

EFFIE OGILVIE:

THE STORY OF A YOUNG LIFE.

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

THE family consisted of Effie's father, her stepmother, her brother Eric who was in the army, and a little personage, the most important of all, the only child of the second Mrs. Ogilvie, the pet and plaything of the house. You may think it would have been more respectful and becoming to reverse this description, and present Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvie first to the notice of the reader, which we shall now proceed to do. The only excuse we can offer for the irregularity of the beginning consists in the fact that

it is the nature of their proceedings in respect to the young people, and particularly to Mr. Ogilvie's daughter Effie, which induces us to disturb the decorous veil which hangs over the doors of every respectable family, in the case of these worthy persons.

In their own lives, had we time and space to recount all that befell them, there would, no doubt, be many interesting particulars, as in the lives of most other people: but when a country gentleman has attained the age of fifty or a little more, with enough of money for his necessities, and no more ambition than can be satisfied by the regulation of the affairs of the parish, it is inevitably through the fortunes of a son or daughter that he comes within reach of the sympathies of the world. These troublesome productions, of whom we take so little thought at first, who are nothing but playthings and embellishments of our own estate for so many years, have a way of pushing us out of our commanding

position as the chief actors in our own lives, setting us aside into a secondary place, and conferring upon us a quite fictitious interest as influences upon theirs. It is an impertinence of fate, it is an irony of circumstance; but still it is so. And it is, consequently, as Effie's father, a character in which he by no means knew himself, that Mr. Ogilvie of Gilston, a gentleman as much respected as any in his county, the chief heritor in his parish, and a deputy-lieutenant, has now to be presented to the world.

He was a good man in his way, not perfect, as in the general he was himself very willing to allow, though he did not, any more than the rest of us, like that niggling sort of criticism which descends to particulars. He was a man who would have suffered a little personal inconvenience rather than do anything which he was convinced was wrong, which most of us, who are old enough to be acquainted with our own ways, will be

aware is no small thing to say. But, ordinarily, also like most of us, his wrong acts were done without taking time to identify them as wrong, on the spur of the moment, in the heat of a present impulse which took from them all the sting of premeditation.

Thus, when he gave good Glen, the virtuous collie, as he came forward smiling and cheerful, with a remark upon the beauty of the morning glistening in his bright eyes and waving majestically in his tail, that sudden kick which sent the good fellow off howling, and oppressed his soul all day with a sense of crime, Mr. Ogilvie did not do it by intention, did not come out with the purpose of doing it, but only did it because he had just got a letter which annoyed him. Glen, who had a tender conscience, lived half the day under a weight of unnecessary remorse, convinced that he must himself have done something very wicked, though

a confused moral sense and the absence of a recognized code made him sadly incapable of discovering what it was ; but his master had not the slightest intention of inflicting any such mental torture.

He treated his human surroundings in something of the same way, convincing Effie sometimes, by a few well-chosen words, of her own complete mental and physical incompetency ; as, for example, when she ran into his library to call his attention to something quite unimportant at the very moment when he was adding up his " sundries," and had nearly arrived at a result.

" If you had any sense of propriety in you, and were not a born idiot that never can be taught there's a time for everything, you would know better than to dart in like a whirlwind in your high heels, and all that nonsense in your mouth, to drive a man frantic !"

Effie would withdraw in tears. But

Mr. Ogilvie had not really meant any harm.

He had succeeded to his father's little estate when he was still in his twenties, and had many aspirations. He had not intended to withdraw from the bar, although he had few clients to speak of. He had indeed fully intended to follow up his profession, and it had not seemed impossible that he might attain to the glorious position of Lord Advocate, or, if not, to that of Sheriff-Substitute, which was perhaps more probable. But by degrees, and especially after his marriage, he had found out that professional work was a great "tie," and that there were many things to be done at home.

His first wife had been the only daughter of the minister, which concentrated his affections still more and more in his own locality. When she died, leaving him with two children, who had never been troublesome to

him before, the neighbourhood was moved with the deepest sympathy for poor Ogilvie. Some people even thought he would not survive it, they had been so united a couple, and lived so entirely for each other: or, at least, that he would go away, abandoning the scene of his past happiness.

But, on the contrary, he stayed at home, paying the tribute of the profoundest dulness for one year to the lost partner of his life, cheering up a little decorously afterwards, and at the end of the second year marrying again. All this was done, it will be seen, in the most respectable and well-regulated way, as indeed was everything that Mr. Ogilvie did when he took time to think of it, being actuated by a conscientious desire to do his duty, and set an example to all honest and virtuous men.

Mrs. Ogilvie was not too young to be the second wife of a gentleman of fifty. She was "quite suitable," everybody said—which,

seeing that he might have married a chit of twenty, as mature widowers have been known to do, was considered by everybody a virtuous abstinence and concession to the duties of the position. She was thirty-five, good-looking, even handsome, and very conscientious. If it was her husband's virtuous principle to submit to personal inconvenience rather than do anything that he knew to be wrong, she went many steps farther in the way of excellence, and seldom did anything unless she was convinced that it was right.

With this high meaning she had come to Gilston, and during the four years of her reign there had, not sternly—for she was not stern: but steadily, and she was a woman of great steadiness of mind and purpose—adhered to it.

These years had been very important years, as may be supposed, in the life of the two young people whom Mrs. Ogilvie described as “the first family.” The boy had been

seventeen and the girl fifteen when she came home a bride. And their mother had been dead only two years: an age at which criticism is more uncompromising, or circumstances under which it would be more difficult to begin married life, could scarcely be. They gazed at her with two pairs of large eyes, and countenances which did not seem able to smile, noting everything she did, putting a mute criticism upon the silent record, objecting dumbly to everything, to her entrance there at all, to her assumption of their mother's chair, their mother's name, all that was now legally and honourably hers.

Can any one imagine a more terrible ordeal for a woman to go through? She confided to her sister afterwards that if she had acted upon impulse, as Robert, poor dear, so often did, the house would have become a hell on earth.

"I would have liked to have put that boy to the door a hundred times a day: and as

for Effie!—I never can tell till this day how it was that I kept my hands off her," she said, reddening with the recollection of many exasperations past. Women who have filled the office of stepmother, aunt, or any other such domestic anomaly, will understand and sympathize. And yet, of course, there was a great deal to be said on the other side too.

The children had heard with an indignation beyond words of their father's intention. It had been said to them, with that natural hypocrisy which is so transparent and almost pardonable, that he took this step very much for their sakes, to give them a new mother.

A new mother! Seven and five might have taken this in with wondering ears and made no remark; but seventeen and fifteen! The boy glowed with fierce wrath; the girl shed torrents of hot tears. They formed plans of leaving Gilston at once, going away to seek their fortunes—to America, to Australia, who could tell where? Effie was certain that she

would mind no hardship, that she could cook and wash, and do everything in the hut, while Eric (boys are always so much luckier than girls!) spent the day in the saddle after the cattle in the ranche.

Or they would go orange-farming, ostrich-farming—what did it matter which?—anything, in fact, but stay at home. Money was the great difficulty in this as in almost all other cases, besides the dreadful fact that Effie was a girl, a thing which had always been hard upon her in all their previous adventures, but now more than ever.

“We might have gone to sea and worked our passages before the mast, if you had only been a laddie and not a lassie,” Eric said with a sigh and a profound sense of the general contrariety of events. This unalterable misfortune, which somehow seemed (though it was she who suffered from it most) her fault, stopped Effie’s tears, and brought instead a look of despair into her round face. There

flashed through her mind an idea of the possibility of neutralizing this disability by means of costume. Rosalind did so in Shakespeare, and Viola, and so had other heroines in less distant regions.

But at the idea of *trousers* Effie's countenance flamed, and she rejected the thought. It was quite possible to endure being unhappy, even in her small experience she was well aware of that—but unwomanly! Oh, what would mamma say? That utterance of habit, the words that rose to her lips without thinking, even now when mamma was about to have a successor—a new mother! brought back the tears in torrents. She flung herself upon Eric's shoulder, and he, poor fellow, gave her with quivering lips a little furtive kiss, the only consolation he could think of, though they were not at all used to caressing each other. Poor children! and yet Mr. Ogilvie had done nothing cruel, and Mrs. Ogilvie was the best-intentioned woman in the world.

It was lucky that they were found at this critical moment by an individual who is of great importance in this little record of events, as he was in the parish and the neighbourhood generally,—that is Uncle John. He was the minister of Gilston; he was their mother's brother; and he was one of the men selected by Providence for the consolation of their fellow-creatures.

Perhaps he was not always very wise. He was too much under the sway of his heart to be infallible in the way of advice, although that heart was so tender and full of sympathy that it often penetrated secrets which were undiscoverable to common men. But in his powers of comfort-giving he was perfect. The very sight of him soothed the angry and softened the obdurate, and he dried the tears of the young by some inspiration given to him alone.

“What is the matter?” he said in his large soft voice, which was deep bass and very

masculine, yet had something in it too of the wood-pigeon's brooding tones. They were seated at the foot of a tree in the little wood that protected Gilston House from the east, on the roots of the big ash which were like gray curves of rock among the green moss and the fallen leaves. He came between them, sitting down too, raising Effie with his arm.

"But I think I can guess. You are just raging at Providence and your father, you two ungrateful bairns."

"Ungrateful!" cried Effie. She was the most speechless of the two, the most prostrate, the most impassioned, and therefore was most ready to reply.

"Oh, what have we to be grateful for?—our own mamma gone away and we'll never see her more; and another woman—another—a Mistress Ogilvie——" In her rage and despair she pronounced every syllable, with what bitterness and burning scorn and fury! Uncle John drew her little hands down from

her face and held them in his own, which were not small, but very firm, though they were soft.

“Your own mother was a very good woman, Effie,” said Uncle John.

The girl paused and looked at him with those fiery eyes which were not softened, but made more angry, by her tears, not seeing how this bore upon the present crisis of affairs.

“Have you any reason to suppose that being herself, as we know she is, with the Lord whom she loved”—and here Uncle John took off his hat as if he were saluting the dearest and most revered of friends—“that she would like you and the rest to be miserable all your lives because she was away?”

“Miserable!” cried Effie. “We were not miserable; we were quite happy; we wanted nothing. Papa may care for new people, but we were happy and wanted nothing, Eric and me.”

“Then, my little Effie,” said Uncle John,

“it is not because of your own mother that you are looking like a little fury—for you see you have learned to let her go, and do without her, and be quite contented in a new way—but only because your father has done the same after his fashion, and it is not the same way as yours.”

“Oh, Uncle John, I am not contented,” cried Effie, conscience-stricken; “I think of mamma every day.”

“And are quite happy,” he said with a smile, “as you ought to be. God bless her up yonder, behind the veil. She is not jealous nor angry, but happy too. And we will be very good friends with Mistress Ogilvie, you and me. Come and see that everything is ready for her, for she will not have an easy handful with you two watching her night and day.”

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CHAPTER II.

THOUGH Mr. Moubray said this, it is not to be supposed that he liked his brother-in-law's second marriage. It was not in flesh and blood to do that.

Gilston House must always be the most important house in that parish to the minister; for it is at once nearest to the manse, and the house in which he is most likely to find people who have at least the outside gloss of education. And he had been used to go there familiarly for nearly twenty years. He had been a favourite with the old people, Mr. Ogilvie's father and mother, and when their son succeeded them he was already engaged to the minister's young sister. There was therefore

a daily habit of meeting for nearly a lifetime. The two men had not always agreed. Indeed it was not in human nature that they should not have sometimes disagreed strenuously, one being the chief heritor, restraining every expenditure, and the other the minister, who was always, by right of his position, wanting to have something done.

But after all their quarrels they "just 'greed again," which is the best and indeed the only policy in such circumstances. And though the laird would thunder against that "pig-headed fellow, your brother John," Mrs. Ogilvie had always been able to smile, knowing that on the other hand she would hear nothing worse from the minister than a recommendation to "remind Robert that schoolhouse roofs and manse windows are not eternal."

And then the children had woven another link between the two houses. Eric had been Uncle John's pupil since the boy had been old enough to trot unattended through the little

wood and across the two fields which separated the manse from the House ; and Effie had trotted by his side when the days were fine, and when she pleased—a still more important stipulation. They had been the children of the manse almost as much as of the House.

The death of the mother had for a time drawn the tie still closer, Ogilvie in his first desolation throwing himself entirely upon the succour and help of his brother-in-law ; and the young ones clinging with redoubled tenderness to the kind Uncle John, whom for the first time they found out to be “so like mamma !” There never was a day in which he did not appear on his way to his visiting, or to a session meeting, or some catechising or christening among the hills. They were dependent upon him, and he upon them. But now this constant association had come to an end. No, not to an end—that it could never do ; but, in all likelihood, it must now change its conditions

John Moubray was an old bachelor without chick or child : so most people thought. In reality, he was not a bachelor at all ; but his married life had lasted only a year, and that was nearly thirty years ago ! The little world about might be excused for forgetting—or himself even—for what is one year out of fifty-four ? Perhaps that one year had given him more insight into the life of men ; perhaps it had made him softer, tenderer to the weak. That mild celibacy, which the Church of Rome has found so powerful an instrument, was touched perhaps to a more benignant outcome still in this Scotch minister, by the fact that he had loved like his fellows, and been as other men in his time, a triumphant bridegroom, a woman's husband. But the experience itself was long past, and had left no trace behind ; it was to him as a dream. Often he felt uncertain whether there had been any reality in it at all—whether it

was not a golden vision such as is permitted to youth.

In these circumstances, it may be supposed that the closing upon him in any degree of the house which had been his sister's, which belonged to the most intimate friend of everyday life, and which was the home of children who were almost his own children, was very serious to Uncle John.

Mrs. Ogilvie, to do her justice, was anxious to obviate any feeling of this kind. The very first time he dined there after her marriage, she took him aside into a corner of the drawing-room, and talked to him privately.

"I hope there will be no difference, Mr. Moubray," she said; "I hope you will not let it make any difference that I am here."

"Difference?" said John, startled a little. He had already felt the difference, but had made up his mind to it as a thing that must be.

“I know,” said the lady, “that I’m not clever enough to take your sister’s place ; but so far as a good meaning goes, and a real desire to be a mother to the children, and a friend to you, if you will let me, nobody could be better disposed than I am, if you will just take me at my word.”

The minister was so unprepared for any such speech that he stammered a little over his reply.

“My sister,” he said, “had no pretensions to be clever. That was never the ground my poor Jeanie took up. She was a good woman, and very dear to——very dear to those she belonged to,” he said, with a huskiness in his voice.

“That’s just what I say. I come here in a way that is hard upon a woman, with one before me that I will always be compared to. But this one thing I must say, that I hope you will come about the house just as often as you used to do, and in the same

way, coming in whenever it enters your head to do so, and believing that you are always welcome. Always welcome. I don't say I will always be here, for I think it only right to keep up with society (if it were but for Effie's sake) more than the last Mrs. Ogilvie did. But I will never be happy if you don't come out and in just in your ordinary, Mr. Moubray, just as you've always been accustomed to do."

John Moubray went home after this address with a mingled sense of humour and vexation and approval. It made him half angry to be invited to his brother-in-law's house in this way, as if he required invitation. But, at the same time, he did not deny that she meant well.

And she did mean well. She meant to make Effie one of the most complete of young ladies, and Gilston the model country-seat of a Scots gentleman. She meant to do her duty to the most minute particular.

She meant her husband to be happy, and her children to be clothed in scarlet and prosperity, and comfort to be diffused around.

All these preliminaries were long past at the point at which this narrative begins. Effie had grown up, and Eric was away in India with his regiment. He had not been intended for a soldier, but whether it was that Mrs. Ogilvie's opinion, expressed very frankly, that the army was the right thing for him, influenced the mind of the family in general, or whether the lad found the new rule too unlike the old to take much pleasure in his home, the fact was that he went into the army and disappeared, to the great grief of Effie and Uncle John, but, so far as appeared, of no one else, for little Roderick had just been born, and Mr. Ogilvie was ridiculously delighted with the baby, which seemed to throw his grown-up son altogether into the shade.

It need scarcely be said that both before

and after this event there was great trouble and many struggles with Effie, who had been so used to her own way, Mrs. Ogilvie said, that to train her was a task almost beyond mortal powers. Yet it had been done. So long as Eric remained at home, the difficulties had been great.

And then there was all but the additional drawback of a premature love story to make matters worse. But that had been happily, silently, expeditiously smothered in the bud, a triumph of which Mrs. Ogilvie was so proud that it was with difficulty she kept it from Effie herself; and she did not attempt to keep it from Mr. Moubray, to whom, after the lads were safely gone, she confided the fact that young Ronald Sutherland, who had been constantly about the house before her marriage, and who since that had spent as much of his time with the brother and sister out-of-doors as had been possible, had come to Mr. Ogilvie a few days before his departure

—"What for, can you imagine?" the lady said.

Now Ronald was a neighbour's son, the companion by nature of the two children of Gilston. He had got his commission in the same regiment, and joined it at the same time as Eric. He was twenty when Eric was eighteen, so much in advance and no more. The minister could have divined, perhaps, had he set his wits to the task, but he had no desire to forestall the explanation, and he shook his head in reply.

"With a proposal for Effie, if you please!" Mrs. Ogilvie said, "and she only sixteen, not half-educated, nor anything like what I want her to be. And, if you will believe me, Robert was half-disposed—well, not to accept it; but to let the boy speak to her, and bring another bonny business on my hands."

"They are too young," said Uncle John.

"Too young! They are too—everything that can be thought of—too ridiculous I would

say. Fortunately Robert spoke to me, and I got him to make the lad promise not to say a word to Effie or to any one till he comes back. It will be a long time before he can come back, and who knows what may happen in the meantime? Too young! There is a great deal more than being merely too young. I mean Effie to make a much better match than that."

"He is a good boy," said Mr. Moubray; "if he were older, and perhaps a little richer, I would not wish a better, for my part."

"If all ministers were as unworldly as you!—it is what is sorely wanted in the Church, as Robert always says. But parents may be pardoned if they look a little more to interest in the case of their children. I will very likely never have grown-up daughters of my own. And Effie must make a good match; I have set my heart on that. She is growing up a pretty creature, and she will be far more quiet and manageable for her education now

that, heaven be praised, those boys are away."

"As one of the boys carries a large piece of my heart with him, you will not expect me to be so pious and so thankful," the minister said.

"O Uncle John! I am sure you would like Effie to get the best of educations. She never would have settled down to it, never! if that lad had got his way."

Mr. Moubray could not say a word against this, for it was all true; but he could not meet Effie's wistful eyes when she crept to his side, in his study or out-of-doors whenever they met, and hung upon his arm, and asked him where he thought they would be by now? It was Eric chiefly they were both thinking of, yet Effie unawares said "they." How far would they be on their journey? It was not then the quick way such as we are happily used to now, but a long, long journey round the stormy Cape, three lingering months

of sea, and so long, so long before any news could come.

The uncle and niece, who were now more close companions than ever, were found in the minister's study one day with a map stretched out before them, their heads closely bent over it, his all clad with vigorous curls of gray, hers shining in soft locks of brown, their eyes so intent that they did not hear the opening door and the rustle of Mrs. Ogilvie's silk gown.

"What are you doing with your heads so close together?" that lady said. And the two started like guilty things. But Uncle John explained calmly that Effie was feeble in her geography, and no more was said.

And so everything settled down. Effie, it was true, was much more manageable after her brother was away. She had to confine herself to shorter walks, to give up much of that freedom of movement which a girl can only be indulged in when she has a brother

by her side. She was very dull for a time, and rather rebellious ; but that too wore out, as everything will wear out if we but wait long enough.

And now she was nineteen, on the threshold of her life—a pretty creature, as her step-mother had said, not a great beauty like those that bewitch the world when they are seen, which is but rarely. Effie was pretty as the girls are by dozens, like the flowers, overflowing over all the face of the country, making it sweet. Her hair and her eyes were brown, like most other people's. She was no wonder or prodigy, but fair and honest and true, a pleasure to behold. And after all those youthful tribulations she was still a happy girl enough at home.

