HE THAT WILL NOT WHEN HE MAY

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

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CHAPTER I.

THE Easter holidays were drawing near an end, and the family at Markham Chase had fallen into a state of existence somewhat different from its usual dignified completeness of life. When I say that the head of the house was Sir William Markham, once Under-Secretary for the Colonies, once President of the Board of Trade, and still, though in opposition, a distinguished member of his party and an important public personage, it is scarcely necessary to add that his house was one of the chief houses in the county, and that "the best people" were to be found there, especially at those times when fashionable gatherings take place in the country. At

Easter the party was of the best kind, sprinkled with great personages, a party such as we should all have liked to be asked to meet. But these fine people had melted away; they had gone on to other great houses, they had got on the wing for town, where, indeed, the Markhams themselves were going early, like most Parliamentary people. Sir William too was away. He was visiting the head of his party in one of the midland counties, helping to settle the programme of enlightened and patriotic opposition for the rest of the session, some untoward events having deranged the system previously decided upon. To say that Sir William's absence was a relief would be untrue; for though he was somewhat punctilious and overwhelming in his orderliness he was greatly admired by his family, and loved—as much as was respectful and proper. But when he went away, and when all the fine people went away, the house without any demonstration slid smoothly, as it were down an easy slope of transition, into a kind of nursery life, delightful to those who were left behind. The family consisted, to begin at the wrong end, of two schoolboys, and two little girls who were in the hands of a governess. But mademoiselle was away too.

There was nobody left at home but mamma and Alice —imagine the rapture of the children thus permitted to be paramount! There was a general dinner for everybody at two o'clock; and in the afternoon, as often as not, Lady Markham herself would be persuaded to go out to their picnic teas in the woods, and all kinds of juvenile dissipations. The nursery meals were superseded altogether. Old Nurse might groan, but she dared not say a word, for was not mamma the ring-leader in everything? There was no authority but hers in the house, and all the servants looked on benignant. In the evening when it was impossible to stay out any longer, they would dance, Alice "pretending" to be the dancing mistress, which was far better fun than *real* dancing. There was no need to run away, or to keep quiet for fear of disturbing papa. In short, a mild Carnival was going on in the house, only dashed by the terrible thought that in a week the holidays would be over. In a week the boys would go back to school, the girls to their governess. The budding woods would become to the one and the other only a recollection, or a sight coldly seen during the course of an orderly walk. Then the boys would have the best of it. They would

go away among all their friends, with the delights of boating and cricket, whereas the little girls would relapse into blue sashes and a correct appearance at dessert, followed, alas, in no small time, by complete loneliness when mamma went to London, and everybody was away.

"Don't let us think about it," said little Bell; "it will be bad enough when it comes. Oh, mamma, come and play the *Tempête*. Alice is going to teach us. Harry, you be my partner, you dance a great deal the best."

This produced a cry of indignant protestation from Mary, whom they all called Marie with a very decided emphasis on the last syllable. "I pulled Roland about all last night," she said, "when he was thinking of something else all the time; it is my turn to have Harry now."

"Don't you see," said Alice, "that Roland is much more your size? It doesn't do to have a little one and a big one in the *Tempête*. He mustn't think of anything else. Don't you know Rol, if you don't take a little trouble you will never learn to dance, and then no one will ask you out when you grow up. I should not

like, for my part, when all the others went out to be always left moping at home."

"Much I'd mind," said Roland with a precocious scorn of society. But just then the music struck up, and the lesson began. Roland was generally thinking of something else, but Harry threw himself into the dance with all the simple devotion of a predestined guardsman. That was to be a great part of his duty in life, and he gave himself up to it dutifully. The drawing-room was very large, partially divided by two pillars, which supported a roof painted with clouds and goddesses in the taste of the seventeenth century. The outer half was but partially lighted, while in the inner part all was bright. In the right-hand corner, behind Lady Markham, was a third room at right angles to this, like the transept crossing a long nave, divided from the drawing-room by curtains half-drawn, and faintly lighted too by a silver lamp. Thus the brilliant interior where the children were dancing was thrown up by two dimnesses; the girls in their light frocks, the bright faces and curls, the abundant light which showed the pictures on the walls, and all the details of the furniture, were thus doubly gay and bright in

consequence. The children moving back and forward, Alice now here, now there, with one side and another as necessity demanded, flitting among them in all her softer grace of young womanhood; and the beautiful mother, the most beautiful of all, smiling on them from the piano, turning round to criticise and encourage, while her hands flashed over the keys, made the prettiest picture. There was an *abandon* of innocent gaiety in the scene, an absence of every harsh tone and suggestion which made it perfect. Was there really no evil and trouble in the place lighted up by the soft pleasure of the women, the mirth of the children? You would have said so—but that just then, though she did not stop smiling, Lady Markham sighed. Her children were in pairs, Harry and Bell, Roland and Marie—but where was Alice's brother? "Ah, my Paul!" she said within herself, but played on. Thus there was one note out of harmony—one, if no more.

Almost exactly coincident with this sigh the door of the drawing-room opened far down in the dim outer part, and two men came in. The house was so entirely given up to this innocent sway of youth, that there was no reason why they should particularly note the opening

of the door. It could not be papa coming in, who was liable to be disturbed by such a trifle as a dance, or any serious visitor, or even the elder brother, who would, when he was at home, occasionally frown down the revels. Accordingly, their ears being quickened by no alarm, no one heard the opening of the door, and the two strangers came in unobserved. One was quite young, not much more than a youth, slim, and, though not very tall, looking taller than he was; the other was of a short, thick-set figure, neither graceful nor handsome, who followed his companion with a mixture of reluctance and defiance, strange enough in such a scene. As they came towards the light this became still more noticeable. The second stranger did not seem to have any affinity with the place in which he found himself, and he had the air of being angry to find himself here. They had the full advantage of the pretty scene as they approached, for their steps were inaudible on the thick carpet, and the merry little company was absorbed in its own proceedings. All at once, however, the music ceased with a kind of shriek on a high note, the dancers, alarmed, stopped short, and Lady Markham left the piano and flew

forward, holding out her hands. "Paul!" she cried, "Paul!"

"Paul!" cried Alice, following her mother, and "Paul!" in various tones echoed the little girls and boys. The strange man who had come in with Paul had time to remark them while the other was receiving the greeting of his mother and sister.

"I thought some one would be sure to come and spoil the fun," Roland said, taking the opportunity to get far from the little ring of performers.

"Now we shall get no more good of mamma," said his little partner with a disconsolate face; but what was this to the joy of the mother and elder sister, whose faces where lighted up with a sudden happiness, infinitely warmer than the innocent pleasure which the new-comers had disturbed!

"We thought you were not coming," said Lady Markham. "Oh, Paul, you have been hard upon us not to write! but no, my dear, I am not going to scold you. I am too happy to have you at last. Have you had any dinner? Alice, ring the bell, and order something for your brother."

"You do not see that I am not alone, mother," said

Paul, with a tone so solemn that both the ladies were startled, not knowing what it could mean. "I have brought with me a very particular friend, who I hope will stay for a little." It was then for the first time that Lady Markham perceived her son's companion.

"You know," she said, "how glad I always am to see your friends; but you must tell me his name," she added with a smile, holding out her hand, "this is a very imperfect introduction." The sweetness of her look as she turned to the stranger dazzled him. There was a moment's confusion on the part of both the men, as this beautiful, smiling lady put her delicate fingers into a rough hand brought forth with a certain reluctance and shamefacedness. She too changed colour a little, and a look of surprise came into her face on a closer view of her son's friend.

"I thank you for your kind reception of me, my lady," said the man; "but Markham, you had better explain to your mother who I am. I go nowhere under false pretences."

Now that the light was full upon him the difference showed all the more. His rough looks, his dress, not shabby, still less dirty, but uncared for, his coarse boots,

the general aspect of his figure, which was neither disorderly nor disreputable, but unquestionably not that of a gentleman, seemed to communicate a sort of electric shock to the little company. The boys pressed forward with a simultaneous idea that Paul was in custody for something or other, and heroic intentions of pouncing upon the intruder and rescuing their brother. Alice gazed at him appalled, with some fancy of the same kind passing through her mind. Only Lady Markham, though she had grown pale, preserved her composure.

"I cannot be anything but glad to see a friend of my boy's," she said, faltering slightly; but there passed through her mind a silent thanksgiving: Thank Heaven, his father was away!

"This is Spears," said Paul, curtly. "You needn't be so fastidious; my mother is not that sort. Mamma, this is a man to whom I owe more than all the dons put together. You ought to be proud to see him in your house. No, we haven't dined, and we've had a long journey. Let them get us something as soon as possible. Hallo, Brown, put this gentleman's things into the greenroom—I suppose we may have the

greenroom?—and tell Mrs. Fry, as soon as she can manage it, to send us something to eat."

"I took the liberty to order something directly, as soon as I saw Mr. Markham, my lady," said Brown. There was a look of mingled benevolence and anxiety in this functionary's face. He was glad to see his young master come back, but he did not conceal his concern at the company in which he was. "The greenroom, my lady?"

"The greenroom is quite a small room," said Lady Markham, faltering. She looked at the stranger with a doubtful air. He was not a boy to be put into such a small place; but then, on the other hand——

"A small room is no matter to me," said Spears. "I'm not used to anything different. In such a career as mine we're glad to get shelter anywhere." He laughed as he spoke of his career. What was his career? He looked as if he expected her to know. Lady Markham concealed her perplexity by a little bow, and turned to Brown, who was waiting her orders with a half-ludicrous sentimental air of sympathy with his mistress.

"Put Mr. Spears into the chintz-room in the east

wing; it is a better room," she said. Then she led the way into the brightness, on the verge of which they had been standing. "It is almost too warm for fires," she said, "but you may like to come nearer to it after your journey. Where have you come from, Paul? Children, now that you have seen Paul, you had better go up stairs to bed."

"I knew how it would be," said Marie; "no one cares for us now Paul has come."

"No one will so much as see mamma as long as he is here," said Bell; while the boys, withdrawing reluctantly, stopping to whisper, and throw black looks back upon the stranger as they strolled away, wondered almost audibly what sort of fellow Paul had got with him. "A bailiff, *I* think," said Roland; "just the sort of fellow that comes after the men in *Harry Lorrequer*." "Or he's done something, and it's a turnkey," said Harry. Elder brothers were in the way of getting into trouble in the works with which these young heroes were familiar. Thus at Paul's appearance the pretty picture broke up and faded away like a phantasmagoria. Childhood and innocence disappeared, and care came back. The aspect of the very room

changed where now there was the young man, peremptory and authoritative, and the two ladies tremulous with the happiness of his return, yet watching him with breathless anxiety, reading, or trying to read, every change in his face.

"Your last letter was from Yorkshire, Paul; what have you been doing? We tried to make out, but we could not. You are so unsatisfactory, you boys; you never will give details of anything. Did you go to see the Normantons? or were you——"

"I was nowhere—that you know of, at least," said Paul. "I was with Spears, holding meetings. We went from one end of the county to another. I can't tell you where we went; it would be harder to say where we didn't go."

Lady Markham looked at her son's companion with a bewildered smile. "Mr. Spears, then, Paul—I suppose—knows a great many people in Yorkshire?" She had not a notion what was meant by holding meetings. He did not indeed look much like a man who would know many "people" in Yorkshire. "People" meant not the country folks, you may be sure, but the great county people, the Yorkshire gentry, the only

class which to Lady Markham told in a county. This was no fault of hers, but only because the others were beyond her range of vision. No, he did not look like a man who would know many people in Yorkshire; but, short of that, what could Paul mean? Lady Markham did not know what significance there really was in what Paul said.

"We saw a great many Yorkshire people; but I go where I am called," said the stranger, "not only where there are people I know."

Seen in the full light, there was nothing repulsive or disagreeable about the man. He looked like one of the men who came now and then to the Chase to put something in order; some clock that had gone wrong, or something about the decorations. He sat a little uneasily upon the sofa where he had placed himself. His speech was unembarrassed, but nothing else about him. He was out of place. To see him there in the midst of this family it was as if he had dropped from another planet; he did not seem to belong to the same species. But his speech was easy enough, though nothing else; he had a fine melodious voice, and he seemed to like to use it.

"I hope we did good work there," he said; "not perhaps of a kind that you would admire, my lady: but from my point of view, excellent work; and Markham, though he is a young aristocrat, was of great use. An enthusiast is always a valuable auxiliary. I do not know when I have made a more successful round. It has taken us just a week."

Lady Markham bowed in bewildered assent, not knowing what to say. She smiled out of sheer politeness, attending to every word, though she could not form an idea of what he meant. She did not care, indeed, to know what Mr. Spears had been doing. It was her son she wanted to know about; but the laws of politeness were imperative. Meanwhile Paul walked about uneasily, placing himself for one moment in front of the expiring fire, then moving from spot to spot, looking intently at some picture or knick-knack he had seen a thousand times before. "You have been getting some new china," he burst forth, after various suppressed signs of impatience. Now that he had brought his friend here, he did not seem desirous that his mother should attend so closely to all he said.

"New china! my dear boy, you have known it all

your life," said Lady Markham. We have only shifted it from one cabinet to another. It is the same old *Sèvres*. Perhaps Mr. Spears takes an interest in china. Show it to him, Paul. It is a valuable cup; it is supposed to have been made for Madame du Barry."

"No," said the strange visitor, "I know nothing about it. What makes it valuable, I wonder? I don't understand putting such a price on things that if you were to let them drop would be smashed into a thousand pieces."

"But you must not let it drop," said Lady Markham, with a little alarm. "I daresay it is quite a fictitous kind of value. Still, I like my *Sèvres*. It is a very pretty ornament."

"Just so," said Spears, with a certain patronage in his tone. "In a luxurious house like this decoration is necessary—and I don't say that it has not a very good effect. But in the places I am used to, a common teacup would be far more useful. Still, I do not deny the grace of ornament," he added, with a smile. "Life can go on very well without it, but it would be stupid to go against it here."

Lady Markham once more made him a little bow.

He spoke as if he intended a compliment; but what did the man mean? And Paul set down the cup roughly as if he would have liked to bring the whole *étagère* to the ground. Altogether it was a confusion, almost a pain, to have him here and yet not to have him. There were so many things she wanted to ask and to know. She gave her son a wistful look. But just then Brown came in to say that the hasty meal which had been prepared was ready. Lady Markham rose. She put out her hand to take her son's arm.

"Were you coming, mother? Don't take so much trouble; it would only be a bore to you," said Paul. "Spears and I will get on very well by ourselves without bothering you."

The tears started into Lady Markham's eyes. She turned a wondering look upon Alice as Paul and his companion went away down the dim length of the room, disappearing from them. Alice had been hovering about her brother, trying to say a word to him now and then, but Paul was too much intent upon what was going on between his friend and his mother to pay any attention. The look of dismay and wonder and blank

disappointment that passed between them could not be described. Had Paul been alone they would both have gone with him to the dining-room: they would have sent away Brown and waited on him—his mother carving for him, Alice flitting about to get anything he wanted. They would have asked a hundred questions, and given him a hundred details of home events, and made the whole atmosphere bright with tender happiness and soft laughter and love. Now they stood and looked at each other listening to the footsteps as they crossed the hall.

"It is all this man whom he has brought with him," Lady Markham said.

CHAPTER II.

THE children were all open-eyed and open-mouthed next morning to see Paul's friend. As for the boys, they did not feel at all sure what might have been going on during the night, or whether Paul's friend would be visible in the morning. "It is money those sort of fellows want," Roland said; and then the question arose whether papa being away mamma would have money enough to satisfy such a claimant. The little girls besieged Alice with questions. Who was that strange man? He looked exactly like the man that came to wind the clocks.

"He is a friend of Paul's; hush—hush!" said Alice; "you must all be very polite and not stare at him."

"But how can he be a friend?" demanded Bell.

"He is a bailiff," said Roland. "In *Harry Lorrequer* there is somebody exactly like that."

"Oh, hush children, for mamma's sake! he will come in directly. He is Paul's friend. Grown-up people do not go by appearances like children. Paul says he has done him more good than all the dons. Most likely he is a very learned man—or an author or something," Alice said.

"Oh, an author! they're a queer lot," said Harry, with relief. At all events, an author was less objectionable than a bailiff.

Lady Markham came in before these questions were over. She was not all so bright as usual. Though she smiled upon them as they all came round her, it was not her own natural smile; and she had a cap on, a thing which she only wore when she was out of sorts, a kind of signal of distress. The family were divided as to this cap. Some of them were in favour of it, some against it. The little girls thought it made their mother look old, whereas Alice was of opinion that it imparted dignity to her appearance.

"I don't want to have a mother just as young and a great deal prettier than I am," she said.

But Bell and Marie called out, "Oh, that odious cap!"

"Why should mamma, only because she is mamma, cover up all her pretty hair? It is such pretty hair! mine is just the same colour," said Bell, who was inclined to vanity.

Lady Markham smiled upon this charming nonsense, but it was not her own smile. "Has any one seen Paul this morning?" she said, with a sigh.

What a change there was in everything! Paul had not come into his mother's dressing-room last night to talk over all he had been doing and meant to do, as had always been his habit when he came home. And when Lady Markham went to her boy's room on her way down stairs, thinking of nothing but the little laughing lecture she was wont to administer on finding him not yet out of bed—which was the usual state of affairs—what was her surprise to find Paul out of his room, already dressed, and "gone for a walk." Brown meeting her in the hall told her this with a subdued voice and mingled wonder and sympathy in his face.

"Mr. Markham is turning over a new leaf, my

lady," he said, with the license of an old servant, who had seen Paul born, so to speak.

"I am very glad to hear it—it is so much better for him," Lady Markham said. So it was, no doubt; but this change, even of the bad habit which was familiar to her, gave her a little shock. Therefore it was with a failure of her usual bright cheerfulness that she took her place at the breakfast-table.

"Has any one seen Paul?" she said.

"Oh, fancy seeing Paul already!" cried the little girls. "He will come in when we have all done breakfast, and Brown will bring him everything quite hot, after we have waited and waited. Brown makes dreadful favourites, don't you think so? He does not mind what he does for Paul."

"Paul has gone out for a walk," said Lady Markham, not without solemnity.

There was a cry of astonishment all round the table. Roland gave Harry a little nod of intelligence. ("He will have found-it was no use, and he will have taken him away.") Alice had looked up into her mother's face with consternation; but as she was Paul's

unhesitating partisan through everything, she recovered herself at once.

"He must be showing Mr. Spears the Park," she said. "What a good thing if he will take to getting up early."

And nobody could say anything against that. Getting up early was a virtue in which Paul had been sadly deficient, as everybody was aware.

However, this was long enough to have been occupied about Paul, and the children, tired of the subject, had already plunged into their own affairs, when their elder brother suddenly appeared, ushering in Mr. Spears—who in the morning light looked more out of place than ever—through the great bow window which opened on the lawn. The stranger had his hat in his hand, and made an awkward sort of bow.

"I am afraid it is a liberty, my lady," he said, stepping in with shoes all wet from the dewy grass. He did not know what to do with his hat, and ended by putting it under his chair when he got to the table. But by that time his embarrassment had disappeared, and his face grew benignant as he looked round, before sitting down, upon the girls and boys. "The sight of

children is a benediction," he said with that softening which mothers know by instinct. He was very like the man who wound up the clocks, who was a most respectable country tradesman; but this look reconciled Lady Markham to him more than anything else which had happened yet.

"You are fond of children?" she said.

"I ought to be. I have had six of my own; but they had hard times after my wife died, and there are but three left."

"Ah!" Lady Markham cried out of the depths of her heart. She looked round upon her own children, and the tears came to her eyes. "I am very, very sorry. There can be nothing in the world so dreadful."

"It is a pull," said her visitor. "Yes, it is a pull. A man does not know what it is till he has gone through it. Often you think, poor things, it is better for them; you would never have been able to rear them as you ought; but when it comes it is a pull; though you may have no bread to give them, it is hard to part with them."

He had begun to eat his breakfast very composedly, notwithstanding this. The way he held his fork was a

wonder to Marie who had but recently acquired full mastery of her own, and Harry had watched with great gravity and interest the passage of the stranger's knife to his mouth. But Lady Markham no longer noticed these things. She forgot that he was like the man that wound up the clocks.

"I always feel," she said, "when I hear of losses like yours as if I ought to go down on my knees and beg your pardon for being so much better off—thank God!"

Spears looked up at her suddenly, putting down his knife and fork. Here was a strange thing; while all the rest were so conscious of the difference between them, the two chief persons had forgotten it. But he did not make any immediate reply. He looked at her wondering, grateful, understanding; and that piece of silent conversation was more effective than anything that could be said.

"There are not many people that feel like you," he said at length; "those that are better off than their neighbours are apt to look as if it sprang from some virtue of theirs. They are more likely to crow over us than to beg our pardon. And just as well too,

Markham," he said with a laugh. "If they were all like your mother, they'd cut the ground from under our feet."

"I do not see that," said Paul. "The principle is unaltered, however well-intentioned those may be who are in the position of unjust superiority; that makes no difference so far as I can see."

All the Markham family were roused to attention when Paul spoke. The children looked at him, stopping their private chatter, and Lady Markham cast a wondering, reproachful look at her boy. Was she in a position of unjust superiority because all her children were living, and another parent had lost the half of his? She felt wounded by this strange speech.

"Ah," said Spears, with a twinkle in his eyes, "there is nothing like a recruit from the other side for going the whole——. You have a beautiful family, and you have a beautiful park, my lady. You have got a great deal more than the most of your fellow-creatures have. I can do nothing but stand and wonder at it for my part. Everything you see, everything you touch, is beautiful. You ought to be very

sorry for all the others, so many of them, who are not so well off as you."

"Indeed I am, Mr. Spears," said Lady Markham, simply; but then she added, after a pause, "for those who have not the things that give happiness; but there are a great many things that are of no importance to happiness. Everybody, of course, cannot have a beautiful park, as you say, and a nice house; but——"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" She looked up surprised. "Ah, I see! You are all for equality, like Paul."

"Like *Paul!* I taught him everything he knows. He had not an idea on the subject before I opened his eyes to the horrible injustice of the present state of affairs. He is my disciple, and I am his master. Now you know who I am. I cannot be in any house under false pretences," said Spears, pushing his chair a little away from the table.

The children all looked at him aghast; and he had himself the air of having made a great and dangerous revelation, probably to be followed by his dismissal from the house as a dangerous person. "Now you

know who I am." The climax was melodramatic in its form; but there was nothing theatrical in it so far as the revolutionary was concerned. He was perfectly sincere. He felt the importance of his own position; and feeling it, could entertain no doubt as to the knowledge of him as their fellest enemy, and the horror of him which must be felt in every house like this throughout the country. He had not wished to come; he had been disappointed to find that Sir William was not there, who (he felt sure) would have refused him admittance. And he would not take advantage of my lady, who was certainly a woman to whom any man might submit himself. Had she rung the bell instantly for her menials to turn him out; had she expressed her horror at the contamination which her family had sustained by sitting down at the same table with him —he would not have been surprised. He pushed his chair gently from the table, and waited to see what she would order; though he was a revolutionary, he had unbounded respect for the mistress of this house.

Lady Markham looked at her strange visitor with bewildered eyes. She made a rapid telegraphic appeal to her son for explanation. "Now you know who I

am," but she did not in the least know who he was. He was famous enough in his way, and he thought himself more famous than he was; but Lady Markham had never heard of him. When she saw that no assistance could be afforded her by her children in this dilemma, she collected her thoughts with a desperate effort. She was one of the women who would rather die than be rude to any one. To speak to a man at her own table, under her own roof, with less than the most perfect courtesy was impossible to her. Besides, she did not really understand what he meant. She was annoyed and affronted that he should speak of her boy as Paul, but in the confusion of the moment that was all her mind took up, and as for openly resenting *that*, how was it possible? One time or another no doubt she would give the stranger a little return blow, a reminder of his over-familiarity, when it could be done with perfect politeness, but not now. She was startled by his solemnity; and it was very clear that he was not a man of what she called "our own class," but Lady Markham's high breeding was above all pettiness.

"Was it really you," she said, "who taught my son

(she would not call him Paul again) all the nonsense he has been talking to us? Yes, indeed it is great nonsense, Mr. Spears—you must let me say so. We are doing no one injustice. My husband says all young men are Radicals one time or other; but I should have expected you, a man with children of your own, to know better. Oh no, I don't want to argue. I am not clever enough for that. Let me give you another cup of tea."

The demagogue stared at the beautiful lady as if he could not believe his ears. Partly he was humiliated, seeing that she was not in the least afraid of him, and even did not realise at all what was the terrible disclosure he had made. This gave him that sense of having made himself ridiculous which is so intolerable to those who are unaccustomed to the world. He cast a jealous look round the table to see if he could detect any laughter.

Paul caught him by the arm at this critical moment.

"Eat your breakfast," he said, in a wrathful undertone. "Do you hear, Spears? Do you think *she* knows? Have some of this fish, for Heaven's sake,

and shut up. What on earth do they care if you taught me or not? Do you think she goes into all that?"

Nobody heard this but Harry, who was listening both with ears and eyes. And Mr. Spears returned to his breakfast as commanded. He was abashed, and he was astonished, but still he made a very hearty meal when all was said. And by and by his spirit rose again; in the eyes of this lady, who had so completely got the better of him, far more than if she had turned him out, there was no way of redeeming himself, but by "bringing her over." That would be a triumph. He immediately addressed himself to it with every art at his command. He had an extremely prepossessing and melodious voice, and he spoke with what the ladies thought a kind of old-fashioned grace. The somewhat stiff, stilted phraseology of the self-educated has always more or less a whiff of the formality of an older age. And he made observations which interested them, in spite of themselves. Lady Markham was very polite to her son's friend.

When the children reminded her of her promise to go with them on a long-planned expedition into the

woods, she put them off. "You know I cannot leave when I have visitors," she said.

