon me."

"They'd impose upon the Apostle Paul," said Mrs Swayne; "and as for the Rector—not as he is much like one of the apostles; he is one as thinks his troubles worse than other folks'—it ain't no good complaining to him. You may come through everything as a woman can come through; but the parson'll find as he's come through more. That's just Mr Hardcastle. If a poor man is left with a young family, it's the Rector as has lost two wives; and as for children and money—though I don't believe for one as he ever had any money—your parsons as come through so much never has——"

"You are a Dissenter, Mrs Swayne," said Sara, with calm superiority.

"Bred and born and brought up in the Church, Miss," said Mrs Swayne, indignantly, "but druve

to the Chapel along of Swayne, and the parson being so aggravatin'. I'm one as likes a bit of sympathy, for my part; but it ain't general in this world," said the large woman, with a sigh.

Sara looked at her curiously, with her head a little on one side. She was old enough to know that one liked a little sympathy, and to feel too that it was not general in this world; but it seemed mighty strange to her that such an ethereal want should exist in the bosom of Mrs Swayne. "Sympathy?" she said, with a curious tone of wonder and inquiry. She was candid enough, notwithstanding a certain comic aspect which the conversation began to take to her, to want to know what it meant.

"Yes," said Mrs Swayne, "just sympathy, Miss. I'm one as has had my troubles, and as don't like to be told that they ain't troubles at all. The minister at the Chapel is 'most as bad, for he says they're blessins in disguise—as if Swayne being weakly and awful worritin' when his rheumatism's bad, could ever be a blessin'. And as for speaking to the Rector, you might as well speak to the Mere, and better too, for *that's* got no answer ready. When a poor body sees a clergyman, it's their comfort to talk a bit and to tell all as they're going through. You can tell Mr Hardcastle I said it, if you please. Lord bless us! I don't need to go so far if it's only

to hear as other folks is worse off. There's old Betty at the lodge, and there's them poor creatures next door, and most all in the village, I'm thankful to say, is worse off nor we are; but I would like to know what's the good of a clergyman if he won't listen to you rational, and show a bit of sympathy for what you've com'd through."

Perhaps Sara's attention had wandered during this speech, or perhaps she was tired of the subject; at all events, looking round her with a little impatience as she listened, her eye was caught by the little card with "Lodgings" printed thereon which hung in Mrs Swayne's parlour window. It recalled her standing grievance, and she took action accordingly at once, as was her wont.

"What is the good of that?" she said, pointing to it suddenly. "I think you ought to keep your parlour to sit in, you who are so well off; but, at least, it can't do you any good to hang it up there, —nobody can see it but people who come to us at Brownlows; and you don't expect them to take lodgings here."

"Begging your pardon, Miss," said Mrs Swayne, solemnly, "it's been that good to me that the lodgings is took."

"Then why do you keep it up to aggravate people?" said Sara; "it makes me wild always

when I pass the door. Why do you keep it there?"

"Lodgers is but men," said Mrs Swayne, "or women, to be more particular. I can't never be sure as I'll like 'em; and they're folks as never sees their own advantages. It might be as we didn't suit, or they wasn't satisfied, or objected to Swayne a-smoking when he's bad with the rheumatism, which is a thing I wouldn't put a stop to not for forty lodgers; for it's the only thing as keeps him from worritin'. So I always keeps the card up; it's the safest way in the end."

"I think it is a wretched sort of way," cried Sara, impetuously. "I wonder how you can confess that you have so little faith in people; instead of trying to like them and getting friends, to be always ready to see them go off. I couldn't have servants in the house like that: they might just as well go to lodge in a cotton-mill or the workhouse. There can't be any human relations between you."

"Relations!" said Mrs Swayne, with a rising colour. "If you think my relations are folks as go and live in lodgings, you're far mistaken, Miss. It's well known as we come of comforable families, both me and Swayne—folks as keeps a good house over their heads. That's our sort. As for taking 'em in, it's mostly for charity as I lets my lodgings—for the sake of poor folks as wants a little fresh air. You

was a different-looking creature when you come out of that stuffy bit of a town. I've a real good memory, and I don't forget. I remember when your papa come and bought the place of the old family; and vexed we all was—but I don't make no doubt as it was all for the best."

"I don't think the old family, as you call them, were much use to anybody in Dewsbury," said Sara, injudiciously, with a thrill of indignation and offended pride.

"Maybe not, Miss," said Mrs Swayne, meekly; "they was the old Squires, and come natural. I don't say no more, not to give offence; but you was a pale little thing then, and not much wonder neither, coming out of a house in a close street as is most fit for a mill, as you was saying. It made a fine difference in you."

"Our house in Masterton is the nicest house I know," said Sara, who was privately furious. "I always want papa to take me back in the winter. Brownlows is very nice, but it is not so much of a house after all."

"It was a different name then," said Mrs Swayne, significantly; "some on us never can think on the new name; and I don't think as you'd like living in a bit of a poky town after this, if your papa was to let you try."

"On the contrary, I should like it excessively," said Sara, with much haughtiness; and then she gave Mrs Swayne a condescending little nod, and drew up a corner of her dress, which had drooped upon the snow. "I hope your lodgers will be nice, and that you will take down your ticket," she said; "but I must go now to see my poor people." Mrs Swayne was so startled by the sudden but affable majesty with which the young lady turned away, that she almost dropped her a curtsy in her surprise. But in fact she only dropped her handkerchief, which was as large as a towel, and which she had a way of holding rolled up like a ball in her hand. It was quite true that the old family had been of little use to anybody at Dewsbury; and that they were almost squalid in their poverty and pretensions and unrespected misfortune before they went away; and that all the little jobs in carpentry which kept Mr Swayne in employment had been wanting during the old regime; in short, it was on Brownlows, so to speak—on the shelfs and stands, and pegs and bits of cupboard, and countless repairs which were always wanting in the now prosperous house—that Swayne's Cottages had been built. This, however, did not make his wife compunctious. She watched Sara's active footsteps over the snow, and saw her pretty figure disappear into the white waste, and was glad she had

given her that sting. To keep this old family bottled up, and give the new people a little dose from time to time of the nauseous residue, was one of her pleasures. She went in and arranged the card more prominently in her parlour window, and felt glad that she had put it there; and then she went and sat with her poor neighbour next door, and railed at the impudent little thing in her furs and velvets, whom the foolish father made such an idol of. But she made her poor neighbour's tea all the same, and frightened away the children, and did the woman good, not being bad any more than most people are who cherish a little comfortable animosity against the nearest great folks. Mrs Swayne, however, not being democratic, was chiefly affected by the fact that the Masterton lawyer's family had no right to be great folks, which was a reasonable grievance in its way.

As for Sara, she went off through the snow, feeling hot at heart with this little encounter, though her feet were cold with standing still. Why had she stood still to be insulted? this was what Sara asked herself; for, after all, Mrs Swayne was nothing to her, and what could it matter to Brownlows whether or not she had a bill in her window? But yet unconsciously it led her thoughts to a consideration of her present home—to the difference between it and

her father's house at Masterton, to all the fairy change which, within the bounds of her own recollection, had passed upon her life. Supposing anything was to happen, as things continually happened to men in business—supposing some bank was to fail, or some railway to break down—a thing which occurred every day—and her papa should lose all his money? Would she really be quite content to go back to the brick house in which she was born? Sara thought it over with a great deal of gravity. In case of such an event happening (and, to be sure, nothing was more likely), she felt that she would greatly prefer total ruin. Total ruin meant instant retirement to a cottage with or without roses—with only two, or perhaps only one, servant—where she would be obliged, with her own hands, to make little dishes for poor papa, and sew the buttons on his shirts, and perhaps milk a very pretty little Alderney cow, and make beautiful little pats of butter for his delectation. This Sara felt that she was equal to. Let the bank or the railway break down to-morrow, and the devoted daughter was ready to go forth with her beloved parent. She smiled to herself at the thought that such a misfortune could alarm her. What was money? she said to herself; and Sara could not but feel that it was quite necessary to take this plan into

full consideration in all its details, for nobody could tell at what moment it might be necessary to put it in practice.

As for the house at Masterton, that was quite a different matter, which she did not see any occasion for considering. If papa was ruined, of course he would have to give up everything, and the Masterton house would be as impossible as Brownlows; and so long as he was not ruined, of course everything would go on as usual. Thus Sara pursued her way cheerfully, feeling that a possible new future had opened upon her, and that she had perceived and accepted her duty in it, and was prepared for whatever might happen. If Mr Brownlow returned that very night, and said, "I am a ruined man," Sara felt that she was able to go up to him, and say, "Papa, you have still your children;" and the thought was so far from depressing her that she went on very cheerfully, and held her head high, and looked at everybody she met with a certain affability, as if she were the queen of that country. And, to tell the truth, such people as she met were not unwilling to acknowledge her claims. There were many who thought her the prettiest girl in Dewsbury parish, and there could be no doubt that she was the richest and most magnificent. If it had been known what heroic sentiments were in her heart, no doubt it

would have deepened the general admiration; but at least she knew them herself, and that is always a great matter. To have your mind made up as to what you must and will do in case of a sudden and at present uncertain, but on the whole quite possible, change of fortune, is a thing to be very thankful for. Sara felt that, considering this suddenly revealed prospect of ruin, it perhaps was not quite prudent to promise future bounties to her poor pensioners; but she did it all the same, thinking that surely somehow she could manage to get her promises fulfilled, through the means of admiring friends or such faithful retainers as might be called forth by the occasion—true knights, who would do anything or everything for her. Thus her course of visits ended quite pleasantly to everybody concerned, and that glow of generosity and magnanimity about her heart made her even more liberal than usual, which was very satisfactory to the poor people. When she had turned back and was on her way home, she encountered the carrier's cart on its way from Masterton. It was a covered waggon, and sometimes, though very rarely, it was used as a means of travelling from one place in the neighbourhood to another by people who could not afford more expensive conveyances. There were two such

people in it now who attracted Sara's attention—one an elderly woman, tall and dark, and somewhat gaunt in her appearance; the other a girl about Sara's own age, with very dark brown hair cut short and lying in rings upon her forehead like a boy's. She had eyes as dark as her hair, and was closely wrapped in a red cloak, and regarded by her companion with tender and anxious looks, to which her paleness and fragile appearance gave a ready explanation. "It ain't the speediest way of travelling, for I've a long round to make, Miss, afore I gets where they're a-going," said the carrier; "they'd a'most done better to walk, and so I told 'em. But I reckon the young un ain't fit, and they're tired like, and it's mortal cold." Sara walked on remorseful after this encounter, half ashamed of her furs, which she did not want—she, whose blood danced in her veins, and who was warm all over with health and comfort, and happiness and pleasant thoughts. And then it occurred to her to wonder whether, if papa were ruined, he and his devoted child would ever have to travel in a carrier's cart, and go round and round a whole parish in the cold before they came to their destination. "But then we could walk," Sara said to herself as she went briskly up the avenue, and saw the bright fire blink-

ing in her own window, where her maid was laying out her evening dress. This, after all, felt a great deal more natural even than the cottage with the roses, and put out of her mind all thought of a dreary journey in the carrier's cart.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ADVENTURE.

JACK in the mean time was on the ice.

Dewsbury Mere was bearing, which was a wonder, considering how lately the frost had set in; and a pretty scene it was, though as yet some of the other magnates of the parish, as well as Sara, were absent. It was a round bit of ornamental water, partly natural, partly artificial, touching upon the village green at one side, and on the other side bordered by some fine elm-trees, underneath which in summer much of the lovemaking of the parish was performed. The church with its pretty spire was visible through the bare branches of the plantation, which backed the elm-trees like a little host of retainers; and on the other side—the village side—glittering over the green in the centre of all the lower and humbler dwellings, you could see the Stanmores' house, which was very tall and very

red, and glistened all over with reflections from the brass nobs on the door, and the twinkling glass of the windows, and even from the polished holly leaves which all but blocked up the entrance. The village people were in full possession of the Mere without the *gêne* imposed by the presence of Lady Motherwell or Mrs Keppel. Fanny Hardcastle, who, if the great people had been there, would have pinned herself on tremblingly to their skirts and lost the fun, was now in the heart of it, not despising young Stanmore's attentions, nor feeling herself painfully above the doctor's wife; and thus rosy and blooming and gay, looked a very different creature from the blue little Fanny whom old Lady Motherwell, had she been there, would have awed into cold and propriety. And the doctor's wife, though she was not exactly in society, was a piquant little woman, and the curate was stalwart, if not interesting, very muscular, and slow to commit himself in the way of speech. Besides, there were many people of whom no account was made in Dewsbury, who enjoyed the ice, and knew how to conduct themselves upon it, and looked just as well as if they had been young squires and squiresses. Jack Brownlow came into the midst of them cordially, and thought there were many more pretty faces visible than were to be seen in more select circles, and was not in the

least appalled by the discovery that the prettiest of all was the corn-factor's daughter in the village. When little Polly Huntly from the baker's wavered on her slide, and was near falling, it was Jack who caught her, and his friendliness put some very silly thoughts into the poor little girl's head; but Jack was thinking of no such vanity. He was as pleased to see the pretty faces about as a right-thinking young man ought to be, but he felt that he had a great many other things to think of for his part, and gave very sensible advice, as has been already seen, to other young fellows of less thoroughly established principles. Jack was not only fancy free, but in principle he was opposed to all that sort of thing. His opinion was, that for anybody less than a young duke or more than an artisan to marry under thirty, was a kind of social and moral suicide. I do not pretend to justify or defend his opinions, but such were his opinions, and he made no secret of them. He was a young fellow with a great many things to do in this world, or at least so he thought. Though he was only a country solicitor's son, he had notions in his head, and there was no saying what he did not aspire to; and to throw everything away for the sake of a girl's pretty face, seemed to him a proceeding little short of idiocy. All this he had expounded to many persons of a different way of thinking; and

indeed the only moments in which he felt inclined to cast aside his creed were when he found it taken up and advocated by other men of the same opinion, but probably less sense of delicacy than himself.

"Where is your father?" said Mr Hardcastle; "he used to be as fond as any one of the ice. Gone to business!—he'll kill himself if he goes on going to business like this all the year round, every day."

"Oh, no," said Jack, "he'll not kill himself; all the same, he might have come, and so would Sara, had we known the Mere was bearing. I did not think it possible there could have been such good ice to-day."

"Not Sara," said the Rector; "this sort of thing is not the thing for her. The village folks are all very well, and in the exercise of my profession I see a great deal of them. But not for Sara, my dear boy —this sort of thing is not in her way."

"Why, Fanny is here," said Jack, opening his eyes.

"Fanny is different," said Mr Hardcastle; "clergy-women have got to be friendly with their poor neighbours—but Sara, who will be an heiress——"

"Is she to be an heiress?" said Jack, with a laugh which could not but sound a little peculiar. "I am sure I don't mind if she is; but I think we may let the future take care of itself. The presence of the

cads would not hurt her any more than they hurt me."

"Don't speak of cads," said the Rector, "to me; they are all my equals—human beings among whom I have lived and laboured. Of course it is natural that you should look on them differently. Jack, can you tell me what it is that keeps young Keppel so long about Ridley? What interest has he in remaining here?"

"The hounds, I suppose," said Jack, curtly, not caring to be questioned.

"Oh, the hounds!" repeated Mr Hardcastle, with a dubious tone. "I suppose it must be that—and nothing particular to do in town. You were quite right, Jack, to stick to your father's business. A briefless barrister is one of the most hopeless wretches in the world."

"I don't think you always thought so, sir," said Jack; "but here is an opening, and I'll see you again." He had not come there to talk to the parson. When he had gone flying across the Mere, thinking of nothing at all but the pleasure of the motion, and had skirted it round and round, and made figures of 8, and done all the gambols common to a first outbreak, he stopped himself at a corner where Fanny Hardcastle, whom her father had been leading about, was standing with young Keppel, looking very pretty,

with her rose cheeks and downcast eyes. Keppel had been mooning about Sara the night before, was the thought that passed through Jack's mind; and what right had he to give Fanny Hardcastle occasion to cast down her eyes? Perhaps it was purely on his friend's account; perhaps because he thought that girls were very hardly dealt with in never being left alone to think of anything but that confounded love-making; but the fact was that he disturbed them rather ruthlessly, and stood before them, balancing himself on his skates. "Get into this chair, Fanny, and I'll give you a turn of the Mere," he said; and the downcast eyes were immediately raised, and their fullest attention conferred upon him. All the humble maidens of Dewsbury at that moment cast glances of envy and yet awe at Fanny. Alice Stanmore, who was growing up, and thought herself quite old enough to receive attention in her own person, glowered at the Rector's daughter with horrible thoughts. The two young gentlemen, the envied of all observers, seemed for the moment, to the female population of the village, to have put themselves at Fanny's feet. Even Mrs Brightbank, the doctor's little clever wife, was taken in for the moment. For the instant that energetic personage balanced in her mind the respective merits of the two candidates, and considered which it would be best for Fanny to

marry; never thinking that the whole matter involved was half-a-dozen words of nonsense on Mr Keppel's part, and on Jack Brownlow's one turn on the ice in the skater's chair.

For it was not until Fanny was seated, and being driven over the Mere, that she looked back with that little smile and saucy glance, and asked demurely, "Are you sure it is quite proper, Mr John?"

"Not proper at all," said Jack; "for we have nobody to take care of us—neither I nor you. My papa is in Masterton at the office, and yours is busy talking to the old women. But quite as proper as listening to all the nonsense Joe Keppel may please to say."

"I listening to his nonsense!" said Fanny, as a pause occurred in their progress. "I don't know why you should think so. He said nothing that everybody might not hear. And besides, I don't listen to anybody's nonsense, nor ever did since I was born," added Fanny, with another little soft glance round into her companion's face.

"Never do," said Jack, seizing the chair with renewed vehemence, and rushing all round the Mere with it at a pace which took away Fanny's breath. When they had reached the same spot again, he came to a standstill to recover his own, and stood leaning upon the chair in which the girl sat, smiling and

glowing with the unwonted whirl. "Just like a pair of lovers," the people said on the Mere, though they were far enough from being lovers. Just at that moment the carrier's cart came lumbering along noisily upon the hard frosty path. It was on its way then to the place where Sara met it on the road. Inside, under the arched cover, were to be seen the same two faces which Sara afterwards saw—the mother's, elderly and gaunt, and full of lines and wrinkles; the sweet face of the girl, with its red lips, and pale cheeks, and lovely eyes. The hood of the red cloak had fallen back a little, and showed the short, curling, almost black hair. A little light came into the young face at sight of all the people on the ice. As was natural, her eyes fixed first on the group so near the edge—pretty Fanny Hardcastle, and Jack, resting from his fatigue, leaning over her chair. The red lips opened with an innocent smile, and the girl pointed out the scene to her mother, whose face relaxed, too, into that momentary look of feigned interest with which an anxious watcher rewards every exertion or stir of reviving life. "What a pretty, pretty creature!" said Fanny Hardcastle, generously, yet with a little passing pang of annoyance at the interruption. Jack did not make any response. He gazed at the little traveller, without knowing it, as if she had been a creature out of another sphere.

Pretty! he did not know whether she was pretty or not. What he thought was that he had never before seen such a face; and all the while the waggon lumbered on, and kept going off, until the Mere and its groups of people were left behind. And Jack Brownlow got to his post again, as if nothing had happened. He drove Fanny round and round until she grew dizzy, and then he rushed back to the field and cut all kind of figures, and executed every possible gambol that skates will lend themselves to. But, oddly enough, all the while he could not get it out of his head how strange it must look to go through the world like that in a carrier's cart. It seemed a sort of new view of life to Jack altogether, and no doubt that was why it attracted him. People who had so little sense of the importance of time, and so great a sense of the importance of money, as to jog along over the whole breadth of the parish in a frosty winter afternoon, by way of saving a few shillings—and one of them so delicate and fragile, with such a face, such soft little rings of dark hair on the forehead, such sweet eyes, such a soft little smile! Jack did not think he had much imagination, yet he could not help picturing to himself how the country must look as they passed through; all the long bare stretches of wood, and the houses here and there, and how the Mere must have flashed upon

them to brighten up the tedious panorama; and then the ring of the horses' hoofs on the road, and their breath steaming up into the air, and the crack of the carrier's whip as he walked beside them. Jack, who dashed along in his dogcart the quickest way, or rode his horse still faster through the well-known lanes, could not but linger on this imagination with the most curious sense of interest and novelty. "It must be poverty," he said to himself; and it was all he could do to keep the words from being spoken out loud.

As for Fanny, I am afraid she never thought again of the poor travellers in the carrier's cart. When the red sunset clouds were gathering in the sky, her father, who was very tender of her, drew her hand within his arm, and took her home. "You have had enough of it," he said, though she did not think so; and when they turned their backs on the village, and took the path towards the Rectory under the bare elm-trees, which stood like pillars of ebony in a golden palace against the setting sun, Mr Hardcastle added a little word of warning. "My love," he said—for he too, like Mr Brownlow, thought there was nobody like his child—"you must not put nonsense into these young fellows' heads."

"*I* put nonsense into their heads!" cried Fanny,

feeling, with a slight thrill of self-abasement, that probably it was quite the other way.

"Not a doubt about it," said the Rector; "and so far as Jack Brownlow is concerned, I don't know that I should object much; but I don't want to lose my little girl yet awhile; I don't know what I should do all alone in the house."

"Oh papa, I will *never* leave you," cried Fanny. She meant it, and even, which is more, believed it for the moment. Was he not more to her than all the young men that had ever been dreamed of? But yet it *was* rather agreeable to Fanny to think that she was suspected of putting nonsense into their heads. She liked the imputation, as indeed most people do, both men and women; and she liked the position—the only lady, with all that was most attractive in the parish at her feet; for Sir Charles was considered by most people as very far from bright. And then the recollection of her rapid whirl across the ice came over her like a warm glow of pleasant recollection as she dressed for the evening. It would be nice to have them come in, to talk it all over after dinner—very nice to have little parties, like the last night's party at Brownlows; and notwithstanding her devotion to her father, after they had dined, and she had gone alone into the drawing-room, Fanny could not but

find it dull. There was neither girl to gossip with, nor man into whose head it would be any satisfaction to put nonsense, near the Rectory, from whom a familiar visit might be expected; and, after the day's amusement, the silent evening, with papa down-stairs enjoying his after-dinner doze in his chair, was far from lively. But it did not occur to Fanny to frame any conjectures upon the two travellers who had looked momentarily out upon her from the carrier's cart.

As for Jack Brownlow, he had a tolerably long walk before him. In summer he would have crossed the park, which much reduced the distance, but, in the dark and through the snow, he thought it expedient to keep the highroad, which was a long way round. He went off very briskly, with the straps of his skates over his shoulder, whistling occasionally, but not from want of thought. Indeed, he had a great many things to think of— the ice itself for one thing, and the pleasant run he had given little Fanny, and the contemptible vacillations of that fellow Keppel from one pretty girl to another, and the office and his work, and a rather curious case which had lately come under his hands. All this occupied him as he went home, while the sunset skies gradually faded. He passed from one thing to another with an unfettered mind,

and more than once there just glanced across his thoughts, a momentary wonder, where would the carrier's cart be now? Had it got home yet, delivered all its parcels, and deposited its passengers? Had it called at Brownlows to leave his cigars, which ought to have arrived a week ago? That poor little pale face—how tired the little creature must be! and how cold! and then the mother. He would never have thought of them again but for that curious way of moving about, of all ways in the world, among the parcels in the carrier's cart.

This speculation had returned to his mind as he came in sight of the park-gates. It was quite dark by this time, but the moon was up overhead, and the road was very visible on either side of that little black block of Swayne's Cottages, which threw a shadow across almost to the frosted silver gates. Something, however, was going on in this bit of shadow. A large black movable object stood in the midst of it; and from Mrs Swayne's door a lively ray of red light fell across the snow. Then by degrees Jack identified the horses, with their steaming breath, and the waggon-wheel upon which the light fell. He said "by Jove" loud out as he stood at the gate and found out what it was. It was the very carrier's cart of which he had been

thinking, and some mysterious transaction was going on in the darkness which he could only guess at vaguely. Something or somebody was being made to descend from the waggon, which a sudden swaying of the horses made difficult. Jack took his cigar from his lips to hear and see the better, and stood and gazed with the vulgarest curiosity. Even the carrier's cart was something to take note of on the road at Brownlows. But when that sudden cry followed, he tossed his cigar away and his skates along with it, and crossed the road in two long steps, to the peril of his equilibrium. Somehow he had divined what was happening. He made a stride into the thick of it, and it was he who lifted up the little figure in the red cloak which had slipped and fallen on the snow. It was natural, for he was the only man about. The carrier was at his horses' heads to keep them steady; Mrs Swayne stood on the steps, afraid to move lest she too should slip; and as for the girl's mother, she was benumbed and stupefied, and could only raise her child up half-way from the ground, and beg somebody to help. Jack got her up in his arms, and pushed Mrs Swayne out of his way, and carried her in. "Is it here she is to go?" he cried over his shoulder as he took her into the parlour, where the card hung in the window, and the fire was burning, There was nothing in it but fire-

light, which cast a hue of life upon the poor little traveller's face. And then she had not fainted, but blushed and gasped with pain and confusion. "Oh, thank you, that will do," she cried—"that will do." And then the others fell upon her, who had come in a procession behind, when he set her down. He was so startled himself that he remained where he was, and looked over their heads and gaped at her. He had put her down in a kind of easy-chair, and there she lay, her face changing from red to pale. Pale enough it was now, while Jack, made by his astonishment into a mere wondering, curious boy, stood with his mouth open and watched. He was not consciously thinking how pretty she was; he was wondering if she had hurt herself, which was a much more sensible thought; but still, of course, he perceived it, though he was not thinking of it. Curls are common enough, you know, but it is not often you see those soft rings, which are so much longer than they look; and the eyes so limpid and liquid all through, yet strained, and pathetic, and weary—a great deal too limpid, as anybody who knew anything about it might have known at a glance. She made a little movement, and gave a cry, and grew red once more, this time with pain, and then as white as the snow. "Oh, my foot, my foot!" she cried, in a piteous voice. The sound of words

brought Jack to himself. "I'll wait outside, Mrs Swayne," he said, "and if the doctor's wanted I'll fetch him; let me know." And then he went out and had a talk with the carrier, and waited. The carrier knew very little about his passenger. He reckoned the young un was delicate—it was along of this here brute swerving when he hadn't ought to—but it couldn't be no more than a sprain. Such was Hobson's opinion. Jack waited, however, a little bewildered in his intellects, till Mrs Swayne came out to say his services were not needed, and that it was a sprain, and could be mended by ordinary female remedies. Then young Mr Brownlow got Hobson's lantern, and searched for his skates, and flung them over his shoulder. How queer they should have come here—how odd to think of that little face peeping out at Mrs Swayne's window—how droll that he should have been on the spot just at that moment! And yet it was neither queer nor droll to Jack, but confused his head somehow, and gave him a strange sort of half-commotion in the region of his heart. It is all very well to be sensible, but yet there is certainly something in it when an adventure like this happens, not to Keppel, or that sort of fellow, but actually to yourself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATHER'S DAY AT THE OFFICE.

WHILE Sara and Jack were thus enjoying themselves, Mr Brownlow went quietly in to his business—very quietly, in the dogcart, with his man driving, who was very steady, and looked as comfortable as his master. Mr Brownlow was rather pleased not to have his son's company that morning; he had something to do which he could scarcely have done had Jack been there—business which was quite justifiable, and indeed right, but which it would have been a disagreeable matter to have explained to Jack. His mind was much more intent upon his own affairs than were those of either of his children on theirs. They had so much time in life to do all they meant to do, that they could afford to set out leisurely, and go forth upon the world with a sweet vacancy in their minds, ready for anything that might turn up; but with Mr Brownlow it was not

so: his objects had grown to be very clear before him. He was not so old as to feel the pains or weariness or languor of age. He was almost as able to enjoy, and perhaps better able to do, in the way of his profession at least, than was young Jack. The difference was, that Mr Brownlow lived only in the present; the future had gradually been cut off, as it were, before him. There was one certainty in his path somewhere a little in advance, but nothing else that could be counted upon, so that whatever he had to do, and anything he might have to enjoy, presented themselves with double clearness in the limited perspective. It was the only time in his life that he had felt the full meaning of the word "Now." The present was his possession, his day in which he lived and worked, with plenty of space behind to go back upon, but nothing reliable before. This gave not only a vividness and distinct character, but also a promptitude, to his actions, scarcely possible to a younger man. To-day was his, but not to-morrow; whereas to Jack and his contemporaries to-morrow was always the real day, never the moment in which they lived.