Mrs. Ogilvie, when all was said, was a well-meaning woman. There was no tyranny nor unkindness in the house.

So this young soul expanded in the hands of the people who had the care of it, and

who had cared for it so far well, though not with much understanding ; how it sped in the times of action, and in the crisis that was approaching, and how far they did their duty by it, we have now to see.

CHAPTER III.

THE parish of Gilston is not a wealthy one. It lies not far from the Borders, where there is much moorland and pasture-land, and not much high farming. The farmhouses are distant and scattered, the population small. The greatest house in the district, indeed, stands within its boundaries, but that was shut up at this moment, and of use to nobody. There were two or three country houses of the smaller sort scattered about, at four and five miles' distance from each other, and a cluster of dwellings near the church, in which amid a few cottages rose the solid square house of the doctor, which he called Gowanbrae, and the cottage of

the Miss Dempsters, which they called Rosebank.

The doctor, whose name was Jardine, had a great deal to do, and rode about the country early and late. The Miss Dempsters had nothing to do except to keep up a general supervision of the proceedings of the neighbours and of all that happened in the country side. It was a supervision not unkind.

They were good neighbours, always handy and ready in any case of family affliction or rejoicing. They were ready to lend anything and everything that might be required—pepper, or a lemon, or cloves, or soap, or any of the little things that so generally give out before the storeroom is replenished, when you are out of reach of co-operative stores or grocers' shops; or their glass and china, or knives, or lamps—or even a fine pair of silver candlesticks which they were very proud of—when their

neighbours had company: or good advice to any extent, which sometimes was not wanted.

It was perhaps because everybody ran to them in case of need that they were so well acquainted with everybody's affairs. And then people were so unreasonable as to find fault and call the Miss Dempsters gossips. It was undeserved: they spoke ill of nobody unless there was good cause; they made no mischief: but they did know everything, and they did more or less superintend the life of the parish, having leisure and unbounded interest in life.

The neighbours grumbled and sometimes called them names—old maids, old cats, and many other pretty titles: which did not prevent them from borrowing the spoons or the candlesticks, or sending for Miss Robina when anything happened. Had these excellent ladies died the parish would have mourned sincerely, and they would have

been universally missed : but as they were alive and well they were called the old cats. Human nature is subject to such perversities.

The rural world in general had thus an affectionate hostility to the all-seeing, all-knowing, all-aiding ladies of Rosebank ; but between them and Dr. Jardine the feeling was a great deal stronger. Hatred, it was understood, was not too strong a word. Rosebank stood a little higher than Gowanbrae : it was raised, indeed, upon a knoll, so that the house, though in front only one storey, was two storeys behind, and in reality a much larger house than it looked. The doctor's house was on the level of the village, and the Miss Dempsters from their point of vantage commanded him completely.

He was of opinion that they watched all his proceedings from the windows of their drawing-room, which in summer were always

open, with white curtains fluttering, and baskets of flowers so arranged that it was hopeless to attempt to return the inspection. There was a garden bench on the path that ran in front of the windows, and on fine days Miss Robina, who was not at all rheumatic, would sit there in order to see the doctor's doings more distinctly. So at least the doctor thought.

"You may say it's as good as a lady at the head of my table," said the doctor. "That old cat counts every bite I put into my mouth. She knows what Merran has got for my dinner, and watches me eat. I cannot take a glass of wine, when I'm tired, but they make a note of it."

"Then, doctor, you should draw down your blind," said the minister, who was always a peacemaker.

"Mè!" cried Dr. Jardine, with a fine Scotch contempt for the other pronoun. "Me give the old hag that satisfaction. Not

for the half of Scotland! I am doing nothing that I am ashamed of, I hope."

Miss Robina on her side expressed other views. She had a soft, slightly-indistinct voice, as if that proverbial butter that "would not melt in her mouth" was held there when she spoke.

"It's a great vexation," she said, in her placid way, "that we cannot look out at our own windows without being affronted with the sight of that hideous house. It's just an offence: and a man's house that is shameless—that will come to the window and take off his dram, and nod his head as if he were saying, Here's to ye. It is just an offence," Miss Robina said.

Miss Robina was the youngest. She was a large woman, soft and imperfectly laced, like a cushion badly stuffed and bulging here and there. Her hair was still yellow as it had been in her youth, but her complexion had not worn so well. Her features

were large like her person. Miss Dempster was smaller and gray, which she considered much more distinguished than the yellow braids of her sister.

"It's common to suppose Beenie dyes her hair; but I'm thankful to say nobody can doubt me," she would say. "It was very bonny hair when we were young; but when the face gets old there's something softening in the white. I would have everybody gray at our age; not that Beenie dyes—oh no. She never had that much thought."

Miss Beenie was always in the foreground, taking up much more room than her sister, and able to be out in all weathers. But Miss Dempster, though rheumatic, and often confined to the house, was the real head of everything. It was she who took upon her chiefly the care of the manners of the young people, and especially of Effie Ogilvie, who was the foremost object

of regard, inspection, and criticism to these ladies. They knew everything about her from her birth. She could not have a headache without their knowledge (though indeed she gave them little trouble in this respect, her headaches being few); and as for her wardrobe, even her new chemises (if the reader will not be shocked) had to be exhibited to the sisters, who had an exasperating way of investigating a hem, and inspecting the stitching, which, as they were partly made by Effie herself, made that young lady's brow burn.

"But I approve of your trimmings," Miss Dempster said; "none of your common cotton stuff. Take my word for it, a real lace is ten times thriftier. It will wear and wear—while that rubbish has to be thrown into the fire."

"It was some we had in the house," Mrs. Ogilvie said; "I could not let her buy thread lace for her underclothes."

"Oh ay, it would be some of her mother's,"

said Miss Robina, with a nod and a tone which as good as said, "That accounts for it." And this made Mrs. Ogilvie indignant too.

The Miss Dempsters had taken a great interest in Ronald Sutherland. They knew (of course) how it was that Mrs. Ogilvie so skillfully had baulked that young hero in his intentions, and they did not approve. The lady defended herself stoutly.

"An engagement at sixteen!" she cried, "and with a long-legged lad in a marching regiment, with not enough money to buy himself shoes."

"And how can ye tell," said Miss Robina, "that she will ever get another offer? He was a nice lad—and nice lads are not so plentiful as they were in our days."

"For all so plentiful as they were, neither you nor me, Mrs. Ogilvie is thinking, ever came to that advancement," said Miss Dempster. "And that's true. But I'm not against young engagements, for my part. It is a great

divert to them both, and a very good thing for the young man ; where there's land and sea between them that they cannot fash their neighbours I can see no harm in it ; and Ronald was a good lad."

"Without a penny !"

"The pennies will come where there's good conduct and a good heart. And I would have let her choose for herself. It's a great divert——"

"I must do my own business my own way, Miss Dempster, and I think I am the best judge of what is good for Effie. I and her father."

"Oh, no doubt—you, and her father ; her mother might have been of a different opinion. But that's neither here nor there, for the poor thing is dead and gone."

"Well, Sarah," said Miss Robina, "it's to be hoped so, or the laird, honest man, would be in a sad position, and our friend here no better. It's unbecoming to discourse in that

loose way. No, no ; we are meaning no interference. We've no right. We are not even cousins or kinswomen, only old friends. But Ronald, ye see—Ronald is a kind of connection. We are wae for Ronald, poor lad. But he's young, and there's plenty of time, and there's no saying what may happen."

"Nothing shall happen if I can help it ; and I hope there will not be a word said to put anything in Effie's head," said Mrs. Ogilvie. And ever since this discussion she had been more severe than ever against the two old ladies.

"Take care that ye put no confidence in them," she said to her stepdaughter. "They can be very sweet when it suits their purpose. But I put no faith in them. They will set you against your duties—they will set you against me. No doubt I'm not your mother : but I have always tried to do my duty by you."

Effie had replied with a few words of ac-

knowledge. Mrs. Ogilvie was always very kind. It was Uncle John's conviction, which had a great deal of weight with the girl, that she meant sincerely to do her duty, as she said. But, nevertheless, the doors of Effie's heart would not open; they yielded a little, just enough to warrant her in feeling that she had not closed them, but that was all.

She was much more at ease with the Miss Dempsters than with her stepmother. Her relations with them were quite simple. They had scolded her and questioned her all her life, and she did not mind what they said to her. Sometimes she would blaze into sudden resentment and cry, or else avenge herself with a few hot words. But as there was no bond of duty in respect to her old friends, there was perfect freedom in their intercourse. If they hurt her she cried out. But when Mrs. Ogilvie hurt her she was silent and thought the more.

Effie was just nineteen when it began to be

rumoured over the country that the mansion-house of Allonby was let. There was no place like it within twenty miles. It was an old house, with the remains of a house still older by its side—a proof that the Allonbies had been in the countryside since the old days when life so near the Border was full of disturbance.

The house lay low on the side of a stream, which, after it had passed decorously by the green lawns and park, ran into a dell which was famed far and near. It was in itself a beautiful little ravine, richly wooded, in the midst of a country not very rich in wood ; and at the opening of the dell or dene, as they called it, was one of those little lonely churchyards which are so pathetic in Scotland, burying-places of the past, which are to be found in the strangest unexpected places, sometimes without any trace of the protecting chapel which in the old times must have consecrated their loneliness and kept the dead like a faithful watcher.

In the midst of this little cluster of graves there were, however, the ruins of a humble little church very primitive and old, which, but for one corner of masonry with a small lancet window still standing, would have looked like a mound somewhat larger than the rest; and in the shadow of the ruin was a tombstone, with an inscription which recorded an old tragedy of love and death; and this it was which brought pilgrims to visit the little shrine.

The proprietor of the house was an old Lady Allonby, widowed and childless, who had long lived in Italy, and was very unlikely ever to return; consequently it made a great excitement in Gilston when it became known that at last she had been persuaded to let her house, and that a very rich family, a very gay family, people with plenty of money, and the most liberal inclinations in the way of spending, were coming to Allonby.

They were people who had been in busi-

ness, rich people, people from London. There were at least one son and some daughters. The inhabitants of the smaller houses, the Ogilvies, the Johnstons, the Hopes, and even the Miss Dempsters—all the families who considered themselves county people,—had great talks and consultations as to whether they should call. There were some who thought it was their duty to Lady Allonby, as an old friend and neighbour; and there were some who thought it a duty to themselves.

The Diroms, which was the name of the strangers, were not in any case people to be ignored. They gave, it was said, everything that could be given in the way of entertainment; the sons and the daughters at least, if not the father and mother, were well educated.

But there were a few people who were not convinced by these arguments. The Miss Dempsters stood in the front of this resisting party. They did not care for entertainments,

and they did not like *parvenos*. The doctor on the other hand, who had not much family to brag of, went to Allonby at once. He said, in his rough way, that it was a providence there was so much influenza fleeing about, which had made it necessary to send for him so soon.

"I went, you may be sure, as fast as Bess's four legs could carry me. I'm of opinion there are many guineas for me lying about there, and it would be disgraceful not to take them," the doctor said with a laugh.

"There's no guineas in the question for Beenie and me," said Miss Dempster. "I'm thinking we'll keep our view of the question. I'm not fond of new people, and I think Lady Allonby, after staying so long away, might just have stayed to the end, and let the heirs do what they liked. She cannot want the money; and it's just an abomination to put strange folk in the house of your

fathers ; and folk that would have been sent down to the servants' hall in other days."

"Not so bad as that," said the minister, "unless perhaps you are going back to feudal times. Money has always had its acknowledgment in modern society—and has paid for it sweetly."

"We will give it no acknowledgment," said the old lady. "We're but little likely to be the better for their money."

This conversation took place at a little dinner in Gilston House, convened, in fact, for the settlement of the question.

"That accounts for the difference of opinion," said the doctor. "I'll be a great deal the better for their money ; and I'm not minding about the blood—so long as they'll keep it cool with my prescriptions," he added, with a laugh. He was a coarse man, as the Rosebank ladies knew, and what could you expect ?

"There is one thing," said Mrs. Ogilvie,

“that has a great effect upon me, and that is, that there are young people in the house. There are not many young people in the neighbourhood, which is a great disadvantage for Effie. It would be a fine thing for her to have some companions of her own age. But I would like to hear something more about the family. Can anybody tell me who *she* was? The man may be a *parvenoo*, but these sort of persons sometimes get very nice wives. There was a friend of my sister’s that married a person of the name of Dirom. And she was a Maitland : so there is no telling.”

“There are Maitlands and Maitlands,” said Miss Robina. “It’s a very good name : but our niece that is married in the north had a butler that was John Maitland. I said she should just call him John. But he did not like that. And then there was a joke that they would call him Lauderdale. But the man was just very much offended, and said the name was his own name, as much

as if he was a duke : in which, no doubt, he was right."

"That's the way with all Scots names," said her sister. "There are Dempsters that I would not hire to wait at my table. We are not setting up to be better than our neighbours. I'm not standing on a name. But I would not encourage these mere monied folk to come into a quiet neighbourhood, and flaunt their big purses in our faces. They'll spoil the servants, they'll learn the common folk ill ways. That's always what happens. Ye'll see the very chickens will be dearer, and Nancy Miller at the shop will set up her saucy face, and tell ye they're all ordered for Allonby ; so they shall have no countenance from me."

"There is something in that," said Mrs. Ogilvie ; "but we have plenty of chickens of our own : I seldom need to buy. And then there is Effie to take into consideration. They will be giving balls and parties. I

have Effie to think of. I am thinking I will have to go."

"I hope Effie will keep them at a distance," said Miss Robina. Effie heard this discussion without taking any part in it. She had no objection to balls and parties, and there was in her mind the vague excitement with which a girl always hears of possible companions of her own age.

What might be coming with them? new adventures, new experiences, eternal friendship perhaps—perhaps—who can tell what? Whether the mother was a Maitland or the father a *parvenoo*, as the ladies said, it mattered little to Effie. She had few companions, and her heart was all on the side of the new people with a thoughtlessness in respect to their antecedents which perhaps was culpable.

But then Effie was but nineteen, which made a difference, Miss Robina herself was the first to allow.

CHAPTER IV.

“WE will just go without waiting any longer,” said Mrs. Ogilvie. “We are their nearest neighbours—and they will take it kind if we lose no time. As for these old cats, it will be little matter to the Diroms what they do—but your papa, that is a different affair. It can do no harm, for everybody knows who *we* are, Effie, and it may do good. So we will be on the safe side, whatever happens. And there is nothing much doing for the horses to-day. Be you ready at three o’clock, and we will take Rory in the carriage for a drive.”

Effie obeyed her stepmother with alacrity. She had not taken any part in the argument, but her imagination had found a great deal

to say. She had seen the young Diroms out riding. She had seen them at church. There were two girls about her own age, and there was a brother. The brother was of quite secondary importance, she said to herself; nevertheless, there are always per-adventures in the air, and when one thinks that at any moment one's predestined companion—he whom heaven intends, whatever men may think or say—may walk round the corner!

The image of Ronald, which had never been very deeply imprinted, had faded out of Effie's imagination. It had never reached any farther than her imagination. And in her little excitement and the pleasurable quickening of her pulsations, as she set out upon this drive with her stepmother, there was that vague sense that there was no telling what might come of it which gives zest to the proceedings of youth. It was the nearest approach to setting out upon a career of

adventure which had ever fallen to Effie's share. She was going to discover a world. She was a new little Columbus, setting her sail towards the unknown.

Mrs. Ogilvie ran on all the way with a sort of monologue, every sentence of which began with, "I wonder."

"Dear me, I wish I could have found out who *she* was. I wonder if it will turn out to be my sister's friend. She was a great deal older than I am, of course, and might very well have grown-up sons and daughters. For Mary is the eldest of us all, and if she had ever had any children, they would have been grown up by this time. We will see whether she will say anything about Mary. And I wonder if you will like the girls. They will always have been accustomed to more luxury than would be at all becoming to a country gentleman's daughter like you. And I wonder if the young man—the brother—will be always at Allonby. We

will have to ask them to their dinner. And I wonder——” But here Mrs. Ogilvie’s wonderings were cut short on her lips ; and so great was her astonishment that her lips dropped apart, and she sat gaping, incapable of speech.

“I declare !” she cried at last, and could say no more. The cause of this consternation was that, as they entered the avenue of Allonby, another vehicle met them coming down. And this turned out to be the carriage from the inn, which was the only one to be had for ten miles round, conveying Miss Dempster and Miss Beenie, in their best apparel. The Gilston coachman stopped, as was natural, and so did the driver of the cab.

“Well,” cried Miss Dempster, waving her hand, “ye are going, I see, after all. We’ve just been having our lunch with them. Since it was to be done, it was just as well to do it in good time. And a very nice luncheon

it was, and nicely set upon the table, that I must say—but how can you wonder, with such a number of servants! If they're not good for that, they're good for nothing. There was just too much, a great deal too much, upon the table; and a fine set-out of plate, and——”

“Sarah, Mrs. Ogilvie is not minding about that.”

“Mrs. Ogilvie is like other folk, and likes to hear our first impressions. And, Effie, you will need just to trim up your beaver; for, though they are not what you can call fine, they are in the flower of the fashion. We'll keep you no longer. Sandy, you may drive on. Eh! no—stop a moment,” cried the old lady, flourishing her umbrella.

• The Gilston coachman had put his horses in motion also; so that when the two carriages were checked again, it was obliquely and from a distance, raising her voice, that Miss Dempster shouted this piece of inform-

ation : "Ye'll be gratified to hear that she *was* a Miss Maitland," the old lady cried.

"Well, if ever I heard the like!" said Mrs. Ogilvie, as they went on. "There to their lunch, after vowing they would never give their countenance——! That shows how little you can trust even your nearest neighbours. They are just two old cats! But I am glad she is the person I thought. As Mary's sister, I will have a different kind of a standing from ordinary strangers, and you will profit by that, Effie. I would not wonder if you found them a great acquisition; and your father and me, we would be very well pleased. We've heard nothing about the gentlemen of the house. I wonder if they're always at home. As I was saying, I wonder if that brother of theirs is an idle man about the place, like so many. I'm not fond of idle men. I wonder——"

And for twenty minutes more Mrs. Ogilvie continued wondering, until the carriage

drew up at the door of Allonby, which was open, admitting a view of a couple of fine footmen and two large dogs, which last got up and came forward with lazy cordiality to welcome the visitors.

“Dear me!” Mrs. Ogilvie said aside. “I am always distressed with Glen for lying at the door. I wonder if it can be the fashion. I wonder——”

There was time for these remarks, for there was a long corridor to go through before a door was softly opened, and the ladies found themselves, much to their surprise, in what Mrs. Ogilvie afterwards called “the dark.” It was a room carefully shaded to that twilight which is dear at the present period to fashionable eyes. The sun is never too overpowering at Gilston; but the Miss Diroms were young women of their generation, and scorned to discriminate. They had sunblinds without and curtains within, so that the light was tem-

pered into an obscurity in which the robust eyes of country people, coming out of that broad vulgar daylight to which they were accustomed, could at first distinguish nothing.

Effie's young and credulous imagination was in a quiver of anticipation, admiration, and wonder. It was all new to her—the great house, the well-regulated silence, the poetic gloom. She held her breath, expecting what might next be revealed to her, with the awe and entranced and wondering satisfaction of a novice about to be initiated. The noiseless figures that rose and came forward and with a soft pressure of her hand, two of them mistily white, the other (only the mother, who didn't count) dark, impressed her beyond description.

The only thing that a little diminished the spell was the voices, more highly pitched than those native to the district, in unaccustomed modulations of "high English." Effie murmured quite unconsciously an in-

distinct "Very well, thank you" in answer to their greetings, and then they all sat down, and it became gradually possible to see.