"Perhaps Mr. Spears would come too?" said Alice. And before he knew what was going to happen, he found himself pushed into the front seat of the carriage, which was like a Noah's ark, with hampers and children. Never had this man of the people, this popular orator, occupied so strange a position. He had never known before what it was to roll luxuriously along the roads, to share in the ease and dignity of wealth. He took notes of it, like a man in a foreign country, and observed keenly all that took place—the manners of the people for whom the world was made: that was how they seemed to take it. The world was made for them. It was not a subject of arrogant satisfaction on their part, or pride in their universal dominion; they took it quite easily, gently, as a matter of course. My lady gave her orders with a gentle confidence in the obedience of everybody she addressed. It was all wonderful to the man who knew only the other side of the question. He asked about everything—the game (with an eye to the poachers); the great extent of the park (as bearing upon one of his favourite points—the abstraction from

the public of so many acres which might have cultivation); and was answered with a perfect absence of all sense of guilt, which was very strange to him. They did not know they were doing wrong, these rich people. They told him all about it, simply, smilingly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. All this went against his preconceived notions, just as the manners of a foreign country so often go against the idea you have formed of them. He had all his senses keenly about him, and yet everything was so novel and surprising that he felt scarcely able to trust to his own impressions. It was the strangest position surely in which a popular agitator, a preacher of democracy and revolution, a special pleader against the rich, ever was.

"We have not many neighbours," Lady Markham said. "That is Lord Westland's property beyond the church. You can see Westland Towers from the turn of the road. And there are the Trevors on the other side of the parish."

"A whole parish," said Spears, "divided amongst three families."

"The Trevors have very little," said Lady Markham. "Sir William is the chief proprietor. But they are

a very good family. Admiral Trevor—you must have heard of him—was once a popular hero. He did a great many daring things I have heard, but fame gets forgotten like other things. He lives very quietly now, an old man——"

"The oldest man that ever was," said Alice. "Fancy, it was in Napoleon's time he was so famous—the great Napoleon—before even *old* people were born."

"Before I was born," said Lady Markham, with her soft laugh; "that is something like saying before the Flood. Then there is the vicar, of course, and a few people of less importance. It is easy to go over a country neighbourhood."

"And what do you call the people in all these cottages, my lady? The world was not made for them as it is for you. These would be the neighbours I should think of. When I hear of your three families in the parish, I wonder what all these roofs mean. Are they not flesh and blood too? Don't they live and have things happen to them as well as you fine folks? If they were cleared away out of the place, what would become of your parish, my lady? Could you get on all the same without them that you make no account of

them? These are the houses where I should feel at home, among the poor cottagers whom you don't even know about——"

"Mamma—not know about them!" cried Alice. "Why, it is our own village! Do you think because it is a mile away that makes any difference? Why, it is our own village, Mr. Spears."

"I dare say," said the revolutionary—"your own village. Perhaps they pay you rent for suffering them to live there, and allowing them to do all the work of the world and keep everything going——"

"Hush, Alice," said Lady Markham. "Perhaps Mr. Spears does not understand a little country village. They are often not at all fond of doing the work, and they do not much like to pay their rent; but we know them very well for that matter. I could tell you all about them, every house. To be sure we have not the same kind of intercourse with them as with our equals."

"Ah, that is the whole question, Lady Markham. Pardon me; I am not your equal, and yet you let me sit in your fine carriage and talk to you. No, I am not a bit humble; I feel myself the equal of any man.

There is nobody in the world whom I will acknowledge my superior—in my dignity as a man."

Lady Markham made him a little bow; it was her way when she did not know what to say. "One does not need to be told," she said, "that you are a very superior man, Mr. Spears; quite equal to talk with anybody, were it the greatest philosopher." Here she stopped short in a little embarrassment. "But we are all very simple, ignorant country people," she added with a smile, "about here."

"Ah, you are very clever, my lady. You beg the question."

"Do I?" said Lady Markham. "I wonder what that means. But now we are just arriving at the place for the pic-nic. When my boy comes up, I will make him take you to the most beautiful point of view. There is a waterfall which we are very proud of, and now when everything is in the first green of spring—— Paul!" she cried, "come and get your directions. I want Mr. Spears to see the view."

"Your mother is something I don't understand Markham," said the demagogue. "I never came across that kind of woman before."

"Didn't you?" said Paul. He was ready to be taught on other points, but not on this. "You see the bondage we live in," said the young man. "Luxury, people call it; to me it seems slavery. Oh, to be free of all this folly and finery—to feel one's self a man among men, earning one's bread, shaping one's own life——"

"Ah!——" said Spears, drawing a long breath. He could not be unaffected by what was an echo of his own eloquence. "But there's a deal to say, too, for the other side."

CHAPTER III.

THE Markhams of the Chase were one of the most important families in the county, as has been already intimated. They owned three parts at least of the parish (for my Lord Westland was a new man, who had bought, not inherited, that property, and all that the Trevors had was their house and park and a few fields that did not count), and a great deal more besides. It was generally said that they had risen into importance as a family only at the time of the Commonwealth, but their pedigree extended far beyond that. In the former generation the family had not been fortunate. Sir William Markham himself had been born the third son, and in his youth he had been absent from England, and had "knocked about the world," as people say, in a way which had no doubt enlarged his experiences and

made him perhaps more fit for the responsibilities of public life in which he had been so fortunate. He had succeeded, on the death of his second brother, when he was over thirty, and it was not till ten years later that he married.

It had occasioned some surprise in the neighbourhood when Isabel Fleetwood, who was a great beauty, and had made quite a sensation, it was said, in her first season, accepted the middle-aged and extremely sedate and serious little baronet. He was not handsome;—he had no sympathy with the gay life into which she had been plunged by her brother and aunt, who were her only guardians; and the world, always pleased to believe that interested motives are involved, and fond of prophesying badly of a marriage, concluded almost with one voice that it was the ambitious aunt and the extravagant brother who had made it up, and that the poor girl was sacrificed. But this was as great a mistake as the world ever made. Perhaps it would be wrong to assert that the marriage was a romantic one, and that the beautiful girl under twenty was passionately in love with her little statesman. Perhaps her modest, tranquil disposition, her dislike to the monotonous

whirl of fashion, and her sense of the precarious tenure by which she held her position in her brother's house, her only home (he married immediately after she did, as everybody knows, and did not conceal the fact that it was necessary to get rid of his sister before venturing upon a wife), had something to do with her decision. But she had never shown any signs of regretting it through all these years. Sir William was neither young nor handsome, but he was a man whose opinion was listened to wherever it was given, whose voice commanded the attention of the country, whose name was known over Europe. And this in some cases affects a young imagination as much as the finest moustache in the world, or the most distinguished stature. She was not clever, but she was a woman of that gracious nature, courteous, tolerant, and sympathetic, which is more perfect without the sharpness of intellect. Nothing that was unkind was possible to her. She had no particular imagination in the common sense of the word, but she had a higher gift, the moral imagination (so to speak) which gave her an exquisite understanding of other people's feelings, and made her incapable of any injury to them. This made Lady Markham the very

ideal of a great lady. As for Sir William, he held his place more firmly than ever with such a partner by his side. They were the happiest couple in the county, as well as the most important. Not only did you meet the best of company at their house, but the sight of a husband and wife so devoted to each other was good for you, everybody said. They were proud of each other, as they had good reason to be: she listened to him as to an oracle, and his tender consideration for her was an example to all. Everything had gone well with the Markhams. They were rich, and naturally inheritances and legacies and successions of all kinds fell to them, which made them richer. Their children were the healthiest and most thriving children that had ever been seen. Alice promised to be almost as pretty as her mother, and Paul was *not* short like Sir William. Thus fortune had favoured them on every side.

About a year before the date of this history, a cloud —like that famous cloud no bigger than a man's hand —had floated up upon the clear sky, almost too clear in unshadowed well-being, over this prosperous house. It was nothing—a thing which most people would have laughed at, a mere reminder that even the Markhams

were not to have everything their own way. It was that Paul, a model boy at school, had suddenly become —wild? Oh no! not wild, that was not the word: indeed it was difficult to know what word to use. He had begun as soon as he went to Oxford by having opinions. He had not been six months there before he was known at the Union and had plunged into all the politico-philosophical questions afloat in that atmosphere of the absolute. This was nothing but what ought to have been in the son of a statesman; but unfortunately to everything his father believed and trusted, Paul took the opposite side. He took up the highest republican principles, the most absolute views as to the equality of the human race. That, though it somewhat horrified his mother and sister, produced at first very little effect upon Sir William, who laughed and informed his family that Johnny Shotover had held precisely the same views when he was an undergraduate, though now he was Lord Rightabout's secretary and as sound a politician as it was possible to desire. "It is the same as the measles," Sir William said. Paul, however, had a theoretical mind and on obstinate temper: he was too logical for life. As soon as he had come to the

conviction that all men are equal, he took the further step which costs a great deal more, and decided that there ought to be equality of property as well as of right. This made Sir William half angry, though it amused him. He bade his son not to be a fool.

"What would become of you," he cried, "you young idiot!" using language not at all parliamentary, "if there was a re-distribution of property? How much do you think would fall to your share?"

"As much as I have any right to, sir," the young revolutionary said.

And then Lady Markham interposed, and assured Paul that he was talking nonsense.

"Why should you take such foolish notions into your head? No one of your family ever did so before. And can you really imagine," she asked with gentle severity, "that you are a better judge of such matters than your papa?" but neither did this powerful argument convince the unreasonable boy.

There was one member of the family, however, who was affected by Paul's arguments, and this was his sister. Alice was dazzled at once by the magnanimity of his sentiments and by his eloquence. Altogether

independent of this, she was, as a matter of course, his natural partisan and defender, always standing up for Paul, with a noble disregard for the right or the wrong in question, which is a characteristic of girls and sisters. (For, Alice justly argued, if he was wrong, he had all the more need for some one to stand up for him.) But in this case her mind was, if not convinced, at least dazzled and imposed upon by the grandeur of this new way of thinking. She would not admit it to Paul, and indeed maintained with him a pretence of serious opposition, arguing very feebly for the most part, though sometimes dealing now and then, all unaware of its weight, a sudden blow under which the adversary staggered, and in the success of which Alice rejoiced without seeing very clearly how it was that one argument should tell so much more than another. But at heart she was profoundly touched by the generosity and nobleness of her brother's views. Such a sweeping revolution would not be pleasant. To be brought down from her own delightful place, to be no longer Miss Markham of the Chase, but only a little girl on the same level with her maid, was a thing she could not endure to think of, and which brought the indignant

blood to her cheek. "*That* you could never do," she cried; "you might take away our money, but you could never make gentlefolk into common people." This was one of the hits which found out a joint in Paul's armour, but unaware of that Alice went on still more confidently. "You *know* good blood makes all the difference—you cannot take that from us. People who have ancestors as we have can never be made into nobodies." At which her brother scoffed and laughed, and bade her remember that old Brown had quite as many grandfathers as they, and was descended from Adam as certainly as the Queen was. "And Harry Fleetwood," said this defiler of his own nest, "do you call him an example of the excellence of blood?" Poor Alice was inclined to cry when her disreputable cousin was thus thrown in her teeth. She clung to her flag and fought for her caste like a little heroine. But when Paul was gone, she owned to her mother that there was a great deal in what he said. It was very noble as Paul stated it. When he asked with lofty indignation, "What have I done to deserve all I have got? I have taken the trouble to be born,"—Alice felt in her heart that there was no answer to this plea.

"My dear," Lady Markham said, "think how foolish it all is; does he know better than your papa and all the men that have considered the subject before him?"

"It may be silly," said Alice, changing her argument, "but it is very different from other young men. They all seem to think the world was made for them; and if Paul is wrong, it is finer than being right like *that*."

This was a fanciful plea which moved Lady Markham, and to which she could make no reply. She shook her head and repeated her remark about Paul's presumption in thinking himself wiser than papa; but she too was affected by the generosity and magnanimity which seemed the leading influences of the creed so warmly adopted by her boy.

This was the state of semi-warfare, not serious enough to have caused real pain, but yet a little disquieting in respect to Paul's future, when the event occurred which has been recorded in the two last chapters. The ladies saw more of the strange companion whom Paul had brought with him than they generally saw of ordinary visitors. He had no letters to write, nor calls to make, nor private occupations of any kind; neither had he

sufficient understanding of the rules of society to know that guests are expected to amuse themselves, and not to oppress with their perpetual presence the ladies of the house. What he wanted, being as it were a traveller in an undiscovered country, was to study the ways of the house, and the women of it, and the manner of their life. And as he was so original as not to know anybody they knew, Lady Markham in her politeness was led to invent all kinds of subjects of conversation, upon which, without exception, Mr. Spears found something to say. He assailed them on all points with the utmost frankness. He sat (on the edge of his chair) and watched Lady Markham at her worsted work, and found fault even with that.

"You spend a great deal of time over it," he said; "and what do you mean to do with it?"

This was the second evening, and they had become quite accustomed to Spears.

"I am not quite sure, to tell the truth. It is for a cushion—probably I shall put it on that sofa, or it will do for a window-seat somewhere, or——"

"There are three cushions on the sofa already, and all the window-seats are as soft as down-beds. You are

doing something that will not be of any use when it is done, and that, excuse me, is not very pretty, and takes up a great deal of your time."

"Show Mr. Spears your work, Alice; he will like that better. Everybody is severe now upon these poor abandoned Berlin wools. Now, Mr. Spears, that pattern came from the School of Art Needlework. It was drawn by somebody very distinguished indeed. It is intended to elevate the mind as well as to occupy the fingers. You cannot but be pleased with that."

"What is it for?" said the critic.

"I—scarcely know; for a screen I think—part of a screen you know, Mr. Spears, to keep off the fire——"

"Ah!—no, I don't know. Among the people I belong to, Miss Alice, there is no need of expedients to keep off the fire. Sometimes there is no fire to have even a look at. I've known poor creatures wandering into the streets when the gas was lighted, because it was warm there. The gas in the shop-windows was all the fire they had a chance of. Did you ever see a little wretched room all black of a winter's night? Black—there's no blackness like that; it is blacker than the crape you all put on when your people die."

"No; she has never seen it," cried Lady Markham. "I did once in our village at home before I was married. Oh, Mr. Spears, I know! it made me cold for years after. No, thank God, Alice has never seen it. We take care there is nothing like that here——. But," she added after a pause—"I don't like to say anything unkind; but, Mr. Spears, after all, it was their own fault."

"Ah, my lady! you that make screens to keep off the fire, do you never do what is wrong? you that are cushioned at every angle, and never know what a hard seat is, or a hard bed, or a harsh look, or a nip of frost, or a pinch of hunger—do you always do what is right? You ought to. You are like angels, with everything beautiful round you; and you look like angels, and you ought to be what they are said to be; but, if instead of all this pretty nonsense you had misery and toil around you, and ugliness, and discord, and quarrelling, would it be wonderful if you went astray sometimes, and gave the other people, the warm, wealthy, well-clothed people, reason to say it was your own fault? Great God!" cried the orator, jumping up. "Why should we be sitting here in this luxury, with everything that caprice

can want, and waste our lives working impossible flowers upon linen rags, while they are starving, and perishing, and sinning for want, trying for the hardest work, and not getting it? Why should there be such differences in life?"

"This is not a place to ask such a question, Spears," said Paul. "You forget that we are the very people who are taking the bread out of the mouths of our brothers. We, and such as we——"

"Hold your tongue, Markham," said the orator. "Do you think it is as easy as that? Don't take any notice of him, my lady. He's young, and he knows no better. He thinks that if he were able to give up all your estates to the people, justice would be done. That is all he knows. Stuff! we could do it all by a rising if it were as easy as that. You young ass," the man continued, filling the ladies with resentment more warm than when he had denounced them all, "don't you see it's a deal better in the hands of your father and mother, that take some thought of the people, than with a beast of a shoddy millionaire, who cares for nothing on this earth but money? I beg your pardon," he added, with a smile, "for introducing such a subject at all; but

sometimes it gets too much for me. I remember the things I've seen. I would not treat lilies in that way, Miss Alice, if I were putting them on wood."

"Oh!" cried Alice with tears in her eyes; "how can you care about a pattern after what you have been saying?" His eloquence had moved her so much that she felt disposed to fling her pattern away. "What can one do? How can one help it?" she said, below her breath, appealing to him with her heart in her eyes.

"I don't like the pattern," said Spears. "If I were going to put it on wood, I'd treat it so—and so." To illustrate his meaning, he made lines with his thumb nail upon her satin. "I'd turn the leaves this way, and the bud *so*. They should not be so stiff—or else they should be stiffer."

"They are conventionally treated, Mr. Spears," said Lady Markham, "and you don't treat anything conventionally, neither our patterns nor your friends."

She had not forgotten that he had called her son Paul, and "you young ass" was still tingling in her ears. Paul took it, however, with the greatest composure as a matter of course.

Spears burst into a great good-humoured laugh.

"I beg your pardon, my lady. We don't mind how we talk to young fellows. I'd have it as conventional, or more, Miss Alice. This falls between two stools. The lily's a glorious thing when you enter into it. Look at the ribs of it, as strong as steel, though they are all sheathed in something smoother than satin. And every curl of the petal is full of vigour and life. I used to think till you drew it or carved it, you never could understand what that means—'Consider the lilies of the field.' There they stand, nobody taking any trouble about them, and come out of the earth built like a tower, or a ship, anything that's strong and full of grand curves and sweeping lines. Now the fault I find with *that* is, that you never would come to understand it a bit better if you worked a hundred of them. If I had a knife and a bit of wood——"

"Do you carve wood, Mr. Spears?"

"Do I carve wood?" he laughed as Lord Lytton might have laughed had he been asked whether he wrote novels. Did not all the world know it? The ignorance of this pretty little lady was not insulting but amusing, showing how far she was out of the world, and

how little in this silent country house they knew what was going on. "Yes—a little," he said, with again a laugh. It tickled him. Her mother had not known who Spears was—Spears the orator—the reformer—the enemy of her order—and now here was this girl who asked with that inimitable innocence, "Do you carve wood?" He was amused beyond measure. "But I could not bring a lily like that out of the softest deal," he said; "it would break its back and lie flat—it has no anatomy. If I had a pencil——"

Alice, who was full of curiosity and interest, here put the desired pencil into his hand, and he sat down at the nearest table, and with many contortions of his limbs and contractions of his lips, as if all his body was drawing, produced in bold black lines a tall lily with a twist of bindweed hanging about its lovely powerful stalk, like strength and weakness combined. "That is as near nature as you can do it without seeing it," he said, pleased with the admiration his drawing called forth. "But if I were to treat it conventionally, I'd split the lily, and lay it flat, without light and shadow at all. I should not make a thing which is neither one nor the other, like your pattern there."

This was the way in which the man talked, assailing them on every side, interesting them, making them angry, keeping them in commotion and amusement. Lady Markham said that it had never cost her so much to be civil to any one; but she was very civil to him, polite, and sometimes even gracious. He stayed three days, and though she uttered a heartfelt thanksgiving when the dog-cart in which Paul drove him to the railway disappeared down the avenue, "Thank heaven he is gone, and your papa only comes back to-morrow!" Lady Markham herself did not deny their strange visitor justice. "But," she said, "now he is gone, let as little as possible be said about him. I do not want to conceal anything from your papa, but I am sure he will not be pleased when he hears of it. For Paul's sake, let as little as possible be said. I will mention it, of course, but I will not dwell upon it. It is much better that little should be said."

CHAPTER IV.

SIR WILLIAM did not come home for two days, but when he did return there was a line between his eyebrows which everybody knew did not come there for nothing. The first glimpse of him made the whole family certain *that he knew:* and that he was angry; but he did not say anything until dinner was over and the children gone to bed. By that time the ladies began to hope with trembling, either that they had been mistaken, or that nothing was going to be said. "I will tell him this evening, but I will choose my time," Lady Markham whispered to Alice as Sir William stood up in front of the fireplace and took his coffee after dinner. He was not a man who sat long after dinner, and he liked to have his coffee in the drawing-room, when all the boys and girls had said good-night. He

was a little man of very neat and precise appearance, always carefully dressed, always dignified and stately. Perhaps this had been put on at first as a necessary balance to his insignificant stature; but it was part of himself now. His family could not but look up to a man who so thoroughly respected himself. He had a fine head, with abundant hair, though it was growing white, and very penetrating, keen blue eyes; but to see him standing thus against the carved marble of the mantelpiece with the faint glimmer of an unnecessary fire throwing up now and then a feeble flash behind him, it was not difficult to understand that his family were afraid of his displeasure. The conversation they maintained was of the most feeble, disjointed description, while he stood there not saying a word. Paul stood about too, helplessly, as men do in a drawing-room, unoccupied, and prepared to resent anything that might be said to him. If only he could be got away Lady Markham felt that she would have courage to dare everything, and tell her husband, as was her wont, all that had occurred since he went away.

"The Westlands called on Tuesday. They were not more amusing than usual. He wanted to tell you of

some great discovery he has made about the state of the law. Paul, will you go and fetch me that law-book I told you of, out of the library? I want to show something in it to papa."

"I don't know what you mean by a law-book," said Paul. He saw that it was intended as a pretext to send him away, and he would not budge.

"And I had a long talk with the vicar about the new cottages. He thinks only those should be allowed to get them who have been very well behaved in the old ones. Paul, by the way, that reminds me I promised to send down the Mudie books to the vicarage. Will you go and see after them, and tell Brown to send them away?"

"Presently," said Paul. He drank his coffee with the most elaborate tediousness. The more his mother tried to get rid of him, the more determined he was not to go.

"Except the vicar and the Westlands we have seen —scarcely anybody. But I want those books to go to-night, Paul."

"You are very anxious to get Paul out of the way," said Sir William. "What does 'scarcely anybody'

mean? Is it true that a man called Spears, a trades-unionist, a paid agitator——?"

"He is nothing of the sort," said Paul, with a sudden burst of passion. "If he is an agitator, it is for the right against the wrong, not for payment; anybody who knows him will tell you so."

"I have heard it from people who know him," said Sir William. "Is it possible that you took advantage of my absence, Paul, to bring such a man here—to lodge such a person in my house?"

"Such a person!" Paul, who had felt it coming ever since his father's arrival, stood to his arms at once. "He is the best man I know," he said, indignantly. "There is no house in the country that might not be proud to receive him; and as for taking advantage of your absence, sir——"

"Indeed," said Lady Markham, holding up her head, though she had grown pale, "you must not say so, William; he did not know you were away; and as for Mr. Spears, I was just about to tell you. He is not a man to be afraid of. It is true he is not—in society, perhaps—he has not quite the air of a person in society—has he, Alice?" This was said with scarcely

a tremble. "But his manners were perfectly good, and his appearance, though it was quite simple—I think you must be making some mistake. I saw no harm in him."

Will it be believed that Paul, instead of showing gratitude, was indignant at this mild approval? "Saw no harm in him," he cried; "his manners, his appearance! Are you mad, mother? He is a man who is worthy to be a king, if merit made kings; or if any man worth the name would accept an office which has been soiled by such ignoble use!"

"Hold your tongue, sir," said Sir William. "It is you who are mad. A stump-orator, a fellow who does much mischief in England! My house is not to be made a shelter for such *canaille*. Your mother should have turned him to the door; and so she would have done, I don't doubt—her instincts are too fine not to have seen the kind of creature he was—but for her foolish devotion to you."

"Paul, Paul! Oh, don't speak—don't say anything," cried Alice in an agony, in her brother's ear.

"Let him say what he pleases," said Sir William. "This must be put a stop to. When the house is his,

he can dishonour it if he likes, but in the meantime the house is mine."

"Certainly the house is yours, sir," cried his son; "I make no claim on it. I feel no right to it. Let me alone, Alice! Do I want the house, or the land, or the money which we steal from the poor to make ourselves splendid, while our fellow-creatures are starving? I am ready to give it up at a moment's notice. It wounds my conscience, it restrains my action. I want nothing with your house, sir. If I may not bring one honest man into it, you may hand it over to any one you please; it is no home for me."

"Paul, Paul!" cried his mother in tones of alarm. Sir William only laughed that laugh of anger which frightens a household.

"Let him rave—let him rave," he cried, throwing himself into a chair. "A boy who speaks so of his home does not deserve one. He does not deserve the position Providence has given him—a good name, a good fortune, honourable ancestors, all thrown away."

"I acknowledge no honour in the ancestors that robbed the poor to make me rich," cried the hot-headed youth. And the end of all was that his mother and

sister had much ado to keep him from leaving the house at once, late as it was, in the heat of passion. Never before had such a storm—or indeed any storm at all—arisen in the peaceful house. It marked the ending of that idyllic age in which the rulers of a family are supreme, and where no new-developed will confronts them within their sacred walls. Raised voices and faces aglow with anger are terrible things in such an inclosure. It seemed to Lady Markham that she would die with shame when she met the look of subdued wonder, curiosity, and sympathy in old Brown's eyes; when, after the storm was over, after a decent interval, he came in, taking great precautions to make himself audible as he approached. It was the first time since she entered the house that her servants had occasion to be sorry for Lady Markham, and this consciousness went to her heart. By the time Brown came in, however, all was very quiet. Sir William had gone away to his library, and Paul, breathing indignation at every pore, was walking about the room with his hands in his pockets, now and then launching an arrow at his mother or sister. A truce had been patched up. He had consented, as a great matter, not

to plunge out of the house into the darkness, but to wait till to-morrow. This was a concession for which they were as grateful as if it had been the noblest gift; it was for their sake he did it; nothing else, he declared, would have made him remain an hour under the same roof.

"Oh hush, Paul—hush! I forbid you to say another word," cried his mother; and then all was silent, as they heard Brown cough before he opened the door.

"Tell Lewis to have the dog-cart ready for Mr. Markham for the first train," she said, not raising her eyes. But all the same she saw the pity in the face of old Brown. He asked no question; he did not express his sorrow to hear of Mr. Markham's sudden departure, as on previous occasions he would have done, exercising the right of his old service; he said, "Certainly, my lady," in a tone which went to Lady Markham's heart. Even Brown perceived that there was no more to be said.