When Mr Brownlow reached his office, the first thing he did was to send for a man who was a character in Masterton. He was known by various names, and it was not very certain which belonged

to him, or indeed if any belonged to him. He was called Inspector Pollaky by many people who were in the habit of reading the papers; but of course he was not that distinguished man. He was called detective and thief-taker, and many other injurious epithets, and he was a man whom John Brownlow had had occasion to consult before now on matters of business. Mr Brownlow had a long conversation with this personage in his private room. He was the sort of man that understands what people mean even when they do not speak very plainly, and naturally he took up at once the lawyer's object and pledged himself to pursue it. "You shall have some information on the subject probably this afternoon, sir," he said as he went away. After this visit Mr Brownlow went about his own business with great steadiness and precision, and cast his eyes over his son's work, and was very particular with the clerks —more than ordinarily particular. It was his way, for he was an admirable business man at all times; but still he was unusually energetic that day. And they were all a little excited about Pollaky, as they called him, what commission he might have received, and which case he might be wanted about. At the time when he usually had his glass of sherry, Mr Brownlow went out; he did not want his mid-day biscuit. He was a little out of sorts, and he

thought a walk would do him good; but instead of going down to Barnes's Pool or across the river to the Meadows, which had been lately flooded, and now were one sheet of ice, places which all the clerks supposed to be the most attractive spots for twenty miles round, he took the way of the town and went up into Masterton. He was going to pay a visit, and it was a most unusual one. He was going to see his wife's mother, old Mrs Fennell, for whom he had no love. It was a thing he did not do for years together, but having been somehow in his own mind thoroughly worked up to it, he took the occasion of Jack's absence and went that day.

Mrs Fennell was sitting in her drawing-room with only her second-best cap on, and with less than her second-best temper. If she had known he was coming she would have received him with a very different state, and she was mortified by her unpreparedness. Also her dinner was ready. As for Mr Brownlow, he was not thinking of dinners. He had something on his mind, and it was his object to conceal that he had anything on his mind—a matter less difficult to a man of his profession than to ordinary mortals. But what he said was that he was anxious chiefly to know if his mother-in-law was comfortable, and if she had everything according to her desires.

Mrs Fennell smiled at this inquiry. She smiled, but she rushed into a thousand grievances. Her lodgings were not to her mind, nor her position. Sara, the little puss, had carriages when she pleased, but her grandmamma never had any conveyance at her disposal to take the air in. And the people of the house were very inattentive, and Nancy—— but here the old woman, who was clever, put a sudden stop to herself and drew up and said no more. She knew that to complain of Nancy would be of no particular advantage to her, for Mr Brownlow was not fond of old Mrs Thomson's maid, and was as likely as not to propose that she should be pensioned and sent away.

"I have told you before," said Mr Brownlow, "that the brougham should be sent down for you when you want to go out, if you will only let me know in time. What Sara has is nothing—or you can have a fly; but it is not fit weather for you to go out at your age."

"You are not so very young yourself, John Brownlow," said the old lady, with a little offence.

"No indeed—far from it—and that is what makes me think," he said abruptly; and then made a pause which she did not understand, referring evidently to something in his own mind. "Did you ever know anybody of the name of Powys in the Isle of Man?"

he resumed, with a certain nervous haste, and an effort which brought heat and colour to his face.

"Powys!" said Mrs Fennell. "I've heard the name; but I think it was Liverpool-ways and not in the Isle of Man. It's a Welsh name. No; I never knew any Powyses. Do you?"

"It was only some one I met," said Mr Brownlow, "who had relations in the Isle of Man. Do you know of anybody who married there and left? Knowing that you came from that quarter, somebody was asking me——"

"I don't know of nobody but one," said the old woman—"one that would make a deal of difference if she were to come back now."

"You mean the woman Phœbe Thomson?" said Mr Brownlow, sternly. "It is a very strange thing to me that her relatives should know nothing about that woman—not even whom she married or what was her name."

"She married a soldier," said Mrs Fennell, "as I always heard. She wasn't my relation—it was poor Fennell that was her cousin. As for *us*, we come of very different folks; and I don't doubt as her name might have been found out," said the old woman, nodding her spiteful old head. Mr Brownlow kept his temper, but it was by a kind of miracle. This was the sort of thing which he was always subject to

on his rare visits to his mother-in-law. "It's for some folks' good that her name couldn't be found out," added the old woman, with another significant nod.

"It would have been for some folks' good if they had never heard of her," said Mr Brownlow. "I wish a hundred times in a year that I had never administered or taken any notice of the old hag's bequest. Then it would have gone to the Crown, I suppose, and all this trouble would have been spared."

"Other things would have had to be spared as well," said Mrs Fennell, in her taunting voice.

"I should have known what was my own and what was not, and my children would have been in no false position," said Mr Brownlow, with energy; "but now——" Here he stopped short, and his looks alarmed his companion, unsympathetic as she was. She loved to have this means of taunting and keeping down his pride, as she said; but her grandchildren's advantage was to a certain extent her own, and the thought of injury to them was alarming, and turned her thoughts into another channel. She took fright at the idea of Phœbe Thomson when she saw Mr Brownlow's face. It was the first time it had ever occurred to her as possible that he, a gentleman, a lawyer, and a clever man, might pos-

sibly have after all to give up to Phœbe Thomson should that poor and despised woman ever appear.

"But she couldn't take the law of you?" Mrs Fennell said, with a gasp. "She wouldn't know anything about it. I may talk disagreeable by times, and I own that we never were fond of each other, you and I, John Brownlow; but I'm not the woman that would ever let on to her, to harm my poor Bessie's children—not I—not if she was to come back this very day."

It is useless to deny that Mr Brownlow's face at that moment looked as if he would have liked to strangle the old woman; but he only made an indignant movement, and looked at her with rage and indignation, which did her no harm. And, poor man, in his excitement perhaps it was not quite true what he himself said—

"If she should come back this very day, it would be your duty to send her to me instantly, that I might give up her mother's trust into her hands," he said. "You may be sure I will never permit poor Bessie's children to enjoy what belongs to another." And then he made a pause and his voice changed. "After all, I suppose you know just as little of her as I do. Did you ever see her?" he said.

"Well, no; I can't say I ever did," said Mrs Fennell, cowed for the moment.

"Nor Nancy?" said Mr Brownlow; "you two would be safe guides, certainly. And you know of nobody else who left the Isle of Man and married—no relation of Fennell's, or of yours?"

"Nobody I know of," said the old woman, peevishly, after a pause. "There might be dozens; but us and the Thomsons and all belonging to us, we've been out of the Isle of Man for nigh upon fifty years."

After that Mr Brownlow went away. He had got no information, no satisfaction, and yet he had made no discovery, which was a kind of negative comfort in its way; but it was clear that his mother-in-law, though she made so much use of Phœbe Thomson's name, was utterly unable to give him any assistance either in discovering the real Phœbe Thomson or in exposing any false pretender. He went across the market-place over the crisp snow in the sunshine with all his faculties, as it were, crisped and sharpened like the air he breathed. This was all the effect as yet which the frosts of age had upon him. He had all his powers unimpaired, and more entirely serviceable and under command than ever they were. He could trust himself not to betray himself, to keep counsel, and act with deliberation, and do nothing hastily. Thus, though his enemies were as yet unknown and unrecognised, and consequently all the more dangerous, he had confidence in his own army

of defence, which was a great matter. He returned to his office, and to his business, and was as clear-headed and self-possessed, and capable of paying attention to the affairs of his clients, as if he had nothing particular in his own to occupy him. And the only help he got from circumstances was that which was given him by the frost, which had happily interfered this day of all others to detain Jack. Jack was not his father's favourite child; he was not, as Sara was, the apple of John Brownlow's eye; and yet the lawyer appreciated, and did justice to, as well as loved, his son, in a just and natural way. He felt that Jack's quick eye would have found out that there was something more than usual going on. He knew that his visit to Mrs Fennell and his unexplained conference with the man of mystery would not have been passed over by Jack without notice; and at the young man's hasty, impetuous time of life, prudence was not to be expected or even desired. If Jack thought it possible that Phœbe Thomson was to be found within a hundred miles, no doubt he would rush off without a moment's thought and hunt her up, and put his own fortune, and, what was more, Sara's, eagerly into her hands. This was what Jack would do, and Mr Brownlow was glad in his heart that Jack would be sure to do it; but yet it would probably be a very different

course which he himself, after much thought and consideration, might think it best to take.

He was long in his office that night, and worked very hard—indeed he would have been almost alone before he left but that one of the clerks had some extra work to do, and another had stayed to keep him company; so that two of them were still there when Inspector Pollaky, as they called him, came back. It was quite late, too late for the ice, or the young men would not have waited—half an hour later at least than the usual time at which Mr Brownlow left the office. And he closed his door carefully behind his mysterious visitor, and made sure that it was securely shut before he began to talk to him, which naturally was a thing that excited much wondering between the young men.

"Young Jack been a naughty boy?" said one to the other; then they listened, but heard nothing. "More likely some fellow going in for Miss Brownlow, and he wants to pick holes in him," said the second. But when half an hour passed and everything continued very undisturbed, they betook themselves to their usual talk. "I suppose it's about the Worsley case," they said, and straightway Inspector Pollaky lost interest in their eyes. So long as it was only a client's business it did not matter. Not for such commonplace concerns would

the young heroes of John Brownlow's office interrupt the even tenor of their way.

"I suppose you have brought me some news," said Mr Brownlow; "come near the fire. Take a chair, it is bitterly cold. I scarcely expected you so soon as to-day."

"Bless you, sir, it's as easy as easy," said the mysterious man—"disgusting easy. If there's anybody that I despise in this world, it's folks that have nothing to conceal. They're all on the surface, them folks are. You can take and read them clear off, through and through."

"Well?" said Mr Brownlow. He turned his face a little away from the light that he might not be spied too closely, though there was not in reality any self-betrayal in his face. His lips were a little white and more compressed than usual, that was all.

"Well, sir, for the first thing, it's all quite true," said the man. "There's four of a family—the mother comely-like still, but older nor might be expected. Poor, awful poor, but making the best of it—keeping their hearts up as far as I could see. The young fellow helping too, and striving his best. I shouldn't say as they had much of a dinner to-day; but as cheerful as cheerful, and as far as I could see——"

"Was this all you discovered?" said Mr Brownlow, severely.

"I am coming to the rest, sir," said the detective, "and you'll say as I've forgotten nothing. The father, which is dead, was once in the Life Guards. He was one of them sprigs as is to be met with there—run away out of a good family. He come from London first as far as she knows; and then they were ordered to Windsor, and then they went to Canada; but I've got the thread, Mr Brownlow—I've got the thread. This poor fellow of a soldier got letters regular for a long time from Wales, she says—post-mark was St Asaphs. Often and often she said as she'd go with him, and see who it was as wrote to him so often. I've been thereabouts myself in the way of my business, and I know there's Powyses as thick as blackberries—that's point number one. Second point was, he always called himself a Welshman, and kept St David's Day. If he'd lived longer he'd have been sent up for promotion, and gone out of the ranks."

"And then?—but go on in your own way, I want to hear it all," said Mr Brownlow. He was getting more and more excited; and yet somehow it was a kind of pleasure to him to feel that his informant was wasting time upon utterly insignificant details. Surely if the detective suspected nothing, it must be that there was nothing to suspect.

"Yes, sir," he said, "that's about where it is; he was one of the Powyses; naturally the children is

Powyses too. But he died afore he went up for promotion; and now they're come a-seeking of their friends. It ain't no credit to me to be employed on such an easy case. The only thing that would put a little credit in it would be, if you'd give me just a bit of a hint what was wanted. If their friends want 'em I'll engage to put 'em on the scent. If their friends don't want 'em—as wouldn't be no wonder; for folks may have a kindness for a brother or a son as is wild, and yet they mightn't be best pleased to hear of a widow a-coming with four children—if they ain't wanted a word will do it, and no questions asked."

John Brownlow gave the man a sharp glance, and then he fell a-musing, as if he was considering whether to give him this hint or not. In reality, he was contemplating, with a mixture of impatience and vexation and content, the total misconception of his object which his emissary had taken up. He was exasperated by his stupidity, and yet he felt a kind of gratitude to him, and relief, as if a danger had been escaped.

"And what of the woman herself?" he said, in a tone which, in spite of him, trembled a little.

"Oh, the woman," said the detective, carelessly; "some bit of a girl as he married, and as was pretty, I don't doubt, in her day. There's nothin' particular about her. She's very fond of her children, and very

free in her talk, like most women when you take 'em the right way. Bless you, sir, when I started her talking of her husband, it was all that I could do to get her to leave off. She don't think she's got anything to hide. He was a gentleman, that's clear. He wouldn't have been near so frank about himself, I'll be bound. She ain't a lady exactly, but there's something about her—and awful open in her way, with them front teeth——"

"Has *she* got front teeth?" said Mr Brownlow, with some eagerness. He pitched upon it as the first personal attribute he had yet heard of, and then he added, with a little confusion, "like the boy——"

"Yes, sir—exactly like the young fellow," said his companion; "but there ain't nothing about her to interest *us*. She told me as she once had friends as lived in Masterton; but she's the sort of woman as don't mind much about friends as long as her children is well off; and I judge she was of well-to-do folks, that was awful put out about her marriage. A man like that, sir, might be far above her, and have friends that was far above her, and yet it ain't the kind of marriage as would satisfy well-to-do folks."

"I thought she came from the Isle of Man," said Mr Brownlow, in what he meant to be an indifferent tone.

"As a child, sir—as a child," said the detective,

with easy carelessness. "Her friends left there when she was but a child, and then they went where there was a garrison, where she met with her good gentleman. · She was never in Masterton herself. It was after she was married and gone, and, I rather think, cast off by all belonging to her, that they came to live here."

Mr Brownlow sat leaning over the fire, and a heavy moisture began to rise on his forehead. The speaker was so careless, and yet these calm details seemed to him so terrible. Could it be that he was making terrors for himself — that the man experienced in mystery was right in being so certain that there was no mystery here—or must he accept the awful circumstantial evidence of these simple particulars? Could there be more than one family which had left the Isle of Man so long ago, and gone to live where there was a garrison, and abandoned its silly daughter when she married her soldier? Mr Brownlow was stupefied, and did not know what to think. He sat and listened while this man whom he had called to his assistance went over again all the facts which seemed to make it evident that the connection of the family with the Powyses of North Wales was the one thing either to be brought forward or got rid of. This was how he had understood his instructions, and he had car-

ried them out so fully that his employer, fully occupied with the incidental information which seemed to prove all he feared, heard his voice run on without remarking it, and would have told him to stop the babble to which he was giving vent, had his thoughts been sufficiently at leisure to care for what he was saying. When he fully perceived the mistake, Mr Brownlow looked upon it as "providential," as people say. He let his detective talk, and then he let him go, but half satisfied, and inclined to think that no confidence was reposed in him. And though it was so late, and the brougham was at the door, and the servants very tired of their unusual detention, Mr Brownlow went back again to the fire, and bent over it, and stretched out his hands to the blaze, and again tried to think. He went over the same ideas a hundred times, and yet they did not seem to grow any clearer to him. He tried to ask himself what was his duty, but duty slunk away, as it were, to the very recesses of his soul, and gave no impulse to his mind, nor so much as showed itself in the darkness. If this should turn out to be true, no doubt there were certain things which he ought to do; and yet, if all this could but be banished for a while, and the year got over which would bring safety—— Mr Brownlow had never in all his life before done what he knew

to be a dishonourable action. He was not openly contemplating such a thing now; only somehow his possessions seemed so much more his than anybody else's; it seemed as if he had so much better right to the good things he had been enjoying for four-and-twenty years than any woman could have who had never possessed them—who knew nothing about them. And then he did not know that it was this woman. He said to himself that he had really no reason to think so. The young man had said nothing about old Mrs Thomson. The detective had never even suspected any mystery in that quarter, though he was a man of mystery, and it was his business to suspect everything. This was what he was thinking when he went back to the fire in his office, and stretched his hands over the blaze. Emotion of any kind somehow chills the physical frame; but when one of the detained clerks came to inform him of the patient brougham which waited outside, and which Sara, by reason of the cold, had sent for him, it was the opinion of the young man that Mr Brownlow was beginning to age rapidly, and that he looked quite old that evening. But he did not look old; he looked, if any one had been there with eyes to see it, like a man for the first time in his life driven to bay. Some men come to that moment in their lives

sooner, some later, some never at all. John Brownlow had been more than five-and-fifty years in the world, and yet he had never been driven to bay before. And he was so now; and except to stand out and resist, and keep his face to his enemies, he did not, in the suddenness of the occurrence, see as yet what he was to do.

In the mean time, however, he had to stoop to ordinary necessities and get into his carriage and be driven home, through the white gleaming country which shone under the moonlight, carrying with him a curious perception of how different it would have been had the house in the High Street been home—had he had nothing more to do than to go up to the old drawing-room, his mother's drawing-room, and find Sara there, and eat his dinner where his father had eaten his, instead of this long drive to the great country-house, which was so much more costly and magnificent than anything his forefathers knew; but then his father, what would he have thought of this complication? What would he have advised, had it been any client of his; nay, what, if it was a client, would Mr Brownlow himself advise? These thoughts kept turning over in his mind half against his will as he lay back in the corner of the carriage and saw the ghostly trees glimmer past in their coating of snow. He was very late, and Sara

was anxious about him; nay, even Jack was anxious, and had come down to the park-gates to look out for the carriage, and also to ask how the little invalid was at Mrs Swayne's. Jack, having this curiosity in his mind, did not pay much attention to his father's looks; but Sara, with a girl's quick perception, saw there was something unusual in his face; and with her usual rapidity she leaped to the conclusion that the bank must have broken or the railway gone wrong, of which she had dreamt in the morning. Thus, they all met at table with a great deal on their minds; and this day, which I have recorded with painstaking minuteness, in order that there may be no future doubt as to its importance in the history, came to an end with outward placidity but much internal perturbation—at least came to an end as much as any day can be said to come to an end which rises upon an unsuspecting family big with undeveloped fate.

CHAPTER VIII.

YOUNG POWYS.

Mr Brownlow took his new clerk into his employment next morning. It is true that this was done to fill up a legitimate vacancy, but yet it took everybody in the office a little by surprise. The junior clerk had generally been a very junior, taken in rather by way of training than for any positive use. The last one, indeed, whom this new-comer replaced, was an overgrown boy in jackets, very different, indeed, from the tall, well-developed Canadian whose appearance filled all Mr Brownlow's clerks with amazement. All sorts of conjectures about him filled the minds of these young gentlemen. They all spied some unknown motive underneath, and their guesses at it were ludicrously far from the real case. The conveyancing clerk suggested that the young fellow was somebody's son "that old Brownlow has ruined, you know, in the way of

business." Other suppositions fixed on the fact that he was the son of a widow by whom, perhaps, the governor might have been bewitched, an idea which was speedily adopted as the favourite and most probable explanation, and caused unbounded amusement in the office. They made so merry over it that once or twice awkward consequences had nearly ensued; for the new clerk had quick ears, and was by no means destitute of intelligence, and decidedly more than a match, physically, for the most of his fellows. As for the real circumstances of his engagement, they were on this wise.

At the hour which Mr Brownlow had appointed to see him again, young Powys presented himself punctually in the outer office, where he was made to wait a little, and heard some "chaffing" about the governor's singular proceedings on the previous day and his interviews with Inspector Pollaky, which probably conveyed a certain amount of information to the young man. When he was ushered into Mr Brownlow's room, there was, notwithstanding his frank and open countenance, a certain cloud on his brow. He stood stiffly before his future employer, and heard with only a half-satisfied look that the lawyer, having made inquiries, was disposed to take advantage of his services. To this the young backwoodsman assented in a stilted way, very different

from his previous frankness; and when all was concluded, he still stood doubtful, with the look upon his face of having something to say.

"I don't know what more there is to settle, except the time when you enter upon your duties," said Mr Brownlow, a little surprised. "You need not begin to-day. Mr Wrinkell, the head-clerk, will give you all the necessary information about hours, and show you all you will have to do—— Is there anything more you would like to say?"

"Why, yes, sir," said the youth abruptly, with a mixture of irritation and compunction. "Perhaps what I say may look very ungrateful; but——why did you send a policeman to my mother? That is not the way to inquire about a man if you mean to trust him. I don't say you have any call to trust me——"

"A policeman!" said Mr Brownlow, in consternation.

"Well, sir, the fellows there," cried the energetic young savage, pointing behind him, "call him Inspector. I don't mean to say you were to take me on my own word; any inquiries you liked to make we were ready to answer; but a policeman—and to my mother!"

Mr Brownlow laughed, but yet this explosion gave him a certain uneasiness. "Compose yourself," he

said, "the man is not a policeman, but he is a confidential agent, whom when I can't examine for myself—— but I hope he did not say or ask anything that annoyed Mrs—your mother?" Mr Brownlow added, hurriedly; and if the jocular youths in the office had seen something like a shade of additional colour rise on his elderly cheek, their amusement and their suspicions would have been equally confirmed.

"Well, no," said young Powys, the compunction gaining ground; "I beg your pardon, sir; you are very kind. I am sure you must think me ungrateful —but——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr Brownlow; "it is quite right you should stand up for your mother. The man is not a policeman,—and I never—intended him —to trouble—your mother," he added, with hesitation. "He went to make inquiries, and these sort of people take their own way. He did not annoy her, I hope?"

"Oh, no!" said the youth, recovering his temper altogether. "She took it up as being some inquiry about my father, and she was a little excited, thinking perhaps that his friends—but never mind. I told her it was best we should depend only on ourselves, and I am sure I am right. Thank you; I shall have good news to tell her to-day."

"Stop a little," said Mr Brownlow, feeling a

reaction upon himself of the compunction which had passed over his young companion. "She thought it was something about your father? Is there anything mysterious, then, about your father? I told you there was a Lady Powys who had lived here."

"I don't think there is anything mysterious about him," said the young man. "I scarcely remember him, though I am the eldest. He died quite young —and my poor mother has always thought that his friends—— But I never encouraged her in that idea, for my part."

"That his friends could do something for you?" said Mr Brownlow.

"Yes, that is what she thought. I don't think myself there is any foundation for it; and seeing they have never found us out all these years—five-and-twenty years——"

"Five-and-twenty years!" Mr Brownlow repeated, with a start—not that the coincidence was anything, but only that the mere sound of the words startled him, excited as he was.

"Yes, I am as old as that," said young Powys, with a smile, and then he recollected himself. "I beg your pardon, sir; I am taking up your time, and I hope you don't think I am ungrateful. Getting this situation so soon is everything in the world to us."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr Brownlow; and

yet he could not but ask himself whether his young visitor laid an emphasis upon *this* situation. What was *this* situation more than another? "But the salary is not very large, you know—do you mean to take your mother and her family on your shoulders with sixty pounds a-year?"

"It is *my* family," said the young man, growing red. "I have no interest separate from theirs." Then he paused for a moment, feeling affronted; but he could not bear malice. Next minute he relapsed into the frank and confidential tone that was natural to him. "There are only five of us after all," he said—"five altogether, and the little sisters don't cost much; and we have a little money—I think we shall do very well."

"I hope so," said Mr Brownlow; and somehow, notwithstanding that he intended in his heart to do this young fellow a deadly injury, a certain affectionate interest in the lad sprang up within him. He was so honest and open, and had such an innocent confidence in the interest of others. None of his ordinary clerks were thus garrulous to Mr Brownlow. It never would have occurred to them to confide in the "guv'nor." He knew them as they came and went, and had a certain knowledge of their belongings—which it was that would have old Robinson's money, and which that had given his father so much

uneasiness; but that was very different from a young fellow that would look into your face and make a confidant of you as to his way of spending his sixty pounds a-year. John Brownlow had possessed a heart ever since he was aware of his own individuality; and influenced by this organ, which had no particular business in the breast of a man of his profession at his years, he looked with eyes that were almost tender upon the young man whom he had just taken into his employment—notwithstanding that, to tell the truth, he meant badly by him, and in one particular at least was far from intending to be his friend.

"I hope so," he said; "and if you are steady and suit us, there may be means found of increasing a little. I don't pledge myself to anything, you know; but we shall see how you get on; and if you have any papers or anything that may give a clue to your father's family," he continued, as he took up his pen, "bring them to me some day and I'll look over them. That's all in the way of business to us. We might satisfy your mother after all, and perhaps be of some use to you."

This he said with an almost paternal smile, dismissing his new clerk, who went away in an enthusiasm of gratitude and satisfaction. It is so pleasant to be kindly used, especially to young people who

know no better. It throws a glow of comfort through the internal consciousness. It is so very, very good of your patron, and, in a smaller way, it is good of you too, who are patronised. You are understood, you are appreciated, you are liked. This was the feeling young Powys had. To think that Mr Brownlow would have been as good to any one else would not have been half so satisfactory; and he went off with ringing hasty steps, which in themselves were beating a measure of exhilaration, to tell his mother, who, though ready on the spot to worship Mr Brownlow, would naturally set this wonderful success down to the score of her boy's excellences. As for the lawyer himself, he took his pen in his hand and wrote a few words of the letter which lay unfinished before him while the young man was going out, as if anxious to make up for the time lost in this interview; but as soon as the door was closed, John Brownlow laid down his pen and leaned back in his chair. What was it he had done?—taken in a viper to his bosom that would sting him? or received a generous, open, confiding youth, in order to blind and hoodwink and rob him? These were strong—nay, rude and harsh words, and he did not say them even to himself; but a kind of shadow of them rolled through his mind, and gave him a momentary panic. Was this what he was about to do? With a pretence

of kindness, even generosity, to take this open-hearted young fellow into his employment, in order to keep him in the dark, and prevent him from finding out that the fortune was his upon which Brownlows and all its grandeur was founded? Was this what he was doing? It seemed to John Brownlow for the moment as if the air of his room was suffocating, or rather as if there was no air at all to breathe, and he plucked at his cravat in the horror of the sensation. But then he came to himself. Perhaps, on the other hand, just as likely, he was taking into his house a secret enemy, who, once posted there, would search and find out everything. Quite likely, very likely; for what did he mean by the emphasis with which he said *this* situation, and all that about his father, which was throwing dust into Mr Brownlow's cautious eyes? Perhaps his mind was a little biassed by his profession—perhaps he was moved by something of the curious legal uncertainty which teaches a man to plead "never indebted" in the same breath with "already paid;" for amid the hurry and tumult of these thoughts came another which was of a more comforting tendency. After all, he had no evidence that the boy was that woman's son. No evidence whatever—not a shadow. And it was not his duty to go out and hunt for her or her son over all the world. Nobody could expect it of him. He had

done it once, but to do it over again would be simply absurd. Let them come and make their claim.

Thus the matter was decided, and there could be no doubt that it was with a thrill of very strange and mingled interest that Mr Brownlow watched young Powys enter upon his duties. He had thought this would be a trouble to him—a constant shadow upon him—a kind of silent threat of misery to come; but the fact was that it did not turn out so. The young fellow was so frank and honest, so far at least as physiognomy went—his very step was so cheerful and active, and rang so lightly on the stones—he was so ready to do anything, so quick and cordial and workmanlike about his work—came in with such a bright face, spoke with such a pleasant respectful confidence, as knowing that some special link existed between his employer and himself; Mr Brownlow grew absolutely attached to the new clerk, for whom he had so little use, to whom he was so kind and fatherly, and against whom—good heavens! was it possible?—he was harbouring such dark designs.

As for young Jack, when he came back to the office after a few days on the ice, there being nothing very important in the way of business going on just then, the sight of this new figure took him very much by surprise. He was not very friendly with

his father's clerks on the whole—perhaps because they were too near himself to be looked upon with charitable eyes; too near, and yet as far off, he thought to himself, as if he had been a duke. Not that Jack had those attributes which distinguished the great family of snobs. When he was among educated men he was as unassuming as it is in the nature of a young man to be, and never dreamed of asking what their pedigree was, or what their balance at their bankers'. But the clerks were different—they were natural enemies—fellows that might set themselves up for being as good as he, and yet were not as good as he, however you chose to look at the question. In short, they were cads. This was the all-expressive word in which Jack developed his sentiments. Any addition to the cads was irksome to him; and then he, the young prince, knew nothing about it, which was more irksome still.

"Who is that tall fellow?" he said to Mr Wrinkell, who was his father's vizier. "What is he doing here? You don't mean to say he's *en permanence?* Who is he, and what is he doing there?"

"That's Mr Powys, Mr John," said Mr Wrinkell, calmly, and with a complacent little nod. The vizier rather liked to snub the heir-apparent when he could, and somehow the Canadian had crept into his good graces too.

"By Jove! and who the deuce is Mr Powys?" said Jack, with unbecoming impatience, almost loud enough to reach the stranger's ear.

"Hush," said Mr Wrinkell, "he has come in young Jones's place, who left at Michaelmas, you know. I should say he was a decided acquisition; steady, very steady—punctual in the morning—clever at his work—always up to his hours——"

"Oh, I see, a piece of perfection," said Jack, with, it must be confessed, a slight sneer. "But I don't see that he was wanted. Brown was quite able for all the work. I should like to know where you picked that fellow up. It's very odd that something always happens when I am absent for a single day."

"The frost has lasted for ten days," said Mr Wrinkell, with serious but mild reproof—"not that I think there is anything in that. We are only young once in this life; and there is nothing particular doing. I am very glad you took advantage of it, Mr John."