The two Miss Diroms were tall and had what are called fine figures. They came and sat on either side of Effie, one clasping her hands round her knees, the other leaning back in a corner of the deep sofa with her head against a cushion. The sofa and the cushion were covered with yellow damask, against which the white dress made a pretty harmony, as Effie's eyes got accustomed to the dimness. But Effie, sitting very straight and properly in her chair, was much bewildered by the ease with which one young lady threw her arms over her head, and the other clasped them round her knees.

"How good of you to come!" said the one on the sofa, who was the eldest. "We were wondering if you would call."

"We saw you at church on Sunday," said the other, "and we thought you looked so nice. What a funny little church! I suppose we ought to say k'k."

"Miss Ogilvie will tell us what to say, and how to talk to the natives. Do tell us. We have been half over the world, but never in Scotland before."

"Oh then, you will perhaps have been in India," said Effie; "my brother is there."

"Is he in the army? Of course, all Scotch people have sons in the army. Oh no, we've never been in India."

"India," said the other, "is not in the world—it's outside. We've been everywhere where people go. Is he coming back soon? Is he good at tennis and that sort of thing? Do you play a great deal here?"

"They do at Lochlee," said Effie, "and at Kirkconnel: but not me. For I have nobody to play with."

“Poor little thing!” said the young lady on the sofa, patting her on the arm: and then they both laughed, while Effie grew crimson with shy pride and confusion. She did not see what she had said that was laughable; but it was evident that they did, and this is not an agreeable sensation even to a little girl.

“You shall come here and play,” said the other. “We are having a new court made. And Fred—where is Fred, Phyll?—Fred will be so pleased to have such a pretty little thing to play with.”

“How should I know where he is?—mooning about somewhere, sketching or something.”

“Oh,” said Effie, “do you sketch”? Perhaps she was secretly mollified, though she said to herself that she was yet more offended, by being called a pretty little thing.

“Not I; but my brother, that is Fred:

and I am Phyllis, and she is Doris. Now tell us your name, for we can't go on calling each other Miss, can we? Such near neighbours as we are, and going to see so much of each other."

"No, of course we can't go on saying Miss. What should you say was her name, Phyll? Let us guess. People are always like their names. I should say Violet."

"Dear no, such a mawkish little sentimental name. She is not sentimental at all—are you? What is an Ogilvie name? You have all family names in Scotland, haven't you, that go from mother to daughter?"

Effie sat confused while they talked over her. She was not accustomed to this sudden familiarity. To call the girls by their names, when she scarcely had formed their acquaintance, seemed terrible to her—alarming, yet pleasant too. She blushed, yet felt it was time to stop the discussion.

"They call me Effie," she said. "That is not all my name, but it is my name at home."

"They call me Effie," repeated Miss Doris, with a faint mockery in her tone; "what a pretty way of saying it, just like the Italians! If you are going to be so conscientious as that, I wasn't christened Doris, I must tell you: but I was determined Phyll should not have all the luck. We are quite eighteenth century here—furniture and all."

"But I can't see the furniture," said Effie, making for the first time an original remark. "Do you like to sit in the dark?"

At this both the sisters laughed again, and said that she was a most amusing little thing. "But don't say that to mamma, or it will quite strengthen her in her rebellion. She would like to sit in the sun, I believe. She was brought up in the barbarous ages, and doesn't know any better. There she is moving off into the other room with your mother.

Now the two old ladies will put their heads together——”

“Mrs. Ogilvie is not an old lady,” said Effie hastily ; “she is my stepmother. She is almost as young as——” Here she paused, with a glance at Miss Phyllis on the sofa, who was still lying back with her head against the cushion. Effie felt instinctively that it would not be wise to finish her sentence. “She is a great deal younger than you would suppose,” she added, once more a little confused.

“That explains why you are in such good order. Have you to do what she tells you ? Mamma is much better than that—we have her very well in hand. Oh, you are not going yet. It is impossible. There must be tea before you go. Mamma likes everybody to have something. And then Fred—you must see Fred—or at least he must see you——”

“Here he is,” said the other, with a sudden grasp of Effie’s arm.

Effie was much startled by this call upon

her attention. She turned round hastily, following the movement of her new friends. There could not have been a more dramatic appearance. Fred was coming in by a door at the end of the room. He had lifted a curtain which hung over it, and stood in the dim light outside holding back the heavy folds—looking, it appeared, into the gloom to see if any one was there.

Naturally, coming out of the daylight his eyes at first made out nothing, and he stood for some time in this highly effective attitude—a spectacle which was not unworthy a maiden's eye. He was tall and slim like his sisters, dark, almost olive in his complexion, with black hair clustering closely in innumerable little curls about his head. He was dressed in a gray morning suit, with a red tie, which was the only spot of colour visible, and had a great effect. He peered into the gloom, curving his eyelids as if he had been shortsighted.

Then, when sufficient time had elapsed to fix his sight upon Effie's sensitive imagination like a sun picture, he spoke: "Are any of you girls there?" This was all, and it was not much that Fred said. He was answered by a chorus of laughter from his sisters. They were very fond of laughing, Effie thought.

"Oh yes, some of us girls are here—three of us. You can come in and be presented," Phyllis said.

"If you think you are worthy of it," said Doris, once more grasping Effie's arm.

They had all held their breath a little when the hero thus dramatically presented himself. Doris had kept her hand on Effie's wrist; perhaps because she wished to feel those little pulses jump, or else it was because of that inevitable peradventure which presented itself to them too, as it had done to Effie. This was the first meeting, but how it might end, or what it might lead to, who could tell? The girls, though they were so unlike each other,

all three held their breath. And then the sisters laughed as he approached, and the little excitement dropped.

“I wish you wouldn’t sit in the dark,” said Fred, dropping the curtain behind him as he entered. “I can’t see where you are sitting, and if I am not so respectful as I ought to be, I hope I may be forgiven, for I can see nothing. Oh, here you are !”

“It is not the princess ; you are not expected to go on your knees,” said his sisters, while Effie once more felt herself blush furiously at being the subject of the conversation. “You are going to be presented to Miss Ogilvie—don’t you know the young lady in white?—oh, of course, you remember. Effie, my brother Fred. And now you know us all, and we are going to be the best of friends.”

“This is very familiar,” said Fred. “Miss Ogilvie, you must not visit it upon me if Phyll and Dor are exasperating. They always are. But when you come to know them they

are not so bad as you might think. They have it all their own way in this house. It has always been the habit of the family to let the girls have their own way—and we find it works well on the whole, though in point of manners it may leave something to be desired.”

He had thrown himself carelessly on the sofa beside his sister as he spoke. Effie sat very still and erect on her chair and listened with a dismay and amazement which it would be hard to put into words. She did not know what to say to this strange group. She was afraid of them, brother and sisters and altogether. It was the greatest relief to her when Mrs. Ogilvie returned into the room again, discoursing in very audible tones with the mistress of the house.

“I am sure I am very glad to have met with you,” Mrs. Ogilvie was saying. “They will be so pleased to hear everything. Poor thing! she is but lonely, with no children

about her, and her husband dead this five years and more. He was a great loss to her—the kindest man, and always at her call. But we must just make up our mind to take the bitter with the sweet in this life. Effie, where are you? We must really be going. We have Rory, that is my little boy, with us in the carriage, and he will be getting very tired of waiting. I hope it will not be long before we see you at Gilston. Good-bye, Mrs. Dirom; Effie, I hope you have said to the young ladies that we will be glad to see them—and you too,” giving her hand to Fred—“you especially, for we have but few young men in the country.”

“I accept your invitation as a compliment to the genus young man, Mrs. Ogilvie—not to me.”

“Well, that is true,” she said with a laugh; “but I am sure, from what I can see of you, it will soon be as particular as you could wish. Young people are a great want just in this

corner of the country. Effie, poor thing, has felt it all her life : but I hope better things will be coming for her now."

"She shall not be lonely if we can help it," said the sisters. They kissed her as they parted, as if they had known her for years, and called her "dear Effie!" waving their hands to her as she disappeared into the light. They did not go out to the door with the visitors, as Effie in the circumstances would have done, but yet sent her away dazzled by their affectionateness, their offers of regard.

She felt another creature, a girl with friends, a member of society, as she drove away. What a thing it is to have friends! She had been assured often by her stepmother that she was a happy girl to have so many people who took an interest in her, and would always be glad to give her good advice. Effie knew where to lay her hand upon a great deal of good advice at any moment ;

but that is not everything that is required in life.

Phyllis and Doris! they were like names out of a book, and it was like a picture in her memory, the slim figure in white sunk deep in the yellow damask of the sofa, with her dark hair relieved against the big soft puffy cushion. Exactly like a picture; whereas Effie herself had sat straight up like a little country girl. Mrs. Ogilvie ran on like a purling stream as they drove home, expressing her satisfaction that it was Mary's friend who was the mistress of the house, and describing all the varieties of feeling in her own mind on the subject—her conviction that this was almost too good to be true, and just more fortunate than could be hoped.

But Effie listened, and paid no attention. She had a world of her own now to escape into. Would she ever be bold enough to call them Phyllis and Doris?—and then

Fred—but nobody surely would expect her to call him Fred.

Effie was disturbed in these delightful thoughts, and Mrs. Ogilvie's monologue was suddenly broken in upon by a sound of horses' hoofs, and a dust and commotion upon the road, followed by the apparition of Dr. Jardine's mare, with her head almost into the carriage window on Effie's side. The doctor's head above the mare's was pale. There was foam on his lips, and he carried his riding whip short and savagely, as if he meant to strike some one.

"Tell me just one thing," he said, without any preliminary greetings; "have these women been there?"

"Dear me, doctor, what a fright you have given me. Is anything wrong with Robert; has anything happened? Bless me, the women! what women? You have just taken my breath away."

"These confounded women that spoil

everything — will ye let me know if they were there ?”

“ Oh, the Miss —— Well, yes—I was as much surprised as you, doctor. With their best bonnets on, and all in state in Mr. Ewing’s carriage ; they were there to their lunch.”

The doctor swore a solemn oath—by —— ! something which he did not say, which is always a safe proceeding.

“ You’ll excuse me for stopping you, but I could not believe it. The old cats ! And to their lunch !” At this he gave a loud laugh. “ They’re just inconceivable !” And rode away.

CHAPTER V.

THE acquaintance thus formed between the houses of Allonby and Gilston was followed by much and close intercourse. In the natural order of things, there came two dinner parties, the first of which was given by Mrs. Ogilvie, and was a very elaborate business. The lady of Gilston began her preparations as soon as she returned from that first momentous call. She spent a long time going over the list of possible guests, making marks upon the sheet of paper on which Effie had written out the names.

“Johnstones — three — no, but that will never do. Him and her we must have, of course: but Mary must just stay at home,

or come after dinner ; where am I to get a gentleman for her ? There will have to be two extra gentlemen anyway for Effie, and one of the Miss Diroms. Do ye think I'm just made of men ? No, no, Mary Johnstone will have to stay at home. The Duncans ?—well, he's cousin to the Marquis, and that is always something ; but he's a foolish creature, and his wife is not much better. Mrs. Heron and Sir John—Oh, yes ; she is just a credit to see at your table, with her diamonds ; and though he is rather doited, poor man, he is a great person in the county. Well, and what do you say to the Smiths ? They're nobody in particular, so far as birth goes ; but the country is getting so dreadfully democratic that what does that matter ? And they're monied people like the Diroms themselves, and Lady Smith has a great deal to say for herself. We will put down the Smiths. But, Effie, there is one thing that just drives me to despair——”

“Yes?” said Effie, looking up from the list; “and what is that?”

“The Miss Dempsters!” cried her stepmother in a tone which might have touched the hardest heart. That was a question indeed. The Miss Dempsters would have to be asked for the loan of their forks and spoons, and their large lamp, and *both* the silver candlesticks. How after that would it be possible to leave them out? And how put them in? And how provide two other men to balance the old ladies? Such questions as these are enough to turn any woman’s hair gray, as Mrs. Ogilvie said.

Then when that was settled there came the bill of fare. The entire village knew days before what there was to be for dinner, and about the fish that was sent for from Dumfries, and did not turn out all that could have been wished, so that at the last moment a mere common salmon from Solway, a thing made no account of, had to be put in the pot.

Mrs. Moffatt at the shop had a sight of the pastry, which was "just remarkable" she said. And a dozen little groups were admitted on the afternoon of the great day to see the table set out, all covered with flowers, with the napkins like snowy turrets round the edge, and the silver and crystal shining. The Ogilvies possessed an epergne won at some racing meeting long before, which was a great work of art, all in frosted silver,—a huntsman standing between a leash of dogs; and this, with the Dempster candlesticks on each side, made a brilliant centre. And the schoolmaster recorded afterwards amid his notes of the rainfall and other interesting pieces of information, that the fine smell of the cooking came as far as the school, and distracted the bairns at their lessons, causing that melting sensation in the jaws which is described by the country folk as watering of the mouth.

Effie was busy all the morning with the flowers, with writing out little cards for the

guests' names, and other such ornamental arrangements.

Glen, confused in his mind and full of curiosity, followed her about everywhere, softly waving his great tail like a fan, sweeping off a light article here and there from the crowded tables, and asking in his superior doggish way, what all this fuss and excitement (which he rather enjoyed on the whole) was about? till somebody sent him away with a kick and an adjuration as being "in everybody's gait"—which was a sad end to his impartial and interested spectatorship.

Little Rory toddled at his sister's heels on the same errand, but could not be kicked like Glen—and altogether there was a great deal of confusion. But you never would have divined this when Mrs. Ogilvie came sweeping down stairs in her pink silk, as if the dinner had all been arranged by her major-domo, and she had never argued with the cook in her life.

It may easily be supposed that the members

of the family had little time to compare notes while their guests remained. And it was not till the last carriage had rolled away and the lady of the house had made her last smiling protestation that it was still just ridiculously early, that this meritorious woman threw herself into her favourite corner of the sofa, with a profound sigh of pleasure and relief.

“Well!” she said, and repeated that long-drawn breath of satisfaction. “Well!—it’s been a terrible trouble; but I cannot say but I’m thoroughly content and pleased now that it’s past.”

To this her husband, standing in front of the expiring fire (for even in August a little fire in the evening is not inappropriate on the Border), replied with a suppressed growl.

“You’re easy pleased,” he said, “but why ye should take all this trouble to fill people with good things, as the Scripture says, that are not hungry and don’t want them—”

“Oh, Robert, just you hold your peace!

You're always very well pleased to go out to your dinner. And as for the Allonby family, it was a clear duty. When you speak of Scripture you surely forget that we're bidden to entertain strangers unawares. No, that's not just right, it's angels we entertain unawares."

"There's no angels in that house, or I am mistaken," said Mr. Ogilvie.

"Well, there's two very well-dressed girls, which is the nearest to it: and there's another person, that may turn out even more important."

"And who may that be?"

"Whist," said Mrs. Ogilvie, holding up a finger of admonition as the others approached. "Well, Uncle John! And Effie, come you here and rest. Poor thing, you're done out. Now I would like to have your frank opinion. Mine is that though it took a great deal of trouble, it's been a great success."

"The salmon was excellent," said Mr. Moubray.

"And the table looked very pretty."

“And yon grouse were not bad at all.” !!!

“Oh,” cried Mrs. Ogilvie, throwing up her hands, “ye tiresome people! Am I thinking of the salmon or the grouse; was there any chance they would be bad in *my* house? I am meaning the party: and my opinion is that everybody was just very well pleased, and that everything went off to a wish.”

“That woman Lady Smith has a tongue that would deave a miller,” said the master of the house. “I request you will put her at a distance from me, Janet, if she ever dines here again.”

“And what will you do when she asks us?” cried his wife. “If she gives you anything but her right hand—my word! but you will be ill pleased.”

To this argument her husband had no reply handy, and after a moment she resumed—

“I am very glad to see you are going to be such friends with the Diroms, Effie; they’re fine girls. Miss Doris, as they call

her, might have had her dress a little higher, but no doubt that's the fault of those grand dressmakers that will have their own way. But the one I like is Mr. Fred. He is a very fine lad; he takes nothing upon him."

"What should he take upon him? He's nothing or nobody, but only a rich man's son."

"Robert, you are just the most bigoted, inconsiderate person! Well, I think it's very difficult when you are just a rich person to be modest and young like yon. If you are a young duke that's different; but to have nothing but money to stand upon—and not to stand upon that—"

"It is very well said," said Uncle John, making her a bow. "There's both charity and observation in what Mrs. Ogilvie says."

"Is there not?" cried the lady in a flush of pleasure. "Oh no, I'm not meaning it is clever of me; but when a young man has nothing else, and is just pleasant, and never

seems to mind, but singles out a bit little thing of a girl in a white frock—”

This made them all look at Effie, who as yet said nothing. She was leaning back in the other corner, tired yet flushed with the pleasure and novelty of finding herself so important a person. Her white frock was very simple, but yet it was the best she had ever had; and never before had Effie been “singled out,” as her stepmother said. The dinner party was a great event to her. Nothing so important had occurred before, nothing in which she herself had been so prominent. A pretty flush of colour came over her face.

There had been a great deal in Fred Dirom’s eyes which was quite new, mysterious, and even, in its novelty, delightful to Effie. She could scarcely help laughing at the recollection, and yet it made a warmth about her heart. To be flattered in that silent way—not by any mere compliment, but by

the homage of a pair of eloquent eyes—is startling, strange, never unsweet to a girl. It is a more subtle coming of age than any birthday can bring. It shows that she has passed out of the band of little girls into that of those young princesses whom all the poets have combined to praise. This first sensation of the awakening consciousness has something exquisite in it not to be put into words.

Her blush grew deeper as she saw the group round all looking at her—her step-mother with a laugh of satisfaction, her father with a glance in which the usual drawing together of his shaggy eyebrows was a very poor simulation of a frown, and Uncle John with a liquid look of tender sympathy not unmingled with tender ridicule and full of love withal.

“Why do you all look at me like that?” Effie cried, to throw off the growing embarrassment. “I am not the only one that had a white frock.”

“Well, I would not call yon a white frock that was drooping off Doris Dirom’s shoulders,” said Mrs. Ogilvie; “but we’ll say no more about that. So far as I could see, everybody was pleased: and they stayed a most unconscionable time. Bless me! it’s past eleven o’clock. A little license may always be given on a great occasion; but though it’s a pleasure to talk it all over, and everything has been just a great success, I think, Effie, you should go to your bed. It’s later than your ordinary, and you have been about the most of the day. Good-night, my dear. You looked very nice, and your flowers were just beautiful: everybody was speaking of them, and I gave the credit where it was due.”

“It is time for me to go too,” said Uncle John.

“Oh, wait a moment.” Mrs. Ogilvie waited till Effie had gone out of the room with her candle, very tired, very happy,

and glad to get away from so much embarrassing observation. The stepmother waited a little until all was safe, and then she gave vent to the suppressed triumph.

“You will just mark my words, you two gentlemen,” she cried. “They have met but three times—once when we called, once when they were playing their tennis, or whatever they call it—and to-night; but if Effie is not Mrs. Fred Dirom before six months are out it will be her own fault.”

“Fred Fiddlestick!” cried Mr. Ogilvie. “You’re just a silly woman, thinking of nothing but love and marriages. I’ll have no more of that.”

“If I’m a silly woman, there’s not far off from here a sillier man,” said Mrs. Ogilvie. “You’ll have to hear a great deal more of it. And if you do not see all the advantages, and the grand thing it would be for Effie to have such a settlement so young—”

“There was one at your hand if you

had wanted to get rid of her, much younger."

"Oh," cried Mrs. Ogilvie, clasping her hands together, "that men, who are always said to be the cleverest and the wisest, should be so slow at the uptake! Any woman would understand—but you, that are her father! The one that was at my hand, as you say, what was it? A long-leggit lad in a marching regiment! with not enough to keep him a horse, let alone a wife. That would have been a bonnie business!—that would have been taking a mother's care of Effie! I am thankful her mother cannot hear ye. But Fred Dirom is very different—the only son of a very rich man. And no doubt the father, who perhaps is not exactly made for society, would give them Allonby, and set them up. That is what my heart is set on for Effie. I have always said, I will never perhaps have a grown-up daughter of my own."