That was in other ways a notable year for the Markhams. For one thing Alice "came out." She was eighteen: she had not been prematurely introduced as an eldest daughter very often is. And in consequence

Lady Markham stayed in London longer and went more into society. This moment, so exciting to the *débutante*, was clouded over to Alice and to her mother by the fact that Paul was in disgrace. They were still in London when the Oxford term ended, and it had been their hope that he would join them there. It is true that this prospect was not altogether an unmingled delight, for a certain alarm was involved in their joy. How would his father and he "get on" after this first quarrel? Would Paul be as submissive, would Sir William be as forgiving, as they ought? All the little triumphs of Alice, her *succès*, the admiration she had excited were made of no account by this doubt and fear about her brother. But when, just before the long vacation began, a letter arrived from Paul, announcing that he did not mean to join them at all, but was going to "stay up and read," with a party of other "men" who entertained that virtuous intention, the revulsion of feeling in the minds of the mother and sister was very painful. They forgot that they had ever entertained any fear about his coming, and cried over his letter with the bitterest pangs of disappointment.

"It is all papa's fault," Alice cried in mournful wrath;

and though Lady Markham checked her daughter, saying, "Hush! surely your papa knows better than you do," yet there was a little rebellion in her heart too against the head of the house. Had he been less hard, Paul would have been more docile.

Sir William, however, as it happened, was rather mollified than offended by this intimation. The authorities of Paul's college had been finding fault. High hopes had been entertained of the young man at first. It had been believed that he would bring distinction to his college, which, who can doubt? is the first thing to be considered. But that hope had proved delusive; he had not "gone in for" half so much as he ought, and of all those things he had "gone in for" he had not been successful in one. This made him to be looked upon coldly by eyes which at first winked with benevolence at the blunders and idleness of a statesman's son. Now that they were aware that he was not likely to bring them any honour, the dons grew querulous with Paul. He was not a duke or a duke's son that he should ride roughshod over the habitudes of the university and its inviolable order. They had not of late shown that delight in him which parents love to see. He had not

excited parental feelings in their academical bosoms. He was visionary, he was Radical; and it was whispered that he received visitors in his rooms who were not of a character to be received there. Fortunately this last accusation had not reached Lady Markham's ears. Had she known, how could she ever have borne that "staying up to read," which at present seemed a proof of Paul's innate virtue? But Sir William was of tougher fibre. He was not displeased to be free of personal contact with his son at this crisis. It is not expedient that there should be quarrels in a family. All that nonsense would blow over. Paul's intellectual measles might be severe, but they were only measles after all, a malady of youth which a young man of marked character took more seriously than a frivolous boy, but which would pass away. "It will be all the better for his degree," his father said with that simplicity of confidence in the noble purpose of "staying up to read" which it is so touching to see. And what could the women say? If it was good for him, was it their part to complain? They were cruelly disappointed, and yet perhaps they were relieved as well. They wrote letters full of the former feeling, but they did not say anything about the

latter—not even to each other. How could they allow even to themselves that it was better for Paul to stay away?

However this disappointment seriously interfered with the glories of her first season to Alice. She did not wish to stay longer in town than Lady Markham's usual time. She longed for the country, when the summer reached its very crown of brightness, and the park looked baked and the streets scorching. They went home as they were in the habit of doing, in the end of June, leaving Sir William to toil through the end of the session by himself; and though it was still more melancholy to be without Paul in the quietness of home, yet there were compensations. They had their usual work to occupy them, and that routine of ordinary living which is the best prop and support of the anxious mind; and Alice was young enough, and her mother scarcely too old to forget, by times altogether, that there were troubles in the world. Nothing very dreadful had happened after all. If Paul did not write very often, were not all boys the same? Thus they kept their anxieties subdued, and were not unhappy—except perhaps for half an hour now and then.

Thus the summer went on. The holidays came once more. The boys came home, the girls were delivered from their governess, and the reign of innocence recommenced. Not to last long this time, for everybody knew that in the second week in August papa was coming home. The children, however, took the good of the fortnight they had all to themselves. The sunshine, the harvest, the woods, how delightful they are in August, with no lessons, no governess, and mamma all to themselves! From morning till night the house was full of laughter and commotion, except when it lay all open and silent with the whole family out of it, gone pic-nicking, gone upon excursions, making simple holiday.

"My lady is the biggest baby of them all," Mrs. Fry said with indulgent disapproval, shaking her head, "if she wasn't thinking all the time of Mr. Paul."

"Bless you there ain't a minute as that boy is out of her head," said Brown. Brown was too respectful to say anything but Mr. Markham in public, but he said Mr. Paul, or even Paul *tout court*, when he was in the housekeeper's room. While these pranks were going on, the house lay like an enchanted palace, all its doors

and windows open to the sweet summer air, the rooms full of flowers and sweetness, but nobody there. There were too many servants about for any fear of robbers, but it is doubtful whether Sir William would have thought it decorous had he seen the openness and vacancy of this summer palace, waiting all garnished and bright for the return of the revellers, for the rush of light feet, the smiles, the voices, the chattering and laughter, the gaiety and glee that in a moment would flood it through and through. But to the spectator whose dignity was not involved, these changes were pretty and pleasant to see, and it was not to be wondered at perhaps if Brown and the army under his charge took holiday too.

One day very shortly before that on which Sir William was expected, a stranger walked slowly up the avenue and came to the great open door. Everything was open as usual. He saw into the great hall as he came gradually up, and saw that it was empty and still. It was a warm day, and he was weighted with a little valise, which he carried, shifting it from one hand to the other with some appearance of fatigue. He was a tall man, very thin and very brown, with the

unmistakable look of an old soldier in his well-squared shoulders, even though his figure drooped a little with fatigue and heat, and slightly with age. When he reached the door, he looked round him, and seeing nobody there went in and placed himself in a great chair which was near the open door. "He's come into my house without knocking many's the day," he said to himself. It was hot, and he was tired, and the coolness and shade inside completed what the glare without had done. He put his valise down by his side and leaned back, and felt himself very comfortable; then quite tranquilly and pleasantly closed his eyes and rested; had there been anything to drink all would have been perfect. But even without this it was very comfortable. The house was perfectly still, but outside a little breeze was getting up, making a murmuring cadence among the trees. There was a sound of bees in the air close at hand, and of birds further off among the branches—everything was sweet and summery and reposeful. The new-comer lay back in his chair in the mood which makes fatigue an accessory of enjoyment. Something of the vagabond was in his appearance which yet scarcely marred his air of gentleman. Poor he was without

doubt, growing old, very tired, dusty, and travel-worn. He was not fastidious about his accommodation, and could have slept as well on a grassy bank, had it been needful, but the chair was very comfortable and pleasant. He fell asleep, or rather went to sleep, quite voluntarily. It was afternoon, near the time when the party might be expected to return, but up to this moment nobody had made any preparation for them, and the new-comer took possession without challenge of all the comfort of the vacant place.

Roland had been allowed that day to drive the dog-cart, the carriage being full, and he and Marie had so urged the stout cob Primrose, which was the steed specially given up to the uses of the schoolroom, that he flew like the wind and got home before the carriage. The little pair burst into the stable-yard like a flash of lightning, and tossed the reins to the first astonished groom they encountered.

"Let's rush in the back way and pretend we have been here for an hour," cried Marie.

They flew rather than walked round by the flower-garden, and through the open window of the drawing-room. There was the carriage turning in at the gate,

a quarter of a mile off; there was plenty of time. But the fact that there was plenty of time did not make them move quietly. They proceeded into the hall, making themselves audible by the chatter of their childish voices and laughter.

"Won't mamma be surprised!" cried Marie.

But, on the contrary, it was herself that was surprised. She gave a lengthened "Oh!" of wonder, alarm, and consternation, as they came in sight of the stranger in the hall. She turned round and clutched at Roland, and like a little coward put him first. He was twelve, not an age to be frightened, and Marie was but eleven. Roland said "Oh!" too, but with a different tone, and, dropping back a little upon her, confronted and gazed at the sleeper in the easy chair. His looks were not of the kind that children fly. The heavy moustache drooping over his mouth seemed to add to the appearance of complete, yet pleasant weariness, in which the shabby figure was wrapped. Here was a thing to encounter when one got home: a man, a gentleman, whom one had never seen before, fast asleep in the great chair in the hall!

"Will he not wake?" whispered Marie. "Oh,

Roland! are you frightened? Shall I run and tell Brown?"

"Frightened!—likely," said Roland; but he kept hold of her frock, not that she could have been of any real assistance to him, but "for company."

The two children stood transfixed before this strange apparition, watching if he would move. At the first stir, Marie most likely would have run away with a shriek; but after all what was there to fear? Mamma had certainly turned into the avenue, and might arrive any moment, and Brown with his army of men and maids was somewhere in the background within call, so there was no real reason to fear. Nevertheless, when the arms that rested on the arms of the chair began to stretch themselves, and the intent gaze of the children drew the tired eyes open, Marie's best efforts to command herself could not restrain a tremulous cry, which quite completed the stranger's awakening.

"Bless me, I've been asleep!" he said, opening his eyes. Then when he saw the two little figures before him, his eyelids opened wider, and a smile came out from underneath them. "Little folks, who are you?"

"It's you to tell us," cried Roland with spirit. "This is our house, but it isn't yours."

"That's true, my little man. I've been asleep, more shame to me. It was hot, and I've had a long walk."

"If you are very tired, poor gentleman," said Marie, coming in now that there seemed nothing to be afraid of, "I—don't think mamma will mind. Oh, Rol, here she is! come and tell her," the little girl cried. They forgot their triumph of being first, in the excitement of this strange piece of news, and flew bursting with it to the door of the carriage which swept up at the moment, filling the stillness with echoes, and waking up the whole silent house. Brown and the footman on duty appeared as by magic, and the whole enchanted palace came to life. The stranger sat still and watched it all with a smile on his face. He saw pretty Alice and her beautiful mother descend from the carriage, and a curious light broke over his countenance.

"Lucky little beggar," he said.

He repeated this phrase two or three times to himself before he was altogether roused from the half-dream, half-languor, he was still in, by the sight of Lady

Markham's eyes fixed upon him, and the alarmed, guilty, nervous inspection of old Brown.

"You must get out of here, sir—you must get out of here, sir—heaven knows how you got into it; this must have been your fault, Charles. I can't let you stay here, though I don't want to be uncivil. My lady's coming this way."

"It's your lady I want, my friend," said the intruder, rising languidly. He made Lady Markham a fine bow as she approached, with surprise in her face. "I must be my own godfather, and present myself to my old friend's family," he said. "I am Colonel Lenny, of the 50th West India Regiment. St. John Lenny at your service, my dear madam, once Will Markham's closest friend."

Lady Markham made him a curtsey in return for his bow.

"Sir William is not at home," she said. If she had not already suffered for her hospitality, his reception would have been less cold; but she had never heard of Colonel Lenny, and what could she say?

"He must have talked to you about me and mine.

I married a Gaveston—Katey. You must have heard him speak of her. No? That is very strange. Then perhaps you will think me an intruder, my Lady Markham. I beg your pardon. I thought I was sure of a welcome; and I was so done with the heat, though I used not to mind the heat, that I fell asleep in your nice, pleasant hall, in this big chair."

Lady Markham inclined her head in assent. What was she to do? who was Colonel Lenny? She cast a glance at Alice, seeking counsel; but how could Alice advise?

"Will you come in now and take a cup of tea with us?" she said.

CHAPTER V.

COLONEL LENNY left his valise in the hall, where, when he rose, it was very visible, a dusty object upon the soft carpet. Lady Markham looked at it with alarm. Did it mean that he intended to stay? Was she to be punished for having received one unsuitable visitor by being forced to be rude to another? She led the way into the drawing-room in great perplexity and trouble. As for Brown and Charles, they both went and looked at the valise with curiosity as a natural phenomenon.

"Is all the beggars coming on visits?" said the footman; "I ain't agoing to wait on another, not if my wages was doubled."

"Hold your tongue," said Brown; "you'll do what I tell you if you want to go from here with a character.

So mind your business, and keep your silly remarks to yourself."

But when Charles disappeared muttering, Brown turned over the dusty, humble portmanteau with his foot, with serious disgust. "My lady hasn't the heart to say no to nobody," he said to himself. He felt perfectly convinced that this miserable representation of a gentleman's luggage would sooner or later have to be carried up stairs.

The stranger followed Lady Markham into the drawing-room, at which he gazed with wonder and admiration. "This is something like a house," he said. "Little we thought when I used to know Will Markham that he would ever come to this honour and glory. It was in the year—bless me, not any year you can recollect—forty years ago if it is a day. His brothers were living, and he was nearly as poor as the rest of us. I married Katey. He must have spoken of the Gavestons, though he might not mention his old friend Lenny. Ah, well, maybe no—to be sure I am not taking everything into consideration. Did your father ever tell you, my boys, of the West Indies, and the insurrection, and all the stirring times we had there?"

Harry and Roland looked at each other with eyes brightening, yet confused. Papa was not a man who told stories of anything,—and Lady Markham interposed. "I think you must be making a mistake," she said. "I am sure Sir William has never been in the West Indies. You must be thinking of some one else of the same name."

The old soldier looked at her with bewildered surprise. "A mistake!" he said. "*I* make a mistake about Will Markham? I have known all about him, and the name of his place, his family, and all his belongings for the last forty years! Why, I—I am his——" Then he paused and looked at Lady Markham, and added slowly, "One of his very oldest friends, be the other who he may."

"I beg your pardon," she said, concealing her embarrassment over the tea-table.

Colonel Lenny was not particularly fond of tea: he would have liked, he thought, something else instead of it, something that foamed and sparkled; yet the tea was better than nothing. He gave her his pardon very easily, not dwelling upon the offence.

"Ah," he said, "I can tell you stories that will make

your hair stand on end. When those niggers broke out, it was not preaching that would do much. That was in the old time, you know, when land meant something in the islands, before emancipation. Did you ever hear about the emancipation? I'll tell you a story about the times before that. We had to get the women and children stowed away—the devils would have thought no more of cutting them to pieces—we were after them in the woods night and day sometimes. Once your father was with us—he was not in the service, as we were, but he was very plucky though he was always small—he joined as a volunteer."

"Where was that? and when was that?" cried the boys; and the girls too drew near, much attracted by the promise of a story. Colonel Lenny waved his long brown hand to them, and went on—

"I'll tell you all about that presently; but I must ask you to let me know, my dear lady, when Markham is expected home. I've got business to talk over—business that is more his than mine. He'll know all about it as soon as he hears my name. It is a long time since we met—and perhaps the notion would never have struck me to seek him out but for—things

that have happened. It is more his business than mine."

"I am not sure whether he will return to-morrow or next day—next day at the latest," said Lady Markham, faltering.

She could not make up her mind what to do. On the occasion of her former mistake, Paul in person had been present to answer for his friend, but there was no one to guarantee this second stranger—this new claimant on her hospitality. If he should be an impostor! but he did not look like an impostor; or, if it should be a mistake after all, and his Will Markham quite a different man? Will Markham! it seemed incredible to Lady Markham that any one should ever have addressed her husband with so much familiarity. These, and a hundred other thoughts, ran through her mind as she poured out the tea.

Meantime, Colonel Lenny made great friends with the children. He began to tell them the most exciting stories. He was not ill at ease as Spears had been, but sat luxuriously thrown back into a luxurious chair, his long limbs stretched out, his long brown hands giving animation to his narrative. Lady Markham managed

to escape while this was going on, and got *Burke* down from the bookshelves in the hall, and anxiously looked up its various lists. There was no Sir William Markham except her husband, no William Markham at all among the county gentry. When Brown, become suspicious by his past experiences, came into the hall at the sound of her foot, she put back the book again guiltily.

The old butler came forward with an expression of concern and trouble on his countenance. "What does your ladyship intend," he asked, solemnly, "that I should do with this?" touching with his foot as he spoke the dusty valise—the old soldier's luggage, which lay very humbly as if ashamed of itself half under the big chair.

Lady Markham could have laughed and she could have cried. "I don't know what to do, Brown," she said.

Brown was very much tempted to give his mistress the benefit of his advice. He forbore, however, exercising a wise discretion, for Lady Markham, though very gracious, was proud; but he was not self-denying enough to divest himself of a general air of anxiety—the air of one who could say a great deal if he would—

shaking his head slightly, and looking at the offending article which seemed to try to withdraw itself out of notice under the shadow of the chair. He could have said a great deal if he had dared. He would have bidden his mistress beware who she took into her house, Sir William wasn't best pleased before, and if it happens again—— Perhaps Lady Markham read something of this in Brown's eyes; and she did not like the butler's advice, which was more or less disapproval, as all effective advice is. The result was however that before dinner the poor little valise was carried up, to the great scorn of the domestics, to a bedroom, and that Colonel Lenny, after keeping the children suspended on his lips all the evening, withdrew early, leaving the mother and daughter to an anxious consultation over him. Alice, too, had consulted a book, but it was an *Army List* that was the subject of her studies. She came to her mother triumphantly with this volume open in her hand.

"Here he is, mamma. John St. John Lenny, 50th West India Regiment. I am so glad I have found it. He is delightful. There never could be any doubt about such a thorough old soldier."

"You thought Mr. Spears interesting, Alice," said Lady Markham, feebly.

"Mamma! and so did you. He was very interesting. I have his lily that he drew for me, and it is beautiful. But he was not a gentleman. He did not know how to sit on his chair, nor how to stand, nor what to say to you or even me. He called me Miss Alice, and you my lady. But Colonel Lenny is entirely different. He is just the same as everybody else, only more amusing than most people. Did you hear the story he was telling about——?"

"Oh, my dear, I was a great deal too anxious to be able to attend to any story. What if he should turn out some agitator too? what if he were a spy to see what kind of life we lead, or an impostor, or some one who has made a mistake, and takes your papa for some other Markham? If I have taken in some one else whom I ought not to have taken in, I think I shall die of shame."

"How can he be an impostor, when he is here in the *Army List?*"

"Let me see it," Lady Markham said. She read out the name word by word, and her mind was a little

relieved. "I suppose there cannot be any mistake since he is here," she said, with a sigh of relief. But, as a matter of fact, Lady Markham sat up in her dressing-gown half the night, afraid of she knew not what, and listening anxiously to all the vague mystical noises that arise in a sleeping house in the middle of the night. She did not know what it was of which she was afraid. How could he be an impostor when his name was in the *Army List*, and when he had that kind brown face? But then, on the other hand, a man from the West Indies, who called her husband Will Markham, was an incredible person. She sat up till the blue summer daylight came silently in at all the windows, putting her suspicious candles to shame, when she, too, became ashamed of herself for her suspicions, and crept very quietly to bed.

Sir William did not come next day, but Colonel Lenny stayed on, and as it is always the *premier pas que coûte*, Lady Markham's doubts were lulled to rest, and she neither frowned nor watched the second night. And on the third Sir William came. It was Alice who went to meet him at the station, in a pretty little pony carriage which he had given her. Everything was done

instinctively by the ladies to disarm any displeasure papa might feel, and to prepare him to receive this second visitor with a friendly countenance. If there was anything that moved Sir William's heart with a momentary impulse of unreasoning pride and foolish fondness, it was supposed by his wife to be the sight of his pretty daughter, with her pretty ponies. These ponies had been named To-to and Ta-ta before Alice had them—after, it was understood, two naughty personages in a play—and as the ponies were very naughty the names were retained. There were no such mischievous and troublesome individuals about the house, and Alice was very proud of the fact that it was she with her light hand who managed them best. Sir William was not fond of wild animals, and yet all the household knew that he liked to be brought home by his daughter in her little carriage, with the ponies skimming over the roads as if they were flying. It was the one piece of dash and daring in which he delighted.

Lady Markham, who was not fond of risking her daughter, came out to the door to entreat her to take care.

"And you will explain everything?" she said; "how it happened, and how very uneasy we have been; but my darling, above all, take care of yourself. Do not let those wicked little things run away with you. Give George the reins if you feel them too strong for your wrist. And make him understand, Alice, how nice, how really nice, and kind, and agreeable he is. George, you must never take your eye off the ponies, and see that Miss Markham takes care."

"I hope they know my hand better than George's," said Alice, scornfully, "better than any one else's. Nobody can interfere between them and me."

"Pretty creatures! I don't know which is the prettiest," said Colonel Lenny, coming up. He had all the children in a cluster round him. "They are three beauties; that is all there is to be said. If you were not so little I could tell you now about a great number of pretty girls in a family, that were called the pride of Barbadoes. I married one of them, and my friend Markham—why, my friend Markham knew them very well, my dear madam," the Colonel said. It did not seem to be the conclusion which he intended to give to his description. However, he added, with a smile,

"But as you're so little I won't tell you about young ladies. I'll tell you about the Oboe men, and the harm they do among the poor niggers."

"Oh," cried Bell and Marie, in one breath, "we should like to hear about the young ladies best."

"Bosh!" cried the boys; "what is the good of stories about a pack of girls? I hate stories that are full of love and all that stupid stuff."

"Then here goes for the Oboe men," said the old soldier. He seated himself under the great portico, in a large Indian bamboo chair that stood there in summer, and the children perched about him like a flight of birds.

Lady Markham looked at this group for a moment, with a softening of all the anxious lines that had got into her face. She was not afraid of her husband, who had always been so good to her, but she was afraid of disapproval, and the Spears' affair was fresh in her mind. But then, in all the circumstances, that was so different!

She left the pretty group round the door, and went slowly down the avenue, that she might be the first to meet her husband. Now that the critical moment

arrived, she began for the first time to think what the business could be which Colonel Lenny was waiting to discuss. "More his business than mine." What was it? This question rose in her mind, giving a little, a very little additional anxiety to her former disquietude. And then, being anxious anyhow, what wonder that her mind should glide on to the subject of Paul and what he was doing. That was a subject that was never long out of her thoughts. Would he come home when the shooting began? He could not stay up to read for ever. Would his father and he meet as father and son ought to meet? Would it be possible to reason or laugh the boy out of his foolish notions, and bring him back to right views, to the disposition which ought to belong to his father's son? This was a wide sea of troubles to be launched upon, all starting from the tiny rivulet of alarm lest Sir William should dislike the new visitor. She went slowly down the avenue, under the flickers of sunshine and shade, under the murmuring of the leaves, catching now and then the sound of the colonel's voice in the distance, and the exclamations of the children. Ah, at their age how simple it all was—no complication of opposed wills, no unknown friends or influences to

contend with! She sighed, poor lady, with happiness, and with pain. It is easy even for a mother to dismiss from her thoughts those who are happy; but how can she forget the one who perhaps is not happy, who is absent, who is among unknown elements, not good or innocent? Thus Lady Markham's thoughts, however occupied with other subjects, came back like the doves to their windows, always to Paul.

CHAPTER VI.

"HAS anything happened, papa? You are so late—nearly an hour. To-to has been almost mad with waiting—has there been an accident? We were all beginning to get frightened here."

"No accident that I know of," said Sir William. He cast a look of pleasure at the pretty equipage and the pretty charioteer—a look of proud proprietorship and paternal pride. Alice was his favourite, they all said. But notwithstanding, he would not join her till he had seen that all his portmanteaus had been got out and carefully packed on the dog-cart which had come for them. Sir William's own gentleman, Mr. Roberts, a most careful and responsible person, whose special charge these portmanteaus were, superintended the operation; but this did not satisfy his master. He

stood by the pony-carriage, talking to his daughter, but he kept his eyes upon his luggage. There were despatch-boxes, no doubt freighted with the interests of the kingdom, and too important to be left to the care of a valet, however conscientious, and a railway porter. It was only when they were all collected and safe that he took his place by the side of Alice.

"You may be sure, my dear," he said, "that unless you take similar precautions you will always be losing something." The ponies had gone off with such a start of delight the moment they were set free, that Sir William's remark was jerked out of his mouth.

"It would be quite a novelty if that happened to you—it would be rather nice, showing that you were human, like the rest of us. Did you really never, never, lose anything, papa?"

"Never," he said; and you had only to look at him to see that this was no exaggeration. Such a perfectly precise and orderly person was never seen; from the top of his hat to the tip of his well-brushed boots there was nothing out of order about him, notwithstanding his journey. His clothes fitted him perfectly; they were just of the cut and the colour that suited his age,

his importance and position. That he would ever have neglected any duty, or forgotten any necessary precaution, seemed impossible. "However," he added, "I must not say too much; when I was young I have no doubt accidents happened. What I object to is that the present generation seems to think it a privilege to be forgetful. I was taught to be ashamed of it in my day."

"Oh yes, papa, we are very silly," said Alice; "though mamma says I am a little old maid and never forget. I take after you, that is what they all say."

Sir William looked at her with a benevolent smile. There is no more subtle flattery that a child can address to a parent than this of "taking after" him, though why it should please us so it would be hard to say. He leaned back in his seat with a sense of well-deserved repose, while the impatient ponies flew along, tossing their pretty heads, their bells jingling, their hasty little hoofs beating time over the dry summer road. "This is very pleasant," he said. It was a perfect summer evening, cool after a hot day, and the road lay through a tranquil, wealthy country, so fresh after the burnt-up

parks, yet full of harvest wealth; the sheaves standing in the fields, some golden breadths of corn still uncut, and the heavy richness of the full foliage throwing deep shadows eastward. The ponies flew like the wind, and Alice, holding them with firm little vigorous hands, turned her soft face to him, all lit up with pleasure at his return. A conscientious statesman, a man who has been broiling in the service of his country, sitting on committees, listening to endless wearisome discussions and all the bothers of the end of the session, it may be supposed what a pleasant relief it was to step into this little fairy carriage and be carried swiftly and softly through the happy autumn fields to his home. "All well?" he said. But a man who has a daily bulletin from his wife asks such a question tranquilly, without any anxiety for the reply.

"I wonder who that lady was in the pink bonnet," said Alice. "Strangers so seldom come out at our station. I wonder who she is going to. Perhaps it is somebody for the vicarage. Oh, yes, they are all quite well. The boys came home on Friday week, and they have never been out of mischief ever since. They are in the woods all day; and the girls have begun their

holidays too. Mademoiselle has gone. We wanted only you, papa, you—and Paul. But who could that lady with the pink bonnet be?"