Now, it was one of Jack's weak points that he hated being called Mr John, and could not bear to be approved of—two peculiarities of which Mr Wrinkell was very thoroughly aware. But the vizier had many privileges. He was serious and substantial, and not a man who could be called a cad, as Jack called his own contemporaries in the office.

Howsoever tiresome or aggravating he might be, he had to be borne with; and he knew his advantages, and was not always generous in the use he made of them. When the young man went off into his own little private room, Mr Wrinkell was tempted to give a little inward chuckle. He was a Dissenter, and he rather liked to put the young autocrat down. "He has too much of his own way—too much of his own way," he said to himself, and went against Jack on principle, and for his good, which is a kind of conduct not always appreciated by those for whose good it is kept up.

And from that moment a kind of opposition, not to say enmity, crept up between Jack and the new clerk—a sort of feeling that they were rather too like each other, and were not practicable in the same hemisphere. Jack tried, but found it did not answer, to call the new-comer a cad. He did not, like the others, follow Jack's own ways at a woeful distance, and copy those things for which Jack rather despised himself, as all cads have a way of doing; but had his own way, and was himself, Powys, not the least like the Browns and Robinsons. The very first evening, as they were driving home together, Jack having spent the day in a close examination of the new-comer, thought it as well to let his father know his opinion on the subject, which he did as they flew

along in their dogcart, with the wicked mare which Jack could scarcely hold in, and the sharp wind whizzing past their ears, that were icy cold with speed.

"I see you have got a new fellow in the office," said Jack. "I hope it's not my idleness that made it necessary. I should have gone back on Monday; but I thought you said——"

"I am glad you didn't come," said Mr Brownlow, quietly. "I should have told you had there been any occasion. No, it was not for that. You know he came in young Jones's place."

"He's not very much like young Jones," said Jack—"as old as I am, I should think. How she pulls, to be sure! One would think, to see her go, she hadn't been out for a week."

"Older than you are," said Mr Brownlow—"five-and-twenty;" and he gave an unconscious sigh—for it was dark, and the wind was sharp, and the mare very fresh; and under such circumstances a man may relieve his mind, at least to the extent of a sigh, without being obliged to render a reason. So, at least, Mr Brownlow thought.

But Jack heard it, somehow, notwithstanding the ring of the mare's hoofs and the rush of the wind, and was confounded—as much confounded as he durst venture on being with such a slippery animal to deal with.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the groom, "keep her steady, sir; this here is the gate she's always a-shying at."

"Oh, confound her!" said Jack—or perhaps it was "confound you"—which would have been more natural; but the little waltz performed by Mrs Bess at that moment, and the sharp crack of the whip, and the wind that whistled through all, made his adjuration less distinct than it might have been. When, however, the dangerous gate was past, and they were going on again with great speed and moderate steadiness, he resumed—

"I thought you did not mean to have another in young Jones's place. I should have said Brown could do all the work. When these fellows have too little to do they get into all sorts of mischief."

"Most fellows do," said Mr Brownlow, calmly. "I may as well tell you, Jack, that I wanted young Powys—I know his people; that is to say," he added hastily, "I don't know his people; but still I've heard something about them—in a kind of a way; and it's my special desire to have him there."

"I said nothing against it, sir," said Jack, displeased. "You are the head, to do whatever you like. I only asked, you know."

"Yes, I know you only asked," said Mr Brownlow, with quiet decision. "That is my business; but I'd

rather you were civil to him, if it is the same to you."

"By Jove, I believe she'll break our necks some day," said Jack, in his irritation, though the mare was doing nothing particular. "Going as quiet as a lamb," the groom said afterwards in amazement, "when he let out at her enough to make a saint contrairy." And "contrairy" she was up to the very door of the house, which perhaps, under the circumstances, was just as well.

CHAPTER IX.

NEW NEIGHBOURS.

PROBABLY one of the reasons why Jack was out of temper at this particular moment was that Mrs Swayne had been impertinent to him. Not that he cared in the least for Mrs Swayne; but naturally he took a little interest in the—child,—he supposed she was only a child,—a little light thing that felt like a feather when he carried her in out of the snow. He *had* carried her in, and he "took an interest" in her; and why he should be met with impertinence when he asked how the little creature was, was more than Jack could understand. The very morning of the day on which he saw young Powys first, he had been answered by Mrs Swayne standing in front of her door, and pulling it close behind her, as if she was afraid of thieves. "She's a-going on as nicely as could be, and there ain't no cause for anxiety,

sir," Mrs Swayne said, which was not a very impertinent speech after all.

"Oh, I did not suppose there was," said Jack. "It was only a sprain, I suppose; but she looked such a delicate little thing. That old woman with her was her mother, eh? What did she mean travelling with a fragile little creature like that in the carrier's cart?"

"I don't know about no old woman," said Mrs Swayne; "the good lady as has my front parlour is the only female as is here, and they've come for quiet, Mr John, not meaning no offence; and when you're a bit nervish, as I knows myself by experience, it goes to your heart every time as there comes a knock at the door."

"You can't have many knocks at the door here," said Jack; "as for me, I only wanted to know how the little thing was."

"Miss is a-doing nicely, sir," Mrs Swayne answered, with solemnity; and this was what Jack considered a very impertinent reception of his kind inquiries. He was amused by it, and yet it put him a little out of temper too. "As if I could possibly mean the child any harm," he said to himself, with a laugh; rather, indeed, insisting on the point that she was a child in all his thoughts on the subject; and then, as has been seen, the sudden introduction of

young Powys and Mr Brownlow's calm adoption of the sentiment that it was *his* business to decide who was to be in the office, came a little hard upon Jack, who, after all, notwithstanding his philosophical indifference as to his sister's heiress-ship, liked to be consulted about matters of business, and did not approve of being put back into a secondary place.

Thus it was with a sense of having done her duty by her new lodgers, that Mrs Swayne paid her periodical visit in the afternoon to the inmates of the parlour, where the object of Jack Brownlow's inquiries lay very much covered up on the little horsehair sofa. She was still suffering from her sprain, and was lying asleep on the narrow and uneasy couch, wrapped in all the shawls her mother possessed, and with her own pretty red cloak thrown over the heap. It was rather a grim little apartment, with dark-green painted walls, and coarse white curtains drawn over the single window. But the inmates probably were used to no better, and certainly were quite content with their quarters. The girl lay asleep with a flush upon her cheeks, which the long eyelashes seemed to overshadow, and her soft rings of dark hair pushed back in pretty disorder off her soft, full, childlike forehead. She was sleeping that grateful sleep of convalescence, in which life itself seems to come back—a sleep deep

and sound and dreamless, and quite undisturbed by the little murmur of voices which went on over the fire. Her mother was a tall meagre woman, older than the mother of such a girl ought to have been. Save that subtle, indefinable resemblance which is called family likeness, the two did not resemble each other. The elder woman now sitting in the horse-hair easy-chair over the fire, was very tall, with long features, and grey cheeks which had never known any roses. She had keen black passionate eyes, looking as young and full of life as if she had been sixteen instead of nearly sixty; and her hair was still as black as it had been in her youth. But somehow the dead darkness of the hair made the grey face underneath look older than if it had been softened by the silvery tones of white that belong to the aged. She was dressed as poor women, who have ceased to care about their appearance, and have no natural instinct that way, so often dress, in everything most suited to increase her personal deficiencies. She had a little black lace cap over her black hair, and a black gown with a rim of greyish white round the neck, badly made, and which took away any shape that might ever have been in her tall figure. Her hands were hard, and red, and thin, with no sort of softening between them and the harsh black sleeve which clapsed her wrists. She

was not a lady, that was evident; and yet you would not have said she was a common woman after you had looked into her eyes.

It was very cold, though the thaw had set in, and the snow was gone—raw and damp with a penetrating chill, which is as bad as frost,—or worse, some people think. And the new-comer sat over the fire, leaning forward in the high-backed horsehair chair, and spreading out her hands to the warmth. She had given Mrs Swayne a general invitation to come in for a chat in the afternoon, not knowing as yet how serious a business that was; and was now making the best of it, interposing a few words now and then, and yet not altogether without comfort in the companionship, the very hum of human speech having something consolatory in it.

"If it's been a fever, that's a thing as will mend," said Mrs Swayne, "and well over too; and a thing as you don't have more nor once. When it's *here*, and there's decline in the family——" she added, putting her hand significantly to her breast.

"There's no decline in my family," said the lodger, quickly. "It was downright sickness always. No, she's quite strong in her chest. I've always said it was a great blessing that they were all strong in their chests."

"And yet you have but this one left," said Mrs Swayne. "Dear, dear!—when it's decline, it comes kind of natural, and you get used to it like. An aunt o' mine had nine, all took one after the other, and she got that used to it, she'd tell you how it would be as soon as e'er a one o' them began to droop; but when it's them sort of masterful sicknesses as you can't do nothing for—— Deary me! all strong in their chests, and you to have had so many and but this one left."

"Ay," said the mother, wringing her thin hands with a momentary yet habitual action, "it's hard when you've reared them so far; but you said it was good air here?"

"Beautiful air, that's what it is," said Mrs Swayne, enthusiastically; "and when she gets a bit stronger, and the weather gets milder, and he mends of his rheumatics, Swayne shall drive her out in his spring-cart. It's a fine way of seeing the country—a deal finer, *I* think, than the gentry in their carriages with a coachman on his box perched up afore them. I ain't one as holds by much doctoring. Doctors and parsons, they're all alike; and I don't care if I never saw one o' them more."

"Isn't there a nice clergyman?" said the lodger—"it's a nice church, for we saw it, passing in the cart, and the child took a fancy to it. In the coun-

try like this, it's nice to have a nice clergyman—that's to say, if you're Church folks."

"There was nothing but Church folks heard tell of where I came from," said Mrs Swayne, with a little heat. "Them as says I wasn't born and bred and confirmed in the Church don't know what they're talking of; but since we come here, you know, along of Swayne being a Dissenter, and the Rector a man as has no sympathy, I've give up. It's the same with the doctors. There ain't one as I haven't tried, exceptin' the homepathetic; and I was turning it over in my mind as soon as Swayne had another bad turn to send for him."

"I hope we shan't want any more doctors," said the mother, once more softly wringing her hands. "But for Pamela's sake——"

"Is that her name?" said Mrs Swayne; "I never knew no one of that name afore; but folks is all for new-fashioned names nowadays. The Pollys and the Betsys as used to be in my young days, I never hear tell of them now; but the girls ain't no nicer nor no better behaved as I can see. It's along o' the story-books and things. There's Miss Sairah as is always a-lending books——"

"Is Miss Sairah the young lady in the great house?" asked the stranger, looking up.

Mrs Swayne assented with a little reluctance.

"Oh! yes, sure enough; but they ain't the real old Squires. Not as the old Squires was much to brag of; they was awful poor, and there never was nothing to be made out of them, neither by honest trades-folks nor cottagers, nor nobody; but him as has it now is nothing but a lawyer out of Masterton. He's made it all, I shouldn't wonder, by cheating poor folks out of their own; but there he is as grand as a prince, and Miss Sairah dressed up like a little peacock, and her carriage and her riding-horse, and her school, as if she was real old gentry. It was Mr John as carried your girl indoors that time when she fell; and a rare troublesome one he can be when he gets it in his head, a-calling at my house, and knocking at the knocker when, for anything he could tell, Swayne might ha' been in one of his bad turns, or your little maid a-snatching a bit of sleep."

"But why does he come?" said the lodger, once more looking up; "is it to ask after Mr Swayne?"

Mr Swayne's spouse gave a great many shakes of her head over this question. "To tell you the truth," she said, "there's a deal of folks thinks if Swayne hadn't a good wife behind him as kept all straight, his bad turns would come very different. That's all as a woman gets for slaving and toiling and understanding the business as well as e'er a man. No; it was not for my husband. I haven't

got nothing to say against Mr John. He's not one of the sort as leads poor girls astray and breaks their hearts; but I wouldn't have him about here, not too often, if I was you. He was a-asking after your girl."

"Pamela?" said the mother, with surprise and almost amusement in her tone, and she looked back to the sofa where her daughter was lying with a flush too pink and roselike for health upon her cheek. "Poor little thing; it is too early for that —she is only a child."

"I don't put no faith in them being only children," said Mrs Swayne. "It comes terrible soon, does that sort of thing; and a gentleman has nice ways with him. When she's once had one of that sort a-running after her, a girl don't take to an honest man as talks plain and straightforward. That's my opinion; and, thank Providence, I've been in the way of temptation myself, and I know what it all means."

Mrs Swayne's lodger did not seem at all delighted by these commentaries. A little flush of pride or pain came over her colourless cheek; and she kept glancing back at the sofa on which her daughter lay. "My Pamela is a little lady, if ever there was a lady," she said, in a nervous undertone; but it was evidently a question she did not mean to discuss

with her landlady; and thus the conversation came to a pause.

Mrs Swayne, however, was not easily subdued; and curiosity urged her even beyond her wont. "I think you said as you had friends here?" she said, making a new start.

"No, no friends. We're alone in the world, she and I," said the woman, hastily. "We've been long away, and everybody is dead that ever belonged to us. She hasn't a soul but me, poor dear, and I'm old. It's dreadful to be old and have a young child. If I was to die——but we're not badly off," she continued, with a faint smile, in answer to an alarmed glance all round the room from Mrs Swayne, "and I'm saving up every penny for her. If I could only see her as well and rosy as she used to be!"

"That will come in time," said the landlady. "Don't you be afeard. It's beautiful air; and what with fresh milk and new-laid eggs, she'll come round as fast as the grass grows. You'll see she will—they always does here. Miss Sairah herself was as puny a bit of a child as ever you set eyes on, and she's a fine tall lass with a colour like a rose—I will say that for her—now."

"And I think you said she was about my child's age," said the mother, with a certain wistful glance out of the window. "Perhaps she and my Pamela——

But of course a young lady like that has plenty of friends. Pamela will never be tall—she's done growing. She takes after her father's side, you see," the poor woman added, with a sigh, looking round once more to the sofa where her child lay.

"And it ain't long, perhaps, since you lost your good gentleman?" said Mrs Swayne, curiosity giving a certain brevity to her speech.

"He was in the army," said the lodger, passing by the direct question, "and it's a wandering sort of life. Now I've come back, all are gone that ever belonged to me, or so much as knew me. It feels dreary like. I don't mind for myself, if I could but find some kind friends for my child."

"Don't you fret," said Mrs Swayne, rising. "She'll find friends, no fear; and it's ridiklus to hear you talk like an old woman, and not a grey hair on your head—— But I hear Swayne a-grumbling, Mrs Preston. He's no better nor an old washerwoman, that man isn't, for his tea."

When the conversation ended thus, the lodger rose, partly in civility, and stood before the fire, looking into the dark little mirror over the mantelshelf when her visitor was gone. It was not vanity that moved her to look at herself. "Threescore and ten!" she was saying softly—"threescore and ten! She'd be near thirty by then, and able to take care of herself."

It was a sombre calculation enough, but it was all the comfort she could take. "The child" all this time had to all appearance lain fast asleep under her wraps, with the red cloak laid over her, a childlike, fragile creature. She began to stir at this moment, and her mother's face cleared as if by magic. She went up to the little hard couch, and murmured her inquiries over it with that indescribable voice which belongs only to doves, and mothers croodling over their sick children. Pamela considered it the most ordinary utterance in the world, and never found out that it was totally unlike the usually almost harsh tones of the same voice when addressing other people. The girl threw off her coverings with a little impatience, and came with tottering steps to the big black easy-chair. The limpid eyes which had struck Jack Brownlow when they gazed wistfully out of the carrier's cart, were almost too bright, as her colour was almost too warm, for the moment; but it was the flush of weakness and sleep, not of fever. She too, like her mother, wore rusty black; but neither that poor and melancholy garb, nor any other disadvantageous circumstance, could impair the sweetness of the young tender face. It was lovely with the sweetness of spring as are the primroses and anemones;—dew, and fragrance, and growth, and all the possibilities of expansion, were in her lovely looks.

You could not have told what she might not grow to. Seeing her, it was possible to understand the eagerness with which the poor old mother, verging on threescore, counted her chances of a dozen years longer in this life. These dozen years might make all the difference to Pamela; and Pamela was all that she had in the world.

"You have had a long sleep, my darling. I am sure you feel better," she said.

"I feel quite well, mamma," said the girl; and she sat down and held out her hands to the fire. Then the mother began to talk, and give an account of the conversation she had been holding. She altered it a little, it must be acknowledged. She omitted all Mrs Swayne's anxieties about Jack Brownlow, and put various orthodox sentiments into her mouth instead. When she had gone on so for some ten minutes, Pamela, who had been making evident efforts to restrain herself, suddenly opened her red lips with a burst of soft ringing laughter, so that the mother stopped confused.

"I am afraid it was very naughty," said the girl; "but I woke up, and I did not want to disturb you, and I could not help listening. Oh, mamma, how clever you are to make up conversation like that when you know Mrs Swayne was talking of Mr John, and was such fun! Why shouldn't I hear about Mr

John? Because one has been ill, is one never to have any more fun? You don't expect me to die now?"

"God forbid!" said the mother. "But what do you know about Mr John? Mrs Swayne said nothing——"

"She said he came a-knocking at the knocker," Pamela said, with a merry little conscious laugh; "and you asked if he came to ask for Mr Swayne. I thought I should have laughed out and betrayed myself then."

"But, my dear," said Mrs Preston, steadily, "why shouldn't he have come to ask for Mr Swayne?"

"Yes, why indeed?" said Pamela, with another merry peal of laughter, which made her mother's face relax, though she was not herself very sensible wherein the joke lay.

"Well," she said, "if he did, or if he didn't, it does not matter very much to us. We know nothing about Mr John."

"Oh, but I do," said Pamela; "it was he that was standing by that lady's chair on the ice—I saw him as plain as possible. I knew him in a minute when he carried me in. Wasn't it nice and kind of him? and he knew—us;—I am sure he did. Why shouldn't he come and ask for me? I think it is the most natural thing in the world."

"How could he know us?" said Mrs Preston, wondering. "My darling, now you are growing older you must not think so much about fun. I don't say it is wrong, but—— For you see, you have grown quite a woman now. It would be nice if you could know Miss Sara," she added, melting; "but she is a little great lady, and you are but a poor little girl——"

"I must know Miss Sara," cried Pamela. "We shall see her every day. I want to know them both. We shall be always seeing them every time they go out. I wonder if she is pretty. The lady was, that was in the chair."

"How can you see everything like that, Pamela?" said her mother, with mild reproof. "I don't remember any lady in a chair."

"But *I've* got a pair of eyes," said Pamela, with a laugh. She was not thinking that they were pretty eyes, but she certainly had a pleasant feeling that they were clear and sharp, and saw everything and everybody within her range of vision. "I like travelling in that cart," she said, after a moment, "if it were not so cold. It would be pleasant in summer to go jogging along and see everything—but then, to be sure, in summer there is no ice, and no nice bright fires shining through the windows. But, mamma, please," the little thing added, with a doubt-

ful look that might be saucy or sad as occasion required, "why are you so dreadfully anxious to find me kind friends?"

This was said with a little laugh, though her eyes were not laughing; but when she saw the serious look her mother cast upon her, she got up hastily and threw herself down, weak as she was, at the old woman's knee.

"Don't you think if we were to live both as long as we could and then to die both together!" cried the changeable girl, with a sudden sob. "Oh, mamma, why didn't you have me when you were young, when you had Florry, that we might have lived ever so long, ever so long together? Would it be wrong for me to die when you die? why should it be wrong? God would know what we meant by it. He would know it wasn't for wickedness. And it would make your mind easy whatever should happen," cried the child, burying her pretty face in her mother's lap. Thus the two desolate creatures clung together, the old woman yearning to live, the young creature quite ready at any word of command that might reach her to give up her short existence. They had nobody in the world belonging to them that they knew of, and in the course of nature their companionship could only be so short, so short! And it was not as if God saw only the outside like

men. He would know what they meant by it; that was what poor little Pamela thought.

But she was as lively as a little bird half an hour after, being a creature of a variable mind. Not a magnificent little princess, self-possessed and reflective, like Sara over the way; 'a little soul full of fancies, and passions, and sudden impulses of every kind—a kitten for fun, a heroine for anything tragic, such as she, not feared, but hoped, might perhaps fall in her way. And the mother, who understood the passion, did not know very much about either the fun or the fancy, and was puzzled by times, and even vexed when she had no need to be vexed. Mrs Preston was greatly perplexed even that night, after this embrace and the wild suggestion that accompanied it, to see how swiftly and fully Pamela's light heart came back to her. She could comprehend such a proposal of despair; but how the despair should suddenly flit off and leave the sweetest fair skies of delight and hope below was more than the poor woman could understand. However, the fact was that hope and despair were quite capable of living next door in Pamela's fully occupied mind, and that despair itself was but another kind of hope when it got into those soft quarters where the air was full of the chirping of birds and the odours of the spring. She could not sing, to call singing, but yet she went

on singing all the evening long over her bits of work, and planned drives in Mr Swayne's spring-cart, and even in the carrier's waggon, much more joyfully than Sara ever anticipated the use of her greys. Yet she had but one life, one worn existence, old and shattered by much suffering, between her and utter solitude and destitution. No wonder her mother looked at her with silent wonder, she who could never get this woeful possibility out of her mind.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE GATE.

It was not to be expected that Sara could be long unconscious of her new humble neighbours. She, too, as well as Jack, had seen them in the carrier's cart; and though Jack had kept his little adventure to himself, Sara had no reason to omit due notice of her encounter. It was quite a new sensation to her when she saw for the first time the little face with its dewy eyes peeping out at Mrs Swayne's window. And the ticket which offended Sara's sight had been promptly taken down, not by Mrs Swayne, but by her lodgers themselves. Sara's impulse was to go over immediately and thank them for this good office; but, on second thoughts, she decided to wait another opportunity. They might not be "nice,"—or they might be ladies, and require more ceremonious treatment, notwithstanding the carrier's waggon. The face that peeped from Mrs Swayne's

window might have belonged to a little princess in disguise for anything that could be said to the contrary. And Sara was still of the age which believes in disguised princesses, at least in theory. She talked about them, however, continually; putting Jack to many hypocritical devices to conceal that he too had seen the little stranger. Though why he should keep that fact secret, nobody, not even himself, could tell. And he had confided it to young Keppel, though he did not think of telling the story at home. "I don't know if you would call her pretty, but her eyes are like two stars," was what Jack said; and he was more angry at Keppel's jocular response than was at all needful. But as for Sara, she was far more eloquent. "She is not pretty," that authority said; "all girls are pretty, I suppose, in a kind of way—I and Fanny Hardcastle and everybody—I despise that. She's *lovely;* one would like to take and kiss her. I don't in the least care whether I am speaking grammar or not; but I want to know her, and I've made up my mind I'll have her here."

"Softly, Sara," said Mr Brownlow, with that indulgent look which Sara alone called into his eyes.

"Oh yes, papa, as softly as you please; but I shall never be like her if I were to live a hundred years.

I'd like to cut all my hair off, and wear it like that; but what's the use, with this odious light hair?"

"I thought it was golden and Titianesque, and all sorts of fine things," said Jack, "besides being fashionable. I've heard Keppel say——"

"Don't, please; Mr Keppel is so stupid," said Sara; and she took in her hand a certain curl she had, which was her favourite curl in a general way, and looked at it with something like disgust. "It isn't even the right colour for the fashion," she said, contemptuously. This was at breakfast, before the gentlemen went to business, which was a favourite hour with all of them, when their minds were free, and the day had not as yet produced its vexations. Mr Brownlow, for his part, had quite got over any symptoms of discomposure that his children might have perceived on his face. Everything was going on well again. Young Powys was safely settled in the office, and his employer already had got used to him, and nothing seemed to be coming of it; and every day was helping on the year, the one remaining year of uncertainty. He was very anxious, but still he was not such a novice in life but that he could keep his anxiety to himself.

"Don't forget to make everything comfortable for your visitors," was what he said, as he drove away; and the fact was, that even Mr Brownlow cast a

glance over at Mrs Swayne's windows; and that Jack brought the mare almost on her haunches, by way of showing his skill, as she dashed out at the gates. And poor little Pamela had limped to the window, for she had not much to amuse her, and the passing of Mr Brownlow's dogcart was an event. "Is that the girl?" said Mr Brownlow; "why, she is like your sister, Jack."

"Like Sara!" Jack gasped in dismay. He was so amazed that he could say nothing more for a full minute. "I suppose you think everything that's pretty is like Sara," he said, when he had recovered his breath.

"Well, perhaps," said the father; "but there's something more there—and yet she's not like Sara either for the matter of that."

"Not the least bit in the world," said Jack, decisively; at which Mr Brownlow only smiled, making no other reply.

Sara, of course, knew nothing of this; and notwithstanding her admiration for the stranger, it is doubtful whether she would have been flattered by the suggestion. She made great preparations for her visitors. There was to be a dinner-party, and old Lady Motherwell and her son Sir Charles were to stay for a day or two—partly because it was too far for the old lady to drive back that night, and partly

perhaps, for other reasons, which nobody was supposed to know anything about. In her own mind, however, Sara was not quite unaware of these other reasons. The girl was so unfortunate as to be aware that she was considered a good match in the county, and she knew very well what Sir Charles meant when he came and mounted guard over her at county gatherings. It was commonly reported of Sir Charles Motherwell that he was not bright—but he was utterly opaque to Sara when he came and stood over her and shut out other people who might have been amusing; though, to tell the truth, Miss Brownlow was in a cynical state of mind altogether about amusing people. She thought they were an extinct species, like mastodons, and the other sort of brutes that lived before the creation. Fanny Hardcastle began to unfold her dress as soon as breakfast was over, and to look out her gloves and her shoes and all her little ornaments, and was in a flutter all day about the dinner at Brownlows. But as for Sara, she was not excited. By way of making up to herself for what she might have to suffer in the evening, she went out for a ride, a pleasure of which she had been debarred for some time by the frost; and little Pamela came again to the window and watched—oh, with what delight and envy and admiration!—the slender-limbed chestnut and the pretty creature he

carried, as they came down all the length of the avenue.

"Oh, mamma, make haste—make haste! it is a prettier sight than Mr John," cried the little girl at Mrs Swayne's window, her cheeks glowing and her eyes shining; "what fun it is to live here and see them all passing!" Probably she enjoyed it quite as much as Sara did. When she had watched the pretty rider as far as that was possible, she sat down by the window to wait till she came back—wondering where she was going—following her as she went cantering along the sunny long stretches of road which Pamela remembered watching from the carrier's cart. What a strange kind of celestial life it must be to be always riding down stately avenues and playing golden-stringed harps, and walking about in glorious silken robes that swept the ground! Pamela laughed to herself at those splendid images—she enjoyed it more than Sara did, though Sara found all these good things wonderfully pleasant too.

"What are you laughing at?" said her mother, who was working at a table at the other end of the room.

"What fun it is to live here!" repeated Pamela. "It is as good as a play; don't you like to see them all riding out and in, and the horses prancing, and the shadows coming down the avenue?—it was the greatest luck in the world to come here."

"Put up your foot, my dear," said her mother, "and don't catch cold at that window. I've seen somebody very like that young lady, but I can't remember where."

"That was Miss Sara, I suppose," said Pamela, with a little awe; and she put up her weak foot, and kept her post till the chestnut and his mistress came back, when the excitement was renewed; and Mrs Preston herself took another look, and wondered where she had seen some one like that. Thus the life of Brownlows became entangled, as it were, in that of the humble dwellers at their gate, before either were aware.

Lady Motherwell arrived in a very solid family coach, just as the winter twilight set in; and undoubtedly, on this occasion at least, it was Pamela who had the best of it. Sara awaited the old lady in the drawing-room, ready to administer to her the indispensable cup of tea; and Sir Charles followed his mother, a tall fellow with a mustache which looked like a respirator. As for Lady Motherwell, she was not a pleasant visitor to Sara; but that was for reasons which I have already stated. In herself she was not a disagreeable old woman. She had even a certain *esprit du corps* which made it evident to her that thus to come in force upon a girl who was alone, was a violent proceeding, and apt to drive the quarry

prematurely to bay. So she did her best to conciliate the young mistress of the house, even before she had received her cup of tea.

"Charley doesn't take tea," she said. "I think we'll send him off; my dear, to look at the stables, or something. I hate to have a man poking about the room when I want a comfortable chat; and in this nice cozy firelight, too, when they look like tall ghosts about a place. You may go and have your cigar, Charley. Sara and I have a hundred things to say."

Sir Charles was understood to murmur through his respirator that it was awful hard upon a fellow to be banished like this; but nevertheless, being in excellent training, and knowing it to be for his good, he went. Then Lady Motherwell took Sara in her arms for the second time, and gave her a maternal kiss.

"My love, you're looking lovely," she said. "I'm sorry for poor Charley, to tell the truth; but I knew you'd have enough of him to-night. Now tell me how you are, and all about yourself. I have not seen you for an age."