"I am sure," said Mr. Moubray, "you have nothing but kindness in your heart."

"You mean I am nothing but a well-intentioned haverel," said Mrs. Ogilvie, with a laugh. "But you'll see that I'm more than that. Effie! bless me, what a start you gave me! I thought by this time that you were in your bed."

Effie had come back to the drawing-room upon some trifling errand. She stood there for a moment, her candle in her hand, her fair head still decked with the rose which had been its only ornament. The light threw a little flickering illumination upon her face, for her stepmother, always thrifty, had already extinguished one of the lamps. Mr. Moubray looked with eyes full of tender pity upon the young figure in the doorway, standing, hesitating, upon the verge of a world unknown. He had no mind for any further discussion. He followed her out when she had carried off the gloves and

little ornaments which she had left behind, and stood with her a moment in the hall to say good-night.

"My little Effie," he said, "an evening like this is little to us, but there is no saying what it may be to you. I think it has brought new thoughts already, to judge by your face."

She looked up at him startled, with her colour rising. "No, Uncle John," she answered, with the natural self-defence of youth: then paused to inquire after her denial. "What kind of new thoughts?"

He stooped over her to kiss her, with his hand upon her shoulder.

"We'll not inquire too far," he said. "Nothing but novelty, my dear, and the rising of the tide."

Effie opened the door for him, letting in the fresh sweep of the night-wind, which came so clear and keen over the moors, and the twinkle of the stars looking down from

the great vault of dark blue sky. The world seemed to widen out round them, with the opening of that door, which let in all the silence and hush of the deep-breathing night. She put her candle upon the table and came out with him, her delicate being thrilling to the influence of the sweet full air which embraced her round and round.

"Oh, Uncle John, what a night! to think we should shut ourselves up in little dull rooms with all this shining outside the door!"

"We are but frail human creatures, Effie, though we have big souls; the dull rooms are best for us at this hour of the night."

"I would like to walk with you down among the trees. I would like to go down the Dene and hear the water rushing, but not to Allonby churchyard."

"No, nor to Allonby at all, Effie. Take time, my bonnie dear, let no one hasten

your thoughts. Come, I cannot have you out here in the night in your white frock. You look like a little ghost; and what would Mrs. Ogilvie say to me if you caught cold just at this crisis of affairs?"

He stopped to laugh softly, but put his arm round her, and led her back within the door. •

"The night is bonnie and the air is fresh, but home and shelter are the best. Good-night. God bless my little Effie," he said.

The people in the village, whose minds were now relieved from the strain of counting all the carriages, and were going to sleep calmly in the certainty that everybody was gone, heard his firm slow step going past, and knew it was the minister, who would naturally be the last to go home. They took a pleasure in hearing him pass, and the children, who were still awake, felt a protection in the fact that he was there,

going leisurely along the road, sure to keep away any ghost or robber that might be lurking in the stillness of the night. His very step was full of thought.

It was pleasant to him, without any sad work in hand, to walk through the little street between the sleeping houses, saying a blessing upon the sleepers as he passed. Usually when he was out so late, it was on his way to some sickbed to minister to the troubled or the dying. He enjoyed the night the exemption and the leisure, and a smile in his eyes looked from the light in Dr. Jardine's window, within which the Dr. was no doubt smoking a comfortable pipe before he went to bed, to the little inquisitive glimmer higher up in Rosebank, where the old ladies were laying aside their old finery and talking over the party. He passed between them with a humorous consciousness of their antagonism which did not disturb the general peace.

The stars shone with a little frost in their brightness, though it was but August; the night-air blew fresh in his face; the village, with all its windows and eyelids closed, slept deep in the silence of the night. "God bless them all—but above all Effie," he repeated, smiling to himself.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Diroms belonged to a class now very common in England, the class of very rich people without any antecedents or responsibilities, which it is so difficult to classify or lay hold of, and which neither the authorities of society nor the moralist have yet fully comprehended. They had a great deal of money, which is popularly recognized to be power, and they owed it to nobody but themselves.

They owed nothing to anybody. They had no estates to keep up; no poor people depended upon them; the clerks and porters at the office were not to call dependents, though probably--out of good nature, when

they were ill or trouble arose in their families, if it happened to come under the notice of the head of the firm, he would fling them a little money, perhaps with an admonition, perhaps with a joke. But this was pure liberality, generosity as his friends called it. He had nothing to "keep up."

Even the sick gamekeeper who had been hurt by a fall, though he was in the new tenant's service, was Lady Allonby's servant, and it was she who had to support his family while he was ill. The rich people were responsible for nobody. If they were kind—and they were not unkind—it was all to their credit, for they had no duty to any one.

This was how the head of the house considered his position. "I don't know anything about your land burdens, your feudal burdens," he would say; "money is what has made me. I pay taxes enough, I hope; but I've got no sentimental taxes

to pay, and I won't have anything to say to such rubbish. I am a working man myself, just like the rest. If these fellows will take care of their own business as I did, they will get on themselves as I have done, and want nothing from anybody. I've no call even to 'keep up' my family; they ought to be working for themselves, as I was at their age. If I do, it's because the girls and their mother are too many for me, and I have to yield to their prejudices."

These were Mr. Dirom's principles: but he threw about his money very liberally all the same, giving large subscriptions, with a determination to stand at the head of the list when he was on it at all, and an inclination to twit the others who did not give so liberally with their stinginess; "What is the use of making bones of it?" he said, with a flourish to Sir John, who was well known to be in straightened

circumstances ; “I just draw a cheque for five hundred and the thing’s done.”

Sir John could no more have drawn a cheque for five hundred than he could have flown, and Mr. Dirom knew it ; and the knowledge gave an edge to his pleasure. Sir John’s twenty-five pounds was in reality a much larger contribution than Mr. Dirom’s five hundred, but the public did not think of this. The public said that Sir John gave the twenty-five because he could not help it, because his position demanded it ; but Mr. Dirom’s five hundred took away the breath of the spectators. It was more than liberal ; it was magnificent.

Mr. Dirom was a man who wore white waistcoats and large well-blown roses in his coat. He swaggered, without knowing it, in his walk, and in his speech, wherever he was visible. The young people were better bred, and were very conscious of those imperfections. They preferred, indeed, that he

should not "trouble," as they said, to come home, especially to come to the country when business prevented. There was no occasion for papa to "trouble." Fred could take his place if he was detained in town.

In this way they showed a great deal of tender consideration for their father's engagements. Perhaps he was deceived by it, perhaps not; no one could tell. He took his own way absolutely, appearing when it suited him, and when it did not suit him leaving them to their own devices. Allonby was too far off for him, too distant from town: though he was quite willing to be known as the occupier of so handsome a "place." He came down for the first of the shooting, which is the right thing in the city, but afterwards did not trouble his family much with his presence, which was satisfactory to everybody concerned. It was not known exactly what Mr. Dirom had risen from, but it was low enough to make

his present elevation wonderful, and to give that double zest to wealth which makes the self-made man happy.

Mrs. Dirom was of a different order. She was two generations at least from the beginning of her family, and she too, though in a less degree than her children, felt that her husband's manners left something to be desired. He had helped himself up by her means, she having been, as in the primitive legend, of the class of the master's daughters : at least her father was the head of the firm under which Dirom had begun to "make his way." But neither was she quite up to the mark.

> "Mamma is dreadfully middle-class," the girls said. In some respects that is worse than the lower class. It made her a little timid and doubtful of her position, which her husband never was. None of these things affected the young people ; they had received "every advantage."

➤ Their father's wealth was supposed to be immense; and when wealth is immense it penetrates everywhere. A moderate fortune is worth very little in a social point of view, but a great fortune opens every door.

The elder brother, who never came to Allonby, who never went near the business, who had been portioned off contemptuously by his father, as if he had been a girl (and scorn could not go farther), had married an earl's daughter, and, more than that, had got her off the very steps of the throne, for she had been a Maid of Honour. He was the most refined and cultivated individual in the world, with one of the most lovely houses in London, and everything about him artistic to the last degree. It was with difficulty that he put up with his father at all. Still, for the sake of his little boy, he acknowledged the relationship from time to time.

As for Fred and his sisters, they have

already been made known to the reader. Fred was by way of being "in the business," and went down to the office three or four times in the week when he was in town. But what he wished to be was an artist. He painted more or less, he modelled, he had a studio of his own in the midst of one of the special artistic quarters, and retired there to work, as he said, whenever the light was good.

For his part Fred aspired to be a Bohemian, and did everything he could in a virtuous way to carry out his intention. He scorned money, or thought he did while enjoying every luxury it could procure. If he could have found a beautiful milkmaid or farm girl with anything like the Rossetti type of countenance he would have married her off-hand ; but then beauties of that description are rare. The country lasses on the Border were all of too cheerful a type. But he had fully made up his mind

that when the right woman appeared no question of money or ambition should be allowed to interfere between him and his inclinations.

"You may say what you will," he said to his sisters, "and I allow my principles would not answer with girls. You have nothing else to look to, to get on in the world. But a man can take that sort of thing in his own hands, and if one gets beauty that's enough. It is more distinction than anything else. I shall insist upon beauty, but nothing more."

"It all depends on what you call beauty," said Miss Phyllis. "You can make anything beauty if you stand by it and swear to it. Marrying a painter isn't at all a bad way. He paints you over and over again till you get recognized as a Type, and then it doesn't matter what other people say."

"You can't call Effie a Type," said the

young lady who called herself Doris—her name in fact was a more humble one: but then not even the Herald's College has anything to do with Christian names.

“She may not be a Type—but if you had seen her as I did in the half light, coming out gradually as one's eyes got used to it like something developing in a camera—Jove! She was like a Burne-Jones—not strong enough for the blessed Damsel or that sort of thing, but sad and sweet like—like—” Fred paused for a simile, “like a hopeless maiden in a procession winding down endless stairs, or—standing about in the wet, or— If she had not been dressed in nineteenth-century costume.”

“He calls that nineteenth-century costume!” said Phyllis with a mixture of sympathy and scorn.

“Poor Effie is not dressed at all,” said the other sister. “She has clothes on, that

is all : but I could make her look very nice if she were in my hands. She has a pretty little figure, not spoiled at all—not too solid like most country girls but just enough to drape a pretty flowing stuff or soft muslin upon. I should turn her out that you would not know her if she trusted herself to me.”

“For goodness’ sake let her alone,” cried Fred ; “don’t make a trollop of my little maiden. Her little stiffness suits her. I like her just so, in her white frock.”

“You should have been born a milliner, Dor.”

“Perhaps I was—and papa’s money has thwarted nature. If he should ever lose it all, which I suppose is on the cards——”

“Oh, very much on the cards,” said Fred.

“There is always a smash some time or other in a great commercial concern.”

“What fun !” said Miss Phyllis.

“Then I should set up directly. The

sisters Dirom, milliners and dressmakers. It would be exceedingly amusing, and we should make a great fortune—all *good* dressmakers do.”

“It would be very amiable of you, Dor, to call your firm the sisters Dirom—for I should be of no use. I shall spend the fortune if you please, but I couldn’t help in any other way.”

“Oh, yes, you could. You will marry, and have all your things from me. I should dress you beautifully, and you would be the most delightful advertisement. Of course you would not have any false pride. You would say to your duchesses, I got this from my sister. She is the only possible dressmaker nowadays.”

“False pride—oh, I hope not! It would be quite a distinction—everybody would go. You could set up afternoon teas, and let them try on all your things. It would be delightful. But papa will not come to grief,

he is too well backed up," said Phyllis with a sigh.

"If I do not marry next season, I shall not wait for the catastrophe," said Doris. "Perhaps if the Opposition comes in we might coax Lord Pantry to get me appointed milliner to the Queen. If Her Majesty had once a dress from me, she would never look at Worth more."

"Worth!" said Phyllis, throwing up her hands in mild but indignant amazement.

"Well, then, Waley, or whatever you call him. Worth is a mere symbol," said Doris with philosophical calm. "How I should like it! but if one marries, one's husband's family and all kinds of impossible people interfere."

"You had better marry, you girls," said Fred; "it is much your best chance. Wipe out the governor with a title. That's what I should do if I could. But unfortunately I can't—the finest of heiresses does not com-

municate her family honours, more's the pity. I shall always be Fred Dirom, if I were to marry a duchess. But an artist's antecedents don't matter. Fortunately he makes his own way."

"Fred," said his mother, coming in, "I wish you would not talk of yourself as an artist, dear. Papa does not like it. He indulges you all a great deal, but there are some things that don't please him at all."

"Quite unreasonably, mother dear," said Fred, who was a good son, and very kind to her on the whole. "Most of the fellows I know in that line are much better born than I am. Gentlemen's sons, most of them."

"Oh, Fred!" said Mrs. Dirom, with eyes of deep reproach. She added in a tremulous voice, "My grandfather had a great deal of property in the country. He had indeed, I assure you, although you think we have nothing but money. And if that does not make a gentleman, what does?"

“What indeed?” said her son: but he made no further reply. And the sisters interposed.

“We were talking of what we shall all do in case the firm should come to grief, and all the money be lost.”

“Oh, girls!” Mrs. Dirom started violently and put her hand to her heart. “Fred! you don’t mean to say that there are rumours in the city, or a word whispered—”

“Not when I heard last—but then I have not been in the city for a month. That reminds me,” said Fred, “that really I ought to put in an appearance—just once in a way.”

“You mean you want to have a run to town?”

“Yes, dear,” said his mother, “go if you think you could be of any use. Oh, you don’t know what it is you are talking of so lightly. I could tell you things— Oh,

Fred, if you think there is anything going on, any danger—”

“Nothing of the sort,” he said, with a laugh. “We were only wondering what we should be good for mother—not much, I believe. I might perhaps draw for the *Graphic* fancy pictures of battles and that sort of thing; or, if the worst came to the worst, there is the *Police News*.”

“You have both got Vocations,” said Phyllis. “It is fine for you. You know what to do, you two. But I can do nothing; I should have to Marry.” She spoke with a languid emphasis as of capitals, in her speech.

“Oh, children!” cried Mrs. Dirom, “what are you thinking of? You think all that is clever, but it does not seem clever to me. It is just the dreadful thing in business that one day you may be up at the top of the tree, and next morning—”

“Nowhere!” said Fred, with a burlesque

groan. And then they all laughed. The anxious middle-class mother looked at them as the hen of the proverb looks at her ducklings. Silly children! what did they know about it? She could have cried in vexation and distress.

“You laugh,” she said, “but you would not laugh if you knew as much as I do. The very name of such a thing is unlucky. I wouldn’t let myself think of it lest it should bring harm. Things may be quite right, and I hope and believe they are quite right: but if there was so much as a whisper on the Exchange that his children—his own children—had been joking on the subject. Oh, a whisper, that’s enough!”

The young people were not in the least impressed by what she said—they had not been brought up in her sphere. That alarm for exposure, that dread of a catastrophe which was strong in her bosom, had no response in theirs. They had no more under-

standing of poverty than of Paradise—and to the girls in particular, the idea of a great event, a matter of much noise and commotion, to be followed by new enchanting freedom and the possibilities of adventure, was really “fun!” as they said. They were not afraid of being dropped by their friends.

Society has undergone a change in this respect. A young lady turned into a fashionable dressmaker would be the most delightful of lions; all her acquaintances would crowd round her. She would be celebrated as “a noble girl” by the serious, and as *chic* by the fast.

Doris looked forward to the possibility with a delightful perception of all the advantages that were in it. It was more exciting than the other expedient of marrying, which was all that, in the poverty of her invention, occurred to Phyllis. They made very merry, while their mother trembled with an alarm for which there was no ap-

parent foundation. She was nervous, which is always a ready explanation of a woman's troubles and fears.

There was, in fact, no foundation whatever for any alarm. Never had the credit of Dirom, Dirom and Company stood higher. There was no cloud, even so big as a finger, upon the sky.

Mr. Dirom himself, though his children were ashamed of him, was not without acceptance in society. In his faithfulness to business, staying in town in September, he had a choice of fine houses in which to make those little visits from Saturday to Monday which are so pleasant; and great ladies who had daughters inquired tenderly about Fred, and learned with the profoundest interest that it was he who was the Prince of Wales, the heir-apparent of the house, he, and not Jack the married son, who would have nothing to say to the business.

When Fred paid a flying visit to town to

“look up the governor,” as he said, and see what was going on, he too was overwhelmed with invitations from Saturday to Monday. And though he was modest enough he was very well aware that he would not be refused, as a son-in-law, by some of the finest people in England.

That he was not a little dazzled by the perception it would be wrong to say—and the young Lady Marys in English country houses are very fair and sweet. But now there would glide before him wherever he went the apparition of Effie in her white frock.

Why should he have thought of Effie, a mere country girl, yet still a country gentlewoman without the piquancy of a milkmaid or a nursery governess? But who can fathom these mysteries? No blooming beauty of the fields had come in Fred’s way, though he had piously invoked all the gods to send him such a one: but Effie, who was scarcely a type at all—Effie, who was only a humble represen-

tative of fair maidenhood, not so perfect, perhaps, not so well dressed, not so beautiful as many of her kind.

Effie had come across his path, and henceforward went with him in spirit wherever he went. Curious accident of human fate ! To think that Mr. Dirom's money, and Fred's accomplishments, and their position in society and in the city, all things which might have made happy a duke's daughter, were to be laid at the careless feet of little Effie Ogilvie !

If she had been a milkmaid the wonder would have been less great.

CHAPTER VII.

AND for all these things Effie cared nothing. This forms always a tragic element in the most ordinary love-making, where one gives what the other does not appreciate, or will not accept, yet the giver cannot be persuaded to withdraw the gift, or to follow the impulse of that natural resentment which comes from kindness disdained.

There was nothing tragical, however, in the present circumstances, which were largely composed of lawn tennis at Allonby, afternoon tea in the dimness of an unnecessarily shaded room, or walks along the side of the little stream. When Effie came for the favourite afternoon game, the sisters and their brother

would escort her home, sometimes all the way, sometimes only as far as the little churchyard where the path struck off and climbed the high river bank.

Nothing could be more pleasant than this walk. The days were often gray and dim ; but the walkers were young, and not too thinly clad ; the damp in the air did not affect them, and the breezes stirred their veins. The stream was small but lively, brown, full of golden lights. So far as the park went the bank was low on the Allonby side, though on the other picturesque, with rising cliffs and a screen of trees. In the lower hollows of these cliffs the red of the rowan berries and the graceful bunches of the barberry anticipated the autumnal tints, and waving bracken below, and a host of tiny ferns in every crevice, gave an air of luxuriance. The grass was doubly green with that emerald brightness which comes from damp, and when the sun shone everything lighted up with almost an arti-

ficial glow of excessive colour, greenness, and growth. The little party would stroll along filling the quiet with their young voices, putting even the birds to silence.

But it was not Effie who talked. She was the audience, sometimes a little shocked, sometimes bewildered, but always amused more or less ; wondering at them, at their cleverness, at their simplicity, at what the country girl thought their ignorance, and at what she knew to be their superior wisdom.

Fred too was remarkable on these points, but not so remarkable as his sisters ; and he did not talk so much. He walked when he could by Effie's side, and made little remarks to her, which Effie accounted for by the conviction that he was very polite, and thought it right to show her those regards which were due to a young lady. She lent but a dull ear to what he said, and gave her chief attention to Phyllis and Doris, whose talk was more wonderful than anything else that Effie knew.

“It is curious,” Miss Phyllis said, “that there never are two picturesque banks to a river. Nature provides herself a theatre, don’t you know. Here are we in the auditorium.”

“Only there is nothing to hear,” said Doris, “except the birds—well, that’s something. But music over there would have a fine effect. It would be rather nice to try it, if it ever was warm enough here for an open air party. You could have the orchestra hidden: the strings there, the wind instruments here, don’t you see, violas in the foreground, and the big ’cello booming out of that juniper.”

“By Jove!” cried Fred from where he strolled behind with Effie, “how astounded the blackbirds would be.”