This second expression of curiosity was added artificially to cover the allusion to Paul. Sir William did not take any notice of either one or the other. "So Mademoiselle has gone?" he said. "I hope you keep order, and that mamma does not let them be too irregular. They will be far happier for a little wholesome restraint."

"I suppose so," said Alice, dubiously. "Anyhow," she added, "they have had nearly a fortnight all to themselves. We have all been idle; but we will settle down into right laws and proper habits now we have got you, papa."

"That will be quite necessary," he said; then, with a slightly impatient tone, "You spoke of Paul—what is your last news of Paul?"

To-to had a very sensitive mouth. At this moment he so resented some imperceptible pull of the reins, that he got into the air altogether, capering with all his four feet, and called for Alice's complete attention. In the midst of this little excitement she said, "Paul is still at

Oxford, papa. He does not write very often. Oh, you bad To-to, what do you mean by this?"

"He has got very fond of Oxford all at once."

"He has all his friends there—at least some of his friends. Papa," cried Alice, with an impulse of alarm, "I wonder who that lady can be. She is coming after us in the village fly. I saw her bonnet just now through the window, when To-to made that bolt."

"My dear, it is quite unimportant who she is—unless you think she is one of your brother's friends. Considering who his associates are, one could never be astonished at any arrival. It may be a lady lecturer, perhaps, on Female Suffrage and Universal Equality."

"Oh, papa! because he knows one man like that! But I have something to tell you—something that makes mamma and me a little uneasy. A gentleman came on Monday—oh, not a common person at all, a *gentleman*, and very nice. We could not tell what to do, but at last, after many consultations, we made up our minds to invite him to stay."

"My dear Alice!" cried Sir William, "what do you and your mother mean? Is my house to be made into an hotel? What is the meaning of it? Am I to

understand that you have taken in another nameless person, another disreputable acquaintance of Paul's? Good heavens! is your mother mad? But I will not put up with it. My house shall not be made a refuge for adventurers, a den of——"

"For that matter," said Alice growing pale, "I suppose it is mamma's house too."

There are opinions that get into the air and spread in sentiment when most opposed to principle. Nobody could have been more horrified than Lady Markham at any claim for her of woman's rights; but when her little daughter, generously bred, found herself suddenly confronted by this undoubted claim of proprietorship, a chord was struck within her which had perhaps only learned to vibrate of recent days. She looked her father in the face with sudden defiance. She had not intended it—on the contrary, the object of her mission, the chief thing in her thoughts, had been to conciliate him in respect to this visitor, and soften his probable displeasure. But a girl's mind is a delicate machine, and there is nothing that so easily changes its balance by a sudden touch. A whole claim of rights, a whole code of natural justice, blazed up in her blue eyes.

She forgot To-to in her sudden indignation, looking with all the severity of logical youth in her father's face.

Sir William was altogether taken aback. He returned her look with a kind of consternation.

"You little——" But then he stopped. A man sometimes remembers (though not always) that when he is speaking to his children of their mother it is necessary to do so with respect. Unquestionably it was expedient that a girl should have full faith in her mother. Besides (it gleamed upon Sir William) Alice was not a child. She was a reasonable little creature, able, after all, more or less, to form an opinion for herself. Perhaps he was more disposed to grant this privilege to the girl who was not likely to make any extravagant use of it, than to the boy; or perhaps his ill success in respect to the boy had taught him a lesson. Anyhow he paused. "Of course," he said, "it is also, as you say, your mamma's house. A friend of hers, I need not tell you, would be as welcome to me as a friend of my own. Do I ever attempt to settle without her who is to be asked? but with your sense, Alice, you must be aware there is a difference. I

must interfere to prevent your excellent mother, who is only too good and kind, from being imposed upon by those disreputable acquaintances of Paul."

"I beg your pardon, papa," said Alice, who had been waiting breathless for the end of his address to make her eager apologies. "But," she added, not unwilling to bring him down summarily from his elevation, "the gentleman I have been speaking of declares that he is your friend, and not Paul's."

"*My* friend! Then I daresay it is quite simple," said Sir William, relapsing into his previous state of perfect repose and calm. "My friends are your mother's friends too."

"Ah, but this is different. (Papa, I am certain that woman is following us.) This is quite different. It is an *old* friend, whom none of us ever heard of. If we had known even his name we should not have been afraid. But do not be frightened, he is very nice. We all like him. He says he knew you in the West Indies, and the thing that alarmed us was that none of us, not even mamma, ever knew you had been there at all."

"The West Indies!" Was it possible that Sir

William started so much as to shake the pony carriage in which he sat? A cloud came suddenly over his serene countenance. He did not say, as Alice fancied he would, "I know nothing about the West Indies." On the contrary, he paused, cleared his throat, and asked in a curiously restrained, yet agitated voice, "What does he—call himself?—what is his name?"

Alice was half alarmed by the effect she had produced. She did not understand it. She wanted to soften and do away with any disagreeable impression.

"Oh, he is very nice," she said. "It is not any one you will mind, papa. And he is all right; he is in the *Army List;* we looked him up at once; we took every precaution; and there he was, just as he said, J. St. John Lenny, 50th West India Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel. After that, of course, and when he said he had known you so well, we could not hesitate any more."

"Lenny!" Sir William said. It was with a tone of relief. He drew a long breath "as if he had expected something much worse," Alice said afterwards. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. To be sure it was a warm evening. But there was

something very strange to the girl in her father's agitation. She did not understand it—he who was always so calm, who never allowed anything to put him out.

"Then were you really in the West Indies, papa?"

"I was in a great many places in my youth," he said. "I was not taken care of as my boys have been. I was the youngest, and I did pretty much as I liked—a bad thing," he added, after a pause; "a very bad thing, though you children never understand it. It led me into places and among people whose very names I seem to have forgotten now."

There was a pause. Alice was very curious, but she did not venture to say more. She did not like even to look at her father who was so unusually disturbed. What could make him so unlike himself? The idea that there might be a mystery in Sir William's life was more than impossible, it was ludicrous. She tried to fix her attention upon the ponies, who were going so beautifully. Then her ear was caught by the steady roll of wheels coming after them. Certainly it was the fly from the village; and certainly it was following on to the gates of the Chase which were now in sight.

This was not the way to the vicarage or to any other house to which a stranger who had stopped at the station of Markham Royal could be going. She had not really believed it possible that the lady in the pink bonnet could be coming to the Chase; but now it seemed almost certain. What could be the meaning of it? Her heart jumped up into sudden excitement. She flourished her whip and touched the ponies till they flew. She could not bear the heavy rolling of that fly, a long way behind, yet always following with the steadiness of fate. This distracted her thoughts at once from her father, and a thousand conjectures rushed into the girl's head. Could it be somebody from Paul? The fly came pounding heavily along, nothing stopping it. What could she do to stop it or conjure its passenger away? If it was bad news that was coming in it, what doubt that it would arrive quite safely? Paul! what could a woman in a pink bonnet have to do with Paul? Could he be ill? Could he be going to marry somebody, to do something foolish? Alice became herself so excited that she could not think of her father. And her father for his part took little notice of Alice. His mind was full of thoughts

that would have been very incomprehensible, very startling to her. The stranger's name had fallen upon him in his tranquillity as a stone falls into still waters. The calm surface of his mind was all broken, filled with widening and ever-widening circles of recollection. He felt dizzy like a man in a dream. The past was so long past, that, thus suddenly recalled to him, after such an interval of years, Sir William had a moment of giddy uncertainty as to whether it had actually existed at all, whether it was not a mere fable, something he had read in a book. Forty years ago—is a man responsible for things he did forty years ago? Can he be blamed if he forgets them? Can he be expected to remember? He who was so systematic, so careful, who never lost anything, who had for years been in a position to set every one else right: was it possible that he had once been foolish as other men? He himself did not understand it. He could not believe it. Lenny? Yes, he remembered there had been a man—the West Indies—ah, yes! things had passed there which he would not care now to talk about, which had been forgotten, which were to him as if they had never been. Had they ever been? he

could scarcely tell. The ponies skimmed along the road, the bells jingled, the gates of the house were in sight, another minute and they would have reached the avenue. And then—instead of his gentle wife, and his innocent children, and universal respect, service, comfort, and worship of every kind, would it be the past in bodily presence that would have to be encountered, painful explanations, revelations, which might make a sudden rending asunder of the beauty and the happiness of life? Sir William wiped his forehead again as they turned in at the gate to the shelter of the familiar trees.

And still there was the dull rumbling of the fly behind. He did not so much as hear it, having been swept away on this torrent of thought. But Alice cast a troubled glance behind as she turned round to go in at the open gate, and made sure that it was coming after her. The girl's head was buzzing and her heart throbbing with mingled fear and excitement. "Would you mind driving up the avenue yourself, papa? I have something to say to Mrs. Lowry at the gate," she said, faltering. Her father scarcely seemed to hear her; he said, "Go on, go on," with an impatient wave of his

hand. She knew nothing about his alarms, nor he about hers. Perhaps, after all, the anxious desire of Alice to intercept what her hasty imagination had concluded to be a messenger of evil had something in it of that eager youthful curiosity which burns to forestall every new event. But if so disappointment was her fate. The little carriage flashed on under the trees and through the slanting lines of sunshine in a breathless silence, both its occupants being far too much absorbed to speak. Half way up the avenue two figures were visible advancing towards them. Lady Markham had been joined by Colonel Lenny a few minutes before. They stood aside, one on each side of the road as the pony-carriage came up. And here on every other occasion Sir William had got down and walked back with his wife to the house. It was part of the formula of his return, which was never omitted. This time, however, when Alice drew up her impatient ponies, he greeted his wife without moving from the carriage.

"We have had a very tedious, dusty journey," he said. "I will go home at once, my love, pardon me, and shake my dust off."

Lady Markham, in the midst of her anxiety, grew pale with surprise at this unusual proceeding. She pressed close to the side of the little carriage—"William," she said, "do you know who it is that is with me?"

The baronet turned round to the long brown figure on the other side. "Alice has told me," he said. "Lenny, is it possible? I did not think I could have recognised you after all these years."

"Nor I you, my fine fellow," said the Colonel. "I'd have passed you if I had met you in Bond Street, Markham; but meeting you here, and knowing it's you, makes a great deal of difference. We've both of us altered in forty years."

"Is it as long as that?" Sir William said. There was no pleasure in his face such as, these innocent ladies thought, should always attend a meeting with an old friend. But on the other hand he cast no doubt upon Colonel Lenny (as indeed how could he, seeing the Colonel's name was in the *Army List?*), but addressed him unhesitatingly, and acknowledged him, which set the worst of Lady Markham's fears at rest. "Go on" he said, in an undertone to his daughter, then waved

his hand to the pedestrians. "In ten minutes I shall be with you," he cried.

The rumbling of the fly had stopped; had it gone further contrary to all Alice's anticipations? This idea gave her a little relief, but she was in so nervous a mood that the sudden jerk with which she urged the ponies forward once more upset To-to's temper, who was his mistress's favourite. He darted on through the lines of trees like a mad thing, wild with the jar to his delicate mouth and the vicinity of his stables.

"Do you want to break your own neck and mine?" Sir William said; "that pony will not bear the whip."

"Why shouldn't he bear it as well as Ta-ta?" said Alice; "is he to be humoured because he is the naughty one? It should be the other way."

"It seldom is the other way," said Sir William, moralising with a self-reference, though Alice did not understand it. "You spoke a greater truth than you are aware of. It is not the best people who are humoured in life. It is the naughty ones who get their way. If you make the worst of everything circumstances will yield to you: but act anxiously for the best and all the burden falls on your shoulders."

"Papa! that is like Thackeray; it is cynical. I never heard you speak so before."

"Nevertheless it is true," said Sir William. His straight and placid brow was ruffled with care. "One does everything one can to be secure from evil, and evil comes."

Could he be thinking about Paul? She turned her ponies (to their great disappointment) as soon as Sir William had stept out of the carriage. Charles indeed had to come to To-to's head and lead him round, so unwilling was that little Turk to turn away from his comfortable stable again. "I will go back and bring mamma home, she was looking tired," the girl said. She was impatient to make sure about the fly that had followed from the station, and the lady in the pink bonnet, and to be in the midst of it, at least, if anything were going to happen. Her mother was still a long way down the avenue. But Alice had scarcely turned when she perceived that there were three figures instead of two in the group she had so lately left. Three figures—and a brilliant speck of colour making itself apparent like a flag at the head of the little procession. Alice felt her heart rush to the scene of action

more quickly than the ponies, which still resisted, tossing their little wicked heads. The lady with the pink bonnet had fallen into the advancing rank. She was tall, and that oriflamme towered over Lady Markham's hat with its soft gray feathers. But their pace was quite moderate, unexcited, showing no sign of trouble. Lady Markham moved along with no appearance of agitation. Perhaps, after all, this new-comer, whoever she might be, had nothing to do with the absent brother, and was no messenger of evil tidings after all.

CHAPTER VII.

"My dear, this is Mrs. Lenny," said Lady Markham. "She has kindly taken us on her way to the north."

"How do you do, my dear young lady? The Colonel wrote me word about you all, praising you up, one more than another, and I thought I'd like to come and see. But, Lenny, you never told me how like she was to her father at her age. I think I see him before me, as handsome a boy——"

"Mrs. Lenny!" cried Alice, in consternation, yet relief. She turned to her mother a pair of questioning, wondering eyes. But Lady Markham could make no answer. She slightly shrugged, so to speak, not her shoulders, but her eyebrows. She was very polite and very hospitable, but this second arrival was almost too

much for her. "I thought you looked tired, mamma," Alice continued. "I came back to drive you home."

Lady Markham shook her head. She was almost cross—as near that unpleasant state as it was possible for her to be. "Perhaps Mrs. Lenny would like to drive, Alice? She has had a long journey. I am not at all tired. I will wait and meet your papa."

"How cool it is under these delicious trees," said the lady of the pink bonnet. "Yes, indeed, if the young lady will have me, it will be a treat to be behind those beautiful ponies. Pretty creatures! like their mistress. I have not seen anything so pretty, Lenny, since we left the regiment. Ah, that was a foolish step. But one never knows when one is well off. '*Lay mew*,' as the French say, is the enemy of '*lay bieng*.' Thank you, my dear. Now this *is* delightful! I wish, instead of being within sight, we were three or four miles from the house."

"Take Mrs. Lenny round by the fishpond," said Lady Markham. She sighed with relief at getting rid of this new claimant upon her attention, though she was so polite. Mrs. Lenny was tall like her husband, and like him, brown and soldierly. She made the

light little carriage bend on one side as she got in. Her brown face within the pink shade of the bonnet was wreathed with smiles. She was delighted like a child with the pretty equipage, and the promised drive—much more delighted than Alice was, who, though relieved of her terrors about Paul, drove off in no very happy state of mind. Yet she could not help taking a little pleasure in her own discrimination.

"I knew you were coming here the first moment I saw you," she said. "I kept asking papa who you were. But he had not seen you—he did not know you; he never knows any one—not even, if he were to see us at a distance, mamma or me."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Lenny. "I should no more have known him! for you may be sure I took a good stare at the station, seeing it was somebody of consequence. He is so changed—oh, not for the worse, my dear; but when you see a nice little old gentleman instead of a pretty young one, it's a shock, that can't be denied. You have to count up and think back how many years it is. Somehow one never feels old one's self. You think the world has stood still with you, though it goes so fast with all the rest."

"I don't feel at all like that," said Alice. "Sometimes I feel so old—older a great deal, I am sure, than mamma."

This statement was received by her companion with laughter, which disconcerted Alice. She drew herself up. She was not so polite as her mother.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at," she said. "Age does not go only by years—when you have a great deal to think of——"

"You darling!" cried Mrs. Lenny. "Did the old woman laugh? But I'd laugh just the same if your dear mamma herself was to talk of feeling old. There's what I call a lovely woman! Lenny never told me half what a dear she was. Old! but don't you gloom at me, my pretty pet; I was once seventeen myself, though you wouldn't think it. The birds now on the trees, I daresay they feel old between one Valentine's day and another. It is not years that does it, as you say. When we come to my time of life the days go on one after another as fast as they can pelt: they're all flyin', flyin', like the echoes in the song. But at your age they're longer—they pass more slow—and when there's much to think about did you say? Ah, but

that's true! When I was your age I had a great deal to think about. We were a large family, six girls of us, and not a penny among the lot. We were just ruined with the emancipation in the West Indies, and all that our parents said to us was, 'Get married! There's the officers,' they said, 'a set of simpletons! What's the good of them but to marry the poor girls that know how to play their cards.' Ah! I thought when I was after Lenny that to be married meant to be well off, and have everything that heart could desire. And so we all thought. We weren't bad girls, don't you think it; but that was how were brought up. Get married! and you'll be well off directly. You never had anything like that said to you to make you old with thinking—"

"Oh, no, no," said Alice, horrified. She scarcely knew whether to be offended by the familiarity of the stranger or interested in her talk. It was an experience altogether different from anything Alice knew of life.

"No, I should think not," said the lady of the pink bonnet, nodding that article vigorously. "Just figure to yourself, my dear, what you would feel if you had to leave this beautiful place, and live down in a house

in the town, and have *that* said to you. You would be shocked, wouldn't you? But it did not shock us. That was how we were brought up. We had to marry by hook or by crook; and we all did marry. Well, there's Lenny, he has made me a very good husband; but marrying him wasn't like coming into a fortune, was it now?—though we've always been the best of friends. It was lucky in one way that we never had any children; it left us free to look after ourselves. Nowadays we live a great deal among our friends. We don't interfere with each other, but we're always glad to come together again. When I'm comfortable anywhere I send him word, and when he's comfortable he sends me word. You mustn't think my coming means more than that, and you must tell your dear mamma so. We've not come to do her any harm or her pretty family. Your papa is startled to see us, but he won't mind in the end. I daresay you have often heard him talk of Barbadoes and the Gavestons? We were six handsome girls, though I say it that shouldn't. You must have heard of us by name."

Alice, whom this speech had filled with wonder,

shook her head. "I never heard the name in my life," she said.

"Well, that is odd," said Mrs. Lenny. "I couldn't believe it even though Lenny said so. That's thorough," she added, with a little laugh. A flush came over her brown cheek. "Never mind, my dear, it is not your fault," she said.

Alice was more and more mystified. She could not imagine what this strange woman could mean. If she had been at first disposed to resent her familiarity, that offence had altogether evaporated. Mrs. Lenny looked and spoke as if she had something to do with the family; her eyes and her tone were full of kindness even when she evidently resented the fact that Alice had never heard of her. She spoke of herself without any kind of effort, as if it were natural that the girl should be interested; and Alice could not but wish to hear more. It was like a new story, original and out of the common. The momentary pause that ensued alarmed her lest it should be coming to an end.

"Did you all marry officers?" she asked at last.

"Did we all marry officers? We did that, every one—except the one that one that married—— Ah!

I mean Gussy, that was the youngest. She married—a civilian—and died, poor girl. The rest of us all took the shilling. Ah! some of the girls are dead, and the rest are scattered—one in Australia, two out in India, me, wandering about the world as you see me, Lenny and I; most likely I'll never see one of them again. We had but one brother; all the little the family had, he got it. It was he that took Gussy's boy—did I tell you she left a boy? Poor Gussy! she died at twenty. It is like as if she never had married or been more than a child. When I think of the past it's always she that comes uppermost—the little one, you know, the pet—and she never lived to get parted from us like the rest.

Alice looked vaguely interested. It seemed to her that she was hearing the prologue of a novel. She did not draw any moral from it, or ask herself whether her own brothers and sisters might ever be dispersed like this about the world; but she wanted to hear more.

"Have the others no children?" she asked.

"Dozens, my dear," said Mrs. Lenny, "here, and there, and everywhere. I've nephews in the service in

every country under the sun, and nieces, all married in the army; it runs in our blood. But Gussy's boy is the one I think of most. He's not a boy now. He's five-and-thirty if he's a day, and my brother is dead that adopted him, and the property has gone from bad to worse, and I don't know what is to be done. Lenny's head is full of him. Perhaps if I were to speak a good word to your papa——"

"Could papa help him?" cried Alice, eagerly; "then you may be sure, quite sure, that he will do it. I will speak to him myself. They all say he always listens to me."

"Will you?" said Mrs. Lenny. She grasped suddenly at the firm little hand in which Alice held the reins, and put down her head as if to kiss it, then looked up with a nervous laugh, winking her eyes rapidly to cast off some tears. "You are a dear little angel!" she cried. "But Lenny will do that, and I'll do it. I won't ask it of you, my pretty darling. It would be more than was right."

Alice was somewhat affronted at this rejection of her proposal. She was bewildered by her companion's demeanour altogether. Why should she cry? and then

refuse her assistance when she could have been of real use? But that was, of course, as Mrs. Lenny pleased.

"This is the fishpond," she said, more coldly. "It is very old, and there are some carp in it that are supposed to be very old too."

The fishpond was a piece of clear and beautiful water embosomed in the richest wood. It was the very centre of all the beauties of the Chase to the Markhams. A little brook trickled into it over a little fall which made music in the silence, itself unseen, mingling a more liquid silvery tone with all the songs of the birds and the murmur of the trees. A little path wandered along by one side, the others were sloping banks of greensward. The trees on all sides stooped as if leaning over each other's shoulders to see themselves in that fairy mirror, where they all fluttered and trembled in reflection between the glimmer of the water and the blue circle of sky, which filled up all the middle with blueness and light. Some light and graceful birches upon the bank seemed to have pressed further forward like advanced posts to get nearest the pool; a great cluster of waterlilies filled up one corner. Even the impatient ponies stood still in this soft coolness and shadow;

perhaps they had caught a glimpse of their pretty tossing heads and arched necks. Mrs. Lenny's bonnet shone in that mirror like an exotic bird, poised over it, and her exclamation of delight broke the quiet with something of the same effect.

"What a lovely place!" she said; "and it's I that would live long if I were a fish in such a sweet spot. Dear, dear, if one lived here it would be a tug to die at all. And you have been here, my darling, all your life?"

"Oh, yes," said Alice, with a little laugh at the ignorance of the question. "This is home, where else could I be? This is only the second season I have ever been to town. I went for a little while last year though I was not out. This summer I have been introduced," she said, with a little innocent ostentation. "I am out now. I go wherever mamma goes."

"Introduced?" said Mrs. Lenny, with a little awe, "to her Majesty—her very self? Tell me how she looked, and all about her. Dear lady! what I'd give to hear a word out of her mouth!"

"I did not mean that," said Alice, feeling important and splendid; "introduced means going out into

society. I was presented too—of course I had to be presented. Oh, there are the children down that opening—do you see them? It is holiday time, and they are all together."

Mrs. Lenny looked round with eager interest, again swaying the little carriage to one side.

"Are you the eldest?" she said; "and you have two little brothers?—only these two?"

She looked quite anxiously in Alice's face.

"Only these two—except Paul—and we are three girls—just the same number of each."

"Who is Paul?"

"Who is Paul?" said Alice, laughing; "that is the strangest question here. Paul is the eldest of all—he is *my* brother. We all come in pairs. There is Harry and Bell, Roland and Marie—and Paul is mine. He is not very much at home now," she said, her face clouding with the recollection. "He is grown up—he is at Oxford. In the holidays he does not always come home like the little ones. No one could expect him to be like the little ones. He is a man."

To a cooler observer Alice's eager explanations would have betrayed the family anxiety, of which Paul was

the object. But Mrs. Lenny had other thoughts in her mind. She clasped her hands together in her lap, and said, "Dear me, dear, dear me!" with suppressed dismay. This suddenly reawakened all the girl's fears. Had it been a mistake, a pretence after all? Was it no old connection, nothing to do with papa's business? (what could papa's business matter, it would not go to any one's heart like the other) but after all some new evil that was threatening Paul?

"Mrs. Lenny," she cried, "oh tell me first, for I can bear it; is it about Paul? Has he got into any trouble? Is it something about *him* you have really come to tell us! Oh, tell me, tell me! and keep it from mamma."

"My dear," cried Mrs. Lenny, confused, "what do I know about your brother? I never heard of him before, and oh, I wish I had not heard of him now. Do you think I would harm him if I had the power to help it? Not I—not I! if there was anything in my power!"

And with this the good woman let fall upon her gloves, which were green, a few tears. Why should she cry because of Paul if she did not know him? Fortunately for Alice the ponies at that moment gave her

no small trouble. She had been thinking of other things and they took the advantage. They wanted to take her home the back way into the stables. Greedy little brutes! as if they had not everything that heart of pony could desire—plenty of corn, plenty of ease, and the prettiest stable with enamelled mangers and everything handsome about them. She stopped them as they began to twist round in the wrong direction, tossing their heads aloft. If they thought to take Alice unawares they were mistaken. Thus she was obliged to withdraw her attention altogether from Mrs. Lenny and fix it upon this rebellious pair, getting them past the dangerous byway and bringing them up with a sweep and dash to the steps of the great door.

CHAPTER VIII.