"Oh, thank you, I'm just as well as ever," said Sara. "Sit down in this nice low chair, and let me give you some tea."

"Thank you," said Lady Motherwell. "And how is Jack and the good papa? Jack is a gay deceiver;

he is not like my boy. You should have seen him driving the girls about the ice in that chair. I am not sure that I think it very nice, do you know, unless it was a very old friend or—somebody *very* particular. I was so sorry I could not come for you——"

"Oh, it did not matter," said Sara; "I was there three days. I got on very well; and then I have more things to do than most girls have. I don't care so very much for amusements. I have a great many things to do."

"Quite a little housekeeper," said Lady Motherwell. "You girls don't like to have such things said to you nowadays; but I'm an old-fashioned old woman, and I must say what I think. What a nice little wife you will make one of these days! That used to be the highest compliment that could be paid to us when I was your age."

"Oh, I don't mind it at all," said Sara; "I suppose that is what one must come to. It is no good worrying one's self about it. I am rather fond of housekeeping. Are you going to be one of the patronesses for the Masterton ball, Lady Motherwell? Do you think one should go?"

"No, I don't think one should go," said the old lady, not without a very clear recollection that she was speaking to John Brownlow the solicitor's

daughter; "but I think a dozen may go, and you shall come with me. I am going to make up a party —yourself and the two Keppels——"

"No," said Sara, "I am a Masterton girl, and I ought not to go with you grand county folks—oh no, papa must take me; but thank you very much all the same."

"You are an odd girl," said Lady Motherwell. "You forget your papa is one of the very richest of the county folks, as you call us. I think Brownlows is the finest place within twenty miles, and you that are the mistress of it——"

"Don't laugh at me, please—I don't like being laughed at. It makes me feel like a cat," said Sara; and she clasped her soft hands together, and sat back in her soft velvet chair out of the firelight, and sheathed her claws as it were; not feeling sure any moment that she might not be tempted to make a spring upon her flattering foe.

"Well, my dear, if you want to spit and scratch, let Charley be the victim, please," said the old lady. "I think he would rather like it. And I am not laughing in the least, I assure you. We used to be brought up to see after everything when I was young; and really, you know, when you have a large establishment, and feel that your husband looks to you for everything——"

"We have not all husbands, thank heaven," said Sara, spitefully; "and I am sure I don't want a situation as a man's housekeeper. It is all very well when it's papa."

"You will not always think so," said Lady Motherwell, laughing; "that is a thing a girl changes her mind about. Of course you will marry some day, as everybody does."

"I don't see," said Sara, very decidedly, "why it should be of course. If there was anybody that papa had set his heart on, and wanted me to marry—or any *good* reason—of course I would do whatever was my duty. But I don't think papa is a likely sort of man to stake me at cards, or get into anybody's power, or anything of that sort."

"Sara, you are the most frightful little cynic," cried Lady Motherwell, laughing; "don't you believe that girls sometimes fall in love?"

"Oh yes, all the silly ones," said Sara, calmly, out of her corner. She was not saying anything that she did not to a certain extent feel; but there is no doubt that she had a special intention at the moment in what she said.

Lady Motherwell had another laugh, for she was amused, and not nearly so much alarmed for the consequences as the young speaker intended she should be. "If all girls had such sentiments, what would

become of the world?" she said. "The world would come to an end."

"I wish it would," said Sara. "Why shouldn't it come to an end? It would be easy to make a nicer world. People are very aggravating in this one. I am sure I don't see why we should make ourselves unhappy about its coming to an end. It would always be a change if it did. And some of the poor people might have better luck. Do *you* think it is such a very nice world?"

"My dear, don't be profane," said Lady Motherwell. "I never did think Mr Hardcastle was very settled in his principles. I declare you frighten me, Sara, sitting and talking in that sceptical way, in the dark."

"Oh, I can ring for lights," said Sara; "but that isn't sceptical. It's sceptical to go on wishing to live for ever, and to make the world last for ever, as if we mightn't have something better. At least so I think. And as for Mr Hardcastle, I don't know what he has to do with it—he never said a word on the subject to me."

"Yes, my dear, but there is a general looseness," said the old lady. "I know the sort of thing. He lets you think whatever you like, and never impresses any doctrines on you as he ought. We are not in Dewsbury parish, you know, and I feel I ought to

speak. There are such differences in clergymen. Our vicar is very pointed, and makes you really feel as if you knew what you believed. And that is such a comfort, my dear. Though, to be sure, you are very young, and you don't feel it now."

"No, I don't feel it at all," said Sara; "but, Lady Motherwell, perhaps you would like to go to your room. I think I hear papa's cart coming up the avenue—will you wait and see him before you go?"

Thus the conversation came to an end, though Lady Motherwell elected to wait, and was as gracious to Mr Brownlow as if he had been twenty county people. Even if Sara did not have Brownlows, as everybody supposed, still she would be rich and bring money enough with her to do a vast deal of good at Motherwell, where the family for a long time had not been rich. Sir Charles's father, old Sir Charles, had not done his duty by the property. Instead of marrying somebody with a fortune, which was clearly the object for which he had been brought into the world, he had married to please a fancy of his own in a very reprehensible way. His wife herself felt that he had failed to do his duty, though it was for her sake; and she was naturally all the more anxious that her son should fulfil this natural responsibility. Sir Charles was not handsome, nor was he bright, nor even so young as he might have

been ; but all this, if it made the sacrifice less, made the necessity more, and accordingly Lady Motherwell was extremely friendly to Mr Brownlow. When she came down for dinner she took a sort of natural protecting place, as if she had been Sara's aunt, or bland, flattering, uninterfering mother-in-law. She called the young mistress of the house to her side, and held her hand, and patted it and caressed it. She told Mr Brownlow how pleased she was to see how the dear child had developed. "You will not be allowed to keep her long," she said, with tender meaning; "I think if she were mine I would go and hide her up so that nobody might see her. But one has to make up one's mind to part with them all the same."

"Not sooner than one can help," said Mr Brownlow, looking not at Lady Motherwell, but at his child, who was the subject of discourse. He knew what the old lady meant as well as Sara did, and he had been in the way of smiling at it, wondering how anybody could imagine he would give his child to a good-tempered idiot; but this night another kind of idea came into his mind. The man was stupid, but he was a gentleman of long established lineage, and he could secure to Sara all the advantages of which she had so precarious a tenure here. He could give her even a kind of title, so far as that

went, though Mr Brownlow was not much moved by a baronet's title; and if anything should happen to endanger Brownlows, it would not matter much to Jack or himself. They could return to the house in Masterton, and make themselves as comfortable as life, without Sara, could be anywhere. This was the thought that was passing through Mr Brownlow's mind when he said, "Not sooner than one can help." He was thinking for the first time that such a bestowal of his child might not be so impossible after all.

Beside her, in the seat she had taken when she escaped from Lady Motherwell, Sir Charles had already taken up his position. He was talking to her through his hard little black mustache—not that he said a great deal. He was a tall man, and she was seated in a low chair, with the usual billows of white on the carpet all round her, so that he could not even approach very near; and she had to look up at him and strain her ear when he spoke, if she wanted to hear—which was a trouble Sara did not choose to take. So she said, "What?" in her indifferent way, playing with her fan, and secretly doing all she could to extend the white billows round her; while he, poor man, bent forward at a right angle till he was extremely uncomfortable, and repeated his very trivial observations with a vain attempt to reach her ear.

"I think I am growing deaf," said Sara; "perhaps it was that dreadful frost—I don't think I have ever got quite thawed yet. When I do, all you have been saying will peal out of the trumpet like Baron Munchausen, you know. So you didn't go to the stables? Wasn't that rather naughty? I am sure it was to the stables your mamma sent you when you went away."

"Tell you what, Miss Brownlow," said Sir Charles; "you are making game of me."

"Oh, no," said Sara; "or did you go to the gate and see such a pretty girl in the cottage opposite? I don't know whether you would fall in love with her, but I have; I never saw any one look so sweet. She has such pretty dark little curls, and yet not curls—something prettier;—and such eyes——"

"Little women with black hair are frights," said Sir Charles—"always thought so, and more than ever now."

"Why more than ever now?" said Sara, with the precision of contempt; and then she went on—"If you don't care either for pretty horses or pretty girls, we shan't know how to amuse you. Perhaps you are fond of reading; I think we have a good many nice books."

Sir Charles said something to his mustache, which was evidently an expletive of some kind. He was

not the sort of man to swear by Jove, or even by George, much less by anything more tangible; but still he did utter something in an inarticulate exclamatory way. "A man would be difficult to please if he didn't get plenty to amuse him here," was how it ended. "I'm not afraid——"

"It is very kind of you to say so," said Sara, so very politely that Sir Charles did not venture upon any more efforts, but stood bending down uneasily, looking at her, and pulling at his respirator in an embarrassed way; not that he was remarkable in this, for certainly the moment before dinner is not favourable to animated or genial conversation. And it was not much better at dinner. Sara had Mr Keppel of Ridley, the eldest brother, at her other side, who talked better than Sir Charles did. His mother kept her eye upon them as well as that was possible from the other end of the table, and she was rather hard upon him afterwards for the small share he had taken in the conversation. "You should have amused her and made her talk, and drawn her out," said the old lady. "Oh, she talked plenty," Sir Charles said, in a discomfited tone; and he did not make much more of it in the evening, when young Mrs Keppel and her sister-in-law, and Fanny Hardcastle, all gathered in a knot round the young mistress of the house. It was a pretty group,

and the hum of talk that issued from it attracted even the old people to linger and listen, though doubtless their own conversation would have been much more worth listening to. There was Sara reclining upon the cushions of a great round ottoman, with Fanny Hardcastle by her, making one mass of the white billows; and opposite, Mrs Keppel, who was a pretty little woman, lay back in a low deep round chair, and Mary Keppel, who was a little fond of attitudes, sat on a stool, leaning her head upon her hands, in the centre. Sometimes they talked all together, so that you could not tell what they said; and they discussed everything that ought to be discussed in heaven and earth, and occasionally something that ought not; and there was a dark fringe of men round about them, joining in the babble. But as for Sir Charles, he knew his *consigne*, and stood at his post, and did not attempt to talk. It was an exercise that was seldom delightful to him; and then he was puzzled, and could not make out whether, as he himself said, it was chaff or serious. But he could always stand over the mistress of his affections, and do a sentinel's duty, and keep other people away from her. That was an occupation he understood.

"Has it been a pleasant evening, Sara?" said Mr Brownlow when the guests had all gone, and Sir

Charles had disappeared with Jack, and Lady Motherwell had retired to think it all over and invent some way of pushing her son on. The father and daughter were left alone in the room, which was still very bright with lights and fire, and did not suggest any of the tawdry ideas supposed to hang about in the air after an entertainment is over. They were both standing by the fire, lingering before they said Good-night.

"Oh yes," said Sara, "if that odious man would not mount guard over me. What have I done that he should always stand at my elbow like that, with his hideous mustache?"

"You mean Sir Charles?" said Mr Brownlow. "I thought girls liked that sort of thing. He means it for a great compliment to you."

"Then I wish he would compliment somebody else," said Sara; "I think it is very hard, papa. A girl lives at home with her father, and is very happy and doesn't want any change; but any man that pleases—any tall creature with neither brains nor sense, nor anything but a mustache—thinks he has a right to come and worry her; and people think she should be pleased. It is awfully hard. No woman ever attempts to treat Jack like that."

Mr Brownlow smiled, but it was not so frankly as usual. "Are you really quite sure about this

matter?" he said. "I wish you would think it over, my darling. He is not bright—but he's a very good fellow in his way; stop a little. And you know I am only Brownlow the solicitor, and if anything should happen to our money, all this position of ours in the county would be lost. Now Sir Charles could give you a better position——"

"Oh, papa! could you ever bear to hear me called Lady Motherwell?" cried Sara—"young Lady Motherwell! I should hate myself and everybody belonging to me. But look here; I have wanted to speak to you for a long time. If you were to lose your money I don't see why you should mind so very much. *I* should not mind. We would go away to the country, and get a cottage somewhere, and be very comfortable. After all, money don't matter so much. We could walk instead of driving, which is often far pleasanter, and do things for ourselves."

"What do you know about my money?" said Mr Brownlow, with a bitter momentary pang. He thought something must have betrayed the true state of affairs to Sara, which would be an almost incredible addition to the calamity.

"Well, not much," said Sara, lightly; "but I know merchants and people are often losing money, and you have an office like a merchant. I should not

mind *that;* but I do mind never being able to turn my head even at home in our very own house, without seeing that man with his horrid mustache."

"Poor Sir Charles!" said Mr Brownlow, and the anxiety on his face lightened a little. She could not know anything about it. Then he lighted her candle for her, and kissed her soft cheek. "You said you would marry any one I asked you to marry," he said, with a smile; but it was not a smile that went deep. Strangely enough he was a little anxious about the answer, as if he had really some plan in his mind.

"And so I should, and never would hesitate," said Sara, promptly, holding his hand,——"but not Sir Charles, please, papa."

This was the easy way in which the girl played, on what might possibly turn out to be the very verge of the precipice.

CHAPTER XI.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE.

AFTER all, no doubt, it is the young people who are the kings and queens of this world. They don't have it in their own hands, nor their own way in it, which would not be good for them, but all our plots and plans are for their advantage whether they know it or not. For their sakes a great deal of harm is done in this world, which the doers hold excused, sometimes sanctified, by its motive, and the young creatures themselves have a great many things to bear which, no doubt, is for their advantage too. It is the least invidious title of rank which can exist in any community, for we have all been young—all had a great many things done for us which we would much rather had been let alone—and all suffered or profited by the plans of our progenitors. But if they are important in the actual universe, they are still more important in the world of fiction. Here we cannot do

without these young heroes and heroines. To make a middle-aged man or woman interesting demands genius, the highest concentration of human power and skill; whereas almost any of us can frame our innocent little tale about Edwin and Angelina, and tempt a little circle to listen notwithstanding the familiarity of the subject. Such is the fact, let us account for it as we may. The youths and maidens, and their encounters, and their quarrels, and their makings-up, their walks and talks and simple doings, are the one subject that never fails; so, though it is a wonder how it should be so, let us go back to them and consider their young prospects and their relations to each other before we go further on in the real progress of our tale.

The way that Sara made acquaintance with the little dweller at her gate was in this wise. It was the day after the dinner-party, when the Motherwells were still at Brownlows. Sara had gone out to convey some consolation to old Betty at the gate, who was a rheumatical old woman. And she thought she had managed to escape very cleverly out of Lady Motherwell's clutches, when, to her horror, Sir Charles overtook her in the avenue. He carried in his manner and appearance all the dignity of a man whose mind is made up. He talked very little, certainly, to begin with—but that was his way; and he caressed his

abrupt little black mustache as men do caress any physical adjunct which is a comfort to them in a crisis. Sara could not conceal it from herself that something was coming, and there was no apparent escape for her. The avenue was long; there was nobody visible coming or going. Had the two been on a desert island, Sir Charles could scarcely have had less fear of interruption. I do not pretend to say that Sara was entirely inexperienced in this sort of thing, and did not know how to snub an incipient lover or get out of such a dilemma in ordinary cases; but Sir Charles Motherwell's was not an ordinary case. In the first place, he was staying in the house, and would have to continue there till to-morrow at least, whatever might happen to him now; and in the second, he was obtuse, and might not understand what anything short of absolute refusal meant. He was not a man to be snubbed graciously or ungraciously, and made to comprehend without words that his suit was not to be offered. Such a point of understanding was too high for him. He was meditating between himself and his mustache what he had to say, and he was impervious to all Sara's delicate indications of an indisposition to listen. How could he tell what people meant unless they said it? Thus he was a man with whom only such solid weapons as Yes and No were of any use; and it would have been

very embarrassing if Sara, with at least twenty-four hours of his society to look forward to, had been obliged to say No. She did the very best she could under the emergency. She talked with all her might and tried to amuse him, and if possible lead him off his grand intention. She chatted incessantly with something of the same feelings that inspired Scherazade, speaking against time, though not precisely for her life, and altogether unaware that, in so far as her companion could abstract his thought from the words he was about to say, when he could find them, his complacent consciousness of the trouble she took to please him was rising higher and higher. Poor dear little thing! he was saying to himself, how pleased she will be! But yet, notwithstanding this comfortable thought, it was a difficult matter to Sir Charles in broad daylight, and with the eyes of the world, as it were, upon him, to prevail upon the right words to come.

They were only half-way down the avenue when he cleared his throat. Sara was in despair. She knew by that sound and by the last convulsive twitch of his mustache that it was just coming. A pause of awful suspense ensued. She was so frightened that even her own endeavour to ward off extremities failed her. She could not go on talking in the horror of the moment. Should she pretend to

have forgotten something in the house and rush back? or should she make believe somebody was calling her, and fly forward? She had thrown herself forward on one foot, ready for a run, when that blessed diversion came for which she could never be sufficiently thankful. She gave a start of delightful relief when they came to the first break in the trees. "Who can that be?" she said, much as, had she been a man, she would have uttered a cheer. It would not have done for Miss Brownlow to burst forth into an unlooked-for hurrah, so she gave vent to this question instead, and made a little rush on to the grass where the unknown figure was visible. It was a pretty little figure in a red cloak; and it was bending forward, anxiously examining some herbage about the root of a tree. At the sound of Sara's exclamation the stranger raised herself hurriedly, blushed, looked confused, and finally, with a certain shy promptitude, came forward, as if, Sara said afterwards, she was a perfect little angel out of heaven.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "perhaps I ought not to be here. I am so sorry; but—it was for old Betty I came."

"You are very welcome to come," said Sara, eagerly—"if you don't mind the damp grass. It is you who live at Mrs Swayne's? Oh, yes, I know

you quite well. Pray, come whenever you please. There are a great many pretty walks in the park."

"Oh, thank you!" said little Pamela. It was the first time she had seen the young great lady so near; and she took a mental inventory of her, all that she was like, and all that she had on. Seeing Miss Sara on foot, like any other human creature, was not a thing that occurred every day; and she took to examining her with a double, or rather triple interest—first, because it *was* Miss Sara, and something very new; second, to be able to describe minutely the glorious vision to her mother; and thirdly, out of genuine admiration. How beautiful she was! and how beautifully dressed! and then the tall gentleman by her side, so unlike anything Pamela ever saw, who took off his hat to her—actually to *her!* No doubt, though he was not so handsome as might have been desired, they were going to be married. He must be very good, gallant, and noble, as he was not so *very* good-looking. Pamela's bright eyes danced with eagerness and excitement as she looked at them. It was as good as a play or a story-book. It was a romance being performed for her benefit, actually occurring under her very eyes.

"I know what you were doing," said Sara, "but it is too early yet. 'Round the ashen roots the violets blow'—I know that is what you were thinking of."

Pamela, who knew very little about violets, and nothing about poetry, opened her eyes very wide. "Indeed," she said, anxiously, "I was only looking for some plantain for Betty's bird—that was all. I did not mean to take any—flowers. I would not do anything so—so—ungrateful."

"But you shall have as many violets as ever you like," said Sara, who was eager to find any pretence for prolonging the conversation. "Do come and walk here by me. I am going to see old Betty. Do you know how she is to-day? Don't you think she is a nice old woman? I am going to tell her she ought to have her grandchild to live with her, and open the gate, now that her rheumatism has come on. It always lasts three months when it comes on. Your Mr Swayne's, you know, goes on and off. I I always hear all about it from my maid."

When she paused for breath, Pamela felt that as the tall gentleman took no part in the conversation it was incumbent upon her to say something. She was much flattered by the unexpected grandeur of walking by Miss Brownlow's side, and being taken into her confidence; but the emergency drove every idea out of her head, as was natural. She could not think of anything that it would be nice to say, and in desperation hazarded a question. "Is there much rheumatism about here?" poor Pamela said, looking

up as if her life depended on the answer she received; and then she grew burning red, and hot all over, and felt as if life itself was no longer worth having, after thus making a fool of herself. As if Miss Brownlow knew anything about the rheumatism here? "What an idiot she will think me!" said she to herself, longing that the earth would open and swallow her up. But Miss Brownlow was by no means critical. On the contrary, Sara rushed into the subject with enthusiasm.

"There is always rheumatism where there are so many trees," she said, with decision—"from the damp, you know. Don't you find it so, at Motherwell, Sir Charles? You have such heaps of trees in that part of the county. Half my poor people have it here. And the dreadful thing is that one doesn't know any cure for it, except flannel. You never can give them too much flannel," said Sara, raising her eyes gravely to her tall companion. "They think flannel is good for everything under the skies."

"Don't know, I'm sure," said Sir Charles. "Can see it's very good of you. Don't know much about rheumatism myself. Always see lots about in our place—flannel pettic—hem—oh—beg your pardon. I'm sure——"

When he uttered that unfortunate remark, poor Sir Charles brought himself up with a sudden start,

and turned very red. It was his horror and embarrassment, poor man, and fear of having shocked his companion's delicacy. But Sara took the meanest advantage of him. She held out her hand, with a sweet smile, "Are you going?" she said; "it is so kind of you to have come so far with me. I hope you will have a pleasant ride. Please make Jack call at the Rectory, and ask if Fanny's cold is better. Shall you be back to luncheon? But you never are, you gentlemen. Till dinner, then," she said, waving her hand. Perhaps there was something mesmeric in it. The disappointed wooer was so startled that he stood still as under a spell.

"Didn't mean to leave you," he said; "don't care for riding. I'd like to see old Betty too."

"Oh, but that would be much too polite," cried Sara. "Please, never mind *me*. It is so kind of you to have come so far. Good-bye just now. I hope you will have a pleasant ride." She was gone before he could move or recover from his consternation. He stood in dumb amaze for a full minute looking after her; and then poor Sir Charles turned away with the obedience of despair. He had been too well brought up on the whole. His mother had brought him to such a pitch of discipline that he could not choose but obey the helm, whosesoever hand might touch it. "It was all those confounded

petticoats," he said to himself. "How could I be such an ass?" which was the most vigorous speech he had made even to himself for ages. As for Sara, she relaxed from her usual dignity, and went along skipping and tripping in the exhilaration of her heart. "Oh, what a blessing he is gone!—oh, what a little angel you were to appear just when you did!" said Sara; and then she gave a glance at her new companion's bewildered face, and composed herself. "But don't let us think of him any more," she continued. "Tell me about yourself—I want to know all about yourself. Wasn't it lucky we met? Please tell me your name, and how old you are, and how you like living here. Of course, you know I am Sara Brownlow. And oh, to be sure, first of all, why did you say ungrateful? Have I ever done anything to make you grateful to me?"

"Oh yes, please," said Pamela. "It is so pretty to see you always when you ride, and when you drive out. I am not quite strong yet, and I don't know anybody here; but I have only to sit down at the window, and there is always something going on. Last night you can't think how pretty it was. The carriage-lamps kept walking up and down like giants with two big eyes. And I can see all up the avenue from my window; and when I looked very close, just as they passed Betty's door, I could see a little glimpse

of the ladies inside. I saw one lovely pink dress; and then in the next, there was a scarlet cloak all trimmed with swansdown. I could tell it was swansdown, it was so fluffy. Oh, I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to talk so much; but it is such fun living there, just opposite the gate. And that is why I am so grateful to you."

Sara, it was impossible to deny, was much staggered by this speech. Its frankness amazed and yet attracted her. It drove her into deep bewilderment as to the rank of her little companion. Was she *a lady?* She would scarcely have taken so much pleasure in the sight, had it been within the range of possibility that she could herself join such a party; but then her voice was a refined voice, and her lovely looks might, as Sara had thought before, have belonged to a princess. The young mistress of Brownlows looked very curiously at Pamela, but she could not fathom her. The red cloak was a little the worse for wear, but still it was such a garb as any one might have worn. There was no sort of finery, no sort of pretension, about the little personage. And then Sara had already made up her mind in any case to take her pretty neighbour under her protection. And she was not stupid, or she would not have been so easily amused. Her spectatorship threw an odd new light upon the accessories of Sara's

own life. While the awful moment before dinner was being got through at the great house, this little creature at the gate was clapping her hands over the sounds and sights out of doors. To her, it was not heavy people coming to dinner, to be entertained in body and mind for three or four mortal hours; but prancing horses and rolling wheels, and the lamps making their shining progress two and two, and all the cheerful commotion. She must be an original little thing to see so tedious a business in such a novel light.

"It is very odd," said Sara, "that I never thought of that before. I almost think I shouldn't mind having stupid people now and then if I had thought of that. And so you think it fun? You wouldn't think it fun if you had to watch them eating their dinner, and amuse them all the evening. It *is* such hard work; and then to ask them to sing when you know they can't sing, no more than peacocks, and to stand and say Thank you when it is all over! I wonder what made you think of looking at the lamps. It is very clever of you, you know, to describe them like that. Do you read a great deal? Are you fond of it? Do you play, or do you draw, or what do you like best?"

This question staggered Pamela as much as her description had done Sara. She grew pale, and then

she grew red. "I am—not in the least clever," she said, "nor—nor accomplished—nor—I am not a great lady like you, Miss Brownlow," the little girl added, with a sudden pang of mortification. She had not been in the least envious of Sara, nor desirous of claiming equality with her. And yet when she thus suddenly perceived the difference, it went to her heart so sharply that she had hard ado not to cry.

As for Sara, she laughed softly, not knowing of any bitterness beneath that reply. She laughed, knowing she was not a great lady, and yet a little disposed to think she was, and pleased to appear so in her companion's eyes. "If you were to speak like that to Lady Motherwell, I wonder what she would say," said Sara; "but I don't want you to be a great lady. I think you are the prettiest little thing I ever saw in my life. There now, I suppose it is wrong to say it—but it is quite true. It is a pleasure just to look at you. If you are not nice and good, it is a great shame, and very ungrateful of you, when God has made you so pretty; but I think you must be nice. Don't blush and tremble like that, as if I were a gentleman. I am just nineteen. How old are you?"

"Seventeen last midsummer," said Pamela, under her breath.

"I knew you were quite a child," said Sara, with

dignity. "Don't look so frightened. I mean to come and see you almost every day. And you shall come home with me, and see the flowers, and the pictures, and all my pretty things. I have quantities of pretty things. Papa is so very kind. *I* have no mother; but that—that—old—lady—is your mother, is she? or your grandmother? Look, there is old Betty at the door. Wicked old woman! what business has she to come out to the door and make her rheumatism worse? Come along a little quicker; but you, poor little dear, what is the matter? Can't you run?"

"I sprained my ankle," said Pamela, blushing more and more, and wondering if Mr John had perhaps kept that little incident to himself.

"And I trying to make you run!" cried the penitent Sara. "Never mind, take my arm. I am not in the least in a hurry. Lean upon me—there's a good child. They should not let you come so far alone."

Thus it was that the two arrived at Betty's cottage, to the old woman's intense amazement. Pamela herself was flattered by the kind help afforded her, but it is doubtful whether she enjoyed it; and in the exciting novelty of the position, she was glad to sit down in a corner and collect herself while her brilliant young patroness fulfilled her benevolent mis-

sion. Betty's lodge was a creation of Miss Brownlow's from beginning to end. It was Sara's design, and Sara had furnished it, up to the pictures on the wall, which were carefully chosen in accordance with what might be supposed to be an old woman's taste, and the little book-shelf which was filled on the same principles. The fact was, however, that Betty had somewhat mortified Sara by pinning up a glorious coloured picture out of the 'Illustrated News,' and by taking in a tale of love and mystery in penny numbers, showing illegitimate tastes both in literature and art. But she was suffering, and at such a moment her offences ought to be forgiven.

"You should not stand at the door like that, and go on opening the gate in such weather," said Sara. "I came to say you must have one of your son's children to help you,—that one you had last year."

"She's gone to service, Miss," said Betty, with a bob.

"Then one of your daughter's,—the daughter you have at Masterton—she has dozens and dozens of children. Why cannot one of them come out and take care of you?"

"Please, Miss," said Betty, "a poor man's childer is his fortune—leastways in a place where there's mills and things. They're all a-doing of something, them little things. I'm awful comfortable, Miss,

thanks to you and your good papa"—at this and all other intervals of her speech, Betty made a curtsy—"but I ain't got money like to pay 'em wages, and except when one's a bit delicate——"

"Betty, sit down, please, and don't make so many curtsies. I don't understand that. If I had a nice old grandmother like you——" said Sara; and then she paused and blushed, and bethought herself—perhaps it might be as well not to enter upon that question. "Anyhow it is very easy to pay them something," she said. "I will pay it for you till your rheumatism is better. And then there is your other son, who was a tailor or something—where is he?"

"Oh, if I could but tell!" said Betty. "Oh, Miss, he's one o' them as brings down grey hairs wi' sorrow—not as I have a many to lose, though when I was a young lass, the likes o' me for a 'ead of 'air wasn't in all Dewsbury. But Tom, I'm afeard, I'm afeard, has tooken to terrible bad ways."

"Drinking or something?" asked Sara, in the tone of a woman experienced in such inevitable miseries.