“It would be interesting to know what they thought. Now, what do you suppose they would do? Stop and listen? or else be struck by the force of the circumstances and set up an opposition?”

“Burst their little throats against the strings.”

“Or be deafened with your vulgar trombones. Fancy a brass band on the side of the wan water !”

“It would be very nice, though,” said Doris. “I said nothing about trombones. It would be quite eighteenth century. And here on the lawn we could sit and drink syllabubs. What are syllabubs ? Probably most people would prefer tea. Effie, what do you think ? you never say a word. Shall we have a garden party, and music over there under the cliff ?”

Effie had walked on softly, taking in everything with a mingled sense of admiration and ridicule. She was quite apart, a spectator, listening to the artificial talk about nothing at all, the conversation made up with a distinct idea of being brilliant and interesting, which yet was natural enough to these young people, themselves artificial, who made up their talk as they made up their life, out

of nothing. Effie laughed within herself with involuntary criticism, yet was half impressed at the same time, feeling that it was like something out of a book.

"Oh, me?" she said in surprise at being consulted. "I have not any opinion, indeed. I never thought of it at all."

"Then think now, and let us hear; for you should know best how the people here would like it."

"Don't you see, Dor, that she thinks us very silly, and would not talk such nonsense as we are talking for the world? There is no sense in it, and Effie is full of sense."

"Miss Ogilvie has both sense and sympathy," said Fred.

This discussion over her alarmed Effie. She grew red and pale; half affronted, half pleased, wholly shy and uncomfortable.

"No," she said, "I couldn't talk like you. I never talk except when—except when—I have got something to say; that is, of course,

I mean something that is—something—not merely out of my head, like you. I am not clever enough for that.”

“Is she making fun of us, Phyll?”

“I think so, Dor. She is fact, and we are—well, what are we?—not fiction altogether, because we’re real enough in flesh and blood.”

Effie was moved to defend herself.

“You are like two young ladies in a book,” she said, “and I am just a girl like anybody else. I say How-do-you-do? and Do you think it will be a fine day? or I can tell you if anything has happened in the village, and that Dr. Jardine was called away this morning to Fairyknowe, so that somebody there must be ill. But you make up what is very nice to listen to, and yet it makes one laugh, because it is about nothing at all.”

“That is quite true,” said Doris; “that is our way. We don’t go in for fact. We

belong to the speculative side. We have nothing real to do, so we have to imagine things to talk about."

"And I hope you think we do it well," said Phyllis with a laugh.

Effie was encouraged to laugh too; but her feelings were very complicated; she was respectful and yet she was a little contemptuous. It was all new to her, and out of her experience; yet the great house, the darkened rooms, the luxury and ease, the way in which life went on, apparently without any effort on the part of this cluster of people, who had everything they wanted without even the trouble of asking for it, as in a fairy tale, harmonized with the artificial talk, the speculations, the studies which were entirely voluntary, without any use as Effie thought, without any call for them.

She herself was not indeed compelled to work as poor girls were, as governesses

were, even as the daughters of people within her own range, who made their own dresses, and taught their little brothers and sisters, had to do. But still there were certain needs which she supplied, and cases in which she had a necessary office to fulfil. There were the flowers for instance. Old Pirie always brought her in a basketful whenever she wanted them; but if Pirie had to be trusted to arrange the flowers!

In Allonby, however, even that was done; the vases refilled themselves somehow, as if by help of the fairies; the table was always magnificent, but nobody knew when it was done or who did it—nobody, that is, of the family. Phyllis and Doris decided, it was to be supposed, what they should wear, but that was all the trouble they took even about their dress. Numbers of men and women worked in the background to provide for all their wants, but they them-

selves had nothing to do with it. And they talked as they lived.

Effie did not put all this into words, but she perceived it, by means of a little humorous perception which was in her eyes though she did not know it. And though they were so much finer than she was, knew so much more, and possessed so much more, yet these young ladies were as the comedians of life to little Effie, performing their drawing-room drama for her amusement. They talked over the little churchyard which lay at the opening of the glen in the same way.

“The Americans have not found out Allonby yet,” they said to each other. “We must ask Miss Greenwood up here—or, oh! let us have Henry Holland. But no, he will not go into any raptures. He has gone through everything in that way. He is more *blasé* than the most *blasé* of Englishmen; let us have some one fresh.

How they will hang over the *Hic jacet!*
And we must have some one who knows
the ballad. Do you know the ballad, Effie?
but perhaps you never heard of it, as you
were born here."

"Do you mean about Helen?" said Effie.
And in her shyness she grew red, up to her
hair.

"Oh Helen fair beyond compare,
I'll make a garland of thy hair,
Shall bind my heart for ever mair."

"How delightful! the rural muse, the
very genius of the country. Effie, you
shall recite it to us standing by the stone
with a shepherd's maud thrown over you,
and that sweet Scotch accent which is
simply delicious."

"And the blush, dear, just as it is,"
said Phyllis, clapping her hands softly;
"you will have the most enormous success."

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the sort,"
said Effie, her soft colour of shyness and

resentment turning into the hot red of shame. "I wish you would not try to make a fool of me, as well as of the place."

"To make a fool of you! Don't be angry, Effie, the phrase is enchanting. Make a fool of—that is Scotch too. You know I am beginning to make a collection of Scotisms; they are one nicer than another. I only wish I had the accent and the voice."

"And the blush, Dor; it would not be half so effective without that. Could you pick up those little particulars which Effie doesn't appreciate, with your dramatic instinct into the bargain——"

"Should I be able to recite Fair Helen as well as Effie? Oh no," said Doris, and she began, "Oh Helen fair beyond compare," with an imitation of that accent which Effie fondly hoped she was free of, which entirely overcame the girl's self-con-

trol. Her blush grew hotter and hotter till she felt herself fiery red with anger, and unable to bear any more.

"If I spoke like that," she cried, "I should be ashamed ever to open my mouth!" then she added with a wave of her hand, "Goodbye, I am going home," for she could not trust herself further.

"Oh, Effie, Effie! Why goodness, the child's offended," cried Phyllis.

"And I had just caught her tone!" said the other.

Then they both turned upon Fred. "Why don't you go after her? Why don't you catch her up? Why do you stand there staring?"

"Why are you both so—disagreeable?" cried Fred, who had hurried on while they spoke, and turned back to fling at them this very innocent missile as he ran; nothing stronger occurred to him to say. He had not the vocabulary of his sisters. They

watched him while he rushed along and saw him overtake the little fugitive. It was a sight which interested these two young ladies. They became contemplative spectators once more.

"I wonder if he will know what to say?" Doris inquired of herself. "It should be a capital opportunity for Fred if he knows how to take advantage of it. He ought to throw us both overboard at once, and say we were a couple of idiots, who did not know what we were talking about. I should, in Fred's place."

"Yes, I suppose that would be the right way; but a man does naturally throw over his sisters," said Phyllis. "You need not be afraid. It was fine to see her blaze up. Fury is not pretty generally—in papa, for instance."

"Ah, that's beyond a sentiment. But in Effie it will only be a flare and all over. She will be penitent. After a little while she will be awfully sweet to Fred."

“And do you really want him to—propose to her, Dor?”

“That is a strong step,” said the young lady, “because if he did he would have to stick to it. I don’t see that I am called upon to consider contingencies. In the meantime it’s very amusing to see Fred in love.”

“In the absence,” said Phyllis, “of more exciting preoccupations.”

“Ah! that’s true; you’re a marrying woman yourself,” was the remark her sister made.

Meanwhile Fred had overtaken Effie, who was already beginning to feel ashamed and remorseful, and to say in her own ear that it was she who was making a fool of herself. How could she have been so silly? People always make themselves ridiculous when they take offence, and, of course, they would only laugh at her for being so touchy, so absurd. But nobody likes to be mocked, or

to be mimicked, which comes to the same thing, Effie said to herself.

A hot tear had gathered into each eye, but the flush was softening down, and compunction was more and more getting possession of her bosom, when Fred, anxious, devoted, panting, came up to her. It was a moment or two before he could get breath to speak.

"I don't know what to say to you, Miss Ogilvie. That is just my difficulty with the girls," said Fred, promptly throwing his sisters over as they had divined. "They have so little perception. Not a bad sort in themselves, and devoted to you: but without tact—without your delicacy of feeling—without——"

"Oh," cried Effie, "you must not compare them with me; they are far, far cleverer—far more instructed—far—— It was so silly of me to be vexed——"

"Not silly at all; just what you would

naturally be with your refined taste. I can't tell you how I felt it," said Fred, giving himself credit for the perception that was wanting in his sisters. "But you will forgive them, Miss Ogilvie? they will be so unhappy."

"Oh no," cried Effie, with once more a sense of the ludicrous in this assertion. But Fred was as grave as an owl, and meant every word he said.

"Yes, indeed, and they deserve to be so; but if I may tell them that you forgive them——"

"It is not worth speaking about, Mr. Dirom; I was foolish too. And are you really going to have Americans here? I never saw any Americans. What interest would they take in our old churchyard, and Adam Fleming's broken old gravestone?"

"They take more interest in that sort of thing than we do whom it belongs to; that is to say, it doesn't belong to us. I am as

much a new man as any Yankee, and have as little right. We are mere interlopers, you know."

Fred said this with a charming smile he had, a smile full of frank candour and openness, which forestalled criticism. Effie had heard the same sentiment expressed by others with a very different effect. When Fred said it, it seemed a delightful absurdity. He laughed a little, and so, carried away by sympathetic feeling, did she, shame-faced and feeling guilty in her heart at the remembrance of the many times in which, without any sense of absurdity, she had heard the same words said.

"We are a queer family," he continued in his pleasant explanatory way. "My father is the money-maker, and he thinks a great deal of it; but we make no money, and I think we are really as indifferent about it as if we had been born in the backwoods. If anything happened at the

office I should take to my studio, and I hope I should not enjoy myself too much, but there would be the danger. 'Ah, freedom is a noble thing,' as old Barbour says."

Effie did not know who old Barbour was, and she was uncertain how to reply. She said at last timidly, "But you could not do without a great deal of money, Mr. Dirom. You have everything you want, and you don't know how it comes. It is like a fairy tale."

Fred smiled again with an acquiescence which had pleasure in it. Though he made so little of his advantages, he liked to hear them recognized.

"You are right," he said, "as you always are, Miss Ogilvie. You seem to know things by instinct. But all the same we don't stand on these things; we are a little Bohemian, all of us young ones. I suppose you would think it something dreadful if you had to turn out of Gilston. But we

should rather like any such twist of the whirligig of fortune. The girls would think it fun."

To this Effie did not make any reply. To be turned out of Gilston was an impossibility, for the family at least, whatever it might be for individuals. And she did not understand about Bohemians. She made no answer at all. When one is in doubt it is the safest way. But Fred walked with her all the way home, and his conversation was certainly more amusing than that with which she was generally entertained. There ran through it a little vein of flattery. There was in his eyes a light of admiration, a gleam from time to time of something which dazzled her, which she could not meet, yet furtively caught under her drooping eyelashes, and which roused a curious pleasure mixed with amusement, and a comical sense of guilt and wickedness on her own part.

She was flattered and dazzled, and yet

something of the same laughter with which she listened to Phyllis and Doris was in her eyes. Did he mean it all? or what did he mean? Was he making conversation like his sisters, saying things that he meant to be pretty? Effie, though she was so simple, so inexperienced, in comparison with those clever young people, wondered, yet kept her balance, steadied by that native instinct of humour, and not carried away by any of these fine things.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WE were seeing young Mr. Dirom a little bit on his way. He is so kind walking home with Effie that it was the least we could do. I never met with a more civil young man."

"It appears to me that young Dirom is never out of your house. You'll have to be thinking what will come of it."

"What should come of it," said Mrs. Ogilvie with a laugh, and a look of too conscious innocence, "but civility, as I say? though they are new people, they have kind, neighbour-like ways."

"I've no confidence," said Miss Dempster, "in that kind of neighbours. If he were to walk home with Beenie or me, that are about .

the oldest friends they have in the district— Oh yes, their oldest friends : for I sent my card and a request to know if a call would be agreeable as soon as they came : it may be old-fashioned, but it's my way ; and I find it to answer. And as I'm saying, if he had made an offer to walk home with me or my sister, that would have been neighbour-like ; but Effie is just quite a different question. I hope if you let it go on, that you're facing the position, and not letting yourself be taken unawares."

" Well," said Mrs. Ogilvie, " that's a thing that seldom happens, though I say it myself. I can generally see as far as most folk. But whatever you do, say nothing of this to Effie. We must just respect her innocence. Experienced people see a great deal that should never be spoken of before the young. I will leave her in your charge and Miss Beenie's, for I am going to Summerlaw, and she has had a long walk."

" Your stepmother is a very grand general,

Effie," said Miss Dempster, as they watched Mrs. Ogilvie's figure disappearing between the high laurel hedges.

It was a warm afternoon, though September had begun. Miss Beenie was seated on the garden seat in front of the drawing-room window, which afforded so commanding a prospect of the doctor's sitting-room, with her work-basket beside her, and her spectacles upon her nose. But Miss Dempster, who thought it was never safe, except perhaps for a day or two in July, to sit out, kept walking about, now nipping off a withered leaf, now gathering a sprig of heliotrope, or the scented verbena, promenading up and down with a shawl upon her shoulders. She had taken Effie's arm with an instant perception of the advantages of an animated walking-staff.

The little platform of fine gravel before the door was edged by the green of the sloping lawn in front, but on either side ended in deep borders filled with every kind of old-fashioned

and sweet-smelling flower. The sloping drive had well-clipped hedges of shining laurel which surrounded the entrance; but nothing interrupted the view from this little height, which commanded not only the doctor's mansion but all the village. No scene could have been more peaceful in the sunny afternoon. There were few people stirring below, there was nobody to be seen at the doctor's windows.

The manse, which was visible at a distance, stood in the broad sunshine with all its doors and windows open, taking in the warmth to its very bosom. Mrs. Ogilvie disappeared for a short time between the hedges, and then came out again, moving along the white road till she was lost in the distance, Glen slowly following, divided in his mind between the advantages of a walk which was good for his health, and the pleasure of lying in the sun and waiting for Effie, which he preferred as a matter of taste. But the large mat at the door, which Glen was aware was the comfortable spot at Rosebank,

was already occupied by the nasty little terrier to which the Miss Dempsters, much to Glen's contempt, were devoted, and the gravel was unpleasant. So he walked, but rather by way of deference to the necessities of the situation than from any lively personal impulse, and went along meditatively with only an occasional slow switch of his tail, keeping well behind the trim and active figure of his mistress. In the absence of other incidents these two moving specks upon the road kept the attention of the small party of spectators on the soft heights of Rosebank.

"Your stepmother's a grand general," said Miss Dempster again; "but she must not think that she deceives everybody, Effie. It's a very legitimate effort; but perhaps if she let things take their own course she would just do as well at the end."

"What is she trying to do?" said Effie with indifference. "It is a pity Mrs. Ogilvie has only Rory; for she is so active and so busy,

she could manage a dozen, Uncle John always says."

"She has you, my dear—and a great deal more interesting than Rory: who is a nice enough bairn, if he were not spoilt, just beyond conception—as, poor thing, some day, she'll find out."

Effie did not pay any attention to the latter part of this speech. She cried "Me!" in the midst of it, with little regard to Miss Dempster, and less (had she been an English girl) to propriety in her pronouns. But she was Scotch, and above reproof.

"No," she cried, "she has not me, Miss Dempster; you are making a mistake. She says I am old enough to guide myself."

"A bonnie guide you would be for yourself. But, no doubt, ye think that too; there is no end to the confidence of young folk in this generation. And you are nineteen, which is a wise age."

"No," said Effie, "I don't think it is a

wise age. And then I have Uncle John ; and then, what is perhaps the best of all, I have nothing to do that calls for any guiding, so I am quite safe."

"Oh, yes, that's a grand thing," said the old lady ; "to be just peaceable and quiet, like Beenie and me, and no cross roads to perplex ye, nor the need of choosing one way or another. But that's a blessing that generally comes on later in life : and we're seldom thankful for it when it does come."

"No," said Effie, "I have nothing to choose. What should I have to choose ? unless it was whether I would have a tweed or a velveteen for my winter frock ; or, perhaps——" here she stopped, with a soft little smile dimpling about her mouth.

"Ay," said the old lady ; "or perhaps—— ? The perhaps is just what I would like to know."

"Sarah," said Miss Beenie from behind,

“what are you doing putting things in the girlie’s head?”

“Just darn your stockings and hold your tongue,” said the elder sister. She leaned her weight more heavily on Effie’s arm by way of securing her attention.

“Now and then,” she said, “the road takes a crook before it divides. There’s that marshy bit where the Laggan burn runs before you come to Windyha’. If you are not thinking, it just depends on which side of the road you take whether you go straight on the good highway to Dumfries, or down the lane that’s always deep in dust, or else a very slough of despond. You’re there before you know.”

“But what has that to do with me?” said Effie; “and then,” she added, with a little elevation of her head, “if I’m in any difficulty, there is Uncle John.”

“Oh, ay: he’s often very fine in the pulpit. I would not ask for a better guide in the Gospel, which is his vocation. But in the

ways of this world, Effie Ogilvie, your Uncle John is just an innocent like yourself."

"That is all you know!" said Effie, indignantly. "Me an innocent!" She was accustomed to hear the word applied to the idiot of the parish, the piteous figure which scarcely any parish is without. Then she laughed, and added, with a sudden change of tone, "They think me very sensible at Allonby. They think I am the one that is always serious. They say I am fact: and they are poetry, I suppose," she said, after a second pause, with another laugh.

"Poetry!" said Miss Dempster, "you're meaning silly nonsense. They are just two haverels these two daft-like girls with their dark rooms, and all their affected ways; and as for the brother——"

"What about the brother?" said Effie, with an almost imperceptible change of tone.

"Aha!" said the old lady, "now we see where the interest lies."

"It is nothing of the kind," cried the girl, "it is just your imagination. You take a pleasure in twisting every word, and making me think shame. It is just to hear what you have got to say."

"I have not very much to say," said Miss Dempster; "we're great students of human nature, both Beenie and me; but I cannot just give my opinion off-hand. There's one thing I will tell you, and that is just that he is not our Ronald, which makes all the difference to me."

"Ronald!" cried the girl, wondering. "Well, no! but did anybody ever say he was like Ronald?"

She paused a little, and a soft suffusion of colour once more came over her face. "What has Ronald to do with it? He is no more like Ronald than he is like—me."

"And I don't think him like you at all," cried Miss Dempster quickly, "which is just the whole question. He is not of your kind,

Effie. We're all human creatures, no doubt, but there's different species. Beenie, what do you think? Would you say that young Fred Dirom—that is the son of a merchant prince, and so grand and so rich—would you say he was of our own kind? would you say he was like Effie, or like Ronald? Ronald's a young man about the same age; would you say he was of Ronald's kind."

"Bless me, what a very strange question!" Miss Beenie looked up with every evidence of alarm. Her spectacles fell from her nose; the stocking in which her hand and arm were enveloped fell limp upon her lap.

"I've no time to answer conundrums; they're just things for winter evenings, not for daylight. And when you know how I've been against it from the very first," she added, after a pause, with some warmth. "It might be a grand thing from a worldly point of view; but what do we know about him or his connections? And as for business, it is

just a delusion ; it's up to-day and down to-morrow. I've lived in Glasgow, and I know what it means. Ye may be very grand, and who but you for a while ; and then the next moment nothing. No ; if there was not another man in the world, not the like of that man," cried Miss Beenie, warming more and more, gesticulating unconsciously with the muffled hand which was all wrapped up in stocking ; "and to compare him with our poor Ronald——" She dropped suddenly from her excitement, as if this name had brought her to herself. "You are making me say what I ought not to say—and before Effie ! I will never be able to look one of them in the face again."