MEANWHILE Sir William Markham had been strangely employed. He came home to get himself brushed free of the dust of his journey; but when he got to the house he thought of that errand no more. He asked for his letters as if these were all that he was thinking of. And you may suppose that in a house which knew the importance of letters, and was aware of all the momentous issues of neglect in that particular, Sir William's letters were carefully arranged on the table in the library. He asked for them, which was unnecessary, and looked so full of business and importance, that Brown found "a screw loose" in his master too. This was not his usual aspect when he came home. Then the busy statesman allowed himself a holiday. Even when he was in office (much more being in

opposition), he had put off his burden of official cares, and had strolled up the avenue with his wife without caring for his letters. When Brown answered respectfully, "They are in the library, Sir William;" within himself that functionary shook his head and said, "There is something wrong." Sir William went into the library, which was large and dim and cool, the very home of quiet leisure and comfort—and closed the door after him with a sense of relief. His letters were all laid out on the table, but he did not so much as look at them. He sat down in his usual chair, and leaned his head in his hands, and gazed into the blank air before him. Was this all he had come for? Certainly he did nothing more: gazed out straight before him and saw nothing; sat motionless doing nothing; paused altogether body and soul. He was not aware yet of the second visitor who had arrived; but he was in no doubt about the first. He did not require to ask himself what his old friend,—whose name had tingled through and through him, though he had professed that he scarcely remembered it—wanted of him. That early chapter of his life which he had put away entirely, which he had honestly forgotten as if it had not been, came back to

him in a moment, no longer capable of being forgotten as he sat by his daughter's side in the little pony carriage. He had not meant any harm in putting it so entirely from him. But nothing is ever lost in this tenacious world. Bury a secret in the deepest earth, and some chance digger, thinking of other things, will bring it up without intending it. Exercise even the most innocent reticence about your own affairs, matters in which you have a perfect right to judge for yourself, and some time or other even this will come up against you like a crime. What harm had he done by burying in his own heart a little inconsequent chapter of his life, an episode that had come to an end so soon, that had left so few results behind? What results had it left? The only one had been promptly and conclusively taken off his hands. He had never felt it; he had never been conscious of any responsibility in respect to it. But that which had seemed to him nothing but a broken thread at twenty-five, was it to reappear against him at sixty like a web of fate perplexing and entangling his feet? A cold dew came out upon his forehead when he thought of his wife. Were she to hear it, were she to know, how could he ever again look her in the face?

And yet he had done her no wrong. There had been no harm, no evil intention in his mind. Half inadvertence, and half a dislike to return to a matter which was an irritation to his orderly mind, as well as a recollection of pain—an incident that had come to nothing, a false beginning in life—were the causes of his original silence about his own youth and all that was in it. A man who marries at forty, is it necessary that he should unfold everything that happened to him at twenty-five? and he had been done with it all; had closed the chapter altogether so very long ago. That it should be re-opened now was intolerable. But yet Sir William knew that he must bear it; he must subdue all signs of annoyance, he must receive his unwelcome visitor as if he were pleased to see him, and ascertain what he wanted, and steal, if possible, his weapons out of his hands.

These were the thoughts in his mind as he sat alone and pondered, arranging his ideas. He had known what it was to be much troubled by public business in his day, but he had experienced little trouble with his own. All was orderly and well regulated in his private affairs: no skeletons in the cupboards, nothing

anywhere that could not meet the eye of day. This was the very sting of the present occurrence to him. A secret! That *he* should be convicted of a hidden chapter of early indiscretion, of having taken a foolish step which might have coloured all his life! Though it was no wrong to her, his wife could scarcely fail to think it a wrong, and he could not but suffer in the estimation of everybody who heard of it. Already, was he not humiliated in his own eyes? But for this pause which enabled him to rearrange his thoughts, to settle his plan of operations, he felt that he must have been overwhelmed altogether. At last, with a sigh, he got up and prepared himself to issue forth out of his sanctuary, and meet the dangers that threatened him; he to be threatened with dangers of such a sort!—It was intolerable—yet it had to be borne. He went out to meet the party which he could hear coming up the avenue. Brown looked at him with suspicious eyes as he came into the hall. Could Brown know anything? did everybody know? Even Lady Markham, he thought, looked at him strangely, almost with alarm. But it is unnecessary to say that this was all in Sir William's imagination. No one had as yet associated

any idea of mystery with him. His wife only thought he was weary with the work of the session, and looking pale. She was standing talking to Colonel Lenny, waiting till Alice should draw up at the door. Sir William, with a faint gleam of returning pleasure, stood on the top of the steps and waited too; but then he was confronted by the vision of the pink bonnet by his daughter's side. A pink bonnet! who had been talking of a pink bonnet? He came down slowly, half afraid of this and everything else that was new.

"In good time, Markham," said Colonel Lenny, waving his hand; "here is another old friend come to see you. She is changed more than you are. From a girl, and a pretty one, she has grown an old woman, and that's not a thing to be permitted; but an old friend, my dear fellow, and more than an old friend. Can't you see it's Katey? Katey, my wife?"

"Katey!" Even Sir William's steady nerves gave way a little. His eyes seemed to give a startled leap of alarm in their sockets. For a moment the impulse in his mind was to turn and fly. Lenny was bad, but his wife was a hundred times worse; and she looked at him, leaning out of the pony carriage and holding out

her hands as if she meant to kiss him; but that was more than flesh and blood could bear. "Katey!" he said; "I cannot believe my eyes. Is it Katey Gaveston after all these years? I know I've grown an old man, and everything has changed, but——"

"You never thought to see the like of me such an old woman? Ah, Will, but it's true. I am Katey Gaveston, as sure as you stand there. I came after him, to stop him from making mischief. He don't mean it—we know that; but he's just as simple as ever. He blurts everything out."

This speech went through and through Sir William. The light seemed to fail from his eyes for a moment; but when he looked round all was as before—Lady Markham talking to Brown, and Alice to the groom, who had come for the pony carriage.

"Hush!" he said, instinctively, with a shudder, giving her his hand to help her to step out. "Hush!" Then, making a little effort over himself, he added, "We are to have time, I hope, to talk over old stories quietly—at our leisure—no need to go back in a moment from the present to the past."

"Nearly forty years—it's a long way to go back,"

she said. "We've grown old folks; but it's better to take our time and talk it all over quietly, as you say. Yes, yes, quietly; that is by far the best way."

Mrs. Lenny nodded till her bonnet seemed to fill all the atmosphere with pink mists of reflection, and laughed, filling the air with reverberations of sound, just as her bonnet did with flickerings of coloured light; but she did not throw her arms round him in sisterly salutation; this was something saved at least.

Then he led her in ceremoniously to the great drawing-room, which was carefully shaded and cool and luxurious after the blaze outside. It was sweet with great bowls of late roses, full of flowers of every kind—a stately room such as Mrs. Lenny was not accustomed to see. She stopped short with a cry of admiration.

"What a lovely place! What a beautiful—beautiful house!" Then she put her handkerchief to her eyes. "To think, poor dear, who might have been the mistress of it all!" she said.

Sir William cast an alarmed glance behind him, but his wife was too far off to hear.

"You must recollect," he said, "that *then* I had no house at all—no place to make—any one the mistress of. I never expected then to be master here."

Mrs. Lenny sat down and wiped her eyes.

"It is a beautiful house," she said. "I've been into the park, and seen a great deal; and when I think of all that's come and gone, when I remember that you were nothing but a poor man, Will Markham. just as poor as all the rest of us—and to see you now, like a prince, with your lovely wife, and her sweet family—oh! I know you'll forgive me, my dear lady; if your heart is as sweet as your face, you'll forgive me; but I can't help thinking that what is given to one is taken from another; and of them that never had a chance of happiness—them that are dead and gone—and the place where they might have been—remembers them no more."

Lady Markham, who could not shut her heart to any distress, came and sat down by her and took her hand.

"I know what you mean," she said. "When I have any sorrow it always comes upon me afresh in a new place."

How far she was from knowing what her visitor meant!

Mrs. Lenny looked up surprised. Then two big honest tears burst out of her eyes, and her whole face lighted up with a smile.

"You are a darling," she said, seizing Lady Markham's soft hand in both of hers, "with a heart as feeling! But I am not crying for anything in particular, my dear—only out of excitement, and the strangeness of everything. You must not be so sorry for me."

Here Colonel Lenny interposed, and pointed out to Lady Markham the tea-table which was awaiting her.

"Give her a big cup, my dear lady; that is what makes Katey happy," he said. "What would she be without her tea? We men take something stronger, I don't deny it; but we're not so dependent upon anything. I could live without my smoke, and I could live without my drink—times have been when I've lived without eating too; but I can't fancy my wife without a tea-pot."

"Not altogether without eating, I hope. Take

some cake now," said Lady Markham, smiling, "to make amends."

"I will have the cake,—but yes, altogether without eating—for as long as it lasted—that was two days; the time is apt to feel long when you've nothing to eat. I've always thought the more of breakfast and dinner and all the little bits of ornamental eating and drinking that we make no account of, since then. Oh I've told all about it to the boys. I'm getting to an end of my stories," said the colonel. "Roland begins to know them better than I; he says, 'That's not how you told it before.' That boy is as sharp as a needle; he's the one you should make a lawyer of, my dear lady. Now Harry's a born soldier; he's up to everything that wants doing with the hands. Put him before a lion, and he'll face it, that little fellow; and he takes in every word you say to him. But Roland by Jove, cross-examines you as if you were in a witness-box: 'You said so-and-so before,' or 'How could you do that when you had just done so-and-so?' He's as keen as an east wind."

"That is a very biting metaphor," said Lady Markham; but it did not occur to her that the colonel was

talking against time to beguile her attention and keep the conversation which was going on at the other side of the room undisturbed. There it was Sir William who was serving Mrs. Lenny with the tea his wife had poured out.

"She knows nothing," he said, in a low tone. "I did not think it was worth while telling her. For God's sake do not let her surmise it now."

"I wouldn't if I could help it, Will; but the boy—there's the boy."

"What boy? You mean Philip's boy?"

Mrs. Lenny put out her hand and grasped his.

"Haven't you heard? Philip's dead, and the property all sold up, and nothing left for one belonging to him. He never learnt, like the rest of us, to scrape and save. It's all gone—every penny. There was not so much to begin with, when you think upon it; and there he is, without a sou."

"My God!" said Sir William under his breath. He was not a man given to oaths, but he was suddenly overwhelmed by the danger that over-shadowed him which he had not thought of before. The evil he had feared was as nothing in comparison. He grew pale

to his very finger-nails. "This is why you have come to me?" he said.

"Nothing but that—do I want to bother you? but *he* must be thought of, too. Will, the boy must not lose his rights."

"He must be provided for," said the baronet, gloomily; "but he has no rights."

"Will! do you mean to bring his mother out of her grave? No rights! We came in friendship, but we'll go in anger if there is any meaning in you to disown the boy."

"I cannot say any more now," said Sir William, hastily. "I will talk to Lenny to-night."

"I don't put my faith in Lenny for that matter. Will, you must satisfy *me*."

"I will, I will, Katey! For God's sake no more."

Alice had come up to them in her easy grace of youth. She heard, if not the words, yet the tone in which they were said; and her father got up hastily and got behind the stranger to whom he was speaking so seriously, but who smiled upon the girl from her great chair.

"Come and talk to me, my pretty," Mrs. Lenny

said. "Your father and I have been reminding each other of things we had both forgotten, and they're not such pleasant things as you. Come and cheer us up, my bonnie dear."

Lady Markham was very well content to see the close conversation that was going on between her husband and this new guest. It took a great burden off her mind. This time she had made no mistake—the claim of the old friendship was real. No suspicion of any kind entered her thoughts. She leaned back in her chair with a grateful sense of relief, and felt glad that she had sent orders by Brown that Mrs. Lenny was to be put into one of the best rooms, thus promoting the colonel too. There remained only one little difficulty: Mrs. Lenny's pink bonnet was a very fine article indeed, but she could not come to dinner in it. Where was she to find a toilette for the evening, since all her luggage, Lady Markham knew, consisted of a bag which she had left with the lodge-keeper? Lady Markham herself was somewhat particular about dress. She wondered privately what it would be best to do, as she leant back in her chair and listened to the colonel talking of Roland and Harry. She must

put on, she concluded, the plainest article in her wardrobe, that Mrs. Lenny might not feel uncomfortable, and she must give Alice a hint to do the same. Thus the alarming sensations aroused by this meeting subsided, to all appearance.

"Yes, you did quite right; they are old friends, very old friends," Sir William said from his dressing-room, in answer to his wife's question. "Did I never tell you I spent two years in Barbadoes? Indeed I suppose I had almost forgotten myself. My uncle had left some property there, and not being of much consequence then I was sent out to look after it. It came to nothing, like most West Indian property. The Gavestons were a family of handsome girls. I—saw a good deal of them; most of the young Englishmen who were there frequented their house. Lenny among the rest. I scarcely recollected his name; but Katey Gaveston of course I was bound to know."

"She implied, I think, that there once had been some—flirtation between you," said Lady Markham, with a smile.

"Ah!" said Sir William—his voice sounded harsher than usual, though he was painfully civil and ready

to explain—"perhaps there might have been—something. It is nearly forty years ago—it is not of much consequence to any one now."

"No—you don't think I mind," she said, this time with a soft laugh. But he did not respond. He had not finished dressing, and *he* was very particular in his attire. His wife had taken a slight liberty, she felt, in disturbing him. Did she not know that he liked perfect tranquillity in that moment of preparation for dinner? It would not have occurred to him to put on a black neck-tie, or change the usual solemn dignity of his appearance on account of any visitor. Lady Markham was glad that her own very simple dress escaped notice, at least.

The other pair meanwhile were comparing notes in their rooms, where Mrs. Lenny's preparations for dinner were by no means so simple as Lady Markham had supposed. The bag, on being opened, had proved to contain what she called "an evening body," much trimmed with lace and ribbons. She regarded this article with great complacency as she pinned the ribbons across her bosom.

"I hope you don't feel that you've any call to be

ashamed of your wife, Lenny," she said. "I hope I'm fit to sit down with my lady, or the Queen herself if she were to think of asking us. There's the good of a real, excellent black silk, it does for anything; in the morning it's one dress, in the evening it's another. My Lady Markham will think I have trunks full when she sees me. She's a sweet woman; I thought so before, but I think so more than ever now, to see the handsome room she's put us in. That proves her sense. She can see I'm not one of the common sort. She doesn't know anything about the connection, and she sha'n't know it through me, to vex her, the pretty dear. She doesn't even know he was ever in the island. After all, it's a long time ago. She shall never hear a word of it through me."

"That would be all very well," said the colonel, "if there was only you and I; but you forget there's another to think of."

"I don't forget; but there's a deal more to think of than I supposed. Why shouldn't he stay where he is? It's the life he's used to. And what would he do here? Money will never be wanting; and a little money would make him a great man where he is. Don't interrupt

me with your reasons, Lenny. He's my flesh and blood, not yours; and I won't do it, I haven't the heart to do it. A lovely woman, and a pretty family as you could see. Don't you know there's the heir grown up—Paul they call him? If it had been but a small boy I shouldn't have minded. And the other, what does he know about it? It can't hurt him, what he doesn't know. And he isn't at an age to change his habits. He's no lad—he's a man as old as you or I."

"Twenty years younger, and more."

"What's twenty years?" said Mrs. Lenny, indignantly. "He's not an old man, if you please, but neither is he young. He's a man at his best—or his worst, perhaps. We haven't seen him since he was a boy. All's fixed and settled about him. And to change his country, and his condition, and his way of living all in a moment!—who could do that? scarcely the best man that ever was. He wouldn't know how to behave; he wouldn't understand what was expected of him. He'd be miserable—and so would the others too."

"I can't argue with you, Katey," said her husband; "you're so used to having your own way. I won't

attempt to argue with you; but I know what's justice —and justice must surely be the best."

"Oh, justice!" cried the colonel's wife, "where do you find it in this world? Is it justice that you're only lieutenant-colonel of a West India regiment, when you ought to have been a general in the army? Don't speak to me. I know you better than any one else does, and when I say that's what you're fit for you may be sure I'm not flattering. Does a man get flattery from his wife? We may get justice in another world, and I for one hope for it; but not here. And here's just a case where justice would do more harm than good. It would do harm to both sides, and punish everybody. It would be real injustice and cruelty, and all that's bad; and would you be the one to force it—and I to recommend it? No, no; I tell you no!"

"I can't argue with you, Katey," her husband repeated. "Have it your own way. It's not my flesh and blood, as you say, but yours. But if it turns out badly, and you repent after——"

"Bless us all," cried Mrs. Lenny, starting to her feet, "there's the dinner bell!"

"I would advise you to put your cap on straight," was all the colonel said.

When this couple entered the dining-room, Mrs. Lenny felt proudly that she had achieved one of the successes of her life. Lady Markham looking up at her as she marched in on her husband's arm, with flowers rustling on her cap and lace on her shoulders, gave one look of bewildered admiration, Mrs. Lenny thought, then glanced at Alice to communicate her wonder. ("I knew she'd think I'd brought my whole wardrobe," she said to the colonel after, "and for that matter, that is fit to be seen, so I have.") The "evening body," the lace, and the ribbons took Lady Markham altogether by surprise; and it cannot be said that her own simple toilet was appreciated by her visitor. But Mrs. Lenny was very kind after dinner, and explained the simple artifice to her hostess, by way of giving a lesson to one of the best dressed of women.

"You look very nice in your muslin, my dear," she said, "and so does that pretty darling, that would look well in anything; but when you come to my time of life it makes a difference; and roaming about from place to place how could I have room for muslins? not

to say that washing is a ruination. I have one evening body made with good black silk. It costs a little more at the time, but what does that matter? And there you are, both for morning and evening, quite set up."

"It is a very admirable plan, I am sure," Lady Markham said, with great seriousness, checking with a look the laugh that was in Alice's eyes. The children were in the drawing-room, all four of them, very ready to make friends with their beloved colonel's wife.

"I feel as if I had something to do with them. I feel as if I were their grandmother, though I never had a child of my own, she said." Thus everything went harmoniously in the drawing-room, though the ladies were all a little curious to know what kept the gentlemen so long over their wine. Sir William's coffee grew cold; he had never been known to be so late before.

CHAPTER IX.

"THEY'RE talking over old days," Mrs. Lenny had said three or four times before the gentlemen appeared. What could be more natural? No doubt they had gone from recollection to recollection: "Do you remember" this and that, and "what happened to" so-and-so? It was very easy to imagine what they were talking about, and how they got led on from one subject to another. They were heard talking, when they at last appeared, all the way up the long drawing-room, pausing at the door.

"All died out, I believe," Colonel Lenny was saying. "The last son lost his children one after another, and died himself at the last broken-hearted, poor man! The daughters were all scattered—but Katey knows more about them than I do."

"I am really afraid to ask any more questions," Sir William said. What more natural?

"Yes, my dear lady," Colonel Lenny resumed, taking his old place beside Lady Markham; "we have been making the most of our time; for it is very likely we may have letters to-morrow, my wife and I, summoning us away. I don't like it, and neither will she, and perhaps we may have another day, but I scarcely think it likely. I don't know how we're to drag ourselves away. You have been kinder than any one ever was; and the children have got a hold of my old heart, bless them!"

The colonel had genuine tears in his eyes.

"Lenny will tell you what I propose," said Sir William on the other side. "It is not an easy position. I have always thought myself quite safe—quite free of responsibility; and now to be pulled up all at once; and when I think of my own boys——"

"Your own boys?" said Mrs. Lenny, raising herself very erect in her chair. "Oh, I feel for you—I feel for you, Will! but if you put the least bit of a slur on my sister or her child——"

"Don't make it worse," he said, throwing up his hands. *I* throw a slur! You know I never thought

of anything so impossible—it *is* impossible; but how could I think of him as mine? Adoption has its rights—but Lenny will tell you what I propose."

A short time after there were affectionate good-nights between the ladies. Lady Markham accompanied Mrs. Lenny to her room to see that she had everything she could desire.

"I am so sorry you must go to-morrow," she said, half out of politeness, but with a little mixture of truth, for there was something in the genial warmth of the strange couple which touched her heart.

"My dear, it's just possible we may have another day," said the old campaigner.

The mother and daughter had a harmless little laugh together over Mrs. Lenny's "evening body," but they agreed that "papa's old friends" were real friends, and adopted them with cordiality though amusement.

"She asked me a great deal about the family and about Paul," Alice said as they separated.

"No letter again to-day," said Lady Markham, with a sigh.

That name subdued their smiles. To think he should be the best beloved, yet so careless of their happiness!

"He is so forgetful," they both said.

And with this so common family sigh, not any present or pressing trouble, only a fear, an anticipation, a doubt what to-morrow might bring forth, the doors of the peaceful chambers closed, and night and quiet settled down on the silent house.

No one knew, however, that the night was not so silent as it appeared. Sir William, of course, was left in his library when all the rest of the world went to bed. It was his habit. He wrote his letters, or he "got up" those questions which were always arising, and which every statesman has to know; or perhaps he only dozed in his great chair; but anyhow, it was his habit to sit up later than all the rest of the household, putting out his lamp himself when he went to bed. This night, however, after midnight when all was still, there was a mysterious conference held in the library. Mrs. Lenny came down the great staircase in her stockings not to make a noise. "I wouldn't disturb that pretty creature, not for the world," she said. "I wouldn't let her know there was a mystery, not for anything you could give me." And she spoke in a whisper during the course of the prolonged discussion,

though Lady Markham was on the upper floor on the other side of the house, and safe in bed. It was Colonel Lenny who was the most stubborn of the conspirators. He spoke of right and justice with such eloquence that his wife was proud of him, even though it was she eventually who put him down, and stopped his argument. It was almost morning—a faint blueness of the new day striking in through all the windows and betraying them, when the Lennys with their shoes in their hands stole up stairs to bed. It would have been strange indeed if some conscientious domestic had not seen this very strange proceeding in the middle of the night; but if they did so, they kept the fact to themselves. Sir William took no such precautions. He shut the heavy door of the library almost ostentatiously, awaking all the silent echoes, and went up the great staircase with his candle in his hand. The rising dawn, however, cast a strange, almost ghastly look upon his face, doing away with the candle. He had told his wife that he had brought some papers from town that had to be attended to, and which had to be sent back to London by next morning's post.

Next morning the Lennys appeared at the breakfast-table in travelling-garb, ready to go away. Mrs. Lenny had put on her pink bonnet not to lose time.

"Have you had your letters?" Lady Markham said, astonished.

"No, my dear, we have had no letters; that was to be the sign if we were wanted," Mrs. Lenny explained. Sir William did not say a word. He did not join in the regret expressed by all the rest, or in the invitations proffered. "You must come back—promise us that you will come back," the children cried; but their father maintained a steady silence which discouraged his wife.

The whole family accompanied the travellers to the door to see them drive away.

"I hope we shall see you again," Lady Markham said; then added, oppressed by her husband's silence, "when you come this way."

"My dear lady," said the colonel, kissing her hand like a Frenchman, "I shall never forget your kindness, nor my wife either; but most likely we shall never pass this way again. There is nothing in the world I should like better; but I don't know if it is to be desired."

"God bless you!" said Mrs. Lenny, taking both Lady Markham's hands, "it's not at all to be desired. Once for old friendship's sake is very well. But if I ever come here again it will not be as an old friend, but for love of you."

"That is the best reason of all," Lady Markham said, with her beautiful smile. And she stood there waving her pretty hand to the strange couple as they drove down the avenue. Mrs. Lenny's pink bonnet made a dotted line of colour all the way as she bobbed it out of the carriage window in perpetual farewells. This made the young ones laugh, though they had been near crying. Sir William alone said nothing. He had gone in again at once when the carriage left the door.

It was that very evening, however, that the letters arrived which cast the family into so great a commotion and obliterated all recollection of the Lennys. It had pleased Lady Markham that her husband, of himself, had begun to speak of Paul the next time they met after the departure of their guests. There was a certain tenderness in his tone, a something which was quite unusual. "Have you heard from him

lately?" he asked with some anxiety, "poor boy!" This was so unusual that Lady Markham would not spoil so excellent a disposition by any complaint of Paul's irregularity in correspondence. She replied that she had heard—not very long ago; that he was still in Oxford; that she hoped he would return for Alice's birthday, which was approaching. Sir William did not say any more then, but he spoke of Paul again at luncheon, saying—"Poor fellow!" this time. "He has very good abilities if he would only make the right use of them," he said.

"Oh, William!" cried Lady Markham, "he is still so young; why should not he make very good use of them yet? We were not so very wise at his age."

"That is true. I was not at all wise at his age: poor Paul!" his father said.

The ladies were quite cheered by this exhibition of interest in Paul, who had not been, they felt, so good or submissive to his father as it was right for a young man to be. "He is letting his heart speak at last," Lady Markham said when she was alone with her daughter; "he is longing to see his boy; and oh, Alice! so am I."

"May I write to him," cried Alice, eagerly, "and tell him he is to come home?"

They talked this over all the afternoon. Paul had not listened to any of their previous entreaties, but perhaps now, if he were told how his father had melted, if he knew how everybody was longing for him! There were two letters written that afternoon, full of tenderness, full of entreaties. "If your reading is so important I will not say a word, you shall go back, you shall be left quite free; but oh, my dearest boy! surely you can spare us a week or two," Lady Markham wrote. Their spirits rose after these letters had been despatched. It did not seem possible that Paul could turn a deaf ear to such entreaties; and by this time surely he, too, must be longing for home. The future had not seemed so bright to them since first these discords began. Now, surely, if Paul would but respond as became an affectionate son, everything would be right.