"Worse than that, Miss. I don't say as it ain't bad enough when a man takes to drinking. Many a sore heart it's giv' me, but it allays comes kind o' natural like," said Betty, with her apron at her eyes.

"But poor Tom, he's gone and come out for a Radical, Miss, and sets hisself up a-making speeches and things. It's that as brought it on me so bad. I've not been so bad before, not sin' his poor father died."

"Then don't stand and curtsy like that, please," said Sara. "A Radical—is that all? I am a little of a Radical myself, and so is papa."

"Ah, the like of you don't know," said Betty. "Mr John wouldn't say nothing for him. He said, 'That's very bad, very bad, Betty,' when I went and told him; and a young gentleman like that is the one to know."

"He knows nothing about it," said Sara; "he's a University man, and Eton, you know; he is all in the old-world way; but papa and I are Radicals, like Tom. Are you?—but I suppose you are too young to know. And oh, here it is just time for luncheon, and you have never told me your name. Betty, make haste and send for Tom or somebody to help you. And there's something coming in a basket; and if you want anything else you must send up to the house."

"You're very kind, Miss," said Betty, "and the neighbours is real kind, and Mrs Swayne, though she has queer ways—— And as for Miss Pammly here——"

"Pamela," said the little girl, softly, from her chair.

"Is that your name?" said Sara. "Pamela—I never knew any one called Pamela before. What a pretty name! Sara is horrible. Every soul calls me Sairah. Look here, you are a little darling; and you don't know what you saved me from this morning; and I'll come to see you the moment Lady Motherwell goes away."

Upon which Sara dropped a rapid kiss upon her new friend's cheek and rushed forth, passing the window like an arrow, rushing up the long avenue like a winged creature, with the wind in her hair and in her dress. The little lodge grew darker to Pamela's dazzled eyes when she was gone.

"Is that really Miss Brownlow, Betty?" she said, after the first pause.

"Who could it be else, I would like to know?" said Betty; "a-leaving her orders like that, and never giving no time to answer or nothing. I wonder what's coming in the basket. Not as I'm one o' the greedy ones as is always looking for something; but what's the good o' serving them rich common folks if you don't get no good out of them? Oh for certain sure it's Miss Sara; and she's taken a fancy to you."

"What do you mean by common folks?" asked Pamela, already disposed, as was natural, to take up

the cudgels for her new friend. "She is a lady, oh, all down to the very tips of her shoes."

"Maybe as far as you knows," said Betty, "but I've been here off and on for forty years, and I mind the old Squires; not saying no harm of Miss Sara, as is very open-handed; but you mind my words, you'll see plenty of her for a bit—she's took a fancy to you."

"Do you think so, *really*, Betty?" said Pamela, with brightening eyes.

"What I says is for a bit," said Betty; "don't you take up as I'm meaning more—for a bit, Miss Pammly; that's how them sort does. She's one as 'ill come every day, and then, when she's other things in hand like, or other folks, or feels a bit tired——"

"Yes, perhaps," said Pamela, who had grown very red; "but that need not have any effect on me. If I was fond of any one, I would never, never change, whatever they might do—not if they were to be cruel and unkind—not if they were to forget me——"

Here the little girl started, and became very silent all in a moment. The blush of indignation on her cheek passed, and was followed by a softer sweeter colour, and her words died away on her lips. And her eyes, which had been shining on old Betty with all the magnanimity of youth, went down, and were covered up under the blue-veined, long-fringed eye-

lids. The fact was, some one else had come into the lodge—had come without knocking, in a very noiseless, stealthy sort of way—"as if he meant it." And this new-comer was no less a person than Mr John.

"My sister says you are ill, Betty," said Jack; "what do you mean by being ill? I am to send in one of your grandchildren from Masterton. What do you say? Shall I? or should you rather be alone?"

"It's allays you for the thoughtful one, Mr John," said Betty, gratefully; "though you're a gentleman, and it don't stand to reason. But Miss Sara's a-going to pay; and if there's a little as is to be arned honest, I'm not one as would send it past my own. There's little Betsy, as is a tidy bit of a thing. But I ain't ill, not to say ill, no more nor Miss Pammly here is ill—her as had her ankle sprained in that awful snow."

Mr John made what Pamela thought a very grand bow at this point of Betty's speech. He had taken his hat off when he came in. Betty's doctor, when he came to see her, did not take off his hat, not even when Pamela was present. The little girl had very quick eyes, and she did not fail to mark the difference. After he had made his bow, Mr John somehow seemed to forget Betty. It was to the little stranger his words, his eyes, his looks, were addressed. "I hope you are better?" he said. "I took the liberty

of going to your house to ask, but Mrs Swayne used to turn me away."

"Oh, thank you; you are very kind," said Pamela; and then she added, "Mrs Swayne is very funny. Mamma would have liked to have thanked you, I am sure."

"And I am sure I did not want any thanks," said Jack; "only to know. You are sure you are better now?"

"Oh, much better," said Pamela; and then there came a pause. It was more than a pause. It was a dead stop, with no apparent possibility of revival. Pamela, for her part, like an inexperienced little girl, fidgeted on her chair, and wrapped herself close in her cloak. Was that all? His sister had a great deal more to say. Jack, though he was not inexperienced, was almost for the moment as awkward as Pamela. He went across the room to look at the picture out of the 'Illustrated News;' and he spoke to Betty's bird, which had just been regaled with the bit of plantain Pamela had brought; and, at last, when all those little exercises had been gone through, he came back.

"I hope you like living here," he said. "It is cold and bleak now, but in summer it is very pretty. You came at the worst time of the year; but I hope you mean to stay?"

"Oh yes, we like it," said Pamela; and then there came another pause.

"My sister is quite pleased to think of having you for a neighbour," said Jack. It was quite extraordinary how stupid he was. He could talk well enough sometimes; but at this present moment he had not a syllable to say. "Except Miss Hardcastle at the Rectory, she has nobody near, and my father and I are so much away."

Pamela looked up at him with a certain sweet surprise in her eyes. Could he too really think her a fit friend for his sister? "It is very kind of Miss Brownlow," she said, "but I am only—I mean I don't think I am—I—I am always with my mother."

"But your mother would not like you to be shut up," said Jack, coming a little nearer. "I always look over the way now when I pass. To see bright faces instead of blank windows is quite pleasant. I daresay you never notice us."

"Oh yes," cried Pamela. "And that pretty horse! It is such fun to live there and see you all passing." She said this forgetting herself, and then she met old Betty's gaze and grew conscious again. "I mean we are always so quiet," she said, and began once more to examine the binding of her cloak.

At this moment the bell from the great house began to tinkle pleasantly in the wintry air: it was

another of Pamela's amusements. And it marked the dinner-hour at which her mother would look for her; but how was she to move with this young man behind her chair? Betty, however, was not so delicate. "I always sets my clock by the luncheon-bell," said old Betty. "There it's a-going, bless it! I has my dinner by it regular, and I sets my clock. Don't you go for to stir, Miss Pammly. Bless you, I don't mind you! And Mr John, he's a-going to his lunch. Don't you mind. I'll set my little bit of a table ready; but I has it afore the fire in this cold weather, and it don't come a-nigh of you."

"Oh, mamma will want me," said Pamela. "I shall come back another time and see you." She made Jack a little curtsy as she got up, but to her confusion he came out with her and opened the gate for her, and sauntered across the road by her side.

"I am not going to lunch—I am going to ride. So you have noticed the mare?" said Jack. "I am rather proud of her. She *is* a beauty. You should see how she goes when the road is clear. I suppose I shall have to go now, for here come the horses and Motherwell. He is one of those men who always turn up just when they're not wanted," Jack continued, opening the gate of Mrs Swayne's little garden for Pamela. Mrs Swayne herself was at the window up-stairs, and Mrs Preston was at the par-

lour window looking out for her child. They both saw that wonderful sight. Young Mr Brownlow with his hat off holding open the little gate, and looking down into the little face, which was so flushed with pleasure and pride, and embarrassment and innocent shame. As for Pamela herself, she did not know if she were walking on solid ground or on air. When the door closed behind her, and she found herself in the dingy little passage with nothing but her dinner before her, and the dusky afternoon, and her work, her heart gave a little cry of impatience. But she was in the parlour time enough to see Jack spring on his horse and trot off into the sunshine with his tall companion. They went off into the sunshine, but in the parlour it was deepest shade, for Mr Swayne had so cleverly contrived his house that the sunshine never entered. Its shadow hung across the road stretching to the gate of Brownlows, almost the whole day, which made everything dingier than it was naturally. This was what Pamela experienced when she came in out of the bright air, out of sight of those young faces and young voices. Could she ever have anything to do with them? Or was it only a kind of dream, too pleasant, too sweet to come to anything? It was her very first outset in life, and she was aware that she was not much of a heroine. Perhaps it was

only the accident of an hour; but even that was pleasant if it should be no more. This, when she had told all about it, and filled the afternoon with the reflected glory, was the philosophical conclusion to which Pamela came at last.

CHAPTER XII.

NEWS OF FRIENDS.

"BUT you must not set your heart upon it, my darling," said Mrs Preston. "It may be or it mayn't be—nobody can say. And you must not get to blame the young lady if she thinks better of it. They are very rich, and they have all the best people in the county coming and going. And you are but my poor little girl, with no grand friends; and you mustn't take it to heart and be disappointed. If you were doing that, though it's such good air and so quiet, I'd have to take my darling away."

"I won't, mamma," said Pamela; "I'll be good. But you say yourself that it *may* be——"

"Yes," said the mother; "young creatures like that are not so worldly-minded—at least, sometimes they're not. She might take a fancy to you; but you mustn't build on it, Pamela. That's all, my dear. We're humble folks, and the like of us don't

go visiting at great houses. And even you've not got the education, my darling; and nothing but your black frocks——"

"Oh, mamma, do you think I want to visit at great houses?" cried Pamela. "I should not know what to say nor how to behave. What I should like would be to go and see her in the mornings when nobody was there, and be her little companion, and listen to her talking, and to see her dressed when she was going out. I know we are poor; but she might get fond of me for all that——"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs Preston, "I think she is a very nice young lady. I wish her mamma had been living, Pamela. If there had been a good woman that had children of her own, living at that great house, I think it would have been a comfort to me."

"Mamma, I can't think why you should always be speaking like that," said Pamela, with a cloud on her brow.

"You would soon know why if you were as old as me," said the mother. "I can't forget I'm old, and how little strength I've got left. And I shouldn't like my pet to be disappointed," she said, rising and drawing Pamela's pretty head to her, as she stood behind her chair; "don't you build upon it, dear. And now I'm going into the kitchen for five minutes to ask for poor Mr Swayne."

It was a thing she did almost every night, and Pamela was not surprised; perhaps it was even a relief to her to have a few minutes all to herself to think over the wonderful events of the day. To be sure, it had been about Sara alone, and her overtures of friendship, that the mother and daughter had been talking. But when Pamela was by herself, she recollected, naturally, that there had been another actor on the scene. She did not think of asking her mother, or even herself, if Mr John was to be depended on, or if there was any danger of disappointment in respect to him. Indeed, Pamela was so wise that she did not, as she said to herself, think at all about this branch of the subject; for, of course, it was not likely she would ever make great friends with a young gentleman. The peculiarity of the matter was that, though she was not thinking of Mr John, she seemed to see him standing before her, holding the gate open, looking into her face, and saying that Motherwell was one of the men that always turned up when they were least wanted. She was not thinking of Jack; and was it her fault if this picture had fixed itself on her retina, if that is the name of it? She went and sat down on the rug before the fire, and gazed into the glow, and thought it all over. After a while she even put her hands over her eyes, that she might think it over the more perfectly.

And it is astonishing how often this picture came between her and her thoughts; but, thank heaven, it was only a picture! Whatever Pamela might be thinking of, it was certainly not of Mr John.

Mrs Swayne's kitchen was by far the most cheerful place in the house. It had a brick floor, which was as red as the hearth was white, and a great array of shining things about the walls. There was a comfortable cat dozing and blinking before the fire, which was reflected out of so many glowing surfaces, copper, pewter, and tin, that the walls were hung with a perfect gallery of cats. Mrs Swayne herself had a wickerwork chair at one side, which she very seldom occupied; for there was a great multiplicity of meals in the house, and there was always something just coming to perfection in the oven or on the fire. But opposite, in a high-backed chair covered with blue and white checked linen, was Mr Swayne, who was the object of so much care, and was subject to the rheumatics, like Betty. The difference of his rheumatics was, that they went off and on. One day he would be well—so well as to go out and see after his business; and the next day he would be fixed in his easy-chair. Perhaps, on the whole, it was more aggravating than if he had gone in steadily for a good long bout when he was at it, and saved his wife's time. But then that was the nature of the man.

There was a visitor in the kitchen when Mrs Preston went in—no less a personage than old Betty, who, with a daring disregard for *her* rheumatics, had come across the road, wrapped in an old cloak, to talk over the news of the day. It was a rash proceeding, no doubt; but yet rheumatics were very ordinary affairs, and it was seldom—very seldom—that anything so exciting came in Betty's way. Mrs Swayne, for her part, had been very eloquent about it before her lodger appeared.

"*I'd* make short work with him," she said, "if it was me. *I'd* send him about his business, you take my word. It ain't me as would trust one of 'em a step further than I could see 'em. Coming a-raging and a-roaring round of a house, as soon as they found out as there was a poor little tender bit of a lamb to devour."

"What is that you say about a bit o' lamb, Nancy?" cried Mr Swayne; "that's an awful treat, that is, at this time of the year. I reckon it's for the new lodgers and not for us. I'll devour it, and welcome, my lass, if you'll set it afore me."

Mrs Swayne gave no direct answer to this question. She cast a glance of mild despair at Betty, who answered by lifting up her hands in sympathy and commiseration. "That's just like the men," said Mrs Swayne. "Talk o' something to

put into them, and that's all as they care for. It's what a poor woman has to put up with late and early. Always a-craving and a-craving, and you ne'er out of a mess, dinner and supper—dinner and supper. But as I was a-saying, if it was me, he should never have the chance of a word in her ear again."

"It's my opinion, Mrs Swayne," said Betty, unwinding her cloak a little, "as in those sort of cases it's mostly the mother's fault."

"I don't know what you mean by the mother's fault," said Mrs Swayne, who was contradictory, and liked to take the initiative. "She never set eyes on him, as I can tell, poor soul. And how was she to know as they were all about in the avenue? It's none o' the mother's fault; but if it was me, now as they've took the first step——"

"That was all as I meant," said Betty, humbly; "now as it's come to that, I would take her off, as it were, this very day."

"And a deal of good you'd do with that," said Mrs Swayne, with natural indignation; "take her off! and leave my parlour empty, and have him a-running after her from one place to another. I thought you was one as knew better; I'd brave it out if it was me—he shouldn't get no advantages in my way o' working. Husht both of you, and hold

your tongues; I never see the like of you for talk, Swayne — when here's the poor lady out o' the parlour as can't abide a noise. Better? ay, a deal better, Mrs Preston: if he wasn't one as adored a good easy-chair afore the fire——"

"And a very good place, too, this cold weather," said Mr Swayne, with a feeble chuckle. "Nancy, you tell the lady about the lamb."

Mrs Swayne and Betty once more exchanged looks of plaintive comment. "That's him all over," she said; "but you're one as understands what men is, Mrs Preston, and I've no need to explain. I hear as Miss Sara took awful to our young Miss, meeting of her promiscuous in the avenue. Betty here, she says as it was wonderful; but I always thought myself as that was how it would be."

"Yes," said the gratified mother; "not that I would have my Pamela build upon it. A young lady like that might change her mind; but I don't deny that it would be very nice. Whatever is a pleasure to Pamela is twice a pleasure to me."

"And a sweet young lady as ever I set eyes on," said Betty, seizing the opportunity, and making Mrs Preston one of her usual bobs.

Pamela's mother was not a lady born; the two women, who were in their way respectful to her, saw this with lynx eyes. She was not even rich enough,

poor soul, to have the appearance of a lady; and it would have been a little difficult for them to have explained why they were so civil. No doubt principally it was because they knew so little of her, and her appearance had the semi-dignity of preoccupation —a thing very difficult to be comprehended in that region of society which is wont to express all its sentiments freely. She had something on her mind, and she did not relieve herself by talking, and she lived in the parlour, while Mrs Swayne contented herself with the kitchen. That was about the extent of her claim on their respect.

"I suppose you are all very fond of Miss Sara, knowing her all her life," Mrs Preston said, after she had received very graciously Betty's tribute to her own child. Though she warned Pamela against building on it, it would be hard to describe the fairy structures which had already sprung in her own mind on these slight foundations; and though she would not have breathed his name for worlds, it is possible that Pamela's mother, in her visions, found a place for Mr John too.

"Fond! I don't know as we're so fond of her neither," said Mrs Swayne. "She's well, and well enough, but I can't say as she's my sort. She's too kind of familiar like—and it ain't like a real county lady neither. But it's Betty as sees her most. And

awful good they are, I will say that for them, to every creature about the place."

"Ah, mum, they ain't the real old gentry," said Betty, with a touch of pathos. "If I was one as had come with 'em, or that——but I'm real old Dewsbury, me, and was at the Hall, coming and going, for twenty years afore their time. I ain't got nothing to say again' Miss Sara. She comed there, that's all—she wasn't *born*. It makes a difference when folks have been forty years and more about a place. To see them pass away as has the right," said Betty, growing sentimental, "and them come in as has only a bag o' money!"

"Little enough money the old Squire had," said Mrs Swayne, tossing her head, "nor manners neither. Don't you be ungrateful, Betty Caley. You was as poor as a church-mouse all along o' your old Squires, and got as fat as fat when the new folks come and put you all comfortable. Deny it, if you can. I would worship the very ground Miss Sara sets foot on, if I was you."

"Ah, she ain't the real old gentry," said Betty, with a sigh.

Perhaps Mrs Preston had a weakness for real old gentry too, and she had a dull life, poor woman, and was glad of a little gossip. She had heard the story before, but she asked to hear it again, hoping for a

little amusement; for a woman, however bowed down to the level of her fortune, gets tired sometimes, even of such a resource as needlework. She would not sit down, for she felt that might be considered lowering herself to their level. But she stood with her hand upon the back of an old high wooden chair, and asked questions. If they were not the real old gentry, and were such upstarts, why was it that the place was called by their name, and how did they come there?

"Some say as it was a poor old creature in Masterton as give him the money," said Mrs Swayne, "away from her own child, as was gone off a-soldiering. I wouldn't say it was money that would thrive. He was called to make the will for her, or something; an old miser, that was what she was; and with that he bought the place. And the folks laughed, and said it was Brownlow's. But he ain't a man to laugh at, ain't Mr Brownlow hisself. A body may have their opinion about the young folks. Young folks ain't nothing much to build upon, as you was a-saying, Mrs Preston, at their best; but I wouldn't be the one as would cross *him* hisself. He's terrible deep, and terrible close, like all them lawyers. And he has a way of talking as is dreadful deceiving. Them as tries to fight honest and open with the likes of him hasn't no chance. He ain't a

hard neighbour like, nor unkind to poor folk; but I wouldn't go again' him, not for all the world, if it was me."

"That's all you know, you women," said Mr Swayne; "he's the easiest-minded gentleman going, is Mr Brownlow. He's one as pays your little bits o' bills like a prince, and don't ask no bothering questions—what's this for, and what's that for, and all them niggle-naggles. He's as free with his money—— What are you two women a-shaking of your heads off for, as if I was a-saying what isn't true?"

"It's true, and it ain't true," said Mrs Swayne; "and if you ever was anyway in trouble along of the young folks, Mrs Preston, or had him to do with, I give you my warning you'll have to mind."

"I shall never have anything to do with Mr Brownlow," said the lodger, with a half-frightened smile. "I'm independent. He can't have anything to say to me."

Mrs Swayne shook her head, and so did Betty, following her lead. The landlady did not very well know why, and neither did the old woman. It was always a practicable way of holding up the beacon before the eyes of Pamela's mother. And that poor soul, who was not very courageous, grew frightened, she could not tell why.

"But there was something to-day as made me laugh," said old Betty—"not as I was in spirits for laughing—what with my back, as was like to split, and my bad knee, and them noises in my ears. But just to see how folks forget! Miss Sara she came in. She was along of your young Miss, mum, and a-making a fuss over her; and she says, 'Betty,' says she, 'we ain't a-going to let you open the gate, and your rheumatics so bad; send for one of them grandchildren o' yours.' Atween oursels, I was just a-thinking o' that; for what's enough for one is enough for two, and it's allays a saving for Polly. My Polly has seven on 'em, mum, and hard work a-keeping all straight. So I up and says, 'A poor man's children is his fortin, Miss,' says I; 'they're all on em' a-working at summat, and I can't have em without paying.' And no more I oughtn't to, serving rich folks. 'What! not for their grandmother?' says she; 'if I had a nice old grandmother like you——'"

"Law!" said Mrs Swayne, "and her own grandmother living in a poky bit of a place in Masterton, as everybody knows—never brought out here for a breath of fresh air, nor none of them going a-nigh of her! To think how little folks is sensible when it's themselves as is to blame!"

"That's what it is," said the triumphant Betty.

"When she said that, it was her conscience as spoke. She went as red as red, and stopped there and then. It was along of old Mrs Fennell, poor old soul! Why ain't she a-living out here, and her own flesh and blood to make her comfortable? It was on my lips to say, 'Law! Miss, there's old Mrs Fennell is older nor me.'"

"Fennell?" said Mrs Preston; "I ought to know that name."

"It was her own mamma's name," said Betty. "Hobson, the carrier, he goes and sees her regular with game and things; but what's game in comparison with your own flesh and blood?"

"Perhaps the mother died young," said Mrs Preston, with some anxiety—"that breaks the link, like. Fennell? I wonder what Fennells she belongs to. I once knew that name well. I wish the old lady was living here."

"You take my word, she'll never live here," said Mrs Swayne. "She ain't grand enough. Old grandmothers is in the way when young folks sets up for lords and ladies. And it ain't that far to Masterton but you could go and see her. There's Hobson, he knows; he'd take you safe, never fear."

Mrs Preston shrank back a little from the suggestion. "I'm not one to pay visits," she said. "But I'll say good-night to you all, now. I hope

you'll soon be better, Mr Swayne. And, Betty, you should not be out of doors on such a cold night. My child will be dull, all by herself." So saying, she left them; but she did not that moment return to Pamela. She went up-stairs by herself in the dark, with her heart beating quick in her ears. "Fennell!" she was saying to herself—"I ought to know that name." It was very dark on the road, and there was nothing visible from the window but the red glow from Betty's lodge, where the door stood innocently open; but notwithstanding Mrs Preston went and looked out, as if the scene could have thrown any enlightenment upon her thoughts. She was excited about it, unimportant though the matter seemed. What if perhaps she might be on the trace of friends—people who would be good to Pamela? There was once a Fennell—Tom Fennell —who ages ago—— No doubt he was dead and gone, with everybody who had belonged to her far-off early life. But standing there in the darkness, pressing her withered cheek close to the window, as if there was something to be seen outside, it went through the old woman's mind how, perhaps, if she had chosen Tom Fennell instead of the other one, things might have been different. If any life could ever have been real to the liver of it, surely her hard life, her many toils and sufferings, must

have been such sure fact as to leave no room for fancy. Yet so truly, even to an unimaginative woman, was this fantastic existence such stuff as dreams are made of, that she stopped to think what the difference might have been if—— She was nearly sixty, worn even beyond her years, incapable of very much thinking; and yet she took a moment to herself ere she could join her child, and permitted herself this strange indulgence. When she descended the stairs again, still in the dark, going softly, and with a certain thrill of excitement, Mrs Preston's mind was full of dreams more unreal than those which Pamela pondered before the fire. She was forming visions of a sweet, kind, fair old lady who would be good to Pamela. Already her heart was lighter for the thought. If she should be ill or feel any signs of breaking up, what a comfort to mount into the carrier's cart and go and commend her child to such a protector! If she had conceived at once the plan of marrying Pamela to Mr John, and making her at one sweep mistress of Brownlows, the idea would have been wisdom itself in comparison; but she did not know that, poor soul!

She came down with a visionary glow about her heart, the secret of which she told to no one, and roused up Pamela, who looked half dazed and dazzled as she drew her hands from before her

face and rose from the rug she had been seated on. Pamela had been dreaming, but not more than her mother. She almost looked as if she had been sleeping as she opened her dazzled eyes. There are times when one sees clearer with one's eyes closed. The child had been looking at that picture of hers so long that she felt guilty when her mother woke her up. She had a kind of shamefaced consciousness, Mr John having been so long about, that her mother must find his presence out—not knowing that her mother was preoccupied and full of her own imaginations too. But they did not say anything to each other about their dreams. They dropped into silence, each over her work, as people are so ready to do who have something to think of. Pamela's little field of imagination was limited, and did not carry her much beyond the encounters of to-day; but Mrs Preston bent her head over her sewing with many an old scene coming up in her mind. She remembered the day when Tom Fennell "spoke" to her first, as vividly in all its particulars as Pamela recollected Jack Brownlow's looks as he stood at the door. How strange if it should be the same Fennells! if Pamela's new friends should be related to her old one—if this lady at Masterton should be the woman in all the world pointed out by Providence to

succour her darling. Poor Mrs Preston uttered praises to Providence unawares—she seemed to see the blessed, yet crooked, ways by which she had been drawn to such a discovery. Her heart accepted it as a plan long ago concerted in heaven for her help when she was most helpless, to surprise her, as it were, with the infinite thought taken for her, and tender kindness. These were the feelings that rose and swelled in her mind and went on from step to step of further certainty. One thing was very confusing, it is true; but still when a woman is in such a state of mind, she can swallow a good many confusing particulars. It was to make out what could be the special relationship (taking it for granted that there was a relationship) between Tom Fennell and this old lady. She could not well have been his mother; perhaps his wife—his widow! This was scarcely a palatable thought, but still she swallowed it—swallowed it, and preferred to think of something else, and permitted the matter to fall back into its former uncertainty. What did it matter about particulars when Providence had been so good to her? Dying itself would be little if she could but make sure of friends for Pamela. She sang, as it were, a "Nunc dimittis" in her soul.

Thus the acquaintance began between the young people at the great house and little Pamela in Mrs

Swayne's cottage. It was not an acquaintance which was likely to arise in the ordinary course of affairs, and naturally it called forth a little comment. Probably, had the mother been living, as Mrs Preston wished, Sara would never have formed so unequal a friendship; but it was immaterial to Mr Brownlow, who heard his child talk of her companion, and was pleased to think she was pleased; and, prepossessed by the pretty face at the window which so often gleamed out upon him, he himself, though he scarcely saw any more of her than that passing glimpse in the morning, was taken with a certain fondness for the lovely little girl. He no longer said she was like Sara; she was like a face he had seen somewhere, he said, and he never failed to look out for her, and after a while gave her a friendly nod as he passed. It was more difficult to find out what were Jack's sentiments. He too saw a great deal of the little stranger, but it was in, of course, an accidental way. He used to happen to be in the avenue when she was coming or going. He happened to be in the park now and then when the spring brightened, and Pamela was able to take long walks. These things, of course, were pure accident, and he made no particular mention of them. As for Pamela herself, she would say, "I met Mr John," in her innocent way, but that was about all. It is true that Mrs Swayne in the cottage

and Betty at the lodge both kept very close watch on the young people's proceedings. If these two had met at the other end of the parish, Betty, notwithstanding her rheumatics, would have managed to know it. But the only one who was aware of this scrutiny was Jack. Thus the spring came on, and the days grew pleasant. It was pleasant for them all, as the buds opened and the great chestnut-blossoms began to rise in milky spires among the big half-folded leaves. Even Mrs Preston opened and smoothed out, and took to white caps and collars, and felt as if she might live till Pamela was five-and-twenty. Five-and-twenty is not a great age, but it is less helpless than seventeen, and in a last extremity there was always Mrs Fennell in Masterton who could be appealed to. Sometimes even the two homely sentinels who watched over Pamela would relax in those lingering spring nights. Old Betty, though she was worldly-minded, was yet a motherly kind of old woman; her heart smote her when she looked in Pamela's face. "And why shouldn't he be honest and true, and marry a pretty lass if it was his fancy?" Betty would say. But as for Mrs Swayne, she thanked Providence she had been in temptation herself, and knew what that sort meant; which was much more than any of the others did, up to this moment—Jack, probably, least of all.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRISIS.