Effie stood upon the gravel opposite to the speaker, notwithstanding the impulse of Miss Dempster's arm to lead her away. "I wish you would tell me what you mean. I wish I knew what Ronald had to do with me," she said.

“ He’s just an old friend, poor laddie—just an old friend. Never you mind what Beenie says. She’s a little touched in that direction, we all know. Never you mind. It’s my own conviction that young Dirom, having no connections, would be but a very precarious—— But no doubt your parents know best. Ronald is just the contrary—plenty of connections, but no money. The one is perhaps as bad as the other. And it’s not for us to interfere. Your own people must know best.”

“ What is there to interfere about ? and what has Ronald to do with it ? and, oh, what are you all talking about ? ” cried Effie, bewildered. What with the conversation which meant nothing, and that which meant too much, her little brain was all in a ferment. She withdrew herself suddenly from Miss Dempster’s arm.

“ I will get you your stick out of the hall which will do just as well as me : for I’m going away.”

“Why should you go away? Your father is in Dumfries, your mother will be getting her tea at Summerlaw. There is nobody wanting you at home; and Beenie has ordered our honey scones that you are so fond of.”

“I want no honey scones!” cried Effie. “You mean something, and you will not tell me what you mean. I am going to Uncle John.”

“She is a hot-headed little thing. She must just take her own gait and guide herself. Poor innocent! as if it were not all settled and planned beforehand what she was to do.”

“Oh, Sarah, stop woman, for goodness’ sake! You are putting things in the girly’s head, and that is just what we promised not to do.”

“What things are you putting in my head? You are just driving me wild!” cried Effie, stamping her foot on the gravel.

It was not the first time by a great many

that she had departed from Rosebank in this way. The criticisms of old ladies are sadly apt to irritate young ones, and this pretence of knowing so much more about her than she knew about herself, has always the most exasperating effect.

She turned her back upon them, and went away between the laurel hedges with a conviction that they were saying, "What a little fury!" and "What an ill brought-up girl!"—which did not mend matters. These were the sort of things the Miss Dempsters said—not without a cackle of laughter—of the rage and impatience of the young creature they had been baiting. Her mind was in high commotion, instinctive rebellion flaming up amid the curiosity and anxiety with which she asked herself what was it that was settled and planned?

Whatever it was, Effie would not do it, that was one thing of which she felt sure. If it had been her own mother, indeed! but who

was Mrs. Ogilvie, to settle for her what she ought to do? She would be her own guide, whatever any one might settle. If she took counsel with any one, it should be Uncle John, who was her nearest friend—when there was anything to take counsel about.

But at present there was nothing, not a question of any sort that she knew, except whether the new tennis court that was making at Gilston could possibly be ready for this season, which, of course, it could not;—no question whatever; and what had Ronald to do with it? Ronald had been gone for three years. There had been no news of him lately. If there were a hundred questions, what could Ronald have to do with them?

She went down very quickly between the laurel hedges and paused at the gate, where she could not be seen from the terrace, to smooth down her ruffled plumes a little and take breath. But as she turned into the road her heart began to thump again, with no more

reason for it than the sudden appearance of Uncle John coming quietly along at his usual leisurely pace. She had said she was going to him ; but she did not really wish to meet Uncle John, whose kind eyes had a way of seeing through and through you, at this present excited moment, for she knew that he would find her out.

Whether he did so or not, he came up in his sober way, smiling that smile which he kept for Effie. He was prone to smile at the world in general, being very friendly and kind, and generally thinking well of his neighbours. But he had a smile which was for Effie alone. He caught in a moment the gleam in her eyes, the moisture, and the blaze of angry feeling.

“What, Effie,” he said, “you have been in the wars. What have the old ladies been saying now?”

“Oh, Uncle John,” she began eagerly ; but then stopped all at once : for the vague talk in which a young man’s name is involved,

which does not tell for very much among women, becomes uncomfortable and suspect when a man is admitted within hearing. She changed her mind and her tone, but could not change her colour, which rose high under her troubled eyes.

“Oh, I suppose it was nothing,” she said, “it was not about me; it was about Ronald—something about Ronald and Mr. Fred Dirom: though they could not even know each other—could they know each other?”

“I can’t tell you, Effie: most likely not; they certainly have not been together here; but they may have met as young men meet—somewhere else.”

“Perhaps that was what it was. But yet I don’t see what Ronald could have to do with it.”

Here Effie stopped again, and grew redder than ever, expecting that Mr. Moubray would ask her, “To do with—what?” and bring back all the confusion again.

But the minister was more wise. He began to perceive vaguely what the character of the suggestion, which had made Effie angry, must have been. It was much clearer to him indeed than it was to her, through these two names, which as yet to Effie suggested no connection.

“Unless it is that Fred Dirom is here and Ronald away,” he said, “I know no link. And what sort of a fellow is Fred Dirom, Effie? for I scarcely know him at all.”

“What sort of a fellow?” Mr. Moubray was so easy, and banished so carefully all meaning from his looks, that Effie was relieved. She began to laugh.

“I don’t know what to say. He is like the girls, but not quite like the girls.”

“That does not give me much information, my dear.”

“Oh, Uncle John, they are all so funny! What can I say? They talk and they talk,

and it is all made up. It is about nothing, about fancies they take in their heads, about what they think—but not real thinking, only fancies, thinking what to say.”

“That’s the art of conversation, Effie,” the minister said.

“Conversation? Oh no, oh, surely not!—conversation would mean something. At Allonby it is all very pretty, but it means nothing at all. They just make stories out of nothing, and talk for the sake of talking. I laugh—I cannot help it, though I could not quite tell you why.”

“And the brother, does he do the same?”

“Oh, the brother! No, he is not so funny, he does not talk so much. He says little, really, on the whole, except”—here Effie stopped and coloured and laughed softly, but in a different tone.

“Except?” repeated Uncle John.

“Well, when he is walking home with me. Then he is obliged to speak, because

there is no one else to say anything. When we are all together it is they who speak. But how can he help it? He has to talk when there is only me."

"And is his talk about fancies too? or does he say things that are more to the purpose, Effie?"

Effie paused a little before she replied, "I have to think," she said; "I don't remember anything he said—except— Oh yes!—but—it was not to the purpose. It was only—nothing in particular," she continued with a little wavering colour, and a small sudden laugh in which there was some confusing recollection.

"Ah!" said Uncle John, nodding his head. "I think I see what you mean."

CHAPTER IX.

THE young ladies at Allonby, though Effie thought they meant nothing except to make conversation, had really more purpose in their extravagances than that severe little critic thought. To young ladies who have nothing to do a new idea in the way of entertainment is a fine thing.

And though a garden party, or any kind of a party, is not an affair of much importance, yet it holds really a large place in unoccupied lives. Even going to it may mean much to the unconcerned and uninterested: the most philosophical of men, the most passive of women, may thus find their fate. They may drift up against a

partner at tennis, or hand a cup of tea to the predestined individual who is to make or mar their happiness for life.

So that no human assembly is without its importance to some one, notwithstanding that to the majority they may be collectively and separately "a bore." But to those who get them up they are still more important, and furnish a much needed occupation and excitement, with the most beneficial effect both upon health and temper.

The Miss Diroms were beginning to feel a little low; the country was more humdrum than they had expected. They had not been quite sure when they came to Scotland that there were not deer-forests on the Border. They had a lingering belief that the peasants wore the tartan. They had hoped for something feudal, some remnant of the Middle Ages.

But they found nothing of this sort

they found a population which was not at all feudal, people who were friendly but not over respectful, unaccustomed to curtsy and disinclined to be patronized. They were thrown back upon themselves. As for the aspect of the great people, the Diroms were acquainted with much greater people, and thought little of the county magnates.

It was a providential suggestion which put that idea about the music under the cliff into the head of Doris. And as a garden party in September, in Scotland, even in the south, is a ticklish performance, and wants every kind of organization, the sisters were immediately plunged into business. There was this in its favour, that they had the power of tempering the calm of the Dumfriesshire aristocracy by visitors from the greater world at that time scattered over all Scotland, and open to variety wherever they could find it. Even of the Americans, for whom the young

ladies had sighed, there were three or four easily attainable. And what with the story of Fair Helen and the little churchyard and the ballad, these visitors would be fully entertained.

Everything was in train, the invitations sent out and accepted, the house in full bustle of preparation, every one occupied and amused, when, to the astonishment of his family, Mr. Dirom arrived upon a visit.

"I thought I'd come and look you up," he said. He was, as he himself described it, "in great force," his white waistcoat ampler, his watch-chain heavier, himself more beaming than ever.

His arrival always made a difference in the house, and it was not perhaps an enjoyable difference. It introduced a certain anxiety—a new element. The kind and docile mother who on ordinary occasions was at everybody's command, and with little resistance did what was told her, be-

came all at once, in the shadow of her husband, a sort of silent authority. She was housekeeper no longer; she had to be consulted, and to give, or pretend to give, orders, which was a trouble to her, as well as to the usual rulers of the house. Nobody disliked it more than Mrs. Dirom herself, who had to pretend that the party was her own idea, and that she had superintended the invitations, in a way which was very painful to the poor lady's rectitude and love of truth.

"You should have confined yourself to giving dinners," her husband said—"as many dinners as you like. You've got a good cellar, or I'm mistaken, and plenty of handsome plate, and all that sort of thing. The dinners are the thing; men like 'em, and take my word for it, it's the men's opinions that tell. Females may think they have it their own way in society, but it's the men's opinion that tells."

“You mean the males, I suppose,” said Doris. “Keep to one kind of word, papa.”

“Yes, Miss D., I mean the males—your superiors,” said Mr. Dirom, with first a stare at his critic and then a laugh. “I thought you might consider the word offensive; but if you don’t mind, neither do I.”

“Oh, what is the use of quarrelling about a word?” said the mother hastily. “We have had dinners. We have returned all that have been given us. That is all any one can expect us to do, George. Then the girls thought—for a little variety, to fill the house and amuse everybody——”

“With tea and toast—and hot-water bottles, I hope to put under their feet. I’ll tell you, Phyllis, what you ought to do. Get out all the keepers and gardeners with warm towels to wipe off the rain off the trees; and have the laundresses out to iron the grass—by Jove, that’s the thing to do;

reduce rheumatic fevers to a minimum, and save as many bad colds as possible. I shall say you did it when I get back to my club."

Phyllis and Doris looked at each other.

"It might be really a good thing to do. And it would be Fun. Don't you think the electric light put on night and day for forty-eight hours would do some good? What an excellent thing it is to have papa here! He is so practical. He sees in a moment the right thing."

This applause had the effect rarely attained, of confusing for a moment the man of money.

"It appears I am having a success," he said. "Or perhaps instead of taking all this trouble you would like me to send a consignment of fur cloaks from town for the use of your guests. The Scotch ladies would like that best, for it would be something," he said with his big laugh, "to carry away."

"And I believe," said Mrs. Dirom, very

anxious to be conciliatory, "you could afford it, George."

"Oh, afford it!" he said with again that laugh, in which there was such a sound of money, of plenty, of a confidence inexhaustible, that nobody could have heard it, and remained unimpressed. But all the same it was an offensive laugh, which the more finely strung nerves of his children could scarcely bear.

"After all," said Fred, "we don't want to insult our neighbours with our money. If they are willing to run the risk, we may let them; and there will always be the house to retire into, if it should be wet."

"Oh, of course there would always be the house. It is a very fine thing to have a good house to retire into, whatever happens. I should like you to realize that, all of you, and make your hay while the sun shines."

The room in which the family were sitting was not dark, as when they were alone. The blinds were all drawn up, the sunshades, so

often drawn when there was no sun, elevated, though a ruddy westerly sky, in all the force of approaching sunset, blazed down upon the front of the house. The young people exchanged looks, in which there was a question.

What did he mean? He meant nothing, it appeared, since he followed up his remarks by opening a parcel which he had brought down stairs in his hand, and from which he took several little morocco boxes, of shape and appearance calculated to make the hearts of women—or at least such hearts of women as Mr. Dirom understood—beat high. They were some “little presents” which he had brought to his family. He had a way of doing it—and “for choice,” as he said, he preferred diamonds.

“They always fetch their price, and they are very portable. Even in a woman’s useless pocket, or in her bag or reticule, or whatever you call it, she might carry a little fortune, and no one ever be the wiser,” Mr. Dirom said.

"When one has diamonds," said Phyllis, "one wishes everybody to be the wiser, papa; we don't get them to conceal them, do we, Dor? Do you think it will be too much to wear that pendant to-morrow—in daylight? Well, it is a little ostentatious."

"And you are rather too young for diamonds, Phyll—if your papa was not so good to you," said Mrs. Dirom in her uncertain voice.

"She's jealous, girls," said her husband, "though hers are the best. Young! nobody is ever too young; take the good of everything while you have it, and as long as you have it, that's my philosophy. And look here, there's the sun shining—I shouldn't be surprised if, after all, to-morrow you were to have a fine day."

They had a fine day, and the party was very successful. Doris had carried out her idea about the music on the opposite bank, and it was very effective. The guests took up this

phrase from the sisters, who asked, "Was it not very effective?" with ingenuous delight in their own success.

It was no common band from the neighbourhood, nor even a party of wandering Germans, but a carefully selected company of minstrels brought from London at an enormous cost: and while half the county walked about upon the tolerably dry lawn, or inspected the house and all the new and elegant articles of art-furniture which the Diroms had brought, the trembling melody of the violins quivered through the air, and the wind instruments sighed and shouted through all the echoes of the Dene. The whole scene was highly effective, and all the actors in it looking and smiling their best.

The Marquis kindly paid Mr. Dirom a compliment on his "splendid hospitality," and the eloquent Americans who made pilgrimages to Adam Fleming's grave, and repeated tenderly

his adjuration to "Helen fair, beyond compare," regarded everything, except Mr. Dirom in his white waistcoat, with that mixture of veneration and condescension which inspires the transatlantic bosom amid the immemorial scenery of old England.

"Don't you feel the spell coming over you, don't you feel the mosses growing?" they cried. "See, this is English dust and damp—the ethereal mould which comes over your very hands, as dear John Burroughs says. Presently, if you don't wash 'em, little plants will begin to grow all along your line of life. Wonderful English country—mother of the ages!"

This was what the American guests said to each other. It was the Miss Dempsters, to whom Americans were as the South Sea Islanders, and who were anxious to observe the customs and manners of the unknown race, before whom these poetical exclamations were made.

“The English country may be wonderful, though I know very little about it; but you are forgetting it is not here,” Miss Dempster said. “This is Scotland; maybe you may never have heard the name before.”

It is needless to say that the ladies and gentlemen from across the Atlantic smiled at the old native woman’s mistake.

“Oh yes, we know Scotland very well,—almost best of all,—for has not everybody read the *Waverleys*?—at least all our fathers and mothers read them, though they may be a little out of date in our day.”

“You must be clever indeed if Walter Scott is not clever enough for you,” said the old lady grimly. “But here’s just one thing that a foolish person like me, it seems, can correct you in, and that’s that this countryside is not England. No, nor ever was; and Adam Fleeming in his grave yonder could have told you that.”

“Was he a Border chief? was he one of

the knights in Branksome Hall? We know all about that. And to think you should be of the same race, and have lived here always, and known the story, and sung the song all your life!"

"I never was much addicted to singing songs, for my part. He must have been a feckless kind of creature to let her get between him and the man that wanted his blood. But he was very natural after that I will say. 'I hackit him in pieces sma'." said Miss Dempster; "that is the real Border spirit: and I make little doubt he was English—the man with the gun."

The pretty young ladies in their pretty toilettes gathered about the old lady.

"It is most interesting," they said; "just what one wished to find in the old country—the real accent—the true hereditary feeling."

"You are just behaving like an old haverel," said Miss Beenie to her sister in

an undertone. It seldom occurred to her to take the command of affairs, but she saw her opportunity and seized it.

“For our part,” she said, “it is just as interesting to us to see real people from America. I have heard a great deal about them, but I never saw them before. It will be a great change to find yourselves in the midst of ceevilization? And what was that about mosses growing on your poor bit little hands? Bless me! I have heard of hair and fur, but never of green growth. Will that be common on your side of the water?”

She spoke with the air of one who was seeking information. Mr. John Burroughs himself, that charming naturalist, might have been disconcerted by so serious a question. And the two old ladies remained in possession of the field.

“I just answered a fool according to his folly,” Miss Beenie remarked, with modest

enjoyment of a triumph that seldom fell to her share, "for you were carried away, Sarah, and let them go on with their impudence. A set of young idiots out of a savage country that were too grand for Walter Scott!"

It was on the whole a great day for the Miss Dempsters. They saw everybody, they explored the whole house, and identified every piece of furniture that was not Lady Allonby's. They made a private inspection of the dining-room, where there was a buffet—erected not only for light refreshments, but covered with luxuries and delicacies of a more serious description.

"Bless me, I knew there was tea and ices," they said; "it's like a ball supper, and a grand one. Oh, those millionaires! they just cannot spend money enough. But I like our own candlesticks," said Miss Dempster, "far better than these branchy things, like the dulse on the shore, the

candelawbra, or whatever they call it, on yon table."

"They're bigger," said Miss Beenie; but my opinion is that the branches are all hollow, not solid like ours."

"There's not many like ours," said Miss Dempster; "indeed I am disposed to think they are just unique. Lord bless us, is that the doctor at the side-table? He is eating up everything. The capacity that man has is just extraordinary—both for dribblets of drink and for solid food."

"Is that you, ladies?" said the doctor. "I looked for you among the first, and now you're here, let me offer you some of this raised pie. It's just particularly good, with truffles as big as my thumb. I take credit for suggesting a game pie. I said they would send the whole parish into my hands with their cauld ices that are not adapted to our climate."

"We were just saying ices are but a wersh

provision, and make you shiver to think of them at this time of the year; but many thanks to you, doctor. We are not in the habit either of eating or drinking between meals. Perhaps a gentleman may want it, and you have science to help you down with it. But two women like us, we are just very well content with a cup of tea."

"Which is a far greater debauch," said the doctor hotly, "for you are always at it." But he put down his plate. "The auld cats," he said to himself; "there's not a drop passes my lips but they see it, and it will be over all the parish that I was standing guzzlin' here at this hour of the day."

But there were others beside the doctor who took advantage of the raised pie and appreciated the truffles. People who have been whetted by music and vague conversation and nothing to do or think of for a weary afternoon, eat with enthusiasm when

the chance occurs ; they eat even cake and bread and butter, how much more the luxurious *mayonnaise* and lobsters and *foie gras*. After the shiver of an ice it was grateful to turn to better fare. And Mr. Dirom was in his glory in the dining-room, which was soon filled by a crowd more animated and genial than that which had strolled about the lawn.

“ You will spoil your dinner,” the ladies said to their husbands, but with small effect.

“ Never mind the dinner,” said the master of the house. “ Have a little of this Château Yquem. It is not a wine you can get every day. I call it melted gold ; but I never ask the price of a wine so long as it’s good ; and there’s plenty more where that came from.”

His wealth was rampant, and sounded in his voice and in his laugh, till you seemed to hear the money tinkle. Phyllis and Doris

and Fred cast piteous glances at each other when they met.

“Oh, will nobody take him away!” they cried under their breath. “Fred, can’t you pretend there is a telegram and dreadful news? Can’t you say the Bank of England is broke, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer has run away?”

He wounded his children’s nerves and their delicacy beyond description, but still it had to be allowed that he was the master of the house. And so the party came to an end, and the guests, many of them with indigestions, but with the most cordial smiles and applause and hand-shakings, were gradually cleared away.

CHAPTER X.

MR. OGILVIE was one of those who carried away an incipient indigestion. He was not accustomed to truffles nor to Château Yquem. But he did not spoil his dinner—for as they were in the habit of dining rather early, and it was now nearly seven o'clock, his wife promptly decided that a cup of tea when he got home would be much the best thing for him, and that no dinner need be served in Gilston House that day. She said, "You must just look a little lively, Robert, till we get away. Don't let strangers think that you've been taking more than is good for you, either of meat or drink."