Markham Chase was situated in one of those districts where the post comes in at night—a very bad thing, as is well known for the digestion, and a great enemy to sleep and comfort. No one, however, had

the philosophy to do without his or her letters on that account. The ladies naturally never took it in consideration at all, and Sir William's official correspondence did not affect his nerves. Lady Markham and her daughter came early into the drawing-room that evening, while it was still daylight, though evening was advancing rapidly. The children, who felt severely the loss of Colonel Lenny and his stories, and were low spirited and out of temper in consequence, went soon to bed. Lady Markham retired into her favourite room—the large recess which made a sort of transept to the great drawing-room. It was filled at the further end by a large Elizabethan window, the upper part of which was composed of quarries of old painted glass in soft tints of greenish white and yellow; and which caught the very last rays of daylight—the lingering glories of the west. Soft mossy velvet curtains framed in, but did not shade the window, for Lady Markham was fond of light—and shrouded the entrance dividing this from the great drawing-room beyond. The fire-place all glimmering with tiles below and bits of mirror above, with shelves of delicate china and pet ornaments, filled the great part of one side, while the other was

clothed with bookcases below and pictures above, closely set. One of Raphael's early Madonnas (or a copy—there was no certainty on the subject, Lady Markham holding to its authenticity with more fervour than any other article of faith, but disinterested critics holding the latter opinion) presided over the whole; and there were some pretty landscapes, and a great many portraits—the true household gods of its mistress. There she had seated herself in the soft waning light of the evening. Alice just outside the velvet curtains was playing softly, now an old stately minuet, now an old-fashioned, quaint gavotte, now a snatch of a languid, dreamy valse—music which did not mean much, but which breathed echoes of soft pleasures past into the quiet. The soft summer twilight fading slowly out of the great window, the cool breathing of the dews and night air from the garden, the dreamy music—all lulled the mind to rest. Lady Markham made not even a pretence at occupation. What was she thinking of? When a woman has her boys out in the world—those strange, unknown, yet so familiar creatures whom she knows by heart yet knows nothing of, who have dipped into a thousand things incompre-

hensible to her, filling her with vague fears and aches of anxiety—of what but of them is she likely to be thinking? She was groping vaguely after her Paul in strange places which her imagination scarcely took in. When the other boys were away they too had their share in her thoughts; but they were still in the age of innocence at school, not young men abroad in the world. Where was he now? She tried to figure to herself a scene of youthful gaiety—one of the college parties she had read of in novels. She was the more bold to think of this, as she felt that her appeal to Paul just despatched would surely detach him, for a time at least, from all such noisy scenes. Lady Markham's imagination was not her strong point. She was floating vaguely in a maze of fancies rather than forming for herself any definite picture, when Brown came into the room with the letters. The music stopped instantly, and Alice, rushing at them, uttered a tremulous cry which made the mother at once aware what had happened. Only Paul could have called forth that cry of trembling satisfaction, delight, and alarm. Lady Markham got up at once and held out her hands for the letters, while Alice ran to light the

candles. "I can see, I can see," Lady Markham said. The mere fact that the letter was Paul's made it more or less luminous in itself and helped the fading light.

Sir William, seated in his library by himself, had been thinking, with a difference, much the same thoughts. With a compunction and compassion indescribable, he had been thinking of his son. Paul, with all his foolish democratical notions, was yet the most aristocratic, the most imperious of young men, knowing nothing of the evils he was so ready to take upon him, generous in giving, but to whom it would be bitterness itself to receive. Would Paul ever turn upon him, upbraid him, curse him? A shiver came over his father at the thought—and along with this a horrible sense of the position in which this haughty young heir would find himself, if—— How was it that such a possibility had altogether escaped his mind? He could not tell: he did not know how to answer himself. Forty years is a large slice out of a man's life. Even had it been some one fully known and loved, it would be unlikely that you should think of him with any persistency of reference after a separation of forty years—and a child, an infant, a thing

with no personality at all! But still, he asked himself, had he never thought when Paul was born of the former time, far away in the morning haze of youth, when a young mother and a child had called forth his interest? Yes, he had thought of it; he had thought with alarm of what had happened then; he had been more anxious about his young wife than young husbands usually are—but no more. It had never occurred to him that his child had anything to do with the other. Strange blindness in a man so accurate! He said to himself, "It will come to nothing; it will be arranged; all will be well:" but in the same breath he said, "Poor Paul! God help him! What would happen to Paul, if——"

He had not been able to do anything all day for thinking of this: he had kept his blue-book before him, but he had made nothing of it. Sir William, whose understood creed it was that public affairs went before everything, could pay no attention to these public affairs. When the letters came in, in the evening, he received them languidly, not feeling that there was anything there which could interest him so much as his own thoughts. When he saw Paul's handwriting

an unusual stir arose in his elderly bosom. But he put it down, and took up a letter from his chief, which would be no doubt of far more importance to the country, with a last attempt to conquer himself. But the words of his chief's letter had no sense to him; he could not understand what there was to be so anxious about. Smith's candidature for Bannockshire—what did it matter? He made a rapid and novel reflection to himself about the trifling character of the incidents which people made so much of; then laid down the solemn sheet with its coronet, and took up the letter of his boy.

A few minutes after he walked into his wife's sitting-room, the letter open in his hand. Lady Markham was seated close to the great window against the dying light, with a candle flaring melancholy on a table beside her, reading her letter. Alice, behind her, read it too, over her mother's shoulder: surprise and trouble were on their faces. Alice had begun to cry. Lady Markham in her wonder and distress, was repeating a few words here and there aloud. "I can no longer hope for anything in this country of prejudice." "Going away to a new world." They were both so

absorbed that they did not hear Sir William's entrance till he suddenly appeared, holding out his letter. "What is the meaning," he asked, "of this, Isabel? What is the meaning of it?" The indignation of the head of the house, which seemed to be directed against themselves, brought the two ladies with a sudden shock out of their own private dismay, and gave them a new part to play. Their hearts still quivering with the sudden blow which Paul's disclosure had given them, they still turned in a moment into apologists and defenders of Paul.

"What is it?—from Paul, William? he has written to you *too*," said Lady Markham, with trembling lips.

"What does it mean?" cried Sir William. "He is going off, he says—away—to Australia or New Zealand, or somewhere. What does it mean? No doubt he takes you into his confidence. If you have known of this intention long you ought to have let me know."

"I am as much overwhelmed as you can be, William. I have just got a letter." Lady Markham stopped, her lips trembling. "Oh, Paul, my boy! He cannot

mean it," she said. "It must be some fancy of the moment. At his age everything is exaggerated. William, William, something must be done. We must go to him and save him."

"Save him! from what are we to save him?" Sir William began to pace up and down with impatience and perplexity. He was not so angry (they thought) as they had feared. He was anxious, unhappy, as they were, though querulous too. "What is the meaning of it? Follies like this do not spring up all at once. You must have seen it coming on. You must know what it means. What has he been writing to you about lately? Is there—any woman——?"

"William!" cried his wife.

"Well!—Alice, run away; we can discuss this better without you.—Well! it need not be anything criminal or vicious, though of course that is what at once you imagine it to be. Has he spoken of any one? Has he ever——No, he would not do that. He is a fool," cried the anxious father; "he is capable of any nonsense. But it need not necessarily be anything that is vicious —from your point of view."

Alice had not gone away. She shrank behind her

mother into the dim corner, yet to her own consciousness stood confronting her brother's accuser with a resolute countenance, from which the colour had all gone out. Her blue eyes were open wide with horror yet denial. Whatever Paul might have done she was ready to defend him; although the possibility of any such wrongdoing went through her like a sword of fire. The light of the candle flickered upon her faintly, showing scarcely anything but her attitude, partially relieved against the lightness of the window—a slim, straight, indignant figure drawn up and set in defence.

"He has not written often lately," said Lady Markham, faltering; "but oh, William, it is not possible; he is not capable——"

"What do you know about it?" cried Sir William, almost roughly. "How can you tell what he is capable of? A young man will go from a house like this, from his mother's side, and will find pleasure—actual pleasure—in the society of creatures bred upon the streets; in their noisy talk, in their bad manners, in all that is most unlike you. God knows how it is; but so it is. Paul may be no better than the rest. Alice, I tell you, run away."

Lady Markham grew red and then deadly pale. She rose trembling to her feet. "Can we go to-night? Can we go at once?" she cried. "Oh, William, let us not lose an hour!"

"You know as well as I do there is no train after eight o'clock. Compose yourself," said Sir William. "Nothing more than what has already happened can happen to him to-night."

"We might get the express at Bluntwood—the train papa generally goes by—if we were to start at once," cried Alice, with her hand on the bell, her eyes turning from her father to her mother. The eager women on each side of him made the greatest contrast to the head of the house. Had Paul been dying instead of simply in a problematical danger, Sir William Markham would not have consented to leave his home in this headlong way, or take any step upon which he had not reflected. He waved his hand impatiently.

"You had much better go to bed," he said, "and don't worry yourself about a matter in which for the present none of us can do anything. I will go to-morrow. Sit down, Alice! Do you think Paul would thank you if you arrived breathless in the middle of the

night? Try to look at the matter coolly. Excitement never does any good. I will go and see if he will listen to reason—to-morrow.

To-morrow! It seemed to both mother and sister as if a thousand calamities, too terrible to think of, might be happening, might have happened, before to-morrow; and on the other hand, how, they asked each other with a pitiful interchange of looks, were they themselves to live through the night? No feeling of this description moved Sir William. He was very much disturbed and annoyed, but certainly it would do no good to any one were he to render himself unfit for action by foolish anxiety. Nor did he feel any of that vague horror of apprehension which filled their minds. He was a great deal more angry and much less alarmed about his son's well-being. On the other hand, he was less sanguine; for he did not hope that Paul would listen to reason, as they hoped that by their entreaties, by their tears, by the sight of the misery his resolution would bring them, Paul might relent and give way. After a while Sir William returned to his library and to his blue-books, and the official letter which he had only half-read, which he had suffered himself to be so much

influenced by parental feeling as to leave in the middle; and though he paused now and then to frown and sigh, and give a thought aside to the troubles of paternity, yet he went on with his work, and gave all the attention that was necessary to the public business, until his usual hour for going to bed.

Lady Markham and Alice spent their evening in a very different way; they read their letter over twenty times at least; they found new meanings in every sentence of it. Hidden things seemed to be brought out, emotions, penitences, relentings, by every new perusal. Sometimes these discoveries plunged them into deeper trouble—sometimes raised them to sudden hope. How little Paul was conscious of the subtle shades of meaning they attributed to him! They were like commentators in all ages; they found a thousand ideas he had never dreamed of lurking in every line of their author; and with all these different readings in their heads spent a sleepless night.

CHAPTER X.

PAUL MARKHAM was not in his rooms. The porter at the college gate looked curiously upon the party of people who asked after him. It was not the time of year when college authorities interfere with undergraduates; neither was a virtuous young man "staying up to read" likely to call forth their censures. The porter could not give them any information as to where to find Paul; the party (he thought) looked anxious, just as he had seen people look whose son had got into trouble: the father with wrinkles in his forehead, but an air of business and anxious determination to look as if there was nothing particular in it—nothing but an ordinary visit; the mother with a redness about her eyes, but a smile, very courteous, even conciliatory, to the porter himself, and so sorry to give him trouble; and an eager young sister

clinging to the mother, looking anxiously about, staring at every figure she saw approaching.

"Here's a gentleman, sir, as can tell you, if any one can," the porter said. All three turned round simultaneously to look at the person thus indicated. He was a young man of not very distinguished appearance, who came carelessly across the quadrangle in a rough coloured suit, with a pipe in his mouth. He came along swinging his cane, smoking his pipe, not thinking of what awaited him. However, those three pairs of eyes affected him unawares. He looked up and saw the little group, and instinctively withdrew his pipe from his mouth. He had just slipped it quickly into the pocket of his loose jacket, and was trying to steal through the party under cover of a messenger who was passing, when Sir William stepped forward and addressed him—

"This man tells me," he said, "that you are a friend of my son, Paul Markham, and can perhaps give us some information where to find him."

While the father spoke, the two ladies looked at the young man with eyes half-investigating, half-imploring. He felt that they were making notes of his rough

clothes, his pipe, which alas! they had seen going into his pocket, and of a general aspect which was not very decorous, and forming opinions unfavourable, not only to himself, but to Paul; while, at the same time, they were entreating him with soft looks to tell them where Paul was, and somehow—they could not tell how—to reassure them on his account.

Young Fairfax, who was not perhaps a very elevated member of society in general, was of a sympathetic nature at least. He was greatly embarrassed by their looks, and confused between the two sides, giving the attention of his eyes to the ladies on the one hand, and that of his ears to Sir William on the other. He felt himself blush at the thought of his own unsatisfactory appearance—his worst clothes (for who expected to meet ladies *in August?*) and the pipe, which both literally and metaphorically burnt his pocket. Lady Markham and Alice took the redness which overspread the stranger's face, not as referring to the state of his own appearance (though they were keenly sensible of that), but as a sign that he had nothing that was comforting or satisfactory to say of Paul—and their hearts sank.

Young Fairfax coughed and cleared his throat.

"Markham?" he said. "I will go and see if he is in his rooms."

"He is not in his rooms," they said all together, a fact which the other knew very well.

When Fairfax found this little expedient of his to gain time did not answer, he ventured on a bolder step. "If you will go to Markham's rooms," he said, "I think I can find him for you. I know where he will be; that is to say I know two or three men's rooms—where he is very likely to be."

"Could not we go with this gentleman?" said Lady Markham, looking at him, though it was to her husband she spoke—and Alice looked at him too with a supplicating look which went to the young good-for-nothing's heart. He gave the ladies a look in return which he felt was apologetic, and yet full of a protest and appeal to their sense of justice. What can I do? I cannot make him all that you wish him to be; was what he felt his look said; and this was really the sentiment in his mind, though he would have laughed at himself for it. They understood him well enough, and their hearts sank a little too.

"Impossible!" said Sir William, "how could you go to—a man's rooms? perhaps into the midst of a—— party" he was going to have said riotous party, but forbore for the sake of the girl. "No, you had better take this—young gentleman's advice—"

"My name is Fairfax," said the youth, taking off his hat. He blushed again, having kept that engaging weakness, though it is not by any means sure that he had kept the modest grace of which it is the sign: and a smile crept about his lips. The hearts of the two women rose a little. If things had been very bad with Paul he would not, they reasoned, have had the heart to smile.

"Mr. Fairfax's advice," said Sir William; "go to Paul's room and wait there, and I will go with Mr. Fairfax to find him. That is much the best thing to do."

"I may have to run about to one place and another," said the young man alarmed; "it is a pity to give you so much trouble. Would not you, sir, wait with the ladies? I promise you to find him with as little delay—"

"I will go with you," said Sir William, in his cold

way, which admitted of no appeal; "you know the way, Isabel, to Paul's rooms." And thus they parted, the young man looking at the ladies again with a kind of dismayed protest: can I help it? He was very much dismayed to have Sir William with him. Fairfax had not much doubt as to where Paul was, and he did not think it was a place which would please his father. He felt already that he had established an understanding with the others which justified his glance of dismay. Lady Markham and her daughter turned very reluctantly away. They went across the quadrangle with drooping heads. Everything lay vacant in the sunshine, no cheerful bustle about, the windows all black, no voices, no footsteps, no lounging figures under the trees. Slowly they went across the light with their heads close together. "He knows where Paul is," said Lady Markham, with a sigh. "But he did not want papa to go," said Alice with another. They crept up the silent staircase and went into the vacant room, and sat down timidly, not venturing to look at anything. They were afraid of seeing something, even a book, which in Paul's absence would betray Paul. His mother glanced furtively, pitifully about her. She

was more bound by honour here in her son's room, more determined to make no discoveries, than if her boy had been her enemy; and who can tell how the consciousness of this sank like a stone into her heart! A few years ago everything would have been so lightly reviewed, so gaily discussed—but now! The fringes of her cloak swept some papers off a side-table, and she let them lie, not venturing to touch them. Paul should not suppose that his mother had come to pry into his secrets. God forbid! He should be allowed to explain himself, to say the best he could for himself.

"Mr. Fairfax looked as if he knew everything. Did not you think so, mamma?"

"Oh, my darling, what can I say? He looked, I think, as if he were fond of Paul."

"That I am sure he did. He was not very nice looking, nor well dressed; but these young men are very careless, are they not, when they are living alone?"

"I should not think anything of that, dear," said Lady Markham, decidedly; "I think, too, though he was careless of his appearance, that he had an innocent look. He met your eye; there was nothing

down-looking about him; and he blushed; that is always a good sign, and smiled at me, like a boy who has got a mother."

"And he did not look at all frightened to see us, as he would have done had there been anything very wrong. I think he was rather pleased—it was papa he was afraid of. Now it is clear that if Paul had been—wicked, as papa said—(oh, Paul, Paul, I beg your pardon dear, I never thought it!)—it would have been you and me, mamma, don't you think, that they would have been afraid of? They could not have borne to look us in the face if *that* had been true; whereas," said Alice, in a tingle of logic, the tears starting into her eyes, "it was papa Mr. Fairfax was afraid of, not you or me."

"That is true," said Lady Markham, brightening slowly, but she did not take all the comfort from this potent argument that Alice expected. "Unless they are very intimate, he is not likely to know all that Paul is doing," she said, shaking her head. Paul's room was far from orderly. Once upon a time he had been very fond of knick-knacks, and had cultivated china and hung plates about the walls. All that was

gone now. Lady Markham looked at the bareness of the room with a pang. Would he have neglected it so if everything had been going well with him? Perhaps had it been much decorated she would have asked herself whether these meritricious ornaments did not indicate a mind given up to frivolity; but at this moment it seemed a curious and significant fact that the ornaments had all disappeared from his walls.

In the meantime young Fairfax was hurrying Sir William at a pace which scarcely befitted his dignity, or his years, along the streets. Probably the young man forgot that his companion was likely to suffer from this rapid progress; and when he remembered, he was not without hope of tiring the angry (as he supposed) father. But Sir William was a statesman and trained to exertion. He puffed a little and got very hot, but he did not flinch. Fairfax it was evident knew very well where he was going. He made a cunning attempt to deceive his companion by pretending to pause and wonder at the first corner; then he smote his thigh, and declared that of course he knew where Paul would be at this hour—not in any man's

lodgings—with the man who was teaching him—what was it? He could not recollect what it was—wood-carving, or something of that sort. "It is a good way off; would it not be better to let me fetch him?" he said, making a last attempt. "Let us get a cab," said Sir William. "Oh, it is not so far as that," said his guide, with a blush. Sir William had a half-suspicion that he was being led round and round about to make him think the way longer than it really was; but that part of Oxford had changed since his time, and he was not quite sure of the way. At last, however, when no further delay was possible, he found himself at the door of a little grimy house, the ground floor of which seemed to be occupied as some kind of workshop, where a man sat working. The place smelt of varnish and the window was full of small picture-frames, gilt and ungilt, and other very simple articles, carved work-boxes and book-shelves. "Oh, Spears! has Markham been here?" the young man cried with a certain relief in his tone, evidently pleased not to see the person of whom he was in search. The workman looked up from his work. He was busy with a glue-pot, and the varnish which smelt so badly. He did not rise from

his bench in honour of the gentleman, or remove his cap from his head. He said shortly, but in a voice of unusual sweetness and refinement—

"He is here still. He has gone up stairs, to wash his hands I suppose."

"Ah!" said Fairfax. It was not a syllable, it was a sigh. He had hoped to have escaped easily; but it was not to be so. He went to the foot of the stairs, which led directly out of the workshop. "Markham!" he cried, "are you there? Come down at once; you are wanted." How could he throw special significance into his voice? It sounded to himself just as careless as usual, though he had meant to make it very serious. "Markham, I say, there's some one wants you—important! Come at once!" he added, going up a few steps.

Sir William stood stiffly down below, watching with the utmost attention, while the workman upon his bench eyed him with suspicious eyes.

Then Paul's voice came still more lightly from above, striking strangely upon the ear of his father, who had never heard that tone in it before.

"Confound you, what's the hurry?" Paul said. "If

it's a dun you ought to know better than to bring him here. I'll come when I'm ready."

"Markham! I tell you it's of the first importance," said the young man, going a step or two higher, but still quite audible to Sir William.

Then there came a burst of laughter from above, seconded by what sounded to Sir William's suspicious ears like feminine voices.

"Is it the Vice-Chancellor?" said Paul; "or the Provost? Say the word, and I'll get out over the leads or through the window—"

The next moment he appeared, rubbing his hands in a towel, and without his coat, with a face more full of laughter than, Sir William thought, he had ever seen it before; and this time he felt certain that he heard women laughing up stairs. He was standing with his back to the light, and his son did not see him for the moment.

Paul came down stairs, gradually emerging, always rubbing his hands. He called out—

"Who is it, Spears? What is this fellow making a fuss about?"

"I cannot tell who it is," said the workman; "it is

some one who has come into my house without taking the trouble to notice me. I presume therefore that it must be what is called a gentleman."

The sound of the man's voice was so pleasant that Sir William did not at first realise the offence in it; and at that moment he was too much absorbed in watching the changes of his son's countenance to think of anything else.

Paul emerged from the shadow of the staircase, which was like a ladder, his face full of amusement and brightness, entirely at his ease, and familiar with all about him. His hat was on and his coat was off, but that evidently made no difference; neither did he cease to dry his hands with the towel as he came leisurely down stairs. It was clear that he expected no one whose appearance could require any more regard to the decorum of formal life.

When he first caught sight of his father a cloud came over him. Sir William's face was not visible, but Sir William's figure and voice were scarcely to be mistaken. The father looked on while the first shadow of fear came over his son's face; then saw it lighten with a desperate effort not to believe what was too apparent;

then darken suddenly and completely with the sense of discovery and of the fate which had overtaken him. To see your child's bright countenance cloud over at the sight of you, to see the struggle of hope that this may not be you, and despair to find that it is you, what mortal parent can bear this unmoved? It would have half killed Lady Markham.

Sir William was of tougher stuff, and less entirely moved by the affections; but yet he felt it. He saw the same line come into his son's forehead which all the family knew so well in his own, and that expression of angry displeasure, impatience and gloom, came over his face. This made him too angry, in spite of himself. He said, harshly—

"Yes, Paul, it is I. I am the last person you expected, or evidently wished to see here."

Paul came down the remaining steps, the very sound of his foot changing; he threw away his towel and took off his hat, and assumed an air of punctilious politeness.

"I do not deny that I am much surprised to see you, sir," he said, darting a glance aside of annoyed reproach at Fairfax. He had flushed a gloomy red, of shame and annoyance, feeling his very shirt-sleeves to be

evidence against him—and looked round for his coat with an inclination to be angry with everybody.

"I had just gone to wash my hands after my work," he said, with a confused apology. Confronted thus suddenly with his father in all the solemnity of authority and parental displeasure, how could he help feeling himself at a disadvantage? He forgot everything but that his father had found him in circumstances which to him would seem equivocal, perhaps disgraceful; but he was not allowed to forget.

"If you require to apologise, Markham, for being found in my shop or my house, you had better not return here," said the master of the place, eyeing him over his shoulder from his bench, "any more."

"I beg your pardon, Spears. My father—does not think with me. It is by no will of mine that he has come here——"

"If you can't be civil, and introduce him civilly—and if he can't be civil, and doesn't know how to treat a man in his own house," said Spears, busy with his glue-pot, "you had better take him away."

"This is the man you brought to my house—in my absence," said Sir William, "imposing upon your mother.

I suppose the well-known"—(he was going to say demagogue, but paused, after looking at the person in question)—"orator and leader of Trades Unions——"

"Yes, that is I," said the master of the shop. "I am quite ready to answer any question on my own account. But I beg your pardon, whoever you may be. Markham did not impose upon his mother, nor did I. He introduced me as his friend, and I lost no time in telling the lady that I was a working man. Lady Markham has the manners of a queen. She was perfectly polite to me, as I hope I am capable of being to any one who comes in the same way into my house."

Sir William gave his son's friend another look. He had no desire to make a personal enemy of this demagogue. A public man must think of expediency in public matters, even where his own affections are concerned.

"You will excuse me," he said, coldly. "My business is with my son. I should not have intruded myself into your house had I known it. Paul, your mother is at your rooms, waiting for you. I must ask you to come there with me at once."

Paul's countenance fell still more.

"My mother!—here!"

"Good morning," said Sir William, taking off his hat with much solemnity. "I am sorry to have invaded Mr. Spears's privacy even for a moment. I will wait for you, Paul, outside."

The workman got up and took off his cap, bowing ceremoniously in answer to Sir William's salutation. He had not moved till his name was mentioned.

"There!" he cried, with comical discomfiture, "dash. the little aristocrat! He has the last word—that's the worst, or the best of them. They have their senses always about them. No flurry—no feeling. Well, Paul, aren't you going? Be off with you and explain, like a good boy, to your mamma and your papa."

"What is it all about?" said a girl's voice from the top of the stairs; and first one, then another, fair, curly, somewhat unkempt head appeared peeping down upon the group below. "And who is the little old gentleman? Father, may we come down stairs?"

"Go back to your work, on the instant," said Spears; "I want no girls here. Well, Markham, why don't you go? Is your father to wait for you all day—and I too?"

"I shall go when I am ready," said Paul, gloomily.

He took a long time to put on that coat. He was not of a temper to be cowed or frightened, and for a moment he was undecided whether to defy his father directly and deny all jurisdiction or control on his part, or to take the more difficult part of extending to Sir William that courtesy which his teacher had instructed him was due from all men to each other—from rebellious sons to fathers as well as in every other relation of life—hearing what he had to say with politeness as he would have heard any other opponent in argument. But the fact is that an argument between father and son on their rociprocal duties is a thing more difficult to maintain with perfect temper and politeness than any argument that ever took place in the Union or perhaps in Parliament itself. And Paul was bitterly angry that his father should have invaded this place, and dismayed to hear that his mother had come, and that he should have her entreaties to meet. He had not anticipated anything of the kind, strangely enough. He had expected letters of all kinds—angry, reproachful, entreating—but it had not occurred to him that his father would come in person, much less any other of the family. He was dismayed and he was angry; his

heart failed him in spite of all his courage. Pride and temper forbade him to run away, yet he would have escaped if he could. He took a long time to put on his coat; he said nothing to either of the two men that stood by, and pushed Fairfax aside when he tried to help him. Spears had given up his work altogether, and stood watching his pupil with a smile upon his face.

"When does that fellow mean to go?" he said. "What is he waiting for? I like the looks of the little old gentleman, as the girls call him. There's stuff in that man. But for him and such as him the people would have had their rights long ago; but I respect the man for all that. Markham, what do you mean by keeping him kicking his heels outside my shop in the sun? That is not the respect due from one man to another. He's an older man than you are, and merits more consideration. What are you frightened for, man alive? Can't you go?"

"Frightened!" cried Paul, with an indignant curl of his lip.

"Yes, frightened, nothing else; or you wouldn't take so long a time about going. Ah, that's driven him out at last! Do you know those people,

Fairfax, or how did you come to bring the father here?"