ALL this time affairs had been going on very quietly in the office. Mr Brownlow came and went every day, and Jack when it suited him, and business went on as usual. As for young Powys, he had turned out an admirable clerk. Nothing could be more punctual, more painstaking than he was. Mr Wrinkell the head-clerk was so pleased that he invited him to tea and chapel on Sunday, which was an offer the stranger had not despised. And it was known that he had taken a little tiny house in the outskirts, not the Dewsbury way, but at the other side of the town—a little house with a garden, where he had been seen planting primroses, to the great amusement of the other clerks. They had tried jeers, but the jeers were not witty, and Powys's patience was found to have limits. And he was so big and strong, and looked so completely as if he meant it,

that the merriment soon came to an end, and he was allowed to take his own way. They said he was currying favour with old Wrinkell; they said he was trying to humbug the governor; they said he had his pleasures his own way, and kept close about them. But all these arrows did not touch the junior clerk. Mr Brownlow watched the young man out of his private office with the most anxious mixture of feelings. Wrinkell himself, though he was of thirty years' standing in the office, and his employer and he had been youths together, did not occupy nearly so much room in Mr Brownlow's favour as this "new fellow." He took a livelier interest even in the papers that had come through his *protégé's* hands. "This is Powys's work, is it?" he would say, as he looked at the fair sheets which cost other people so much trouble. Powys did his work very well for one thing, but that did not explain it. Mr Brownlow got into a way of drawing back the curtain which covered the glass partition between his own room and the outer office. He would draw back this curtain, accidentally as it were, the least in the world, and cast his eyes now and then on the desk at which the young man sat. He thought sometimes it was a pity to keep him there, a broad-shouldered, deep-chested fellow like that, at a desk, and consulted with himself whether he could not

make some partial explanation to him, and advance him money and send him off to a farm in his native Canada. It would be better for Powys, and it would be better for Brownlows. But he had not the courage to take such a direct step. Many a thought was in his mind as he sat glancing by times from the side of the curtain—compunctions and self-reproaches now and then, but chiefly, it must be confessed, more selfish thoughts. Business went on just the same, but yet it cannot be denied that an occasional terror seized Mr Wrinkell's spirit that his principal's mind was "beginning to go." "And young John never was fit to hold the candle to him," Mr Wrinkell said, in those moments of privacy when he confided his cares to the wife of his bosom. "When our Mr Brownlow goes, the business will go, you'll see that. His opinion on that Waterworks case was not so clear as it used to be—not near so clear as it used to be; he'll sit for an hour at a time and never put pen to paper. He is but a young man yet, for his time of life, but I'm afraid he's beginning to go; and when he goes, the business will go. You'll see young John, with his fine notions, will never keep it up for a year."

"Well, Thomas, never mind," said Mrs Wrinkell; "it's sure to last out our time."

"Ah! that's just like women," said her husband —"after me the Deluge; but I can tell you I do

mind." He had the same opinion of women as Mrs Swayne had of men, and it sprang from personal superiority in both cases, which is stronger than theory. But still he did let himself be comforted by the feminine suggestion. "There will be peace in my time;" this was the judgment formed by his head-clerk who knew so well of Mr Brownlow's altered ways.

All this went on for some months after the admission of young Powys, and then all at once there was a change. The change made itself apparent in the Canadian to begin with. At first it was only like a shadow creeping over the young man; then by degrees the difference grew more and more marked. He ceased to be held up as a model by the sorrowing Wrinkell; he ceased to be an example of the punctual and accurate. His eyes began to be red and bloodshot in the mornings; he looked weary, heavy, languid—sick of work, and sick of everything. Evidently he had taken to bad ways. So all his companions in the office concluded, not without satisfaction. Mr Wrinkell made up his mind to it sorrowing. "I've seen many go, but I thought the root of the matter was in him," he said to his domestic counsellor. "Well, Thomas, we did our best for him," that sympathetic woman replied. It was not everybody that Mr Wrinkell

would have asked to chapel and tea. And this was how his kindness was to be rewarded. As for Mr Brownlow, when he awoke to a sense of the change, it had a very strange effect upon him. He had a distinct impression of pain, for he liked the lad, about whom he knew so much more than anybody else knew. And in the midst of his pain there came a guilty throb of satisfaction, which woke him thoroughly up, and made him ask himself sternly what this all meant. Was he glad to see the young man go wrong because he stood in his own miserable selfish way? This was what a few months of such a secret had brought him to. It was now April, and in October the year would be out, and all the danger over. Once more, and always with a deeper impatience, he longed for this moment. It seemed to him, notwithstanding his matured and steady intellect, that if that day had but come, if that hour were but attained, his natural freedom would come back to him. If he had been consulted about his own case, he would have seen through this vain supposition; but it *was* his own case, and he did not see through it. Meanwhile, in the interval, what was he to do? He drew his curtain aside, and sat and watched the changed looks of this unfortunate boy. He had begun so innocently and well, was he to be allowed to end

badly, like so many? Had not he himself, in receiving the lad, and trading as it were on his ignorance, taken on himself something of the responsibility? He sat thinking of this when he ought to have been thinking of other people's business. There was not one of all his clients whose affairs were so complicated and engrossing as his own. He was more perplexed and beaten about in his own mind than any of the people who came to ask him for his advice. Oh, the sounding nothings they would bring before him; he who was engaged in personal conflict with the very first principles of honour and rectitude. Was he to let the lad perish? was he to interfere? What was he to do?

At the very height of his perplexity, one of those April days, Mr Brownlow was very late at the office. Not exactly on account of the confusion of mind he was in, and yet because the intrusion of this personal subject had retarded him in his business. He was there after all the clerks were gone—even Mr Wrinkell. He had watched young Powys go away from that very window where he had once watched Bessie Fennell passing in her thin cloak. The young man went off by himself, taking the contrary road, as Mr Brownlow knew, from that which led to his home. He looked ill—he looked unhappy;

and his employer watched him with a sickening at his heart. Was it his fault? and could he mend it or stop the evil, even were he to make up his mind to try? After that he had more than an hour's work, and sent off the dogcart to wait for him at the Green Man in the market-place. It was very quiet in the office when all his people were gone. As he sat working, there came over him memories of other times when he had worked like this, when his mother would come stealing down to him from the rooms above; when Bessie would come with her work to sit by him as he finished his. Strange to think that neither Bessie nor his mother were up-stairs now; strange to believe, when you came to think of it, that there was nobody there—that the house was vacant, and his home elsewhere, and all his own generation, his own contemporaries, cut off from his side. These ideas floated through his mind as he worked, but they did not impair the soundness of the work, as some other thoughts did. His mind was not beginning to go, though Mr Wrinkell thought so. It was even a wonder to himself how quickly, how clearly he got through it; and how fit he was for work yet, though the world was so changed.

He had finished while it was still good daylight, and put away his papers and buttoned his coat, and

prepared to set out in an easy way. There was nothing particular to hurry him. There was Jack's mare, which flew rather than trotted, to take him home. Thus thinking, he went out, drawing on his gloves. Opposite him, as he opened the door, the sky was glowing in the west after the sunset, and he could see a woman's figure against it passing slowly, as if waiting for some one. Before he could shut the door, it became evident that it was for himself she was waiting. Somehow he divined who she was before she said a word. A comely, elderly, motherly woman, dressed like a farmer's or a shopkeeper's wife, in the days when people dressed like their condition. She had a large figured shawl on, and a bonnet with black ribbons. And he knew she was Powys's mother — the woman on earth he most dreaded—come to speak to him about her son.

"Mr Brownlow," she said, coming up to him with a nervous movement of her hand, "I've been waiting about this hour not to be troublesome. Oh! could you let me speak to you ten minutes? I won't keep you. Oh please, if I might speak to you five minutes *now*."

"Surely," he said; he was not quite sure if it was audible, but he said it with his lips. And he went in and held the door open for her. Then, though he never could tell why, he took her up-stairs—not to

the office which he had just closed, but up to the long-silent drawing-room which he had not entered for years. There came upon his mind an impression that Bessie was surely about somewhere, to come and stand by him, if he could only call her. But in the first place he had to do with his guest. He gave her a chair, and made her sit down, and stood before her. "Tell me how I can serve you," he said. It seemed to him like a dream, and he could not understand it. Would she tell her fatal name, and make her claim, and end it all at once? That was folly. But still it seemed somehow natural to think that this was why she had come. The woman he had hunted for far and wide—whom he had then neglected and thought no more of—whom lately he had woke up to such horror and fear of, his greatest danger, his worst enemy,—was it she who was sitting so humbly before him now?

"I have no right to trouble you, Mr Brownlow," she said; "it's because you were so kind to my boy. Many a time I wanted to come and thank you; and now—oh, it's a different thing now!"

"Your son is young Powys," said Mr Brownlow—"yes; I knew by—by the face. He has gone home some time ago. I wonder you did not meet him in the street."

"Gone away from the office—not gone home," said

Mrs Powys. "Oh, Mr Brownlow, I want to speak to you about him. He is as good as gold. He never had another thought in his mind but his sisters and me. He'd come and spend all his time with us when other young men were going about their pleasure. There never was such a son as he was—nor a brother. And oh, Mr Brownlow, now it's come to this! I feel as if it would break my heart."

"What has it come to?" said Mr Brownlow. He drew forward a chair and sat down facing her, and the noise he made in doing so seemed to wake thunders in the empty house. He had got over his agitation by this time, and was as calm as he always was. And his profession came to his help, and opened his eyes and ears to everything that might be of use to him, notwithstanding the effect the house had upon him in its stillness, and this meeting which he had so much reason to fear.

"Oh, sir, it's come to grief and trouble," said the poor woman. "Something has come between my boy and me. We are parted as far as if the Atlantic was between us. I don't know what is in his heart. Oh, sir, it's for your influence I've come. He'll do anything for you. It's hard to ask a stranger to help me with my own son, and him so good and so kind; but if it goes on like this, it will break my heart."

"I feared there was something wrong," said Mr Brownlow; "I feared it, though I never thought it could have gone so far. I'll do what I can, but I fear it is little I can do. If he has taken to bad ways——"

But here the stranger gave a cry of denial which rang through the room. "Bad ways!—my boy!" said the mother. "Mr Brownlow, you know a great deal more than I do, but you don't know my son. He taken to bad ways! I would sooner believe I was wicked myself. I am wicked, to come and complain of him to them that don't know."

"Then what in the name of goodness is it?" said the lawyer, startled out of his seriousness. He began to lose the tragic sense of a dangerous presence. It might be the woman he feared; but it was a homely, incoherent, inconsequent personage all the same.

Mrs Powys drew herself up solemnly. She too was less respectful of the man who did not understand. "What it is, sir," she said, slowly, and with a certain pomp, "is, that my boy has something on his mind."

Something on his mind! John Brownlow sank again into a strange fever of suspense and curiosity and unreasonable panic. Could it be so? Could the youth have found out something, and be sifting it to get at the truth? The room seemed to take life and

become a conscious spectator, looking at him, to see how he would act in this emergency. But yet he persevered in the course he had decided on, not giving in to his own feelings. "What can he have on his mind?" he asked. His pretended ignorance sounded in his own ears like a lie; but nevertheless he went on all the same.

"That's what I don't know, sir," said Mrs Powys, putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "He's been rummaging among my papers, and he's maybe found something, or he's heard some talk that has put things in his head. I know he has heard things in this very house—people talking about families, and wills, and all that. His father was of a very good family, Mr Brownlow. I don't know them, but I know they're rich people. Maybe it's that, or perhaps—— but I don't know how to account for it. It's something that is eating into his heart. And he has such a confidence in you! It was you that took him up when we were strangers, and had nobody to look to us. I have a little that my poor husband left me; but it's very little to keep four upon; and I may say it's you that gave us bread, for that matter. There's nothing in this world my boy wouldn't do for you."

Then there was a pause. The poor woman had exhausted her words and her self-command and her

breath, and stopped perforce, and Mr Brownlow did not know how to reply. What could he say to her? It was a matter of death and life between him and her boy, instead of the indifferent question she thought. "Would you like me to speak to him?" he said at last, with a little difficulty of utterance; "should I ask him what is occupying his mind? But he might not choose to tell me. What would you wish me to do?"

"Oh, sir, you're very good," said Mrs Powys, melting into gratitude. "I never can thank God enough that my poor boy has met with such a kind friend."

"Hush!" said Mr Brownlow, rising from his chair. He could not bear this; thanking God, as if God did not know well enough, too well, how the real state of the matter was! He was not a man used to deception, or who could adapt himself to it readily. He had all the habits of an honest life against him, and that impulse to speak truth and do right which he struggled with as if it were a temptation. Thus his position was awfully the reverse of that of a man tempting and falling. He was doing wrong with all the force of his will, and striving against his own inclination and instinct of uprightness; but here was one thing beyond his strength. To bring God in, and render Him, as it were, a party, was more than he could bear. "I am not so kind as

you think," he said, hoarsely. "I am not—I mean your son deserves all that I can do."

"Oh, sir, that's kind—that's kindness itself to say so," cried the poor mother. "Nothing that could be said is so kind as that—and me, that was beginning to lose faith in him! It was to ask you to speak to him, Mr Brownlow. If you were to ask him, he might open his heart to you. A gentleman is different from a poor woman. Not that anybody could feel for him like me, but he would think such a deal of your advice. If you would speak and get him to open his heart. That was what I wanted to ask you, if it's not too much. If you would be so kind—and God knows, if ever it was in my power or my children's, though I'm but a poor creature, to do anything in this world that would be of service to you——"

God again. What did the woman mean? And she was a widow, one of those that God was said to take special charge of. It was bad enough before without that. John Brownlow had gone to the fireless hearth, and was standing by it leaning his head against the high carved wooden mantelpiece, and looking down upon the cold vacancy where for so many years the fire that warmed his inmost life had blazed and sparkled. He stood thus and listened, and within him the void seemed as cold, and the

emptiness as profound. It was his moment of fate. He was going to cast himself off from the life he had lived at that hearth—to make a separation for ever and ever between the John Brownlow, honest and generous, who had been trained to manhood within these walls, and had loved and married, and brought his bride to this fireside—and the country gentleman who, in all his great house, would never more find the easy heart and clear conscience which were natural to this atmosphere. He stood there, and looked down on the old domestic centre, and asked himself if it was worth the terrible sacrifice; honour and honesty and truth—and all to keep Brownlows for Sara, to preserve the greys, and the flowers, and the park, and Jack's wonderful mare, and all the superfluities that these young creatures treated so lightly? Was it worth the price? This was the question he was asking himself, while his visitor, in her chair between him and the window, spoke of her gratitude. But there was no trace in his face, even if she could have seen it, that he had descended into the very depths, and was debating with himself a matter of life and death. When her voice ceased, Mr Brownlow's self-debate ceased too, coming to a sharp and sudden end, as if it was only under cover of her words that it could pass unnoted. Then he came towards her slowly, and took the chair opposite

to her, and met her eye. The colour had gone out of his face, but he was too self-possessed and experienced a man to show what the struggle was through which he had just come. And the poor woman thought it so natural that he should be full of thought. Was he not considering, in his wonderful kindness, what he could do for her boy?

"I will do what you ask me," he said. "It may be difficult, but I will try. Don't thank me, for you don't know whether I shall succeed. I will do—what I can. I will speak to your son, perhaps to-morrow—the earliest opportunity I have. You were quite right to come. And—you may—trust him—to me," said Mr Brownlow. He did not mean to say these last words. What was it that drew them—dragged them from his lips? "You may trust him to me." He even repeated it twice, wondering at himself all the while, and not knowing what he meant. As for poor Mrs Powys, she was overwhelmed by her gratitude.

"Oh, sir, with all my heart," she cried,—"him, and all my hopes in this world!" And then she bade God bless him, who was so good to her and her boy. Yes, that was the worst of it. John Brownlow felt that but too clearly all through. It was hard enough to struggle with himself, with his own conscience and instincts; but behind all there was

another struggle which would be harder still—the struggle with God, to whom this woman would appeal, and who, he was but too clearly aware, knew all about it. But sufficient unto the moment was its own conflict. He took his hat, and took his visitor down-stairs, and answered the amazed looks of the housekeeper, who came to see what this unusual disturbance meant, with a few words of explanation, and shook hands with Mrs Powys at the door. The sunset glow had only just gone, so short a time had this conversation really occupied, though it involved so much, and the first magical tone of twilight had fallen into the evening air. When Mr Brownlow left the office door he went straight on, and did not remember the carriage that was waiting for him. He was so much absorbed by his own affairs, and had so many things to think of, that even the strength of habit failed him. Without knowing, he set out walking upon the well-known way. Probably the mere fact of movement was a solace to him. He went along steadily by the budding hedgerows and the little gardens and the cottage doors, and did not know it. What he was really doing was holding conversation with young Powys, conversations with his children, all mingled and penetrated with one long never-ending conflict with himself. He had been passive hitherto, now he would

have to be active. He had contented himself simply with keeping back the knowledge which after all it was not his business to communicate. Now, if he was to gain his object, he must do positively what he had hitherto done negatively. He must mislead —he must contradict—he must lie. The young man's knowledge of his rights, if they were his rights, must be very imperfect. To confuse him, to deceive him, to destroy all possible evidence, to use every device to lose his time and blind his eyes, was what Mr Brownlow had now to do.

And there can be no doubt that, but for the intervention of personal feelings, it would have been an easy thing enough to do. If there had been no right and wrong involved, no personal advantage or loss, how very simple a matter to make this youth, who had such perfect confidence in him, believe as he pleased; and how easy after to make much of young Powys, to advance him, to provide for him—to do a great deal better for him, in short, than he could do for himself with old Mrs Thomson's fifty thousand pounds! If there was no right and wrong involved! Mr Brownlow walked on and on as he thought, and never once observed the length of the way. One thing in the world he could not do—that was, to take away all the sweet indulgences with which he had surrounded her, the delights, the

luxuries, the position, from his child. He could not reduce Sara to be Brownlow the solicitor's daughter in the dark old-fashioned house at Masterton. He went over all her pretty ways to himself as he went on. He saw her gliding about the great house which seemed her natural sphere. He saw her receiving his guests, people who would not have known her, or would at least have patronised her from a very lofty distance, had she been in that house at Masterton; he saw her rolling forth in her pretty carriage with the greys, which were the envy of the county. All these matters were things for which, in his own person, John Brownlow cared not a straw. He did not care even to secure them for his son, who was a man and had his profession, and was no better than himself; but Sara—— And then the superb little princess she was to the rest of the world! the devoted little daughter she was to him! Words of hers came somehow dropping into his ears as the twilight breathed around him. How she had once said—— Good heavens! what was that she had said?

All at once Mr Brownlow awoke. He found himself walking on the Dewsbury road, instead of driving, as he ought to have been. He remembered that the dogcart was waiting for him in the market-place. He became aware that he had forgotten himself, forgot-

ten everything, in the stress and urgency of his thoughts. What was the galvanic touch that brought him back to consciousness? The recollection of half-a-dozen words once spoken by his child — girlish words, perhaps forgotten as soon as uttered; yet when he stopped, and turned round to see how far he had come, though he had been walking very moderately and the evening was not warm, a sudden rush of colour, like a girl's blush, had come to his face. If the mare had been in sight, in her wildest mood, it would have been a relief to him to seize the reins, and fight it out with her, and fly on, at any risk, away from that spot, away from that thought, away from the suggestion so humbling, so saving, so merciful and cruel, which had suddenly entered his mind. But the mare was making everybody very uncomfortable in the market-place at Masterton, and could not aid her master to escape from himself. Then he turned again, and went on. It was a seven-miles' walk, and he had come three parts of the way; but even the distance that remained was long to a man who had suddenly fallen into company with a new idea which he would rather not entertain. He felt the jar in all his limbs from this sudden electric shock. Sara had said it, it was true—she had meant it. He had her young life in his hands, and he could save Brownlows to her, and yet save his soul. Which

was the most to be thought of, his soul or her happiness?—that was the question. Such was the sudden tumult that ran through John Brownlow's veins. He seemed to be left there alone in the country quiet, in the soft twilight, under the dropping dew, to consider it, shut out from all counsel or succour of God or man. Man he himself shut out, locking his secret in his own breast—God! whom he knew his last struggle was to be with, whom that woman had insisted on bringing in, a party to the whole matter—was not He standing aside, in a terrible stillness, a spectator, waiting to see what would come of it, refusing all participation? Would God any more than man approve of this way of saving John Brownlow's soul? But the more he tried to escape from it the more it came back. She had said it, and she had meant it, with a certain sweet scorn of life's darker chances, and faith unbounded in her father, of all men, who was God's deputy to the child. Mr Brownlow quickened his pace, walked faster and faster, till his heart thumped against his breast, and his breath came in gasps; but he could not go so fast as his thoughts, which went on before.

Thus he came to the gate of Brownlows before he knew. It was the prettiest evening scene. Twilight had settled down to the softest night; big stars, lambent and dilating, were coming softly out, as if to

look at something, out of the sweet blue. And it was no more dark than it was light. Old Betty, on her step, was sitting crooning, with many quavers, one of her old songs. And Pamela, who had just watered her flowers, leant over the gate, smiling, and listening with eyes that were very like the stars. Somehow this picture went to Mr Brownlow's heart. He went up to the child as he passed, and laid a kind hand upon her pretty head, on the soft rings of her dark hair. "Good-night, little one," he said, quite softly, with that half-shame which a man feels when he betrays that he has a heart in him. He had never taken so much notice of her before. It was partly because anything associated with Sara touched him to the quick at this moment; partly for her own sake, and for the sake of the dews and stars; and partly that his mind was overstrained and tottering. "Poor little thing," he said to himself, as he went up the avenue, "she is nobody, and she is happy." With this passing thought, Mr Brownlow fell once more into the hands of his demon, and, thus agitated and struggling, reached his home.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEXT morning Mr Brownlow was not well enough to go to business. He was not ill. He repeated the assurance a score of times to himself and to his children. He had not slept well, that was all—and perhaps a day's rest, a little quiet and tranquillity, would do him good. He had got up at his usual hour, and was down to breakfast, and read his paper, and everything went on in its ordinary way; but yet he was indisposed—and a day's rest would do him good. Young John assented heartily, and was very willing to take his father's place for the day and manage all his business. It was a bright morning, and the room was full of flowers, and the young leaves fluttered at the windows in the earliest green of spring. It was exhilarating to stand in the great recesses of the windows and look out upon the park, all green and budding, and think it was all yours and your children's—a sort of feeling which had

little effect upon the young people, but was sweet yet overwhelming to their father as he stood and looked out in the quiet of the morning. All his—all theirs; yet perhaps——

"I don't think I shall go down to-day," he said. "You can tell Wrinkell to send me up the papers in the Wardell case. He knows what I want. He can send the—the new clerk up with them—Powys I mean."

"Powys?" said Jack.

"Well, yes, Powys. Is there any reason why he should not send Powys?" said Mr Brownlow, peremptorily, feeling hot and conscious, and ready to take offence.

"No, certainly," said Jack, with some surprise. He did not take to Powys, that was unquestionable; yet the chances are he would never have remarked upon Mr Brownlow's choice of him but for the curious impatience and peremptoriness in his father's tone.

"I like him," said Mr Brownlow—"he knows what he has to do, and—he does it. I like a man who does that—it gives one confidence for the time to come."

"Yes," said Jack. "I never cared for him, sir, as you know. He is not my ideal of a clerk—but that don't matter; only I rather think Wrinkell has

changed his opinion lately. The young fellow gets on well enough—but there is a difference. I suppose that sort of extra punctuality and virtue can only last a certain time."

"I daresay these are very fine notions, Jack," said his father; "but I am not quite such an accomplished man of the world, I suppose, as if I had been brought up at Eton. I believe in virtue lasting a long time. You must bear with my old-fashioned prejudices." This Mr Brownlow said in a way which puzzled Jack, for he was not a man given to sneers.

"Of course, if you take it like that, sir, I have not another word to say," said the young man, and he went away feeling bitterly hostile to Powys, who seemed to be the cause of it all. He said to himself that to be snubbed on account of a clerk was a new experience, and lost himself in conjectures as to the cause of this unexplained partiality—"a fellow who is going to the bad and all," Jack said to himself; and his feeling was somewhat vindictive, and he did not feel so sorry as he ought to have done that Powys was going to the bad. It seemed on the whole a kind of retribution. Mr Wrinkell himself had been sent for to Brownlows on various occasions, but it was not an honour that had been accorded to any of the clerks; and now this young fellow, whose appear-

ance and conduct had both begun to be doubtful, was to have the privilege. Jack did not comprehend it; uneasy unexpressed suspicions came into his mind, all utterly wide of the mark, yet not the less uncomfortable. The mare was a comfort to him as she went off in one of her long dashes, without ever taking breath, like an arrow down the avenue; and so was the momentary glimpse of a little face at the window, to which he took off his hat; but notwithstanding these consolations, he was irritated and somewhat disturbed. On account of a cad! He had no right to give such a title to his father's favourite; but still it must be allowed that it was a little hard.

"Who is Powys?" said Sara, when her brother was gone. "And why are you angry, papa? You are cross, you know, and that is not like you. I am afraid you must be ill."

"Cross, am I?" said Mr Brownlow. "I suppose I am not quite well—I told you I had a bad night."

"Yes——but what has Powys to do with it?—and who is he?" said Sara, looking into his face.

Then various possibilities rushed into her father's mind; should he tell her what he was going to ask of her? Should he claim her promise and hold her to her word? Should he make an attempt, the only one possible, to secure for himself a confidant

and counsellor? Ah, no! that was out of the question. He might sully his own honour, but never, never his child's. And he felt, even with a certain exultation, that his child would not have yielded to the temptation—that she would balk him instead of obeying him, did she know why. He felt this in his inmost mind, and he was glad. She would do what he asked her, trusting in him, and in her it would be a virtue—only his should be the sin.

"Who is he?" he said, with a doubtful smile which resulted from his own thoughts and not from her question. "You will know who he is before long. I want to be civil to him, Sara. He is not just like any other clerk. I would bring him, if you would not be shocked—to lunch——"

"Shocked!" said Sara, with one of her princess airs—"I am not a great lady. You are Mr Brownlow the solicitor, papa—I hope I know my proper place."

"Yes," said John Brownlow; but the words brought an uneasy colour to his face, and confounded him in the midst of his projects. To keep her from being merely Mr Brownlow the solicitor's daughter, he was going to soil his own honour and risk her happiness; and yet it was thus that she asserted her condition whenever she had a chance. He left her as soon as he could, taking no such advantage of his unusual holiday as Sara supposed he would. He left

the breakfast-room which was so bright, and wandered away into the library, a room which, busy man as he was, he occupied very seldom. It was of all the rooms in Brownlows the one which had most appearance of having been made by a new proprietor. There were books in it, to be sure, which had belonged to the Brownlows, the solicitors, for generations; but these were not half or quarter part enough to fill the room, which was larger than any two rooms in the High Street—and consequently it had been necessary to fill the vacant space with ranges upon ranges of literature out of the bookseller's, which had not mellowed on the shelves, nor come to belong to them by nature. Mr Brownlow did not think of this, but yet he was somehow conscious of it when, with the prospect of a long unoccupied day before him, he went into this room. It was on the other side of the house, turned away from the sunshine, and looking out upon nothing but evergreens, sombre corners of shrubberies, and the paths which led to the kitchen and stables. He went in and sat down by the table, and looked round at all the shelves, and drew a blotting-book towards him mechanically. What did he want with it? he had no letters to write there—nothing to do that belonged to that luxurious leisurely place. If there was work to be done, it was at the office that he ought to do it. He had not the habit

of writing here—nor even of reading. The handsome library had nothing to do with his life. This, perhaps, was why he established himself in it on the special day of which we speak. It seemed to him as if any moment his fine house might topple down about his ears like a house of cards. He had thought over it in the High Street till he was sick and his head swam; perhaps some new light might fall on the subject if he were to think of it here. This was why he established himself at the table, making in his leisure a pretence to himself of having something to do. If he had been used to any sort of guile or dishonourable dealing, the chances are it would have been easier for him; but it is hard upon a man to change the habits of his life. John Brownlow had to maintain with himself a fight harder than that which a man ordinarily has to fight against temptation; for the fact was that this was far, very far from being his case. He was not tempted to do wrong. It was the good impulse which in his mind had come to be the thing to be struggled against. What he wanted was to do what was right; but with all the steadiness of a virtuous resolution he had set himself to struggle against his impulse and to do wrong.

Here was the state of the case: He had found, as he undoubtedly believed, the woman whom more than twenty years ago he had given him-

self so much trouble to find. She was here, a poor woman—to whom old Mrs Thomson's fifty thousand pounds would be equal to as many millions—with a son, whose every prospect would be changed, whose life would begin on a totally different level, if his legitimate inheritance came to him as it ought: this was all very distinct and clear. But, on the other hand, to withdraw that fifty thousand pounds from his own affairs at this moment, would be next to ruin to John Brownlow. It would be a loss to him of almost as much more. It would reduce him again hopelessly to the character of the country solicitor—a character which he had not abandoned, which he had, in short, rather prided himself in keeping up, but which was very different, in conjunction with his present standing in the county, from what it would be were he Brownlow the solicitor alone. And then there was the awful question of interest, which ought to have been accumulating all these five-and-twenty years. He thought to himself, as he reflected, that his best course would have been to reject young Powys's application at the very first, and throw him off, and leave him to find occupation where he could. Then, if the young man had discovered anything, it would at least have been a fair fight. But he had of his own will entered into relations with him; he had him under his eyes day by day, a standing temptation

a standing reproach; he had kept his enemy close by him to make discoveries that otherwise he probably never would have made; and Powys had made discoveries. At any moment the demand might come which should change the character of the position altogether. All this was old ground over which he had gone time after time. There was nothing new in it but the sudden remedy which had occurred to him on the previous night as he walked home. He had not as yet confessed to himself that he had accepted that suggestion, and yet only half voluntarily he had taken the first steps to bring it about. It was a remedy almost as bad as the original danger—very unpalatable, very mortifying—but it was better than utter downfall. By moments Mr Brownlow's heart revolted altogether against it. It was selling his child, even though it was for her own sake—it was taking advantage of her best instincts, and of her rash girlish readiness to put her future into his hands.