“Drink!” said the good man. “Yon’s nectar: but I might have done without the salad. Salad is a cold thing upon the stomach. I’m lively enough if you would let me alone. And he’s a grand fellow the father of them. He grudges nothing. I have not seen such a supper since my dancing days.”

“It was no supper; it was just a tea party. I wish you would wake up, and understand. Here is Mr. Dirom with Effie coming to put me into the carriage. Rouse up, man, and say a civil word.”

“I’ll do that,” said Mr. Ogilvie. “We’ve had a most enjoyable evening, Mr. Dirom, a good supper and a capital band, and—— But I cannot get it out of my head that it’s been a ball—which is impossible now I see all these young ladies with hats and bonnets upon their heads.”

“I wish it had been a ball,” said the overwhelming host. “We ought to have kept it up half through the night, and enjoyed another

supper, eh ? at midnight, and a little more of that Clicquot. I hope there's enough for half-a-dozen balls. Why hadn't you the sense to keep the young people for the evening, Fred ? Perhaps you thought the provisions wouldn't last, or that I would object to pay the band for a few hours longer. My children make me look stingy, Mrs. Ogilvie. They have got a number of small economical ways."

"And that's an excellent thing," said the lady, "for perhaps they may not have husbands that will be so liberal as their father—or so well able to afford it—and then what would they do ?"

"I hope to put them beyond the risk of all that," said the man of money, jingling his coins. He did not offer to put Mrs. Ogilvie into the carriage as she had supposed, but looked on with his hands in his pockets, and saw her get in. The Ogilvies were almost the last to leave, and the last object that impressed itself upon them as they turned round the

corner of the house was Mr. Dirom's white waistcoat, which looked half as big as Allonby itself. When every one had disappeared, he took Fred, who was not very willing, by the arm, and led him along the river bank.

"Is that the family," he said, "my fine fellow, that they tell me you want to marry into, Fred?"

"I have never thought of the family. Since you bring it in so suddenly—though I was scarcely prepared to speak on the subject—yes: that's the young lady whom in all the world, sir, I should choose for my wife."

"Much you know about the world," said Mr. Dirom. "I can't imagine what you are thinking of; a bit of a bread-and-butter girl, red and white, not a fortune, no style about her, or anything out of the common. Why, at your age, without a tithe of your advantages, I shouldn't have looked at her, Mr. Fred."

If there was in Fred's mind the involun-

tary instinctive flash of a comparison between his good homely mother and pretty Effie, may it be forgiven him! He could do nothing more than mutter a half sulky word upon difference of taste.

“That’s true,” said his father; “one man’s meat is another man’s poison. My Lady Alicia’s not much to look at, but she is Lady Alicia; that’s always a point in her favour. But this little girl has nothing to show. Bread and butter, that’s all that can be said.”

To this Fred, with gathering curves upon his forehead, made no reply at all.

“And her people are barely presentable,” said the father. “I say this with no personal feeling, only for your good; very Scotch, but nothing else about them to remember them by. A sodden stagnant old Scotch squire, and a flippant middle-class mother, and I suppose a few pounds of her own that will make her think herself somebody. My dear fellow,

there you have everything that is most objectionable. A milkmaid would not be half so bad, for she would ask no questions and understand that she got everything from you——”

“There is no question of any milkmaid,” said Fred in high offence.

“Middle class is social destruction,” said Mr. Dirom. “Annihilation, that’s what it is. High or low has some chance, but there’s no good in your *milieu*. Whatever happens, you’ll never be able to make anything out of her. They have no go in that position; they’re too respectable to go out of the beaten way. That little thing, sir, will think it’s unbecoming to do this or that. She’ll never put out a step beyond what she knows. She’ll be no help to you if anything happens. She’ll set up her principles; she’ll preach your duty to you. A pretty kind of wife for the son of a man who has made his way to the top of the tree, by

Jove! and that may tumble down again some fine day."

"I don't know what you mean, sir," said Fred. "You might add she will most likely neither look nor listen to me, and all this sermon of yours will go for nought."

"I didn't mean it for a sermon. I give it you in friendship to warn you what's before you. You think perhaps after this I'm going to forbid the banns: though there's no banns wanted in this free country, I believe. No, Fred, that's not it; I'm not going to interfere. If you like insipidity, it's your own concern: if you choose a wife in order to carry her on your shoulders—and be well kicked while you do it: mind that."

"I think, sir," said Fred, who had grown very red, "that we had better drop the subject. If you mean to oppose, why, of course, you can oppose—but if not, this

sort of thing does little good. It can never alter my mind, and I don't see even how it can relieve yours."

"Oh yes, it relieves mine," said his father. "It shows you my opinion. After that, if you choose to take your own way, why, you must do it. I should have advised you to look out for a nice little fortune which might have been a stand-by in case of anything happening. No, nothing's going to happen. Still you know—— Or I'd have married rank (you might if you had liked), and secured a little family interest. Things might change in a day, at any moment. Jack might tire of his blue china and come and offer himself for the office. If he did, you have married against my advice, and Jack being the eldest son—— Well, I don't need to say any more."

"I quite understand, sir," Fred said.

"Well, that's a good thing; but you need not go too far on the other side, and think

I'm going to disinherit you, or any of that rubbish. Did I disinherit Jack? I bring you up in the best way, spend no end of money on you, teach you to think yourselves twice the man I am, and then you take your own way."

"Indeed, sir," cried Fred anxiously, "you are mistaken. I——" But though he did not think he was twice the man his father was, yet he did think he was a very different man from his father, and this consciousness made him stammer and fall into confusion, not knowing what to say.

"Don't trouble yourself to contradict me," said Mr. Dirom. "*I* don't think so. I think your father's twice the man you are. Let each of us keep his opinion. We shan't convince each other. And if you insist on marrying your insipidity, do. Tell the stupid old father to communicate with my lawyers about the settlements, and get it over as soon as you please."

"You are going a great deal too fast, sir," said Fred. He was pale with the hurry and rapid discussion. "I can't calculate like this upon what is going to happen. Nothing has happened as yet."

"You mean she mayn't have you? Never fear; young fellows with a father behind them ain't so common. Most men in my position would put a stop to it altogether. I don't; what does it matter to me? Dirom and Co. don't depend upon daughters-in-law. A woman's fortune is as nothing to what's going through my hands every day. I say, let every man please himself. And you've got quiet tastes and all that sort of thing, Fred. Thinking of coming up to town to look after business a little? Well, don't; there's no need of you just now. I've got some ticklish operations on, but they're things I keep in my own hands."

"I don't pretend to be the business man you are," said Fred with a fervour which

was a little forced, "but if I could be of use——"

"No, I don't think you could be of use. Go on with your love-making. By the way, I'm going back to-night. When is the train? I'll just go in and mention it to your mother. I wanted to see what sort of a set you had about. Poor lot!" said Mr. Dirom, shaking his heavy chain as he looked at his watch. "Not a shilling to spare among 'em—and thinking all the world of themselves. So do I? Yes: but then I've got something to stand upon. Money, my boy, that's the only real power."

Phyllis and Doris met their brother anxiously on his way back. "What is he going to do?" they both said; "what has he been talking to you about? Have you got to give her up, you poor old Fred?"

"I shouldn't have given her up for a dozen governors; but he's very good about

it. Really to hear him you would think—— He's perhaps better about it than I deserve. He's going back to town by the fast train to-night."

"To-night!" There was both relief and grievance in the tone of the girls.

"He might just as well have gone this morning, and much more comfortable for him," said Phyllis.

"For us too," said her sister, and the three stood together and indulged in a little guilty laugh which expressed the relief of their souls. "It is horrid of us, when he's always so kind: but papa does not really enjoy the country, nor perhaps our society. He is always much happier when he's in town and within reach of the club."

"And in the meantime we have got our diamonds."

"And I my freedom," said Fred; then he added with a look of compunction, "I say, though, look here. He's as good to us as

he knows how, and we're not just what you would call——”

“Grateful,” said both the sisters in a breath. Then they began to make excuses, each in her own way.

“We did not bring up ourselves. We ought to have got the sort of education that would have kept us in papa's sphere. He should have seen to that; but he didn't, Fred, you know, and how can we help it? I am always as civil to him as it's possible to be. If he were ill, or anything happened—By-the-bye, we are always saying now, ‘If anything happened:’ as if there was some trouble in the air.”

“It's all right; you needn't be superstitious. He is in the best of spirits, and says I am not wanted, and that he's got some tremendous operation in hand.”

“I do not suppose you would make much difference, dear Fred, even if you were wanted,” said Miss Phyllis sweetly. “Of

course if he were ill we should go to him wherever he was. If he should have an accident now, I could bind up his arteries, or foment his foot if he strained it. I have not got my ambulance certificate for nothing. But keeping very well and quite rampant, and richer than anybody, what could we do for him?"

"It's the sentiment of the thing," said Fred.

"As if he ever thought of the sentiment: or minded anything about us."

They returned to the house in the course of this conversation — where already the servants had cleared the dining-room and replaced it in its ordinary condition. Here Doris paused to tell the butler that dinner must be served early on account of her father's departure: but her interference was received by that functionary with a bland smile, which rebuked the intrusion.

"We have known it, miss, since master came," a little speech which brought back

the young people to their original state of exasperated satisfaction.

“You see!” the girls said, while even Fred while he laughed felt a prick of irritation. Williams the butler had a great respect for his master, a respect by no means general in such cases. He had served a duke in his day, but he had never met with any one who was so indifferent to every one else, so masterful and easy in his egotism, as his present gentleman. And that he himself should have known what Mr. Dirom’s arrangements were, while the children did not know, was a thing that pleased this regent of the household. It was putting things in their proper place.

All the arrangements were made in the same unalterable imperious way. There was no hurry with Mr. Dirom. He dined and indulged in a great many remarks upon county people, whom he thought very small beer, he who was used to the best society.

He would not in London have condescended to notice such people.

But in the country, if the girls liked, and as there was nothing better to be had—"From time to time give them a good spread," he said; "don't mind what's the occasion—a good spread, all the delicacies of the season; that's the sort of thing to do. Hang economy, that's the virtue of the poor-proud. You're not poor, thanks to me, and you have no call to be humble, chicks. Give it 'em grand, regardless of expense. As long as I'm there to pay, I like you to cut a figure. I like to feed 'em up and laugh in their faces. They'll call me vulgar, you bet. Never mind; what I like is to let them say it, and then make them knuckle under. Let 'em see you're rich,—that's what the beggars feel,—and you'll have every one of them, the best of them, on their knees. Pity is," he added after a while, "that there's nobody here that is any good. Nothing marriageable, eh,

Phyll? Ah, well, for that fellow there, who might have picked up something better any day of his life; but nothing for you girls. Not so much as a bit of a young baronet, or even a Scotch squire. Nothing but the doctor; the doctor won't do. I'm very indulgent, but there I draw the line. Do you hear, mother? No doctor. I'll not stand the doctor—not till they're forty at the least, and have got no other hope."

The girls sat pale, and made no reply. Their mother gave a feeble laugh, as in duty bound, and said, "That's your fun, George." Thus the propriety of Doris's statement that they ought to have been brought up in papa's sphere was made apparent: for in that case they would have laughed too: whereas now they sat silent and pale, and looked at each other, with sentiments unutterable: fortunately the servants had gone away, but he was quite capable of having spoken before the servants.

After dinner they waited with ill-restrained impatience the hour of the train. *He* had rarely made himself so offensive; he went on about the doctor, who would probably be their fate as they got near forty, with inexhaustible enjoyment, and elicited from their mother that little remonstrating laugh, which they forgave her for pity, saying to each other, "Poor mamma!" Decidedly it is much better when daughters, and sons too, for that matter, are brought up in their father's sphere. He went away in great good humour, refusing Fred's offer to drive him to the station.

"None of your dog-carts for me," he said: "I've ordered the brougham. Good-bye girls; take care of yourselves, and try to rummage out something superior to that doctor. And, Fred, you'd better think better of it, my fine fellow, or, if you won't be warned, do as you like, and be hanged to you. Good-bye, old lady; I expect to hear

you've got screwed up with rheumatism in this damp old den here."

"And when will you come back, George? They say the weather is fine up to November. I hope you'll soon come back."

"Not for some time—unless I should have worse luck," said the rich man. He was at the door when he said this, his wife accompanying him, while Fred stood outside with his hair blown about his eyes, at the door of the brougham. The girls, standing behind, saw it all like a picture. Their father, still with his white waistcoat showing under his overcoat, his heavy chain glittering, and the beam and the roll of triumphant money in his eye and his gait—"Not soon, unless I have worse luck," and he paused a moment and gave a comprehensive look around him with sudden gravity, as he spoke.

Then there was a laugh, a good-bye—and the carriage rolled away, and they all stood

for a moment looking out into the blackness of the night.

“What does he mean by worse luck?” they said to their mother as she came in from the door.

“He means nothing; it is just his fun. He’s got the grandest operations in hand he has ever had. What a father you have got, girls! and to think he lets you do whatever you please, and keeps you rolling in wealth all the same!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE day of the party at Allonby had been a day of pleasure to Effie, but of pleasure she was half afraid of and only half understood. The atmosphere about her had been touched by something beyond her experience,—softened, brightened, glorified, she could not tell how. She did not understand it, and yet she did understand it, and this soft conflict between knowing and not knowing increased its magical effect. She was surrounded by that atmosphere of admiration, of adoration, which is the first romantic aspect of a love-making. Everything in her and about her was so beautiful and lovely in the eyes of her young and undeclared lover, that somehow in spite of herself

this atmosphere got into her own eyes and affected her conception of herself. It was all an effect of fancy, unreal, not meaning, even to Fred Dirom, what it had seemed to mean.

When love came to its perfection, when he had told it, and made sure of a return (if he was to have a return), then Fred too, or any, the most romantic of lovers, would so far return to common earth as to become aware that it was a woman and not a poetical angel whom he was about to marry.

But at present fancy was supreme, and Effie was as no real creature ever had been, lit up with the effulgence of a tender imagination, even in her own consciousness. She was not vain, nor apt to take much upon herself; neither was she by any means prepared to respond to the sentiment with which Fred regarded her. She did not look at him through that glorifying medium. But she became aware of herself through it in a bewildering, dazzling, incomprehensible way.

Her feet trod the air, a suffusion of light seemed to be about her. It was a merely sympathetic effect, although she was the glorified object ; but for the moment it was very remarkable and even sweet.

“ Well ! it appears you were the queen of the entertainment, Effie, for all so simple as you sit there,” said her stepmother. “ I hope you were content.”

“ Me ! ” said Effie, in those half bewildered tones, conscious of it, yet incapable of acknowledging it, not knowing how it could be. She added in a subdued voice : “ They were all very kind,” blushing so deeply that her countenance and throat rose red out of her white frock.

“ Her ! ” cried Mr. Ogilvie, still a little confused with the truffles ; “ what would she be the queen of the feast for, a little thing like that ? I have nothing to say against you, Effie ; but there were many finer women there.”

"Hold your tongue, Robert," said his wife. "There may be some things on which you're qualified to speak : but the looks of his own daughter, and her just turning out of a girl into a woman, is what no man can judge. You just can't realize Effie as anything more than Effie. But I've seen it for a long time. That's not the point of view from which she is regarded there."

"I know no other point of view," he said in his sleepy voice. "You are putting rank nonsense into her head."

"Just you lean back in your corner and take a rest," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "you've been exposed to the sun, and you've had heating viands and drinks instead of your good cup of tea : and leave Effie's head to me. I'll put nothing into it that should not be there."

"I think Effie's head can take care of itself," said the subject of the discussion, though indeed if she had said the truth she would have acknowledged that the little head

in question was in the condition which is popularly described as "turned," and not in a very fit condition to judge of itself.

"It is easy to see that Mr. Dirom is a most liberal person," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "and spares nothing. I would not wonder if we were to see him at Gilston to-morrow. What for? Oh, just for civility, and to see your father. There might be business questions arising between them; who can tell? And, Effie, I hope you'll be reasonable, and not set yourself against anything that would be for your good."

"I hope not," said Effie, "but I don't know what it is that you think would be for my good."

"That is just what I am afraid of," Mrs. Ogilvie said, "that's what young folk are always doing. I can remember myself in my young days the chances I threw away. Instead of seeing what's in it as a real serious matter, you will just consider it as a joke, as

a thing to amuse yourself with. That is not what a reasonable person would do. You're young, to be sure, but you will not be always young; and it is just silly to treat in that light way what might be such a grand settlement for life."

"I wish," cried Effie, reddening now with sudden anger,—“oh, I wish you would——”

“Mind my own business? But it is my own business. When I married your father it was one of the first of my duties to look after you, and consider your best interests. I hope I've always done my duty by you, Effie. From seeing that your hair was cut regularly, which was just in a heart-breaking tangle about your shoulders when I came home to Gilston, to seeing you well settled, there is nothing I have had so much in my mind. Now don't you make me any answer, for you will just say something you will regret. I shall never have grown-up daughters of my own, and if I were not to think of you

I would be a most reprehensible person. All I have to ask of you is that you will not be a fool and throw away your advantages. You need not stir a finger. Just take things pleasantly and make a nice answer to them that ask, and everything else will come to your hand. Lucky girl that you are! Yes, my dear, you are just a very lucky girl. Scarcely nineteen, and everything you can desire ready to drop into your lap. There is not one in a hundred that has a lot like that. There are many that might do not amiss but for some circumstances that's against them: but there is no circumstance against you, and nothing that can harm you, unless just some nonsense fancy that you may take up at your own hand."

Thus Mrs. Ogilvie ran on during the drive home. After one or two murmurs of protest Effie fell into silence, preferring, as she often did, the soft current of her own thoughts to the weary words of her stepmother, who

indeed was by no means unaccustomed to carry on a monologue of this description, in which she gave forth a great many sentiments that were a credit to her, and gave full intimation, had any attention been paid to her, of various plans which were hotly but ineffectually objected to when she carried them out.

Mr. Ogilvie in his corner, what with his truffles and the unusual fatigue of an afternoon spent in the midst of a crowd, and the familiar lullaby of his wife's voice, and the swift motion of the horses glad to get home, had got happily and composedly to sleep. And if Effie did not sleep, she did what was better. She allowed herself to float away on a dreamy tide of feeling, which indeed was partly caused by Fred Dirom's devotion, yet was not responsive to it, nor implied any enchantment of her own in which he held a leading place. She mused, but not of Fred. The pleasure of life, of youth, of the love shown to her, of perhaps, though

it is a less admirable sentiment, gratified vanity, buoyed her up and carried her along.

No doubt it was gratified vanity; yet it was something more. The feeling that we are admired and beloved has a subtle delight in it, breathing soft and warm into the heart, which is more than a vain gratification. It brings a conviction that the world, so good to us, is good and kind to its core—that there is a delightful communication with all lovely things possible to humanity to which we now have got the key, that we are entering into our heritage, and that the beautiful days are dawning for us that dawn upon all in their time, in their hour and place.

This, perhaps, has much to do with the elevation and ecstasy even of true love. Without love at all on her own part, but only the reflected glow of that which shone from her young lover, who had not as yet breathed a word to her of hopes or of wishes, this soft uprising tide, this consciousness of

a new existence, caught Effie now. She ceased to pay any attention to her step-mother, whose wise words floated away upon the breezes, and perhaps got diffused into nature, and helped to replenish that stock of wisdom which the quiet and silence garner up to transmit to fit listeners in their time. Some other country girl, perhaps, going out into the fields to ask herself what she should do in similar circumstances, got the benefit of those counsels, adjuring her to abandon fancy and follow the paths of prudence, though they floated over Effie's head and made no impression on her dreaming soul.

This vague and delightful period lasted without being broken by anything definite for some time longer. The Dirom family in general had been checked and startled, they could scarcely tell how, by the visit of the father. Not that its abruptness surprised them, or its brevity, to both of which things they were accustomed. No one indeed could

define what was the cause, or indeed what was exactly the effect. It did not reach the length of anxiety or alarm, and it was not produced by any special thing which he had done or said; but yet they were checked, made uncomfortable; they could not tell why.