"I know them? I am not half grand enough. How should I know a man who is a Right Honourable? I met them by chance. Spears, you may say what you like, but even a little rank, however it may go against reason, has an effect—"

"Do you think I need you to tell me that? If it hadn't an effect what would be the use of all we're doing? 'Why stand I in peril every day?' as that fine democrat Paul says somewhere. To be sure there's something in it. I once lived three days in that man's house. I didn't know he was absent, as he says he was. I should have liked to have stood up to him and stated my way of thinking, and seen what he had to say for himself. It was the first sneaking thing I ever knew in Markham to take me there while his father was away. Life goes on wheels in those houses," said Spears, taking his seat again upon his bench. "It was all one could do after a day or two to keep one's moral consciousness awake. A footman waited upon me hand and foot, and I never spoke to him—not as I ought to have done—about the unnatural folly of his position,

till the last day. I couldn't do it; a fortnight in that place would have demoralised even me. The mother—ah, there it is! We can't build up women like that. I don't know how you're to do it without their conditions. We have good women, and brave women, and pure women, but nothing like that. You have to see it," said Spears, shaking his head, "even to know what it is."

"So long as it's only a fine lady—" said the young man.

"Don't talk of what you don't understand," said the other. "I'd have the best of everything in my Republic. I'd have that little old man's pluck and self-command; and the lady—I don't see my way to anything like the lady."

"I have always told you, Spears, that the old society which you condemn has everything that is good in it, if you would have patience and—"

"*You* have always told me!" said Spears in his melodious voice.

He returned to his work without further argument, as if this were enough reply. He was finishing a number of little carved frames, of which his window

was full. There was a bill in the window on which "Selling off" was printed in large letters. The shop was full of wood and bits of carving all done up in bundles, and everything about showed marks of an approaching departure or breaking-up. The master of the house put on his cap again and gave himself up to his work. It was not of a kind which impressed the spectator. But the man who worked was not commonplace in appearance. He was not much taller than Sir William, but had a large massive head, covered with a crop of dusky hair. The softness of his eyes corresponded with that of his voice, but the lines of the face were not soft. He took no further notice of Fairfax, who, for his part, took his neglect quite calmly. The young man took his pipe out of his pocket, where he had put it stealthily when he first caught sight of the ladies, for one moment paused, and looked at it with a look of half-comic half-serious uncertainty. Should he keep it as a memento of that interview? He looked at it again and laughed, then pulled out of another pocket a little box of matches and lighted his pipe. He, like Paul, was quite familiar and at his ease in the workman's shop.

CHAPTER XI.

"YOU have kept me a long time waiting," said Sir William. "I should have thought elaborate leave-takings unnecessary in a place where you seem so much at home."

"I took no leave," said Paul; "it was quite unnecessary. I shall see Spears again to-night."

Sir William turned round upon his son with quick impatience; then paused. This was not a case to be treated hastily, and patience was the best. "You and I differ in a great many points," he said; "therefore it is not wonderful perhaps that I should think you have made a curious choice of a trade to learn: for I suppose you are by way of learning a trade. Don't you think a certain amount of civilisation is necessary before picture-frames will become remunerative? I don't think you could live by them in the bush."

Paul coloured high with that acute sense of being open to ridicule which is so terrible to youth. "Spears is selling off his stock," he said. "I do not know if it is a sign of high civilisation, but he sells his picture-frames and lives by them. Most men of genius have been reduced to make their livelihood by some inferior branch of their work."

"And what then do you call his highest work?" Sir William asked carelessly. Paul, astonished, but willing to believe that his father had taken an interest in Spears and that all was about to go as he wished, fell into the trap, as any other unsuspicious nature would have done.

"His carvings are wonderful," he said, with all the fervour of enthusiasm. "When he has a congenial subject he is equal to Gibbons or any one. He ought to have been a great sculptor. If you saw some of the things he has done you would see what bitter satire it is that *he* should live by those wretched little picture-frames."

"Is it so, indeed?" said Sir William. "Then it is the higher branch of wood-carving and not picture-frames that you are learning, I suppose? Do

you mean then to carry high art, Paul, into the bush?"

"I cannot see what this has to do with the bush, sir," said Paul, impatiently. "One must live there by one's hands, and to know how to use them in any special way cannot be a disadvantage in any other way. That is Spears's view of the subject, and mine too."

"I doubt if wood-carving will help you much in felling trees or making them into huts," said Sir William, with a great air of candour. "What do you suppose the advantage is likely to be of changing from a state of society where everything that is beautiful has its value, to one where you will live by your hands, as you say, and where the highest skill will only not do you any harm? I should like to know the reasoning by which you have arrived at your present convictions —the ideas expressed in the letter I got last night."

"You have received my letter then?" Paul said, with dignity. "You know what my settled determination is. I hope you do not mean, and that my mother does not mean, to attempt to turn me from a plan which I have not decided on without great thought."

"I don't know what your mother may mean to do,

my boy," said Sir William, quietly. "She will act according to her own standards of duty, not mine; but I know what I intend myself, and the first thing is to understand your reasons for the extraordinary step you propose. You, the heir of a fine property——" Sir William made a stumble before the word *heir*, which, notwithstanding that Paul was about to abjure everything, led him to make a rapid calculation of his father's power in this matter. The Markham property was not all entailed. Did the father mean to disinherit his lawful successor? Paul felt a flush of indignation go over him, though he was about to declare his intention of giving up all.

"The heir of a fine property," said Sir William, "and an influential position. At this moment, young as you are, you might make a start in public life, and have a hand in the government of your country, which is as high an ambition as a man can entertain. How have you managed to persuade yourself that to go out into a half savage country and encounter the first difficulties of savage life is better or more honourable than this? To live by your hands instead of your head," he continued, growing warm, "to surround

yourself with beggarly elements of living instead of the highest developments of civilisation—to make yourself of no more account than any ploughboy——"

Here Paul felt himself touch the ground. There had stolen over him a chill of alarm as to how he was to answer such a question, but this last clause brought him back to the superficial polemics with which he was familiar enough. "Why should I be of more account than any ploughboy?" he said; "that is the whole question. Why is there this immense gulf between the ploughboy and me? Is he less a man than I am? Are not my advantages a shame to me in the face of manhood? What right have I to humiliate him for my advancement?"

"What right have you to be a fool?" said Sir William, bitterly. "I don't know: your mother is not a fool, though she is not clever. If your ploughboy had been educated as you have been, your argument might have had some show of reason. Do you mean to tell me that education is nothing—that a lad from the fields ought to be of as much use in the world as you are? This is to despise not only rank, which I know is your favourite type of injustice, but

breeding, culture, everything you have acquired by your work. How do you justify yourself in throwing away *that?* There is no question of humiliating the ploughboy; the ploughboy will be of ten times as much use as you are in the bush."

This view of the question was not pleasant to Paul. He held himself up with great stateliness, and did not deign to look at his father. "That remains to be seen, sir," he said.

"What remains to be seen?—that a man brought up to farming will make a better farmer than you—or your friend the wood-carver? Suppose we consider the question from his point of view," said Sir William. "He is a skilled workman, you tell me."

"I said a man of genius."

"All the better for my argument. Your man of genius," Sir William went on with a barely perceptible smile, "may be—appreciated, let us say, in a country like this, where art is known: but who will care for his art where he is going?"

"More than here," cried Paul hotly, interrupting his father. "Here, because he has no money, nor position to make him known, and no impudence to push him

into favour, his beautiful work is taken no notice of, and he lives by making picture-frames. Ploughing and digging is better than that. The earth at least is grateful for what is done for her."

"Not always," said Sir William. "I thought you had heard enough about farming to know better. However, the advantage of emigrating to your—friend, will be, not the gain of anything, but the giving up of his work, and the sacrifice of what you call his genius. No, I do not scoff at his genius. I know nothing about it. I take it on your word. Your man of genius will throw away his chief distinction on your own showing; and *you* will throw away what as yet are your only distinctions, the position you derive from your ancestors, the education which you have got (partially) by your own exertions —for what? to attempt to do clumsily what two ploughmen could do much better than you.——Ah! who is that?"

Paul's eye had been caught some moments before by a lady coming towards them, at sight of whom a sudden flush came over his face. A lady! was she a lady? She was dressed very simply in a black alpaca

gown, the long plain lines of which harmonised and gave elegance to a tall, well-developed figure. The dress was well made and graceful, such as any lady might have worn; but the little hat upon the young woman's head was doubtful. Even Sir William, who looked somewhat anxiously at her, seeing the flush on his son's face, felt that it was doubtful. The faded brown velvet and scrubby little feather did not suit the rest of the dress. She walked well, as she came towards them, but when she perceived Paul and his companion, an air of embarrassment which was half fright came over her face. When Paul, all red and glowing with a mixture of feelings which Sir William could not fathom, took off his hat, she gave him an alarmed, inquiring look, blushed fiercely, and replied to his salutation with a hurried nod of her head, which made the question of her position more uncertain than ever. Still she was a handsome young woman: before she had seen Paul, Sir William himself had remarked her stately carriage and figure. "Who is that?" he repeated, suspicious, as a parent naturally is of a young man's unknown female friends, yet not unprepared to hear that it was somebody not unworthy to be known

by Sir William Markham's son; for it might well be that ladies in a learned community, fearless of misconception, were not always so particular as could be desired about their hats. He turned half round and gave a glance after her as she continued her way, which, as she had just done the same, was somewhat awkward. But Paul marched straight forward and took no notice. "Who is that?" Sir William repeated, sharply, determined this time to have a reply.

Paul's blush and discomfiture, and his marked and ceremonious recognition of the stranger, meant several things. They meant that he felt himself certain to be misconstrued, yet was too proud and too sincere to take any means of avoiding misconstruction; that he was annoyed by the encounter, alarmed by the new idea which his father would certainly take up in consequence; yet forced by this alarm and annoyance to show a more marked and excessive courtesy to the person (oh, had she but gone down another street and kept out of the way!) whose appearance plunged him into so much confusion, and would, he felt sure, complicate everything. Whether this sudden liveliness of consciousness did not mean that there was cause for

alarm is another matter. In the meantime all that Paul felt was that the girl's name once mentioned must add tenfold to the difficulty of his position.

"Who is it? It is Spears's eldest daughter," he said curtly, with a new and brilliant suffusion of colour over all his face.

"Oh!" was all Sir William said. What more was necessary? The young man felt, with a sensation of intolerable impatience that he was judged and condemned on the spot; but he could not protest against a conclusion which was not put into words. If he said anything, would not his guilt be considered doubly proved? Silence seemed his only policy; and no more was said. The discussion, which had been so serious, came to a dead stop. They walked on together without saying another word. Sir William, who had been so bent upon convincing his son, dropped his argument all at once. Paul did not look at him, but yet he was aware that the line on his forehead, the pucker that meant trouble, had deepened. The young man felt himself suddenly in the grip of despair. He felt himself judged, the question settled, everything changed. His whole conduct had assumed a new light in his

father's eyes, and it was a false light. Instead of respecting him as the logical if rash devotee of certain fixed principles, his father evidently concluded him to be the victim of a commonplace love affair. How was Paul to overcome this hasty and false judgment? Pride and prudence alike made it necessary that he should take no notice of it. He held his head higher in the air than ever, and walked on with a certain protestation and appeal against the injustice done him in every step he took. Sir William, on his side, dropped the argument with a mixture of despair and contempt. This was how it was—far more easy to understand than democratic ideas or communistic principles in the heir to a great property, here was an inducement which was plain to the meanest capacity: a fine, handsome, young woman! This was how it was! Sir William felt angry with himself for being duped, and for having really for a moment believed in the revolutionary sentiments which had been assumed (he had no doubt) in order to carry on this other pursuit. How foolish he had been to allow himself to be thus deceived! He gave up his argument with an abruptness which had impatience in it, and for the moment he could

not say anything to the boy who had thus succeeded in deceiving him, and added the feeling of shame for his own gullibility to that of anger. He had taken the trouble to attempt to convince him, to believe in an intellectual error, which, however exasperating, was not discreditable—and this was how it was!

What was to be done? It was all a mistake, but Paul could not say so, for his father did not condescend to make any accusation. Thus they walked on, fuming both with indignation and impatience. Now and then the young man eyed his father as if he could have taken him by the shoulders and shaken him, an undutiful form of the mutual exasperation. But Sir William was beyond this. What was the good? He would save his breath, he thought, for better purposes. Why should he talk himself hoarse while Paul laughed in his sleeve, not caring a straw for his arguments, meaning perhaps to laugh with the girl the next time they met over the ease with which his father had fallen into the snare. No, the fellow was not worthy of argument; he who was capable of masking an unworthy entanglement in this way. Let his mother try her hand upon him, the father thought, indignantly. She

might do something. A woman's tears and suffering are sometimes more effectual than reason. Sir William felt in his indignant disgust that to let his own beautiful and perfect wife enter the lists against this—hussy—yes, he was coarse in his vexation and distress—to let Lady Markham, the pride of the county, a woman whom it was a glory for a man to have won—to let her come down from her pedestal and humble herself to the pleadings and the tears of an anxious mother for a boy so little worthy of her as to be capable of such a connection—was a disgrace. But then he knew that was not how she would feel it. She would not think of her own dignity. And she would get it all out of him—women can; they do not disdain to return and return to the inquiry, to ask question after question; he would not be able to elude her examination. She would get it all out of him—how far it had gone, all about it. And then some strong step must be taken—something must be done—though, for the moment, he could not think what that something should be.

"I see them at last," said Alice from the window. "Oh, Paul! Papa is coming along quite quietly, not

scolding him. He is looking—not so angry. It is so natural to see them walking along—quite friendly. He is not scolding——"

"Oh, my dear! do not use such a word. Scold! we might scold Harry for climbing trees: but this is too serious, far too serious. How is my poor boy looking? Oh, I hope—I hope your papa has not been hard upon him. Men forget that they were once young and foolish too.'

"That was what I meant," said Alice. "I wonder—— they are not saying anything to each other, mamma."

Lady Markham had come to the window and was looking out too, over her child's shoulder, while the father and the son came along the street together, silent, separated by so much that was real, and something that was mistaken. The mother and daughter looked out together with but one heart. Not a breath had ever come between these two: they knew each other absolutely as no one else knew either. How could it be possible for them to misunderstand each other, to fall apart, to experience ever whatever might happen, the chill distance and severance which was between Sir William and his son? Lady Markham leant upon her child's shoulder.

"Not a word," she said; "not a word. Oh, my boy —my boy! Your father must have given it up; he must think there is nothing more to be said."

"But we will never give him up!" cried the girl. "How could we give him up? That is impossible. You could as soon give up *me!*"

"Not Paul, dear—never Paul: but the attempt to turn him from his own way. If he will not listen to your papa, Alice, what attention will he pay to me and you?"

Alice had no answer to make to this question, so intent was she, watching the expression of Paul's face as he crossed the street and disappeared under the gateway. She read in it, or thought she read in it, the conclusion of a stormy argument, the opposition to all that could be said to him, the determination to have his own way which was natural to Paul. And she too, with a sigh, recognised the futility of argument.

"He never would listen to papa," she said. "Papa proves you so in the wrong that you can't help going on with it. But he will not be cruel to you and me. Oh, when he knows it will break our hearts!" said Alice.

And then they were silent, hearing the steps come

up the staircase, turning two pairs of anxious eyes towards the door. Sir William came in first with a kind of stern introduction of the culprit.

"Here is Paul," he said. And then without any words, with a certain half-protest against their presence there at all, Paul submitted to be kissed by his mother and sister. They stood all together in a confused group for a moment, not knowing what to do or say, for it is difficult to rush into such a subject as this which was in all their thoughts in a company of four. Lady Markham held her boy by the hand, and looked at him pathetically with an unspoken appeal which made his heart ache, but felt that she must have him to herself, must be free of all spectators, before she could say all she had to say to him. "We had better go back to the inn and get some luncheon," said Sir William, breaking the spell with practical simplicity. He took his wife by the arm as they went down stairs. "The democracy is a pretence, and so is the fancy for a new world," he half-whispered, hissing into her ear. "It is a woman, as I thought."

Lady Markham started so that she almost lost her footing, and her parasol fell out of her hand.

"A woman?" she said, with a scarlet blush of trouble and shame. The first intrusion of this possibility daunts and terrifies a mother. A woman! what does that mean?—not the pure and delicate love with which all her thoughts would be in sympathy; something very different. The shock of separation between the boy, the heir of all her hopes, and a man half-known, who is no longer the child of her bosom, was almost more than she could bear. The cry she gave echoed low but bitter through the empty passages, where many such have echoed, audible or inaudible, before.

CHAPTER XII.

"I CANNOT move him one step from his resolution," said Lady Markham, pressing her hands over her eyes. They were aching with tears, with the sleeplessness of the past night, and that burning of anxiety which is worse than either. "He does not seem to care for what I say to him. His mind is made up, he declares. God help us! William, our eldest boy! And he used to be so good, so affectionate; but now he will not listen to a word I say."

They were in a room in the hotel, one of those bare and loveless rooms, denuded of everything that is warm or homelike, in which so often the bitterest scenes of the tragedy of our life take place. Lady Markham sat by the bare table; Sir William paced up and down between that and the door. Outside was

all the commotion of one of those big caravanserai which have become so common in England, echoes of noisy parties below, and a constant passage up and down of many feet. Trouble itself is made harder vulgarised by such contact. They were far too much absorbed to think of this, yet it made them a little more miserable unawares.

"Does he mean to marry her?" Sir William said.

"Oh!" cried Lady Markham, with a start as if she had received a blow; "I cannot think it is that. He will not allow it is that. It is, what he has always said, those new principles, those revolutionary ideas. I do not know what those men are worthy of who fill a boy's head with ridiculous theories, who teach him to despise his home."

"There are few who are much harmed by that. Isabel you must not be squeamish. You must forget you are a delicate lady, and speak plainly. I know what a young man is at Paul's age; they can hold the wildest theories without feeling any necessity to act upon them. It is a privilege of youth; but against that other kind of influence, they are helpless. And a woman like you does not understand the arts and the

wiles of these others. And he does not know how important it is," said Sir William, with a piteous tone in his voice; "he does not know——"

"He knows very well what he is to me and to you," Lady Markham said. In this particular she spoke with perfect calm, not fearing anything. "How should he not know? I have not hidden it from him that a great part of the happiness of my life hangs upon his. It seems ungrateful when one has so many blessings; but, oh! if *one* is in trouble, how can you be comforted though all the others are well? All your heart goes to the one. It is not that you love the others less, but *him* more—*him* more."

Sir William listened to this outburst without a word. They were bearing one burden between them, and yet each had a separate burden to bear. His heart would not be racked like hers by the desertion of the boy. He would not concentrate his whole soul on Paul because Paul was in trouble. But on the other hand, she was altogether unaware of what was in his thoughts, the doubtful position in which perhaps Paul might one day find himself; the need there was that his future should be within his own power to shape and

form. Also Sir William was aware of the disappointment and misery awaiting those who compromise their whole lives in one fit of foolish passion, and secure their own misery by a hasty marriage. These were the things he was thinking of. He saw his son waking up to the realities of a life very different from anything he had dreamed—and encumbered, he, so fastidious, so fantastical, with an uneducated woman and all the miseries of premature fatherhood. He groaned as this picture arose in his mind.

"Trouble," he said. "Yes, I suppose if a young man allows himself to get entangled, there is trouble involved in the breaking of the tie; but not half so much trouble as will come after, when his life is dragged down by association with a woman like that,—when he has a wretched home, a sordid life, a hundred miserable necessities to provide for,—you don't know what it is, you can't know what it is——"

He broke off abruptly. Would she perhaps suspect him—*him*, her husband—of having learned by experience what these horrors were?

But no such notion entered Lady Markham's mind. "No," she said; "I think you are wrong, William. I

think it is not *that* that is in my boy's mind. Oh, if one could know—if one could feel sure, that his heart was open as it used to be!"

Here she paused; and there was silence between the two, Sir William walking slowly up and down, with his head forward, and she sitting wistful gazing into the dark air, her eyes enlarged with anxiety and pain. They were such prosperous, happy people—so well off, so full of everything that can make life smooth and sweet, that the silence of their trouble was all the more impressive—so many things that harm poorer people would have passed innocently over them. They had such a stock (people might have said) of comfort and happiness to fall back upon. Nevertheless, this blow was so skilfully dealt, that it found out the weak places in their armour at once. To Sir William, indeed, it came as a sort of retribution! but what had his wife done to have her gladness thus stolen away from her? Fortunately those who suffer thus innocently are not those who ask such questions. She shed her tears silently, with many prayers for him who was the cause; but she did not complain of the pain which was laid upon her for no fault of hers. They had talked it all

over in every possible aspect, and now they were silent, saying nothing. What was there to say? They could do nothing, however they might toil or struggle. It was not in their power to change the circumstances. Even Sir William, though he was a man of much influence, a great personage, of importance in Europe—capable perhaps of stopping revolutions, of transforming the face of a country, and modifying the fortunes of a race by the advice he might give—was powerless before his boy. He could not turn Paul from the way he had chosen, nor persuade him to think differently. He might be able to destroy old corporations, to raise up new cities, to disestablish a church, or disturb an empire; but he could not make a change in the fancies of his son—whether it was in his opinions, or in his inclinations; that was altogether beyond his power. He sighed heavily as he went and came from the dull green-painted wall, to the dull table covered with a green cloth. The Queen might listen to him, and the country; but Paul would not listen. What wonder that his wife covering her hot eyes with her hand, and knowing that Paul's contumacy would steal all the pleasure out of her life, should feel herself powerless too?

There was one thing however that threw a little light on Lady Markham's thoughts—one person to whom she could still appeal. She did not speak of this to her husband, who might, she felt, oppose her purpose. But she told Alice, with whom her consultations were still more confidential and detailed.

"He was made welcome in our house," she said; "he was received as well as if he had been—any one else; and he is not a man without sense or feeling. If it is put before him as it ought, he will understand. I will go and speak to Mr. Spears——"

"About—his daughter?" Alice faltered.

Lady Markham did not make any reply. She would not say anything about the chief object of her mission. What she wanted above all things was to test the truthfulness of her son's assertion that this daughter was nothing to him. Sir William put no faith in these assertions; but Paul's mother believed in him with trembling, even while she feared, and longed for some indirect testimony which would convince her husband. She thought over it all night, while she lay awake listening to the clocks answering each other with hour after hour.

Paul had not responded to his mother's inquiries, as they had all hoped. He had resisted her questions proudly, and he had not attempted to explain.

"You have made up your mind, you and my father, that I have not spoken the truth," he said. "Why should I repeat what you will not believe? I have nothing to say but what I have said."

"Oh, Paul, look in my face, and tell me—tell me!" she said. "I will not doubt you." But he was obdurate.

"I have told you," he said, "and you have doubted."

There was something even in this pride and indignant resistance of her entreaties which moved his mother to believe in him; but Sir William was of a different opinion. Her heart was torn asunder with doubt and fear; and here was the one way in which she could know. Her husband might think of Spears as a dangerous demagogue, but to her he was a man whose face had brightened at the sight of her children, a man to whom she had given her own ready sympathy —a human creature, whom she knew. Had she not a right to go to him, to appeal to him to relinquish his hold on her boy? Whether it was by his arguments,

or by something less abstract, he had, it seemed, power which was almost absolute over her boy. Lady Markham did not mean to say anything to him about his daughter, to ask of him whether it was love for her which was leading Paul away; but could any one doubt that she would discover the truth if she could see him, and speak to him without any one to interfere between them? She could not endure the doubts of Paul which rose in her own mind, nor to be obliged to listen to his father's doubts of him, and say no word in his defence.

Notwithstanding her sleepless night, she got up very early in the morning, full of this idea, and stole out of the inn unperceived. It was not till the morning air blowing in her face, and the looks of the passers-by, which, like any one unaccustomed to go about alone, she thought specially directed to her, had fully roused her out of the mist of thought in which she was enveloped, that she remembered that she did not know where Spears was to be found. What was she to do? She went along vaguely, unwilling to return, past Paul's college, with all its vacant windows twinkling in the sun, by the way which her husband had taken when he went to seek Paul the day before. Her heart gave a

little leap as she passed the gate to see some one come out whose face seemed familiar to her. Was it Paul so early? Had he changed his habits like everything else? But she saw very well it was not Paul; it was his friend who had guided Sir William in search of him on the previous day.

Young Fairfax took off his hat respectfully, and would have passed, but she stopped and beckoned to him to come to her. Here, too, Providence had thrown in her way a witness who might corroborate Paul. She was out of breath with agitation when he came across the street.

"Can I—be of any use, Lady Markham?" the young man said.

"If it will not detain you—if it is not out of your way," she said, with anxious politeness, "would you show me where Mr. Spears lives—Mr. Spears—I think my husband said you knew him—the—the public speaker—the—very great Radical—he whom my son knows?"

Fairfax was puzzled for the moment by this respectful description.

"Oh, Spears!" he cried at last, suddenly waking to intelligence; he had not heard him called Mr. Spears

before. A laugh woke about the corners of his mouth. He was apt to laugh at most things, and it amused him to hear the softening politeness with which the great lady spoke of the demagogue. But the next moment the wistful anxiety in Lady Markham's eyes made him ashamed of his smile.

"I will show you the place if you will let me go with you," he said.

It seemed some strange negligence on the part of the race generally that such a woman should be unattended wherever she might choose to go. He was a democrat too, mildly, with less devotion to Spears than Paul, yet with some interest in his teaching; but Paul's mother roused within him a natural loyalty and respect which was not in accordance with these principles—loyalty in which a subtle unexpressed regard for her rank mingled with reverence for herself. It was not as a mere woman and his friend's mother, but also as a lady—the kind that queens are made of—that she affected his mind. The idea of her required an attendant, a servant, a retainer. He put himself into the vacant place hastily, to repair the neglect of the world.

Lady Markham took an unfair advantage of this

devotion. She plied him with questions—subtle and skilful—not always about Paul, but coming back to Paul with many a wily twist and turn. She threw herself with the warmest pretence of interest into his own career—what he was doing, how his studies were being directed, what his future was to be? Was it a pretence? No, it was not altogether a pretence. She could not but be polite, and true politeness cannot but be interested. She was pleased that he should tell her about himself, and a kind of shadow of an anxiety that he too should do well came into her mind—a shadow faint and vague of her great anxiety and longing that Paul should do well, better than any one had ever done before. And like a lark descending in circles of cautious approach to her home, she came back to Paul when her young companion was off his guard, when she had beguiled him to babble of himself.