And there were also other questions involved. When it came to the point, would Sara hold by her promise—had she meant it, in earnest, as a real promise when she made it? She was a girl who would do anything, everything for her father's sake, in the way of self-sacrifice; but would she understand sacrificing herself to save, not her father,

but Brownlows? All these were very doubtful questions. Mr Brownlow, who had never before been in anybody's power, who knew nothing about mysteries, found himself now, as it were, in everybody's power, threading a darkling way, from which his own efforts could never deliver him. He was in the power of young Powys, who any day could come to his door and demand—how much? any sum almost—his whole fortune—with no alternative but that of a lawsuit, which would take his good name as well. He was in the power of his son, who, if he heard of it, might simplify matters very summarily, and the chances were would do so; and he was in the power of Sara, who could save him if she would — save him not only from the consequences but from the sin—save his conscience and his credit, and her own position. Why should not she do it? Young Powys was poor, and perhaps not highly educated; but he was pleasanter to look at, more worth talking to, than Sir Charles Motherwell. If he gave his daughter to this youth, John Brownlow felt that he would do more than merely make him amends for having taken his inheritance. It would be restoring the inheritance to him, and giving him over and above it something that was worth more than compound interest—worth more than any fortune under the sun.

When he had come to this point, however, a revulsion occurred in his thoughts. How could he think of marrying his child, his Sara, she of whom he had made a kind of princess, who might marry anybody, as people say—how could he give her to a nameless young man in his office? What would the world say? What inquiries, what suspicions would arise, if he gave up his house and all its advantages to a young fellow without a penny? And then Sara herself, so delicate in all her tastes, so daintily brought up, so difficult to please! If she were so little fastidious at the end, what would be thought of it? She had refused Sir Charles Motherwell, if not actually yet tacitly—and Sir Charles had many advantages, and was very nearly the greatest man in the county—refused him, and now was going to take her father's uncultivated clerk. Would she, could she do it? was it a thing he ought to ask of her? or was it not better that he should take it upon his conscience boldly to deceive and wrong the stranger than to put such a burden on the delicate shoulders of his child?

Thus he passed the morning, driven about from one idea to another and feeling little comfort in any, longing for Powys's arrival, that he might read in his eyes how much he knew, and yet fearing it, lest he might know too much. If any of his clients

had come to him in such a state of mind, John Brownlow would have looked upon that man with a certain pity mingled with contempt, and while advising him to his best would have said to himself, How weak all this shilly-shally is! one way or other let something be decided. But it is a very different matter deciding on one's own affairs and on the affairs of other people. Even at that moment, notwithstanding his own agitation and mental distress, had he been suddenly called upon for counsel he could have given it clearly and fully —the thing was, that he could not advise himself.

And to aggravate matters, while he sat thus thinking it all over and waiting for Powys, and working himself up almost to the point of preparing for a personal contest with him, the Rector chanced to call, and was brought triumphantly into the library. "Papa is so seldom at home," Sara had said, with a certain exultation; "come and see him." And Mr Hardcastle was exultant too. "How lucky that I should have come to-day of all others," he said. "One never sees you by daylight."

"Well, yes," said Mr Brownlow, who was cross and out of temper in spite of himself; "I am visible by daylight to everybody on the road between this and Masterton. I don't think I shut myself up."

"That's exactly what I mean," said the Rector; "but you have been overdoing it, Brownlow. You're ill. I always told you you ought to give yourself more leisure. A man at your time of life is not like a young fellow. We can't do it, my dear sir —we can't do it. I am up to as much as most men of my age; but it won't do both morning and night —I have found that out."

"It suits me very well," said Mr Brownlow. "I am not ill, thank you. I had a restless night—rather——"

"Ah, that's just it," said Mr Hardcastle. "The brain is fatigued—that is what it is. And you ought to take warning. It is the beginning of so many things. For instance, last year when my head was so bad——"

"Don't speak of it," said Mr Brownlow. "My head is not bad; I am all right. I have a—a clerk coming with some papers: that is what I am waiting for. Is Fanny with you to-day?"

"No," said Mr Hardcastle. "They have begun to have her up at Ridley more than I care to see her. And there is that young Keppel, you know. Not that he means anything, I suppose. Indeed, I thought he was devoted to Sara a short time ago. Ah, my dear Brownlow, it is a difficult matter for us, left as we both are with young girls who have never known maternal care——"

It was not a moment when Mr Brownlow could enter upon such a subject. But he instinctively changed his expression, and looked solemn and serious, as the occasion demanded. Poor Bessie! —he had probably been a truer lover to her than the Rector had been to the two Mrs Hardcastles, though she had not been in his mind just then; but he felt bound to put on the necessary melancholy look.

"Yes," he said; "no doubt it is difficult. My clerk is very late. He ought to have been here at twelve. I have a good many pressing matters of business just now——"

"I see, I see; you have no time for private considerations," said the Rector. "Don't overdo it, don't overdo it,—that is all I have got to say. Remember what a condition I was in only two years since—took no pleasure in anything. Man delighted me not, nor woman either—not even my little Fanny. If ever there was a miserable state on earth, it is that. I see a fine tall young fellow straying about there among the shrubberies. Is that your clerk?"

Mr Brownlow got up hastily and came to the window, and there beyond all question was Powys, who had lost his way, and had got involved in the maze of paths which divided the evergreens.

It was a curious way for him to approach the house, and he was not the man to seek a back entrance, however humble his circumstances had been. But anyhow it was he, and he had got confused, and stood under one of the great laurels, looking at the way to the stables, and the way to the kitchen, feeling that neither way was his way, and not knowing where to turn. Mr Brownlow opened the window and called to him. Many a day after he thought of it, with that vague wonder which such symbolical circumstances naturally excite. It did not seem important enough to be part of the symbolism of Providence at the moment. Yet it was strange to remember that it was thus the young man was brought into the house. Mr Brownlow set the window open, and watched him as he came forward, undeniably a fine tall young fellow, as Mr Hardcastle said. Somehow a kind of pride in his good looks, such as a father might have felt, came into John Brownlow's mind. Sir Charles, with his black respirator, was not to be named in the same day with young Powys, so far as appearance went. He was looking as he did when he first came to the office, fresh, and frank, and open-hearted. Those appearances which had so troubled the mind of Mr Wrinkell and alarmed Mr Brownlow himself, were not visible in his open counte-

nance. He came forward with his firm and rapid step, not the step of a dweller in streets. And Mr Hardcastle, who had a slight infusion of muscular Christianity in his creed, could not refrain from admiration.

"That is not much like what one looks for in a lawyer's clerk," said the Rector. "What a chest that young fellow has got! Who is he, Brownlow?—not a Masterton man, I should think."

"He is a Canadian," said Mr Brownlow, "not very long in the office, but very promising. He has brought me some papers that I must attend to——"

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Mr Hardcastle—"always business; but I shall stay to luncheon as you are at home. I suppose you mean to allow yourself some lunch?"

"Surely," said Mr Brownlow; but it was impossible to reply otherwise than coldly. He had wanted no spy upon his actions, nobody to speculate on what he meant in the strange step he was about to take. He could not send his neighbour away; but at the same time he could not be cordial to him as if he desired his company. And then he turned to speak to his clerk, leaving the Rector, who went away in a puzzled state of mind, wondering whether Mr Brownlow meant to be rude to him. As for young Powys, he came in by the window,

taking off his hat, and looking at his employer with an honest mixture of amusement and embarrassment. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said; "I had lost my way; I don't know where I was going——"

"You were going to the stables," said Mr Brownlow, "where I daresay you would have found something much more amusing than with me. Come in. You are later than I expected. How is it you did not come up in the dogcart? My son should have thought of that."

"He did not say anything about it," said Powys, "but I liked the walk. Mr Wrinkell told me to bring you these, sir. They are the papers in the Wardell case; and he gave me some explanations which I was to repeat to you—some new facts that have just come out——"

"Sit down," said Mr Brownlow. He gave the young man a seat at his table, and resumed his own, and drew the papers to him. But he was not thinking of the papers or of the Wardell case. His attention was fixed upon his young companion. Perhaps it was the walk, perhaps some new discovery, perhaps because he began to see his way to the recovery of that which John Brownlow was determined not to give up, but certainly his eye was as bright and his colour as fresh as when he had first come to the office innocent and unsuspecting. He sat down with

none of the affectation either of humility or of equality which a Masterton youth of his position would have shown. He was not afraid of his employer, who had been kind to him, and his transatlantic ideas made him feel the difference between them, though great in the mean time, to be rather a difference of time than of class. Such at least was the unconscious feeling in his mind. It is true that he had begun to learn that more things than time, or even industry and brains, are necessary in an old and long-constituted social system, but his new knowledge had not affected his instincts. He was respectful, but he did not feel himself out of place in Mr Brownlow's library. He took his seat, and looked round him with the interest of a man free to observe or even comment, which, considering that even Mr Wrinkell was rather disposed at Brownlows to sit on the edge of his chair, was a pleasant variety. Mr Brownlow drew the papers to him, and bent over them, leaning his head on both his hands; but the fact was, he was looking at Powys from under that cover, fixing his anxious gaze upon him, reading what was in the unsuspicious face—what was in it, and most likely a great deal which was not in it. When he had done this for some minutes he suddenly raised his head, removed his hands from his forehead to his chin, and looked steadily at his young companion.

"I will attend to these by-and-by," he said, abruptly; "in the mean time, my young friend, I have something to say to you."

Then Powys, whose eyes had been fixed upon a dark picture over and beyond, at some distance, Mr Brownlow's head, came to himself suddenly, and met the look fixed upon him. The elder man thought there was a little defiance in the glance which the younger cast upon him; but this is one of the things in which one sees always what one is prepared to see. Powys, for his part, was not in the least defiant; he was a little surprised, a little curious, eager to hear and reply, but he was utterly unconscious of the sentiments which the other read in his eyes.

"I thought a little while ago," said Mr Brownlow, in his excitement going further than he meant to go, "that I had found in you one of the best clerks that ever I had."

Here he stopped for a moment, and Powys regarded him open-mouthed, waiting for more. His frank face clouded over a little when he saw that Mr Brownlow made a pause. "I was going to say, Thank you, sir," said the young man; "and indeed I do say, Thank you; but am I to understand that you don't think so now?"

"I don't know what to think," said Mr Brownlow. "I take more interest in you than—than I am in

the habit of taking in a—in a stranger; but they tell me at the office there is a change, and I see there is a change. It has been suggested to me that you were going to the bad, which I don't believe; and it has been suggested to me that you had something on your mind——"

The young man had changed colour, as indeed he could scarcely help doing; his *amour propre* was still as lively and as easily excited as is natural to his age. "If you are speaking of my duties in the office, sir," he said, "you have a perfect right to speak; but I don't suppose they could be influenced one way or another by the fact that I had something on my mind——"

"I am not speaking to you so much as your employer as—as your friend," said Mr Brownlow. "You know the change has been visible. People have spoken about it to me—not perhaps the people you would imagine to have interfered. And I want to speak to you as an old man may speak to a young man—as I should wish, if the circumstances made it needful, any one would speak to my son. Why do you smile?"

"I beg your pardon, sir; but I could not but smile at the thought of Mr John——"

"Never mind Mr John," said Mr Brownlow, discomfited. "He has his way, and we have ours.

don't set up my son as an example. The thing is, that I should be glad if you would take me into your confidence. If anything is wrong I might be able to help you; and if you have something on your mind——"

"Mr Brownlow," said young Powys, with a deep blush, "I am very sorry to seem ungrateful, but a man, if he is good for anything, must have something he keeps to himself. If it is about my work, I will hear whatever you please to say to me, and make whatever explanations you require. I am not going to the bad; but for anything else, I think I have a right to my own mind."

"I don't deny it—I don't deny it," said Mr Brownlow, anxiously. "Don't think I want to thrust myself into your affairs; but if either advice or help——"

"Thank you," said the young man. He smiled, and once more Mr Brownlow, though not imaginative, put a thousand meanings into the smile. "I will be more attentive to my work," he said; "perhaps I have suffered my own thoughts to interfere with me. Thank you, sir, for your kindness. I am very glad that you have given me this warning."

"But it does not tempt you to open your heart," said Mr Brownlow, smiling too, though not with very pleasurable feelings.

"There is nothing in my heart that is worth opening," said Powys; "nothing but my own small affairs—thank you heartily all the same."

This is how Mr Brownlow was baffled notwithstanding his superior age and prudence and skill. He sat silent for a time with that curious feeling of humiliation and displeasure which attends a defeat even when nobody is to be blamed for it. Then by way of saving his dignity he drew once more towards him the Wardell papers and studied them in silence. As for the young man, he resumed, but with a troubled mind, his examination of the dark old picture. Perhaps his refusal to open his heart arose as much from the fact that he had next to nothing to tell as from any other reason, and the moment that the conversation ceased his heart misgave him. Young Powys was not one of the people possessed by a blessed certainty that the course they themselves take is the best. As soon as he had closed his mouth a revulsion of feeling came upon him. He seemed to himself hard-hearted, ungrateful, odious, and sat thinking over all Mr Brownlow's kindness to him, and his detestable requital of that kindness, and asking himself how he could recommence the interrupted talk. What could he say to show that he was very grateful, and a devoted servant, notwithstanding that there was a corner of his

heart which he could not open up? or must he continue to lie under this sense of having disappointed and refused to confide in so kind a friend? A spectator would have supposed the circumstances unchanged had he seen the lawyer seated calmly at the table looking over his papers, and his clerk at a little distance respectfully waiting his employer's pleasure; but in the breast of the young man, who was much too young to be sure of himself, there was a wonderful change. He seemed to himself to have made a friend into an enemy—to have lost his vantage-ground in Mr Brownlow's good opinion, and above all to have been ungrateful and unkind. Thus they sat in dead silence till the bell for luncheon—the great bell which amused Pamela, bringing a lively picture before her of all that was going on at the great house—began to sound into the stillness. Then Mr Brownlow stirred, gathered his papers together, and rose from his chair. Powys sat still, not knowing what to do; and it may be imagined what his feelings were when his employer spoke.

"Come along, Powys," said Mr Brownlow—"you have had a long walk, and you must be hungry—come and have some lunch."

CHAPTER XV.

LUNCHEON.

It was like a dream to the young Canadian when he followed the master of the house into the dining-room;—not that *that*, or any other social privilege, would have struck the youth with astonishment or exultation as it would have done a young man from Masterton; but because he had just behaved so ungratefully and ungraciously, and had no right to any such recompense. He had heard enough in the office about Brownlows to know that it was an unprecedented honour that was being paid him; but it was the coals of fire thus heaped upon his head which he principally felt. Sara was already at the head of the table in all that perfection of dainty apparel which dazzles the eyes of people unused to it. Naturally the stranger knew nothing about any one particular of her dress, but he felt, without knowing how, the difference between that costly

simplicity and all the finery of the women he was accustomed to see. It was a different sphere and atmosphere altogether from any he had ever entered; and the only advantage he had over any of his fellow-clerks who might have been introduced in the same way was, that he had mastered the first grand rule of good-breeding, and had forgotten himself. He had no time to think how he ought to behave in his own person. His mind was too much occupied by the novelty of the sphere into which he was thus suddenly brought. Sara inclined her head graciously as he was brought in, and was not surprised; but as for Mr Hardcastle, whose seat was just opposite that of young Powys, words could not express his consternation. One of the clerks! Mr Brownlow the solicitor was not such a great man himself that he should feel justified in introducing his clerks at his table; and after that, what next? A rapid calculation passed through Mr Hardcastle's mind as he stared at the new-comer. If this sort of thing was to go on, it would have to be looked to. If Mr Brownlow thought it right for Sara, he certainly should not think it right for his Fanny. Jack Brownlow himself, with Brownlows perhaps, and at least a large share of his father's fortune, was not to be despised; but the clerks! The Rector even felt himself injured—though, to be sure, young Powys or

any other clerk could not have dreamed of paying addresses to him. And it must be admitted that the conversation was not lively at table. Mr Brownlow was embarrassed as knowing his own intentions, which, of course, nobody else did. Mr Hardcastle was astonished and partially affronted. And Powys kept silence. Thus there was only Sara to keep up a little appearance of animation at the table. It is at such moments that the true superiority of womankind really shows itself. She was not embarrassed—the social difference which, as she thought, existed between her and her father's clerk was so great and complete that Sara felt herself as fully at liberty to be gracious to him, as if he had been his own mother or sister. "If Mr Powys walked all the way he must want his luncheon, papa," she said. "Don't you think it is a pretty road? Of course it is not grand like your scenery in Canada. We don't have any Niagaras in England; but it is pleasant, don't you think?"

"It is very pleasant," said young Powys; "but there are more things in Canada than Niagara."

"I suppose so," said Sara, who was rather of opinion that he ought to have been much flattered by her allusion to Canada; "and there are prettier places in England than Dewsbury—but still people who belong to it are fond of it all the same. Mr Hard-

castle, this is the dish you are so fond of—are you ill, like papa, that you don't eat to-day?"

"Not ill, my dear," said the Rector, with meaning —"only like your papa, a little out of sorts."

"I don't know why people should be out of sorts who have everything they can possibly want," said Sara. "I think it is wicked both of papa and you. If you were poor men in the village, with not enough for your children to eat, you would know better than to be out of sorts. I am sure it would do us all a great deal of good if we were suddenly ruined," the young woman continued, looking her father, as it happened, full in the face. Of course she did not mean anything. It came into her head all at once to say this, and she said it; but equally of course it fell with a very different significance on her father's ears. He changed colour in spite of himself—he dropped on his plate a morsel he was carrying to his mouth. A sick sensation came over him. Sara did not know very much about the foundation of his fortune, but still she knew something; and she was just as likely as not to let fall some word which would throw final illumination upon the mind of the young stranger. Mr Brownlow smiled a sickly sort of smile at her from the other end of the table.

"Don't use such strong language," he said. "Being ruined means with Sara going to live in a

cottage covered with roses, and taking care of one's aged father; but, my darling, your father is not yet old enough to give in to being ruined, even should such a chance happen to us. So you must make up your mind to do without the cottage. The roses you can have, as many as you like."

"Sara means by ruin, that is to say," said the Rector, "something rather better than the best that I have been able to struggle into, and nothing to do for it. I should accept her ruin with all my heart."

"You are laughing at me," said Sara, "both of you. Fanny would know if she were here. You understand, don't you, Mr Powys? What do I care for cottages or roses? but if one were suddenly brought face to face with the realities of life——"

"You have got that out of a book, Sara," said the Rector.

"And if I have, Mr Hardcastle?" said Sara. "I hope some books are true. I know what I mean, whether you know it or not. And so does Mr Powys," she added, suddenly meeting the stranger's eye.

This appeal was unlucky, for it neutralised the amusement of the two elder gentlemen, and brought them back to their starting-point. It was a mistake in every way, for Powys, though he was looking on

with interest and wonder, did not understand what Sara meant. He looked at her when she spoke, and reddened, and faltered something, and then betook himself to his plate with great assiduity, to hide his perplexity. He had never known anything but the realities of life. He had known them in their most primitive shape, and he was beginning to become acquainted with them still more bitterly in the shape they take in the midst of civilisation, when poverty has to contend with more than the primitive necessities. And to think of this dainty creature, whose very air that she breathed seemed different from that of his world, desiring to be brought face to face with such realities! He had been looking at her with great reverence, but now there mingled with his reverence just that shade of conscious superiority which a man likes to feel. He was not good, sweet, delightsome, celestial, as she was, but he knew better —precious distinction between the woman and the man.

But Sara, always thinking of him as so different from herself that she could use freedom with him, was not satisfied. "*You* understand me?" she said, repeating her appeal.

"No," said young Powys; "at least if it is real poverty she speaks of, I don't think Miss Brownlow can know what it means." He turned to her father

as he spoke with the instinct of natural good-breeding. And thereupon there occurred a curious change. The two gentlemen began to approve of the stranger. Sara, who up to this moment had been so gracious, approved of him no more.

"You are quite right," said the Rector; "what Miss Brownlow is thinking of is an imaginary poverty which exists no longer—if it ever existed. If your father had ever been a poor curate, my dear Sara, like myself, for instance——"

"Oh, if you are all going to turn against me——" said Sara, with a little shrug of her shoulders. And she turned away as much as she could do it without rudeness from the side of the table at which young Powys sat, and began in revenge to talk society. "So Fanny is at Ridley," she said; "what does she mean by always being at Ridley? The Keppels are very well, but they are not so charming as that comes to. Is there any one nice staying there just now?"

"Perhaps you and I should not agree about niceness," said the Rector. "There are several people down for Easter. There is Sir Joseph Scrape, for instance, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer once, before you were born. I am very fond of him, but you would prefer his grandson, Sara, if he happened to have a grandson."

"On the contrary, I like old gentlemen," said Sara. "I never see anything else, for one thing. There is yourself, Mr Hardcastle, and papa——"

"Well, I suppose I am an old gentleman," said the Rector, ruefully; "at least to babies like you. This is how things go in this world—one shifts the burden on to one's neighbour. Probably Sir Joseph is of my mind, and thinks somebody else old. And then, in revenge, we have nothing to do but to call you young creatures babies, though you have the world in your hands," Mr Hardcastle added, with a sigh; for he was a vigorous man, and a widower, and had been already twice married, and saw no reason why he should not take that step again. And it was hard upon him to be called an old gentleman in this unabashed and open way.

"Well, they have the world before them," said Mr Brownlow; "but I am not so sure that they have it in their hands."

"We have nothing in our hands," said Sara, indignantly—"even I, though papa is awfully good to me. I don't mean to speak slang, but he is *awfully* good, you know; but what does it matter? I daren't go anywhere by myself, or do anything that everybody else doesn't do. And as for Fanny, she would not so much as take a walk if she thought you did not like it."

"Fanny is a very good girl," said Mr Hardcastle, with a certain melting in his voice.

"We are all very good girls," said Sara; "but what is the use of it? We have to do everything we are told just the same; and have old Lady Motherwell, for example, sitting upon one, whenever she has a chance. And then you say we have the world in our hands! If you were to let us do a little as we pleased, and be happy our own way——"

"Then you have changed your mind," said Mr Brownlow. He was smiling, but yet underneath that he was very serious, not able to refrain from giving in his mind a thousand times more weight than they deserved to his daughter's light and random words, though he knew well enough they were random and light. "I thought you were a dutiful child, who would do what I asked you, even in the most important transaction of your life—so you said once, at least."

"Anything you asked me, papa?" cried Sara, with a sudden change of countenance. "Yes, to be sure! anything! Not because I am dutiful, but because—you are surely all very stupid to-day—because—— Don't you know what I mean?"

"Yes," said young Powys, who all this time had not spoken a word. Perhaps in her impatience her eye had fallen upon him; perhaps it was because he

could not help it; but however that might be, the monosyllable sent a little electric shock round the table. As for the speaker himself, he had no sooner uttered it than he reddened like a girl up to his very hair. Sara started a little, and became suddenly silent, looking at the unexpected interpreter she had got; and as for the Rector, he stared with the air of a man who asks himself, What next?

The sudden pause thus made in the conversation by his inadvertent reply, confused the young man most of all. He felt it down to the very tips of his fingers. It went tingling through and through him, as if he were the centre of the electricity—as indeed he was. His first impulse, to get up and run away, of course could not be yielded to; and as luncheon was over by this time, and the servants gone, and the business of the meal over, it was harder than ever to find any shelter to retire behind. Despair at last, however, gave him a little courage. "I think, sir," he said, turning to Mr Brownlow, "if you have no commands for me that I had better go. Mr Wrinkell will want to know your opinion; unless, indeed——"

"I am not well enough for work," said Mr Brownlow, "and you may as well take a holiday as you are here. It will do you good. Go and look at the horses, and take a stroll in the park. Of course you

are fond of the country. I don't think there is much to see in the house——"

"If Mr Powys would like to see the Claude, I will take him into the drawing-room," said Sara, with all her originalbenignity. Powys, to tell the truth, did not very well know whether he was standing on his head, or on the other and more ordinary extremity. He was confounded by the grace showed to him. And being a backwoodsman by nature, and knowing not much more than Masterton in the civilised world, the fact is that at first, before he considered the matter, he had not an idea what a Claude was. But that made no difference; he was ready to have gone to Pandemonium if the same offer had been made to show the way. Not that he had fallen in love at first sight with the young mistress of Brownlows. He was too much dazzled, too much surprised for that; but he had understood what she meant, and the finest little delicate thread of *rapport* had come into existence between them. As for Sara's condescension and benignity, he liked it. Her brother would have driven him frantic with a tithe of the affability which Sara thought her duty under the circumstances; but from her it was what it ought to be. The young man did not think it was possible that such a privilege was to be accorded to him, but he looked at her gratefully, thanking her

with his eyes. And Sara looked at him, and for an instant saw into those eyes, and became suddenly sensible that it was not her father's clerk, but a man, a young man, to whom she had made this obliging offer. It was not an idea that had entered her head before; he was a clerk whom Mr Brownlow chose to bring in to luncheon. He might have been a hundred for anything Sara cared. Now, all at once it dawned upon her that the clerk was a man, and young, and also well-looking, a discovery which filled her with a certain mixture of horror and amusement. "Well, how was I to know?" she said to herself; although, to be sure, she had been sitting at the same table with him for about an hour.

"Certainly, if Powys likes, let him see the Claude; but I should think he would prefer the horses," said Mr Brownlow; and then Sara rose and shook out her long skirt, and made a little sign to the stranger to follow her. When the two young creatures disappeared, Mr Hardcastle, who had been staring at them, open-mouthed, turned round aghast and pale with consternation upon his friend.

"Brownlow, are you mad?" he said; "good heavens! if it was anybody but you I should think it was softening of the brain."

"It may be softening of the brain," said Mr

Brownlow, cheerfully; "I don't know what the symptoms are. What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" said the Rector—he had to stop and pour himself out a glass of wine to collect his faculties—"why, it looks as if you meant it. Send your clerk off with your child, a young fellow like that, as if they were equals! Your *clerk!* I should not permit it with my Fanny, I can tell you that."

"Do you think Sara will run away with him?" said Mr Brownlow, smiling. "I feel sure I can trust *him* not to do it. Why, what nonsense you are speaking! If you have no more confidence in my little friend Fanny, I have. *She* would be in no danger from my clerk if she were to see him every day, and show him all the pictures in the world."

"Oh, Fanny,—that is not the question," said the Rector, half suspicious of the praise, and half pleased. "It was Sara we were talking of. I don't believe she would care if a man was a chimney-sweep. You have inoculated her with your dreadful Radical ideas——"

"I? I am not a Radical," said Mr Brownlow; and he still smiled, though he entered into no further explanation. As for the Rector, he gulped down his wine, and subsided into his neckcloth, as he did when he was disturbed in his mind. He had no parallel in his experience to this amazing indiscre-

tion. Fanny?—no; to be sure Fanny was a very good girl, and knew her place better—she would not have offered to show the Claude, though it had been the finest Claude in the world, even to a curate, much less to a clerk. And then it seemed to Mr Hardcastle that Mr Brownlow's eyes looked very heavy, and that there were many tokens half visible about him of softening of the brain.

Meanwhile Sara went sweeping along the great wide fresh airy passages, and through the hall, and up the grand staircase. Her dress was of silk, and rustled—not a vulgar rustle, like that which announces some women offensively wherever they go, but a soft satiny silvery ripple of sound, which harmonised her going like a low accompaniment. Young Powys had only seen her for the first time that day, and he was a reasonable young fellow, and had not a thought of love or love-making in his mind. Love! as if anything so preposterous could ever arise between this young princess and a poor lawyer's clerk, maintaining his mother and his little sisters on sixty pounds a-year. But yet, he was a young man, and she was a girl; and following after her as he did, it was not in human nature not to behold and note the fair creature, with her glistening robes and her shining hair. Now and then, when she passed through a patch of sunshine from one of the windows, she

seemed to light up all over, and reflect it back again, and send forth soft rays of responsive light. Though she was so slender and slight, her step was as steady and free as his own, Canadian and backwoodsman as he was; and yet, as she moved, her pretty head swayed by times like the head of a tall lily upon the breeze, not with weakness, but with the flexile grace that belonged to her nature. Powys saw all this, and it bewitched him, though she was altogether out of his sphere. Something in the atmosphere about her went to his head. It was the most delicate intoxication that ever man felt, and yet it was intoxication in a way. He went up-stairs after her, feeling like a man in a dream, not knowing what fairy palace, what new event she might be leading him to; but quite willing and ready, under her guidance, to meet any destiny that might await him. The Claude was so placed in the great drawing-room that the actual landscape, so far as the mild greenness of the park could be called landscape, met your eye as you turned from the immortal landscape of the picture. Sara went straight up to it without a pause, and showed her companion where he was to stand. "This is the Claude," she said, with a majestic little wave of her hand by way of introduction. And the young man stood and looked at the picture, with her dress almost touching him. If he did not know much about the

Claude at the commencement, he knew still less now. But he looked into the clear depths of the picture with the most devout attention. There was a ripple of water, and a straight line of light gleaming down into it, penetrating the stream, and casting up all the crisp cool glistening wavelets against its own glow. But as for the young spectator, who was not a connoisseur, his head got confused somehow between the sun on Claude's ripples of water, and the sun as it had fallen in the hall upon Sara's hair and her dress.