Mrs. Dirom herself retired to her room and cried, though she would not or could not give any reason for it; and the young people, though none of their pursuits had been blamed by their father, tacitly by one impulse paused in them, renouncing their most cherished habits, though with no cause they knew.

The same indefinite check weighed upon Fred. He had received, to his own surprise, full license from his father to do as he pleased, and make his own choice, a permission indeed which he had fully calculated upon—for Mr. Dirom's sentiment of wealth was such that he had always persistently

scoffed at the idea of a wife's fortune being any special object on the part of his sons—but which he had not expected to receive without asking for it, without putting forth his reasons, in this prodigal way.

But Fred did not at once take advantage of this permission to please himself. Perhaps the mere fact that his father took it so entirely for granted, gave the subject greater gravity and difficulty in the eyes of the son, and he became doubtful in proportion as the difficulties seemed smoothed away. He did not even see Effie for some days after. The first touch of winter came with the beginning of October, and tennis became a thing of the past. Neither was there much pleasure to be had either in walks or rides. The outside world grew dark, and to the discouraged and disturbed family it was almost an advantage to shut themselves up for a day or two, to gather round the fire, and either mutely or by implication consult with

each other, and question that Sphinx of the future which gives no reply.

When this impression began to wear off, and the natural course of life was resumed, Fred found another obstacle to the promotion of his suit. Effie gave him no rebuff, showed no signs of dislike or displeasure, but smiled to meet him, with a soft colour rising over her face, which many a lover would have interpreted to mean the most flattering things. But with all this, Fred felt a certain atmosphere of abstraction about her which affected him, though his feelings were far from abstract. He had a glimmering of the truth in respect to her, such as only a fairly sympathetic nature and the perfect sincerity of his mind could have conveyed to him.

The girl was moved, he felt, by love, by something in the air, by an ethereal sentiment—but not by him. She felt his love, thrilling somehow sympathetically the delicate strings of her being, but did not share the

passion. This stopped him in the strangest way, re-acting upon him, taking the words from his lips. It was too delicate for words. It seemed to him that even a definite breath of purpose, much more the vulgar question, Will you marry me? would have broken the spell. And thus a little interval passed which was not without its sweetness. The nature of their intercourse changed a little. It became less easy, yet almost more familiar; instead of the lawns, the tennis, the walk through the glen, the talk of Doris and Phyllis for a background, it was now in Gilston chiefly that he met Effie. He came upon all possible and impossible errands, to bring books or to borrow them, to bring flowers from the conservatories, or grapes and peaches, or grouse; to consult Mr. Ogilvie about the little farm, of which he knew nothing: or any other pretext that occurred to him. And then he would sit in the homely drawing-room at Gilston the whole

afternoon through, while Effie did her needle-work, or arranged the flowers, or brought out the dessert dishes for the fruit, or carried him, a pretty handmaiden, his cup of tea.

“Now just sit still,” Mrs. Ogilvie said, “and let Effie serve you. A woman should always hand the tea. You’re fine for heavier things, but tea is a girl’s business.”

And Fred sat in bliss, and took that domestic nectar from the hand of Effie, standing sweetly with a smile before him, and felt himself grow nearer and nearer, and yet still farther and farther away.

This state of affairs did not satisfy Mrs. Ogilvie at all. She asked herself sometimes whether Fred after all was trifling with Effie? whether it was possible that he might be amusing himself? whether her father should interfere? This excellent woman was well aware that to get Effie’s father to interfere was about as likely as that good Glen, sweeping his mighty tail, should stop Fred upon

the threshold, and ask him what were his intentions. But then "her father" meant, of course, her father's wife, and the lady herself felt no reluctance, if Effie's interest required it, to take this step.

Her objects were various. In the first place, as a matter of principle, she had a rooted objection to shilly-shally in a question of this kind. She had the feeling that her own prospects had suffered from it, as many women have; and though Mrs. Ogilvie had not suffered much, and was very well satisfied on the whole with her life, still she might, she felt, have married earlier and married better but for the senseless delays of the man in more cases than one.

From a less abstract point of view she desired the question to be settled in Effie's interests, feeling sure both that Fred was an excellent *parti*, and that he was that highly desirable thing—a good young man. Perhaps a sense that to have the house to

herself, without the perpetual presence of a grown-up stepdaughter, might be an advantage, had a certain weight with her; but a motive which had much greater weight, was the thought of the triumph of thus marrying Effie—who was not even her own, and for whom her exertions would be recognized as disinterested—in this brilliant manner at nineteen—a triumph greater than any which had been achieved by any mother in the county since the time when May Caerlaverock married an English duke. None of these, it will be perceived, were sordid reasons, and Mrs. Ogilvie had no need to be ashamed of any of them. The advantage of her husband's daughter was foremost in her thoughts.

But with all this in her, it may well be believed that Mrs. Ogilvie was very impatient of the young people's delays, of the hours that Fred wasted in the Gilston drawing-room without ever coming to the point,

and of the total want of any anxiety or desire that he should come to the point, on the part of Effie.

“He will just let the moment pass,” this excellent woman said to herself as she sat and frowned, feeling that she gave them a hundred opportunities of which they took no heed, which they did not even seem to be conscious of.

It was all she could do, she said afterwards, to keep her hands off them! the two silly things! just playing with their fate. She was moved almost beyond her power of self-control, and would sit quivering with the desire to hasten matters, ready every time she opened her lips to address them on the subject, while Fred took his tea with every appearance of calm, and Effie served him as if in a dream.

“Oh ye two silly things!”—this was what was on her lips twenty times in an afternoon: and she would get up and go out

of the room, partly lest she should betray herself, partly that he might have an opportunity. But it was not till about the end of October, on a dusky afternoon after a day of storm and rain, that Fred found his opportunity, not when Mrs. Ogilvie, but when Effie happened to be absent, for it was, after all, to the elder lady, not to the younger, that he at length found courage to speak.

CHAPTER XII.

“MRS. OGILVIE, may I say a word to you?” he asked.

“Dear me, Mr. Fred, a hundred if you like. I am just always most ready to listen to what my friends have to say.”

Which was true enough but with limitations, and implied the possibility of finding an opening, a somewhat difficult process. She made a very brief pause, looking at him, and then continued, “It will be something of importance? I am sure I am flattered that you should make a confidant of me.”

“It is something of a great deal of importance—to me. I am going to ask you as a

kind friend, which you have always shown yourself——”

“Hoots,” said the lady, “I’ve had nothing in my power. But what will it be? for though I have the best will in the world, and would do anything to serve you, I cannot think what power I have to be of any use, or what I can do.”

“Oh, of the greatest use. Tell me first,” cried the young man, who had risen up and was standing before her with an evident tremor about him. “Shall I have time to tell you everything? is Miss Effie coming back directly? will she soon be here?”

Mrs. Ogilvie felt as if her senses were abandoning her. It was evident he wanted Effie to stay away in order that he might reveal something to *her*. Dear, what could it be? Was it possible that she had been mistaken all through? was it possible—? Mrs. Ogilvie was not a vain woman, but

the circumstances were such as to confuse the clearest head.

"She has gone up to the manse to her Uncle John's. Well, I would not wonder if she was half-an-hour away. But, Mr. Dirom, you will excuse me, I would sooner have believed you wanted me out of the way than Effie. I could have imagined you had something to say to her: but me!"

"Ah, that is just it," said Fred, "I feel as if I dared not. I want you to tell me, dear Mrs. Ogilvie, if it is any good. She is—well, not cold—she is always sweetness itself. But I feel as if I were kept at a distance, as if nothing of that sort had ever approached her—no idea—— Other girls laugh about marriage and lovers and so forth, but she never. I feel as if I should shock her, as if——"

"Then it is about Effie that you want to speak?"

He was so full of emotion that it was

only by a nod of his head that he could reply.

“You know this is just an extraordinary kind of proceeding, Mr. Fred. It’s a thing nobody thinks of doing. She will perhaps not like it, for she has a great deal of spirit—that you should first have spoken to me.”

“It is in many parts of the world the right thing to do. I—didn’t know——”

“Oh, it is just a very right thing, no doubt, in principle: but a girl would perhaps think—Well, you must just say your mind, and I will help you if I can. It may be something different from what I expect.”

“What could it be, Mrs. Ogilvie? I have loved her since the first moment I saw her. When I lifted the curtain and my eyes fell upon that fair creature, so innocent, so gentle! I have never thought of any one in the same way. My fate was decided in

that moment. Do you think there is any hope for me?"

"Hope!" said Mrs. Ogilvie, "well, I must say I think you are a very humble-minded young man."

He came up to her and took her hand and kissed it. He was full of agitation.

"I am in no way worthy of such happiness. Humble-minded—oh no, I am not humble-minded. But Effie—tell me! has she ever spoken of me, has she said anything to make you think—has she——"

"My dear Mr. Fred, of course we have spoken of you many a time: not that I would say she ever said anything—oh no, she would not say anything. She is shy by nature, and shyer than I could wish with me. But, dear me, how is it likely she would be insensible? You've been so devoted that everybody has seen it. Oh, yes, I expected.—And how could she help but see? She has never met with anybody else,

she is just fresh from the nursery and the schoolroom, and has never had such a notion presented to her mind. It would be very strange to me, just out of all possibility, that she should refuse such an offer."

The pang of pleasure which had penetrated Fred's being was here modified by a pang of pain. He shrank a little from these words. This was not how he regarded his love. He cried anxiously, "Don't say that. If you think it is possible that she may learn to—love me——"

"And why not?" said this representative of all that was straightforward and commonplace. "There is nobody before you, that is one thing I can tell you. There was a young man—a boy I might say—but I would never allow her to hear a word about it. No, no, there is nobody—you may feel quite free to speak."

"You make me—very happy," he said, but in a tone by no means so assured as

his words. Then he added, hesitating, "Perhaps I should not ask more: but if she had ever shown—oh, I am sure you must know what I mean—any interest—any——"

"Toots!" said Mrs. Ogilvie, "am I going to betray a bit girlie's secrets, even if I knew them. One thing, she will not perhaps be pleased that you have spoken to me. I am but her stepmother when all is said. Her father is in the library, and he is the right person. Just you step across the passage and have a word with him. That will be far more to the purpose than trying to get poor Effie's little secrets out of me."

"But, Mrs. Ogilvie," cried Fred—

"I will just show you the way. It would be awkward if she found you here with me with that disturbed look; but her father is another matter altogether. Now, don't be blate, as we say here. Don't be too modest. Just go straight in and tell him—Robert,

here is Mr. Fred Dirom that is wishful to have a word with you."

Fred followed, altogether taken by surprise. He was not in the least "wishful" to have a word with Mr. Ogilvie. He wanted to find out from a sympathetic spectator whether Effie's virginal thoughts had ever turned towards him, whether he might tell his tale without alarming her, without perhaps compromising his own interests; but his ideas had not taken the practical form of definite proposals, or an interview with the father. Not that Fred had the slightest intention of declaring his love without offering himself fully for Effie's acceptance; but to speak of his proposal, and to commit him to a meeting of this sort before he knew anything of Effie's sentiments, threw a business air, which was half ludicrous and half horrible, over the little tender romance. But what can a young man do in such absurd circumstances? Mrs. Ogilvie did not ask his

opinion. She led the way, talking in her usual full round voice, which filled the house.

“Just come away,” she said. “To go to headquarters is always the best, and then your mind will be at ease. As for objections on her part, I will not give them a thought. You may be sure a young creature of that age, that has never had a word said to her, is very little likely to object. And ye can just settle with her father. Robert, I am saying this is Mr. Dirom come to say a word to you. Just leave Rory to himself; he can amuse himself very well if you take no notice. And he is as safe as the kirk steeple, and will take no notice of you.”

“I’m sure I’m very glad to see Mr. Dirom—at any time,” said Mr. Ogilvie: but it was not a propitious moment. The room in which he sat, and which was called the library, was a dreary dark gray room with a few bookcases, and furniture of a dingy kind.

The old armchairs, when they were discarded from other regions, found their way there, and stood about harshly, like so many old gentlemen, with an air of twirling their thumbs and frowning at intruders. But to-day these old fogeys in mahogany were put to a use to which indeed they were not unaccustomed, but which deranged all the previous habitudes of a lifetime. They were collected in the middle of the room to form an imaginary stage-coach with its steeds, four in hand, driven with much cracking of his whip and pulling of the cords attached to the unyielding old backs, by Master Rory, seated on high in his white pinafore, and gee-wo-ing and chirruping like an experienced coachman. Mr. Ogilvie himself, with much appropriate gesture, was at the moment of Fred's entry riding as postilion the leader, which had got disorderly. The little drama required that he should manifest all the alarm of a rider about to be thrown off,

and this he was doing with much demonstration when the door opened.

Fred thought that if anything could have added to the absurdity of his own position it was this. Mr. Ogilvie was on ordinary occasions very undemonstrative, a grave leathern-jawed senior, who spoke little and looked somewhat frowningly upon the levities of existence. He got off his horse, so to speak, with much confusion as the stranger came in.

"You see," he said, apologetically—but for the moment said no more.

"Oh yes, we see. Rory, ye'll tumble off that high seat; how have ye got so high a seat? Bless me, ye'll have a fall if ye don't take care."

"You see," continued Mr. Ogilvie, "the weather has been wet and the little fellow has not got his usual exercise. At that age they must have exercise. You'll think it's not very becoming for a man of my age——"

"Hoots," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "what does it matter about your age? You are just a father whatever age you are, and Mr. Dirom will think no worse of you for playing with your own little child. Come, Rory, come, my wee man, and leave papa to his business."

"No, I'll no go," shouted the child. "We're thust coming in to the inn, and all the passengers will get out o' the coach. Pappa, pappa, the off leader, she's runned away. Get hold o' her, get hold o' her; she'll upset the coach."

Fred looked on with unsympathetic eyes while the elderly pseudo-postilion, very shamefaced, made pretence of arresting the runaway steed, which bore the sedate form of a mahogany arm-chair.

"You will just excuse me," he said, "till the play's played out. There, now, Rory, fling your reins to the hostler, and go in and get your dram—which means a chocolate sweetie," he added, to forestall any reproof.

If Rory's father had been a great personage, or even if being only Mr. Ogilvie of Gilston he had been Rory's grandfather, the situation would have been charming; but as he was neither, and very commonplace and elderly, the tableau was spoiled. ("Old idiot," the Miss Dempsters would have said, "making a fool of a bairn that should have been his son's bairn, and neglecting his own lawful children, at his age!" The sentiment was absurd, but Fred shared it.) Perhaps it was the unrelaxing countenance of the young man, as Mrs. Ogilvie seized and carried off the charioteer which made the poor papa so ill at ease. He pulled the chairs apart with an uneasy smile and gave one to his visitor.

"No, I am not ashamed of it," he said, "but I daresay I would look ridiculous enough to a stranger:" and with this he sat down before his table, on which, amid the writing things, were a child's trumpet and

other articles belonging to a person of very tender years. "And in what can I be of use to you?" he asked.

It was Fred's turn to grow red. He had been led into this snare against his will. He felt rather disgusted, rather angry.

"I don't know," he said, "that it was anything calling for your attention to-day. It was a matter—still undecided. I should not have disturbed you—at a moment of relaxation."

"Oh, if that is all," said Mr. Ogilvie with a smile, "I have Rory always, you know. The little pickle is for ever on my hands. He likes me better than the weemen, because I spoil him more, my wife says."

Having said this with effusion, the good man awoke once more to the fact that his audience was not with him, and grew dully red.

"I am entirely at your service now," he said; "would it be anything about the

wheat? Your griever is, no doubt, a very trustworthy man, but I would not leave your fields longer uncut if I was you. There is no sun now to do them any good."

"Thanks, very much," said Fred, "it was not about the wheat——"

"Or perhaps the state of the woods? There will be a good deal of pruning required, but it will be safest to have the factor over, and do nothing but what he approves."

"It was not about the woods. It was an entirely personal question. Perhaps another day would be more appropriate. I—have lost the thread of what I was going to say."

"Dear me," said the good man, "that's a pity. Is there nothing that I can suggest, I wonder, to bring it back to your mind?"

He looked so honestly solicitous to know what the difficulty was, that Fred's irri-

tation was stayed. An embarrassment of another kind took possession of him.

"Mr. Ogilvie," he said, "I don't know why I should have come to you, for indeed I have no authority. I have come to ask you for—what I am sure you will not give, unless I have another consent first. It is about—your daughter that I want to speak."

Mr. Ogilvie opened his eyes a little and raised himself in his seat.

"Ay!" he said, "and what will it be about Effie?"

He had observed nothing, seeing his mind was but little occupied with Effie. To be sure, his wife had worried him with talk about this young fellow, but he had long accustomed himself to hear a great deal that his wife said without paying any attention. He had an understanding that there could be only one way in which Fred Dirom could have anything to say to him about his daughter: but still, though he had

heard a good deal of talk on the subject, it was a surprise.

“Sir,” said Fred, collecting himself, “I have loved her since the first time I saw her. I want to know whether I have your permission to speak to Miss Ogilvie—to tell her——”

Poor Fred was very truly and sincerely in love. It was horrible to him to have to discourse on the subject and speak these words which he should have breathed into Effie’s ear to this dull old gentleman. So strange a travesty of the scene which he had so often tenderly figured to himself filled him with confusion, and took from him all power of expressing himself.

“This is very important, Mr. Dirom,” said Effie’s father, straightening himself out.

“It is very important to me,” cried the young man; “all my hopes are involved in it, my happiness for life.”

“Yes, it’s very important,” said Mr.

Ogilvie, "if I'm to take this, as I suppose, as a proposal of marriage to Effie. She is young, and you are but young for that responsibility; and you will understand, of course, that I would never force her inclinations."

"Good heavens, sir," cried the young fellow, starting to his feet, "what do you take me for?—do you think that I—I——"

"No, no," said Mr. Ogilvie, shaking his gray head. "Sit down, my young friend. There could be no such thing as forcing her inclinations; but otherwise if your good father and mother approve, there would not, so far as I can see, be any objections on our part. No, so far as I can see, there need be no objection. I should like to have an opportunity of talking it over with my wife. And Effie herself would naturally require to be consulted: but with these little preliminaries—I have heard nothing but good of you, and I cannot see that

there ' would be any objections on our part."

At this point the door opened quickly, and Mrs. Ogilvie came in.

"Well," she said, "I hope ye have got it over and settled everything: for, Mr. Fred, Effie is just coming down from the manse, and I thought you would perhaps like to see her, not under my nose, as people say, but where ye could have a little freedom. If ye hurry you will meet her where the road strikes off into the little wood—and that's a nice little roundabout, where a great deal can be got through. But come away, ye must not lose a moment; and afterwards ye can finish your talk with papa."

If Fred could have disappeared through the dingy old carpet, if he could have melted into thin air, there would have been no more seen of him in Gilston house that day. But he could not escape his fate. He was hurried along to a side door, where

Mrs. Ogilvie pointed out to him the little path by which Effie would certainly return home. She almost pushed him out into the waning afternoon to go and tell his love.

When he heard the door close behind him and felt himself free and in the open world, Fred for a moment had the strongest impulse on his mind to fly. The enthusiasm of his youthful love had been desecrated by all these odious prefaces, his tender dreams had been dispelled. How could he say to Effie in words fit for her hearing what he had been compelled to say to those horrible people to whom she belonged, and to hear resaid by them in their still more horrible way? He stood for a moment uncertain whether to go on or turn and fly—feeling ashamed, outraged, irritated. It seemed an insult to Effie to carry that soiled and desecrated story for her hearing now.

But just then she appeared at the opening of the road, unconscious, coming sweetly along, in maiden meditation, a little touched with dreams. The sight of her produced another revolution in Fred's thoughts. Could it be for him that soft mist that was in her eyes? He went forward, with his heart beating, to meet her and his fate.

END OF VOLUME I.