"It is very lovely," he said, rather more because he thought it was the thing he ought to say than from any other cause.

"Yes," said Sara; "we are very proud of our Claude; but I should like to know why active men like papa should like those sort of pictures; he prefers landscapes to everything else—whereas they make me impatient. I want something that lives and breathes. I like pictures of life—not that one everlasting line of light fixed down upon the canvass with no possibility of change."

"I don't know much about pictures," said Powys—"but yet—don't you think it is less natural still to see one everlasting attitude—like that, for instance, on the other wall? People don't keep doing one particular thing all their lives."

"I should like to be a policeman and tell them to

move on," said Sara. "That woman there, who is giving the bread to the beggar—she has been the vexation of my life; why can't she give it and have done with it? I think I hate pictures—I don't see what we want with them. I always want to know what happened next."

"But nothing need happen at all here," said Powys, with unconscious comprehension, turning to the Claude again. He was a little out of his depth, and not used to this kind of talk, but more and more it was going to his head, and that intoxication carried him on.

"That is the worst of all," said Sara. "Why doesn't there come a storm?—what is the good of everything always being the same? That was what I meant down-stairs when you pretended you did not understand."

What was the poor young fellow to say? He was penetrated to his very heart by the sweet poison of this unprecedented flattery—for it was flattery, though Sara meant nothing more than the freemasonry of youth. She had forgotten he was a clerk, standing there before the Claude; she had even forgotten her own horror at the discovery that he was a man. He was young like herself, willing to follow her lead, and he "understood;" which after all, though Sara was not particularly wise, is the

true test of social capabilities. He did know what she meant, though in that one case he had not responded; and Sara, like everybody else of quick intelligence and rapid mind, met with a great many people who stared and did not know what she meant. This was why she did the stranger the honour of a half reproach. It brought the poor youth's intoxication to its height.

"But I don't think you understand," he said, ruefully, apologetically, pathetically, laying himself down at her feet, as it were, to be trod upon if she pleased—"you don't know how hard it is to be poor; so long as it is only one's self, perhaps, or so long as it is mere hardship, one can bear it; but there is worse than that; you have to feel yourself mean and sordid—you have to do shabby things. You have to put yourself under galling obligations; but I ought not to speak to you like this—that is what it really is to be poor."

Sara stood and looked at him, opening her eyes wider and wider. This was not in the least like the cottage with the roses: but she had forgotten her dream; what she was thinking of now was whether he was referring to his own case—whether his life was like that—whether her father could not do something for him; but for the natural grace of sympathy which restrained her, she would have

said so right out; but in her simplicity she said something very near as bad. "Mr Powys," she said, quite earnestly, "do you live in Masterton all alone?"

Then he woke up and came to himself. It was like falling from a great height, and finding one's feet, in a very confused, sheepish sort of way, on the common ground. And the thought crossed his mind, also, that she might think he was referring to himself, and made him still more sheepish and confused. But yet, now that he was roused, he was able to answer for himself. "No, Miss Brownlow," he said; "my mother and my little sisters are with me. I don't live alone."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Sara, whose turn it now was to blush. "I hope you like Masterton?" This very faltering and uncomfortable question was the end of the interview; for it was very clear no answer was required. And then she showed him the way down-stairs, and he went his way by himself, retracing the very steps which he had taken when he was following her. He felt, poor fellow, as if he had made a mistake somehow, and done something wrong, and went out very rueful into the park, as he would have gone to his desk, in strict obedience to his employer's commands.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PROMISE.

LATE in the afternoon Mr Brownlow did really look as if he were taking a holiday. He came forth into the avenue as Sara was going out, and joined her, and she seized her opportunity, and took his arm, and led him up and down in the afternoon sunshine. It is a pretty sight to see a girl clinging to her father, pouring all her guesses and philosophies into his ears, and claiming his confidence. It is a different kind of intercourse, more picturesque, more amusing, in some ways even more touching, than the intercourse of a mother and daughter, especially when there is, as with these two, no mother in the case, and the one sole parent has both offices to fulfil. Sara clung to her father's arm, and congratulated herself upon having got him out, and promised herself a good long talk. "For I never see you, papa," she said; "you know

I never see you. You are at that horrid office the whole long day."

"Only all the mornings and all the evenings," said Mr Brownlow, "which is a pretty good proportion, I think, of life."

"Oh, but there is always Jack or somebody," said Sara, tightening her clasp of his arm; "and sometimes one wants only you."

"Have you something to say to me then?" said her father, with a little curiosity, even anxiety,—for of course his own disturbed thoughts accompanied him everywhere, and put meanings into every word that was said.

"Something!" said Sara, with indignation; "heaps of things. I want to tell you, and I want to ask you;—but, by the by, answer me first, before I forget, is this Mr Powys very poor?"

"Powys!" said Mr Brownlow, with a suppressed thrill of excitement. "What of Powys? It seems to me I hear of nothing else. Where has the young fellow gone?"

"*I* did not do anything to him," said Sara, turning her large eyes full of mock reproach upon her father's face. "You need not ask him from me in that way. I suppose he has gone home—to his mother and his little sisters," she added, dropping her voice.

"And what do you know about his mother and his little sisters?" said Mr Brownlow, startled yet amused by her tone.

"Well, he told me he had such people belonging to him, papa," said Sara; "and he gave me a very grand description before that of what it is to be poor. I want to know if he is very poor? and could I send anything to them, or do anything? or are they too grand for that? or couldn't you raise his salary, or something? You ought to do something, since he is a favourite of your own."

"Did he complain to you?" said Mr Brownlow, in consternation; "and I trust in goodness, Sara, you did not propose to do anything for them, as you say?"

"No, indeed; I had not the courage," said Sara. "I never have sense enough to do such things. Complain! oh, dear no; he did not complain. But he was so much in earnest about it, you know, *apropos* of that silly speech I made at luncheon, that he made me quite uncomfortable. Is he a—a gentleman, papa?"

"He is my clerk," said Mr Brownlow, shortly; and then the conversation dropped. Sara was not a young woman to be stopped in this way in ordinary cases, though she did stop this time, seeing her father fully meant it; but all the same she did not stop

thinking, which indeed, in her case, was a thing very difficult to do.

Then Mr Brownlow began to nerve himself for a great effort. It excited him as nothing had excited him for many a long year. He drew his child's arm more closely through his own, and drew her nearer to him. They were going slowly down the avenue, upon which the afternoon sunshine lay warm, all marked and lined across by columns of trees, and the light shadows of the half-developed foliage. "Do you know," he said, "I have been thinking a great deal lately about a thing you once said to me. I don't know whether you meant it——"

"I never say anything I don't mean," said Sara, interrupting him; but she too felt that something more than usual was coming, and did not enlarge upon the subject. "What was it, papa?" she said, clinging still closer to his arm.

"You refused Motherwell," said Mr Brownlow, "though he could have given you an excellent position, and is, they tell me, a very honest fellow. I told you to consider it, but you refused him, Sara."

"Well, no," said Sara, candidly; "refusing people is very clumsy sort of work, unless you want to tell of it after, and that is mean. I did not refuse him. I only contrived, you know, that he should not speak."

"Well, I suppose it comes to about the same thing," said Mr Brownlow. "What I am going to say now is very serious. You once told me you would marry the man I asked you to marry. Hush, my darling, don't speak yet. I daresay you never thought I would ask such a proof of confidence from you; but there are strange turns in circumstances. I am not going to be cruel, like a tyrannical father in a book; but if I were to ask you to do such a great thing for me—to do it blindly without asking questions, to try to love and to marry a man, not of your own choice, but mine—Sara, would you do it? Don't speak yet. I would not bind you. At the last moment you should be free to withdraw from the bargain——"

"Let me speak, papa!" cried Sara. "Do you mean to say that you *need* this—that you really *want* it? Is it something that can't be done any other way? first tell me that."

"I don't think it can be done any other way," said Mr Brownlow, sadly, with a sigh.

"Then, of course, I will do it," said Sara. She turned to him as she spoke, and fixed her eyes intently on his face. Her levity, her lightness, her careless freedom, were all gone. No doubt she had meant the original promise, as she said, but she had made it with a certain gay bravado, little dreaming

of anything to follow. Now she was suddenly sobered and silenced. There was no mistaking the reality in Mr Brownlow's face. Sara was not a careful, thoughtful woman: she was a creature who leapt at conclusions, and would not linger over the most solemn decision. And then she was not old enough to see both sides of a question. She jumped at it, and gave her pledge, and fixed her fate more quickly than a girl of another temperament would have chosen a pair of gloves. But for all that she was very grave. She looked up in her father's face, questioning him with her eyes. She was ready to put her life in his hands, to give him her future, her happiness, as if it had been a flower for his coat. But yet she was sufficiently roused to see that this was no laughing matter. "Of course I will do it," she repeated, without any grandeur of expression; but she never looked so grave, or had been so serious all her life.

As for her father, he looked at her with a gaze that seemed to devour her. He was so intent that he did not even perceive at the first minute that she had consented. Then the words caught his ear and went to his heart—"Of course I will do it." When he caught the meaning, strangely enough his object went altogether out of his mind, and he thought of nothing but of the half-pathetic, unhesitating, magnificent generosity of his child. She had not asked

a question, why or wherefore, but had given herself up at once with a kind of prodigal readiness. A sudden gush of tears, such as had not refreshed them for years, came into Mr Brownlow's eyes. Not that they ran over, or fell, or displayed themselves in any way, but they came up under the bushy eyebrows like water under reeds, making a certain glimmer in the shade. He gathered up her two little hands into his, and pressed them together, holding her fast to him. He was so touched that his impulse was to give her back her word, not to take advantage of it; to let everything go to ruin if it would, and keep his child safe. But was it not for herself? Then he bent over her and kissed her on the forehead. He could not say anything, but there are many occasions, besides those proper to lovers, when that which is inexpressible may be put into a kiss. The touch of her father's lips on Sara's forehead told her a hundred things; love, sorrow, pain, and a certain poignant mixture of joy and humiliation. He could not have uttered a word to save his life. She was willing to do it, with a lavish youthful promptitude; and he, was he to accept the sacrifice? This was what John Brownlow was thinking when he stooped over her and pressed his lips on his child's brow. She had taken from him the power of speech.

Such a supreme moment cannot last. Sara, too,

not knowing why, had felt that *serrement de cœur*. But she knew little reason for it, and none in particular why her father should be so moved, and her spirits came back to her long before his did. She walked along by his side in silence, feeling by the close pressure of her hands that he had not quite come to himself, for some time after *she* had come back to herself. With every step she took the impression glided off Sara's mind; her natural lightheartedness returned to her. Moreover, she was not to be compelled to marry that very day, so there was no need for being miserable about it just yet at least. She was about to speak half-a-dozen times before she really ventured on utterance; and when at last she took her step out of the solemnity and sublimity of the situation, this was how Sara plunged into it, without any interval of repose.

"I beg your pardon, papa; I would not trouble you if I could help it. But please, now it is all decided, will you just tell me—am I to marry anybody that turns up? or is there any one in particular? I beg your pardon, but one likes to know."

This question affected Mr Brownlow's nerves, though nobody had been aware that he had any nerves. He gave an abrupt, short laugh, which was not very merry, and clasped her hands tighter than ever in his.

"Sara," he said; "this is not a joke. Do you know there is scarcely anything I would not have done rather than ask this of you? It is a very serious matter to me."

"I am sure I am treating it very seriously," said Sara. "I don't take it for a joke; but you see, papa, there is a difference. What you care for is that it should be settled. It is not you that have the marrying to do; but for my part it is *that* that is of the most importance. I should rather like to know who it was, if it would be the same to you."

Once more Mr Brownlow pressed in his own the soft, slender hands he held. "You shall know in time—you shall know in good time," he said, "if it is inevitable;" and he gave a sort of moan over her as a woman might have done. His beautiful* child! who was fit for a prince's bride, if any prince were good enough. Perhaps even yet the necessity might be escaped.

"But I should like to know now," said Sara; and then she gave a little start, and coloured suddenly, and looked him quickly, keenly in the face. "Papa!" she said,—"you don't mean—do you mean—this Mr Powys, perhaps?"

* The fact was, Sara was not beautiful. There was not the least trace of perfection about her; but her father had prepossessions and prejudices, such as parents are apt to have, unphilosophical as it may be.

Mr Brownlow actually shrank from her eye. He grew pale, almost green; faltered, dropped her hands —"My darling!" he said feebly. He had not once dreamt of making any revelation on this subject. He had not even intended to put it to her at all, had it not come to him, as it were, by necessity; and consequently he was quite unprepared to defend himself. As for Sara, she clung to him closer, and looked him still more keenly in the eyes.

"Tell me," she said; "I will keep my word all the same. It will make no difference to me. Papa, tell me! it is better I should know at once."

"You ought not to have asked me such a question, Sara," said Mr Brownlow, recovering himself; "if I ask this sacrifice of you, you shall know all about it in good time. I can't tell; my own scheme does not look so reasonable to me as it did—I may give it up altogether. But in the mean time don't ask me any more questions. And if you should repent, even at the last moment——"

"But if it is necessary to you, papa?" said Sara, opening her eyes—"if it has to be done, what does it matter whether I repent or not?"

"Nothing is necessary to me that would cost your happiness," said Mr Brownlow. And then they went on again for some time in silence. As for Sara, she had no inclination to have the magnificence of her

sacrifice thus interfered with. For the moment her feeling was that, on the whole, it would even be better that the marriage to which she devoted herself should be an unhappy and unfit one. If it were happy it would not be a sacrifice; and to be able to repent at the last, like any commonplace young woman following her own inclinations, was not at all according to Sara's estimation of the contract. She went on by her father's side, thinking of that and of some other things in silence. Her thoughts were of a very different tenor from his. She was not taking the matter tragically as he supposed—no blank veil had been thrown over Sara's future by this intimation, though Mr Brownlow, walking absorbed by her side, was inclined to think so. On the contrary, her imagination had begun to play with the idea lightly, as with a far-off possibility in which there was some excitement, and even some amusement possible. While her father relapsed into painful consideration of the whole subject, Sara went on demurely by his side, not without the dawnings of a smile about the corners of her mouth. There was nothing said between them for a long time. It seemed to Mr Brownlow as if the conversation had broken off at such a point that it would be hard to recommence it. He seemed to have committed and betrayed himself without doing any good whatever by

it; and he was wroth at his own weakness. Softening of the brain! there might be something in what the Rector said. Perhaps it was disease, and not the pressure of circumstances, which had made him take so seriously the first note of alarm. Perhaps his whole scheme to secure Brownlows and his fortune to his daughter was premature, if not unnecessary. It was while he was thus opening up anew the whole matter, that Sara at last ventured to betray the tenor of her thoughts.

"Papa," she said, "I asked you a question just now, and you did not answer me; but answer me now, for I want to know. This—this—gentleman—Mr Powys. Is he—a gentleman, papa?"

"I told you he was my clerk, Sara," said Mr Brownlow, much annoyed by the question.

"I know you did, but that is not quite enough. A man may be a gentleman though he is a clerk. I want a plain answer," said Sara, looking up again into her father's face.

And he was not without the common weakness of Englishmen for good connections—very far from that. He would not have minded, to tell the truth, giving a thousand pounds or so on the spot to any known family called Powys which would have adopted the young Canadian into its bosom. "I don't know what Powys has to do with the matter,"

he said; and then unconsciously his tone changed. "It is a good name; and I think—I imagine—he must belong somehow to the Lady Powys who once lived near Masterton. His father was well born; but, I believe," added Mr Brownlow, with a slight shiver, "that he married—beneath him. I think so. I can't say I am quite sure."

"I should have thought you would have known everything," said Sara. "Of course, papa, you know I am dying to ask you a hundred questions; but I won't, if you will only just tell me one thing. A girl may promise to accept any one—whom—whom her people wish her to have; but is it as certain," said Sara, solemnly, "that he—will have me?"

Then Mr Brownlow stood still for a moment, looking with wonder, incomprehension, and a certain mixture of awe and dismay upon his child. Sara, obeying his movement, stood still also with her eyes cast down, and just showing a glimmer of malice under their lids, with the colour glowing softly in her cheeks, with the ghost of a smile coming and going round her pretty mouth. "Oh child, child!" was all Mr Brownlow said. He was moved to smile in spite of himself, but he was more moved to wonder. After all, she was making a joke of it—or was it really possible that, in this careless smiling way, the young creature, who had thrust her life

into his hands like a flower, to be disposed of as he would, was going forward to meet all unknown evils and dangers? The sober, steady, calculating man could understand a great many things more abstruse, but he could not understand this.

Their conference, however, ended here; for they had reached old Betty's cottage by this time, who came out, ungrateful old woman as she was, to curtsy as humbly to Mr Brownlow as if he had been twenty old squires, and to ask after his health. And Sara had occasion to speak to her friend Pamela on the other side of the way. It was not consistent with the father's dignity, of course, to go with her to visit those humble neighbours, but he stood at the gate with old Betty behind in a whirl of curtsies, watching while Sara's tall, straight, graceful figure went across the road, and Pamela, with her little, fresh, bright, dewy face, like an April morning, came running out to meet her. "Poor little thing!" Mr Brownlow said to himself—though he could not have explained why he was sorry for Pamela; and then he turned back slowly and went home, crossing the long shadows of the trees. He was not satisfied with himself or with his day's work. He was like a doctor accustomed to regard with a cool and impartial eye the diseases of others, but much at a loss when he had his own personal pains in hand. He

was uneasy and ashamed when he was alone and reminded himself that he had managed very badly. What was he to do? Was he to act as a doctor would, and put his domestic malady into the hands of a brother practitioner? But this was a suggestion at which he shuddered. Was he to take Jack into his counsel and get the aid of his judgment?—but Jack was worse, a thousand times worse, than a stranger. He had all his life been considered a very clever lawyer, and he knew it; he had got scores of people out of scrapes, and, one way or other, half the county was beholden to him; and he could do nothing but get himself deeper and deeper into his own miserable scrape. Faint thoughts of making it into "a case" and taking opinions on it—taking Wrinkell's opinion, for instance, quietly, his old friend who had a clear head and a great deal of experience—came into his mind. He had made a muddle of it himself. And then the Rector's question recurred to him with still greater force—could it be softening of the brain? Perhaps it would be best to speak to the doctor first of all.

Meanwhile Sara had gone into Mrs Swayne's little dark parlour, out of the sunshine, and had seated herself at Pamela's post in the window, very dreamy and full of thought. She did not even speak for a long time, but let her little friend prattle to her. "I

saw you and Mr Brownlow coming down the avenue," said Pamela; "what a long time you were, and how strange it looked! Sometimes you had a great deal to say, and then for a long time you would walk on and on, and never look at each other. Was he scolding you? Sometimes I thought he was."

Sara made no answer to this question; she only uttered a long, somewhat demonstrative sigh, and then went off upon a way of her own. "I wonder how it would have felt to have had a mother?" she said, and sighed again, to her companion's great dismay.

"How it would have felt!" said Pamela; "that is just the one thing that makes me feel I don't envy you. You have quantities and quantities of fine things, but I have mamma."

"And I have papa," said Sara, quickly, not disposed to be set at a disadvantage; "that was not what I meant. Sometimes, though you may think it very wicked, I feel as if I was rather glad; for, of course, if mamma had been living it would have been very different for me; and then sometimes I think I would give a great deal—— Look here. I don't like talking of such things; but did you ever think what you would do if you were married? It is one of the subjects Fanny Hardcastle likes. How do

you think you should feel? to the—to the gentleman, you know?"

"Think!" said Pamela; "does one need to think about it? love him, to be sure." And this she said with a rising colour, and with two rays of new light waking up in her eyes.

"Ah, love him," said Sara; "it is very easy to talk; but how are you to love him? that does not come of itself just when it is told, you know; at least I suppose it doesn't—I am sure I never tried."

"But if you did not love him, of course you would not marry him," said Pamela, getting confused.

"Yes—that is just one of the things it is so easy to say," said Sara; "and I suppose at your age you don't know any better. Don't you know that people *have* to marry whether they like it or not? and when they never, never would have thought of it themselves? I suppose," said Sara, in the strength of her superior knowledge, "that most of us are married like that. Because it suits our people, or because—I don't know what—anything but one's own will." And this little speech the young martyr again rounded with a sigh.

"Are you going to be married?" said Pamela, drawing a footstool close to her friend's feet, and looking up with awe into her face. "I wish you would tell me. Mamma has gone to Dewsbury, and

she will not be back for an hour. Oh, do tell me—I will never repeat it to anybody. And, dear Miss Brownlow, if you don't love him——"

"Hush," said Sara, "I never said anything about a *him*. It is you who are such a romantic little girl. What I was speaking of was one's duty; one has to do one's duty whether one likes it or not."

This oracular speech was very disappointing to Pamela. She looked up eagerly with her bright eyes, trying to make out the romance which she had no doubt existed. "I can fancy," she said, softly, "why you wanted your mother;" and her little hand stole into Sara's, which lay on her knee. Sara did not resist the soft caress. She took the hand and pressed it close between her own, which were longer, and not so rounded and childlike; and then, being a girl of uncertain disposition, she laughed, to Pamela's great surprise and dismay.

"I think, perhaps, I like to be my own mistress best," she said; "if mamma had lived she never would have let me do anything I wanted to do—and then most likely she would not have known what I meant. It is Jack, you know, who is most like mamma."

"But he is very nice," said Pamela, quickly; and then she bent down her head as quickly, feeling the hot crimson rushing to her face, though she did not

well know why. Sara took no notice of it—never observed it, indeed—and kept smoothing down in her own her little neighbour's soft small hand.

"Oh, yes," she said, "and I am very fond of my brother; only he and I are not alike, you know. I wonder who Jack will marry, if he ever marries; but it is very fine to hear him talk of that—perhaps he never did to you. He is so scornful of everybody who falls in love, and calls them asses, and all sorts of things. I should just like to see him fall in love himself. If he were to make a very foolish marriage it would be fun. They say those dreadfully wise people always do."

"Do they?" said Pamela; and she bent down to look at the border of her little black silk apron, and to set it to rights, very energetically, with her unoccupied hand. But she did not ask any further question; and so the two girls sat together for a few minutes, hand clasped in hand, the head of the one almost touching the other, yet each far afield in her own thoughts; of which, to tell the truth, though she was so much the elder and the wiser, Sara's thoughts were the least painful, the least heavy, of the two.

"You don't give me any advice, Pamela," she said at last. "Come up the avenue with me at least. Papa has gone home, and it is quite dark here out of the sun. Put on your hat and come with me.

I like the light when it slants so, and falls in long lines. I think you have a headache to-day, and a walk will do you good."

"Yes, I think I have a little headache," said Pamela, softly; and she put on her hat and followed her companion out. The sunshine had passed beyond Betty's cottage, and cut the avenue obliquely in two —the one end all light, the other all gloom. The two young creatures ran lightly across the shady end, Sara, as always, leading the way. Her mind, it is true, was as full as it could be of her father's communication, but the burden sat lightly on her. Now and then a word or two would tingle, as it were, in her ears; now and then it would occur to her that her fate was sealed, as she said, and a sigh, half false half true, would come to her lips; but, in the mean time, she was more amused by the novelty of the position than discouraged by the approach of fate.

"What are you thinking of?" she said, when they came into the tender light in the further part of the avenue; for the two, by this time, had slackened their pace, and drawn close together, as is the wont of girls, though they did not speak.

"I was only looking at our shadows going before us," said Pamela, and this time the little girl echoed very softly Sara's sigh.

"They are not at all beautiful to look at; they are shadows on stilts," said Sara; "you might think of something more interesting than that."

"But I wish something did go before us like that to show the way," said Pamela. "I wish it was true about guardian angels—if we could only see them, that is to say; and then it is so difficult to know——"

"What?" said Sara; "you are too young to want a guardian angel; you are not much more than a little angel yourself. When one has begun to go daily further from the east, one knows the good of being quite a child."

"But I am not quite a child," said Pamela, under her breath.

"Oh yes, you are. But look here, Jack must be coming; don't you hear the wheels? I did not know it was so late. Shall you mind going back alone, for I must run and dress? And please come to me in the morning as soon as ever they are gone, I have such heaps of things to say."

Saying this, Sara ran off, flying along under the trees, she and her shadow; and poor little Pamela, not so much distressed as perhaps she ought to have been to be left alone, turned back towards the house. The dogcart was audible before it dashed through the gate, and Pamela's heart beat, keeping time with

the ringing of the mare's feet and the sound of the wheels. But it stopped before Betty's door, and some one jumped down, and the mare and the dog-cart and the groom dashed past Pamela in a kind of whirlwind. Mr John had keen eyes, and saw something before him in the avenue; and he was quick-witted, and timed his inquiries after Betty in the most prudent way. Before Pamela, whose heart beat louder than ever, was half-way down the avenue, he had joined her, evidently, whatever Betty or Mrs Swayne might say to the contrary, in the most purely accidental way.

"This is luck," said Jack; "I have not seen you for two whole days, except at the window, which doesn't count. I don't know how we managed to endure the dulness before that window came to be inhabited. Come this way a little under the chestnuts—you have the sun in your eyes."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Pamela, "and I must not wait; I am going home."

"I suppose you have been walking with Sara, and she has left you to go home alone," said Jack; "it is like her. She never thinks of anything. But tell me what you have been doing these two frightfully long days?"

From which it will be seen that Mr John, as well as his sister, had made a little progress towards in-

timacy since he became first acquainted with the lodgers at Mrs Swayne's.

"I don't think they have been frightfully long days," said Pamela, making the least little timid response to his emphasis and to his eyes—wrong, no doubt, but almost inevitable. "I have been doing nothing more than usual; mamma has wanted me, that is all."

"Then it is too bad of mamma," said Jack; "you know you ought to be out every day. I must come and talk to her about it—air and exercise, you know."

"But you are not a doctor," said Pamela, with a soft ring of laughter—not that he was witty, but that the poor child was happy, and showed it in spite of herself; for Mr John had turned, and was walking down the avenue, very slowly, pausing almost every minute, and not at all like a man who was going home to dinner. He was still young. I suppose that was why he preferred Pamela to the more momentous fact which was in course of preparation at the great house.

"I am a little of everything," he said; "I should like to go out to Australia, and get a farm, and keep sheep. Don't you like the old stories and the old pictures with the shepherdesses? If you had a little hat all covered with flowers, and a crook with ribbons——"

"Oh, but I should not like to be a shepherdess," cried Pamela, in haste.

"Shouldn't you? Well, I did not mean that; but to go out into the bush, or the backwoods, or whatever they call it, and do everything and get everything for one's self. Shouldn't you like that? Better than all the nonsense and all the ceremony here," said Jack, bending down to see under the shade of her hat, which, as it happened, was difficult enough.

"*We* don't have much ceremony," said Pamela, "but if I was a lady like your sister——"

"Like Sara!" said Jack; and he nodded his head with a little brotherly contempt. "Don't be anything different from what you are. I should like people to wear always the same dress, and keep exactly as they were when—the first time, you know. I like you, for instance, in your red cloak. I never see a red cloak without thinking of you. I hope you will keep that one for ever and ever," said the philosophical youth. As for Pamela, she could not but feel a little confused, wondering whether this, or Sara's description of her brother, was the reality. And she should not have known what to answer but that the bell at the house interfered in her behalf, and began to sound forth its touching call—a sound which could not be gainsaid.

"There is the bell," she cried; "you will be too late

for dinner. Oh, please, don't come any further. There is old Betty looking out."

"Bother dinner," said Mr John, "and old Betty too," he added, under his breath. He had taken her hand, the same hand which Sara had been holding, to bid her good-bye, no doubt in the ordinary way. At all events, old Betty's vicinity made the farewell all that politeness required. But he did not leave her until he had opened the gate for her, and watched her enter at her own door. "When my sister leaves Miss Preston in the avenue," he said, turning gravely to Betty, with that severe propriety for which he was distinguished, "be sure you always see her safely home; she is too young to walk about alone." And with these dignified words Mr John walked on, having seen the last of her, leaving Betty speechless with amazement. "As if I done it!" Betty said. And then he went home to dinner. Thus both Mr Brownlow's children, though he did not know it, had begun to make little speculations for themselves in undiscovered ways.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS, EDINBURGH.