"Ah!" she said, "I fear you are both idle, both Paul and you," when Fairfax had been making confession of sundry shortcomings.

"No, Markham is not like me," he said. "Markham puts more of himself into everything; he does not take things lightly as I do. He is a more serious

fellow altogether. That makes me rather fear Spears's influence over him, if you will let me say so."

"Indeed I will let you say so," Paul's mother replied. "That is just what makes me unhappy. He is a great deal with Mr. Spears?"

"One time and another—yes, they have seen a great deal of each other," Fairfax said. "Perhaps you don't know, Spears is the most entertaining fellow. He has his own opinion about everything. I think myself he is wrong just as often as he is right; but he has his own way of looking at things. I don't go with him in half he says, but I like to hear him talk——"

"And his house is a pleasant place to go to?" said the anxious mother. "Excuse me if I don't quite know. He is not in any kind of society, but he has a family? It is a pleasant house?"

Fairfax stared and then he laughed.

"It is not a house at all, in the way you think of," he said. "I don't suppose you can form any idea—we go and talk to him in his workshop. There is no sort of ceremony. He will hold forth for the hour when he is in the vein, and he is very entertaining—but as for what you understand by a pleasant house——"

Lady Markham's heart grew lighter every moment.

"But he has a family?" she said.

"Oh, yes—there are girls, I believe," said Fairfax. Was he on his guard? She almost feared the directness of this question had put him on his guard. "One sees them sometimes running out and in, but that has nothing to do with it," he added, carelessly. "In his class it is not at all the same as in other ranks of life."

Here there was a pause. Not an inference was there in all this of any other influence than that of the political visionary—the influence which Paul acknowledged. Lady Markham's heart had given a leap of pleasure. Oh, if Sir William had but heard this careless, impartial witness, every word of whose evidence supported that of Paul! But then a chill breath of suspicion came over her. What if he were less unconscious than she thought, skilfully arranging his replies so as to back up Paul's assertions? This discouraged and silenced her, in spite of herself. How easy it is to learn the miserable alphabet of suspicion! She went along with him doubtfully, sick at heart, asking no more questions, not knowing whether there

was anything in the whole matter to which she could trust.

"There is Spears's shop. You will find him at work already; he is always early. May I come back again for you, Lady Markham, in case you should miss the way to the hotel?"

"You are very kind," she said; but the sight of the place where Paul had spent so much of his time raised again a sick flutter in her bosom. She waved her hand to him without any further reply, with a smile which went to his heart; and then crossed over, dismissing him thus, and went direct to the fountain-head of information—to Spears's open door.

CHAPTER XIII.

SPEARS was seated on his bench, with his tools and his glue-pot, as Sir William had seen him on the previous day, when Lady Markham entered the shop. He had never ceased to be industrious at his work, though he had so many other things to do. Indeed, the many other things he had to do made it incumbent upon him to work early and late, in order to keep, as he called it, "the pot boiling." For he was not a paid agitator. The man was proud, as men will be in all stations; and, moreover, he was uncertain—not to be calculated upon as a supporter of all kinds of measures which might be proved good for "the trade," and therefore not half so serviceable an implement as many who were much less powerful. Like the independent member who cannot be trusted always to vote

with one party, he was looked upon with doubt even by those who took the greatest advantage of his gifts. His influence had never done himself any good. He had acquired it by exhausting labour, which had taken him away from the work by which he made his bread, without supplying any bread in the interval to nourish those who were dependent upon him; and the consequence was that he had to work at other times early and late, and was saved from all possibility of the idle life which a stump orator may be so easily led into. His shop itself was swept and clean, the boards freshly watered in large damp circles still marked upon the wood, and a great bundle of large flowers—sunflowers and dahlias—stuck into a large jug, stood in the window among the picture-frames. Some brilliant gladiolas, in the brightest tints of colour, lay neglected on the floor, and a great magnificent stalk of foxglove nodded on the table at which he was working. These floral decorations, unexpected in such a place, made the shop cheerful; and so did a stray ray of morning sun, which got in through a break in the houses opposite, and fell across it, dividing it as with a line of gold. The door stood open; the air, even though

laden with varnish, retained some freshness. Lady Markham came in softly, and stood, her heart beating, not knowing well how to open this important interview, in the middle of the sunshine. Her breath came quick. Now that she had arrived at the point for which she had been aiming, a sudden alarm seized her. Might it not have been better, she asked herself, hurriedly, to remain in ignorance—not to seek to be convinced? There are things which it is better not to know.

Spears, who was whistling over his work, did not hear the light footstep coming in; but he noted, with the quick sense of a man to whom daylight is indispensable, the shadow that had come across the sunshine. He paused and looked up. A doubt—a question came over his face. Was it possible he did not know her? Then he rose and came forward, holding out to Lady Markham a hand not free from stains of the varnish which perfumed the shop.

"Is it you, my lady?" he cried. His face beamed over with a smile of welcome, but showed no surprise or alarm at the appearance of such an inquisitor. He drew forth a rough wooden seat without any back, and placed it in the centre of the vacant space.

"I am very glad to see you in my poor place," he said.

"Thank you," said Lady Markham. She glanced round her with a little perturbation. She did not know how to begin. "Mr. Spears!" she said, faltering a little, "I was very glad to see you in *my* house."

"Were you, my lady?" He stood before her with a good-humoured smile upon his face, but slightly shook his head. "Never mind, you were as kind as if you had been glad to see me, and that says more. But your husband upbraided me for coming to his house in his absence, which you know was your son's fault, and not mine."

"It is of my son I want to speak to you," said Lady Markham, seizing this easy means of introducing her subject. "Mr. Spears, you know something of what he is to me—my eldest boy, the one who should be the prop of the family: to whom his brothers and sisters will look hereafter as the head of the family."

"Ay, that's just it," said the revolutionary. "Why should they look to him? What is there so creditable in being the eldest son? It was no thanks to him. He was not born first for any merit of his. Far

better to teach them to depend on themselves—to give them their just share—to make no eldest sons."

"As if that were possible," Lady Markham said, with a soft smile at this theoretical folly. "One must be the eldest, whatever you say; and if any harm were to happen to us," she added, after a pause, raising her beautiful head, "I have no fear that Paul would give up his position then. If we were to become poor, to lose all we have—such things have happened, Mr. Spears—my boy would not find it hard to remember to take up his duties as the eldest son!"

"Ah!" said Spears in involuntary sympathy. Then he added with again the same good-humoured smile, "There now, that is how you get the better of us, you aristocrats. You are terribly cunning in argument, my lady. You get over us by a suggestion of generosity when we are talking of justice. The thing will never happen, of course—not in our day, more's the pity—your money and your land will never be taken from you."

"Do you think that is a pity, Mr. Spears?"

"Well, yes," he said, laughing, "from our point of

view; but it will never happen, not in our time. And even if it did happen, don't you think it would be far better to live each man for himself, and not a whole family casting themselves on the shoulders of your son Paul?"

"My son Paul," said Lady Markham, in a low voice, looking at him through the tears in her eyes, "will be far away from us—will not be at hand to be of use or consolation in case anything should happen to us, if you and he have your will, Mr. Spears. He will be far away where he will be of no use to his family, Such a thing might happen, though God forbid it! as that I might be left to struggle alone for my children; and Paul, my eldest, my natural help, far away, lost to me, as if he had never been."

Spears turned away while she was speaking, and returned to his bench. He cleared his throat; his face flushed; he was as much embarrassed as she had been at the beginning, and did not know how to reply.

"My lady," he said, "this is too bad; I think it is too bad. After all a man has more things to think of in this world than whether his family has need of him, or if he can be of use to his mamma."

He said the last word with a semitone of ridicule, then blushed for himself as he caught her eye. Lady Markham saw her advantage. She would not let him escape.

"Are there then many things in this world that are better than being of use to your family, and helping in a hard task your mother? Do you think so, Mr. Spears? Ah, no! I am certain you don't. You are talking *au bout des lèvres*, not from your heart. If we should ever need him, Paul will be—who can tell?—thousands and thousands of miles away; and for what? Why do you want him to go with you? Why are you going? I do not know the reason. Because you are impatient, and do not like the manner in which things are arranged at home?"

"We will not enter into that, my lady," said Spears; "we will not enter into that."

He said this, half in contempt of her intelligence, which did not rise to his lofty view, half because (and this really meant the same thing) it was very difficult to explain why he thought it expedient to go away. Many motives were mingled in his resolution which he did not dwell upon even to himself. He was tired of

poor work and poor pay, and the struggle of living; tired of having to manufacture pictures-frames for bread when he could have done something so much better: and disgusted that his higher work got no real appreciation from any one. And he was tired too even of his agitation, the speeches and popular applause which were all very well for the moment, but neither seemed to convince any one, nor to affect the world at all. All this was going on day after day, week after week, but never came to anything. Often speakers whom he knew to be much inferior to himself were more warmly applauded; and some whom he considered (as other people considered him) to be stump orators and noisy demagogues, got elevated and salaried, and swaggered about in all the importance of delegates and representatives of the people, while he received no such distinction. Though this was partly his own fault through the pride and love of independence which characterised him, yet Spears felt it. It soured him, in spite of himself. All this, however, lay in his heart undivulged, except by a bitter word now and then; and what he said to himself was that the old country was thoroughly corrupt and hopeless, but

that in a new country, under better conditions, life would be more worth having. Did this fine lady, who knew nothing about it, divine what was secretly shut up in his mind? He grew half afraid of her, simple and ignorant as she had seemed to him a little while before.

"Ah, Mr. Spears, let us speak of it! You forget how important it is to me. But for you, I should not run any risk of losing my boy."

"I did not propose that he should come with me. You will do me the justice to believe, Lady Markham, that I never attempted to bias him."

"To bias him," she said—"what is it then? Is it not all your doing? Why, should Paul go away, but for you? He has got these notions which you have taught him into his head—"

"On the contrary," said the workman, "I have told him that were I in his place I should certainly stay in England. This is no place for a poor man who thinks—but for a man who is not poor, who has a position like his, why, it is the ideal place. There is no aristocracy so solid as in England. I have told him so a hundred times."

Lady Markham's face grew whiter and whiter. It

did not occur to her that this very advice might be conveyed in a tone which would make Paul wildly indignant at the supposed immunity and privileged condition with which his friend credited him. Such an explanation did not occur to her. Dismay stole over her heart; it was then as Sir William thought—Paul was not telling them the truth. The cause of his wild project was not philosophy and foolish opinions, since even his leader disowned it. It was something else. Her heart sank within her, she lost the control of her better sense. "If it is not you," she said, "who is it then—who is it, Mr. Spears? You have—a daughter?" This seemed to come from her in spite of herself.

"A daughter—I have three," he said, "but what have they—" here he stopped, and getting up from his bench gave vent to a low whistle of astonishment and perplexity. He was as much surprised as she could be, and not much more pleased. He gazed at her a moment speechless. "Can that be so?" he said.

Impossible to sink lower than Lady Markham's heart sank—it seemed to melt away altogether in humiliation and disappointment. She looked at him piteously, the

tears so gathering into her eyes that she could scarcely see his face.

"Oh, Mr. Spears," she cried, "you know what such a connection always comes to; disappointment on both sides—the woman's as well as the man's. Whatever his feelings may be now, he would soon find out that she was not—like the women he had been used to; and she would find herself among—habits that were not congenial to her. Oh, Mr. Spears, for both their sakes—you that Paul thinks so much of, you whose opinion he follows so meekly—oh, will you not exert your authority, and forbid it—forbid it altogether?"

Lady Markham lost control of the words she was saying. She did not think whether this was likely to be a mode of entreaty that would be grateful to him. She lost her own fine sense of what was fit and seemly, in the eagerness of the appeal which might save her boy.

He stood over her, looking at her, changed she could not tell how. His face clouded over before her eyes. At first this seemed only the effect of the tears that blinded her, but when these latter fell she became aware that the countenance which had been

so good-humoured and friendly was full now of a very different sentiment. The man seemed to have expanded even in outline as he stood between her and the light.

"Forbid it, forbid it altogether!" he repeated, with a smile that seemed to freeze her. "Why?" She felt herself tremble before him as he fixed his eyes upon her. "My lady," he said, "you forget where you are, and you forget your politeness for once. How do you know my girl is not like the women he has been used to? By God! she's better than most he'll meet with among your depraved and worn-out race. *My* girl! if it is true, and she likes him, do you think I would forbid it, to save your fine blood from pollution, and keep your Paul for some fine lady of the kind he's been used to? No, not for a million of mothers—not for all the soft-spoken insults in the world."

Lady Markham made no reply; she could not, her agitation was so great; but indignation began to steady her nerves, and give back her forces. What had she said to call for this? How dared he speak of insult, the man whom she felt she had honoured by coming to him, by appealing to him? She was not an angel,

though she was a good woman, and instinctively she began to call together her faculties, to range herself, as it were, on her own side.

Apparently, however, after this outburst, Spears felt ashamed of himself. A fine sense of courtesy was in the man, almost finer than her own. He began to be ashamed of having thus violated hospitality, of having so addressed her in his own house. He turned away from her to recover himself, turning his back upon her, then came back with again a changed aspect. "I beg your pardon," he said; "I ought to have more control of myself in my own place. I don't believe it's true what you think. No, my lady, I don't mean you're saying what you don't believe—I think you're deceived. I won't ask who's told you, or how it's come into your head; I'll put it to a better test. I'll ask the girl herself."

"Mr. Spears," said Lady Markham, "you have been very rude to me; I have not insulted you, nor did I mean to do so. It never occurred to me," she added, with a fine sting in her words which penetrated through all his armour, "that I need fear anything from *you* which I should not have encountered in—another rank

of life. But I do not wish to make reprisals," she said, with a faint smile, rising from her seat. "If you question your daughter on such a subject it ought not to be before me."

"My lady," cried Spears, his face full of passion, "unless it is to be open war between us it shall be before you. If there's love between them there should be no shame in it. My girl is one that can hold up her head before any on the face of the earth. It is not my beginning, but it shall be settled and cleared up on the spot. Janet! come down here, I want you," he called at the foot of the stairs.

Even in the midst of her agitation, Lady Markham had been conscious of sounds above, footsteps and young voices, one of which indeed had been persistently singing all the time, some trivial song of the moment in a clear little sweet voice, like the trill of a bird. The insignificant tune had run through all this exciting interview, and worked itself into Lady Markham's head, and in spite of herself she stood still, not resisting any longer, turning towards the stairs involuntarily, watching for the appearance of the girl who (perhaps) was dearer to her boy than anything else, who, perhaps,

was his motive for relinquishing everything else, including his mother's happiness and the comfort of his family. What woman could remain unmoved under such circumstances? Once more her heart began to beat as she turned her face towards the dingy stairs. Was it some beautiful apparition which was to appear from it, some creature such as exists in poetry, some woman for whom it would be comprehensible that a man should give up all? Lady Markham had romance enough in her to feel that this was possible, almost to wish it, while she feared it. If it were so, it would be more easy to forgive Paul. Ah, forgive him!—that was never hard; that was not the question. Our forgiveness, like a weeping angel, is it not always hovering, forestalling even the evil to be forgiven, over our children's wayward ways? But to get it out of her mind, out of her memory, that he had deceived her, that was not so easy. She, who had come in search of evidence to exonerate Paul, can any one wonder that she stood trembling, scarcely seeing, scarcely hearing, yet all eyes and ears, to receive the testimony of this indisputable witness, against whom there could be no appeal? But when the girl's foot sounded on the stair

it seemed to Lady Markham that she had already given up all hope that Paul was true—provided only that this woman for whom he had compromised the honour of his word, might at least afford some justification for the sacrifice.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHAT is it, father? do you want me?"

The girl spoke to her father, but her eyes were caught instantly by the unusual apparition of the lady in the shop. Who was she? not an ordinary customer, not anybody with an order for picture frames. A flutter awoke in Janet's breast. Was it perhaps somebody sent from the shop to offer that situation which was the dream of her fancy? a situation, she did not quite know what, varying as her hopes and sense of self-importance varied from that of a companion (which, the forewoman of the shop had told her, her manners and look were equal to—not to speak of her education) to that of a lady's maid. Emigration was not an idea which pleased Janet. She was afraid of the sea, afraid of the unknown, and not at all desirous of being always

at home, shut up within the circle of family duties and companionship. She wanted to see the world, as all young people had, she thought, a right to do. To go into the wilds had no charm for her. She had grown up in the close presence of all her father's theories without being affected by one of them. She had heard him speak by the hour and had paid no attention. All his moral independence, the haughtiness of his determination to be his own master, and stand under subjection to no man, affected his child no more than to make her wish the more fervently for that "situation," which would deliver her from the monotony of these "holdings forth." Janet's ideal of a happy existence was that of a large "establishment" where there would be a crowd of servants, elegant valets and splendid butlers at the feet of the pretty maid whom nobody would be able to tell from a lady—or perhaps a chance of catching the eye of the master of one of these fine gentlemen, who would make her a lady in earnest, with servants of her own. Nobody knew of these secret dreams which occupied her fancy, and grew and flourished in the atmosphere of the shop; but when her father called her suddenly, and she came

down to see Lady Markham standing so exactly like (she thought) a lady whom the forewoman might have sent with the offer of a situation, her heart began to beat, and her head to turn round with excitement—excitement only not so great as that of the woman who stood gazing at her with wistful eyes, asking herself if this was the woman whom Paul preferred to all the world.

Janet was tall, and possessed what the people at the shop called "a lovely figure;" the mantles and jackets never looked so well as upon her. The habit of putting these garments on, and making a little parade in front of the glass to show them, which was her daily duty, had given a certain ease of carriage not usual in her class. When you are accustomed to be gazed at, whether for yourself, or what you carry on your shoulders, it takes away the native embarrassment of the self-conscious creature. She was dressed in that gown of black alpaca which is the uniform of the shops, and which did full justice to the fine lines of her form. These were not the mere slim outlines of a girlish figure which might turn to anything, but really beautiful, finely proportioned, and imposing. She came

down into her father's shop, into the line of sunshine that crossed it, with the air of a young queen. Her face, however, was not so fine. She was pale, her nose not quite so delicate, her mouth not so small as beauty demanded. Her hair was fair, with little colour in it, and affording but little relief to the forehead upon which it clustered in a wild but careful disorder, according to the fashion of the time. Lady Markham took in every line and every feature as the girl advanced: far more critically than if she had been, as Janet thought, an intending employer did she examine this new unknown being who (was it possible?) had Paul's future in her hands. They gazed at each other, forgetting the man who stood by watching their mutual interest with what would have been amusement had he been less indignant and curious. Men and women are always so strange to each other. He looked at these two with a half-despairing, half-comic (notwithstanding his seriousness) consciousness that the ideas that were going through their minds were to him a sealed book. He did not know, poor man, that the lady, who was a stranger, was the one of the two that was comprehensible to him, and that stranger than all Greek or Latin,

more mysterious than philosophy, would have been to him, had he been able to see them, the thoughts in the mind of his own child.

"I want to ask you a question, Janet. Don't be alarmed, it is not anything to frighten you," he said. "In the first place this is Lady Markham, the mother of Mr. Markham whom you have so often seen here."

Janet made a curtsey to the lady, uttering a little confused "Oh!" of wonder, and opening her eyes, and even her mouth, in surprise. Could Mr. Markham have recommended her? *Mr. Markham!* She did not know what to think. Why should he wish her to be under his mother's care? Thought goes quick at all times, quickest of all in such a crisis, when the next word may change all your prospects in life. Her mind plunged forward in a moment into a world of possibilities, while her eyelids quivered with that expression, and her mouth kept the form of the "Oh!" tremulous and astonished. The quiver communicated itself to her whole frame—what might come next?

"You must understand," said Lady Markham quickly, "that I have nothing to do with the question your father is going to ask you. It is not put in

consequence of anything I have told him—nor is it put at my desire."

Spears gave a little laugh, elevating his eyebrows. Yes, this was the sort of thing to be expected. She had led him on to it, and now she protested that she had nothing to do with it—was not this the kind of tactics pursued by her class in all ages? To push the frank and honest man of the people into a corner and then to disown him. He laughed, though he had not much inclination to laugh.

"Quite right, quite true," he said; "it is for my own satisfaction entirely. Janet, nobody has ever come between you and me," the man added with a certain pathos. He looked at his daughter with a mist of honest affection and trust in his eyes, and without an idea, without a suspicion, that between him and her lay a whole world of difference, indescribable by ordinary words. "I have been father and mother both to you. Answer me, my girl, without any fear. Mr. Markham has told his family that he is going with us to Queensland. Janet, answer me plainly, is it out of love for you?"

"Father!" Janet, whose face was turned towards

him, gave a sudden cry. In a moment a flame of colour went over her. She opened her eyes still wider, and her mouth, with dismay. "Oh, father! father!" she cried, in a tone of warning and alarm.

It seemed to Lady Markham that nothing more was necessary. Her limbs refused to support her any longer. She sank upon the seat which she had abandoned. The girl was afraid to speak the truth before her; but yet what doubt could there be of the meaning in her voice.

"I ask you to tell me plainly—to speak out as between you and me," said Spears. He was not slow to perceive what her tone implied, and the warning in it made him angry. "There is no reason why you should hesitate to say it. If so it is, there is nothing wrong in it as far as I can see. Blush you must, I suppose—girls cannot help it; but tell me, like an innocent creature as you are, tell me the truth. I tell you there is nothing to be ashamed of. Is it out of love for you?"

Her thoughts rushed, tumbling over each other in a wild dance, a feverish Bacchic procession, through Janet's head. She did not mean to say, or even to

imply what was not true. But such questioning could only mean one thing, that Mr. Markham had confessed to his mother that he was "in love" for her—that unthought-of, bewildering promotion was within her reach. She did not mean to tell a lie. She blushed more hotly than ever.

"Oh, father, how can you ask me such a thing—before a lady?" she said.

"Then it is true?"

Janet did not make any reply; she dropped her head with a modest grace, twisting her fingers together nervously, her whole frame quivering. It was not she that had told them anything: they had told her. Ah! she remembered now a score of little nothings. Had not he picked up her thimble for her when she let it fall? Had not he opened the door for her when she came and went? How often she had wondered how he could come night after night and day after day—for what?—to talk to father, to listen to father! Many and many a time she had wondered at, and in her heart despised, her father's disciples. It was "bosh" that he was saying, and yet these others would sit round him and take it all in.

But here was something altogether different. That a young man should only have pretended to listen to father, should have come for herself all the time, was quite comprehensible to Janet. There was nothing strange even—nothing out of the way in it. It was what lovers had done from the beginning of time.

"Is that all you have got to say?" said her father. "Can't you give us any more satisfaction? Speak out when I tell you, Janet. All this time that he has been coming here, not saying a word to you, pretending to be my disciple—" A little sting of wounded vanity was in Spears too. He did not quite like to feel that he had been deceived, that his most fervent follower was nothing but the lover of his daughter. "All this time," he repeated, "has it been for you he has been coming? That is what we want to know."

Still Janet said nothing. She stood with her eyes cast down, interlacing her fingers in and out, out and in—her mind in such a sudden heat of active operation that she had not leisure to speak. It was not the first time that the idea had presented itself to her. She had thought of it as a very desirable thing that Mr. Markham (or one of the others) should fall in love with her. But

up to this moment she had not been able to see any likli-hood of her desire realising itself. However, her mind leaped into instant action, supporting with a whole array of proof the suggestion so suddenly placed before her, of the truth of which she did not entertain a moment's doubt. How could she doubt it? If he had told his mother, certainly it must be true; and the other facts adapted themselves as by magic to this great central fact. As soon as she had got possession of that as a foundation, the details seemed to come at a wish, and a whole superstructure of blessedness sprang upwards towards the skies.

"I don't know what you wish me to say, father," she answered, at last, after another peremptory call. She spoke with all the modesty of conviction, for she felt now that every word was true. "There are things as a girl cannot speak about. There are a deal of things as are nothing in themselves; but still a girl knows what they mean."

These modest words gave an indescribable pang to both her hearers. As for Spears, it was all he could do not to cry out with anger and pain. To think that at this great crisis, at a moment when so much depended upon

it, she should speak with such disregard of grammar, notwithstanding all the care he had taken of her education.

"There are things as a girl cannot speak about."

He knew that this would catch Lady Markham's ears, and he felt himself humbled before her—not because of the fact, which there was no harm in, which was indeed natural enough; but that his girl should tell it in such grammar occupied Spears to the exclusion of deeper sentiment. He turned to his visitor with a conciliatory tone, and a look of deprecation as if asking her pardon.

"Well!" he said, "my lady! there does not seem to be much doubt on that point. We will have to make up our minds to it, though it is not what I could have wished, any more than you."

The very light seemed darkened in Lady Markham's eyes, the room went round with her, and she saw nothing clearly. Oh, why had she come here to make sure! Why had she not let it alone, all vague as it was! An hour ago she had thought anything better than uncertainty—but now uncertainty itself would have been a boon. She looked at Spears, catching the tone of

deprecation in his voice, which seemed so natural, and made a sudden appeal to him.

"Make up our minds to it," she cried. "How is that possible? Oh, Mr. Spears, I have always thought you so superior to anything of the kind. You would not take advantage of the confidence placed in you; you would not allow my boy, because of his admiration for your talents, to ruin himself, to compromise his position, to disappoint all our hopes!"

She rose up and put out her hands, appealing—in the forgetfulness of personal despair—to his generosity, though it was against himself and his own child. The most courteous, the most considerate person will forget when it is their own dearest interests which are concerned.

His fantastic distress about the grammar went out of the man's mind. His forehead contracted, a gleam of anger came from his eyes. But he had no doubt as to having right on his side, and he answered with dignity. "Madam," he said, "we had better understand each other. I don't want your son any more than you want my daughter; but they have their rights, and if they like each other I will not interfere."

She was driven almost wild by this reply. "Sir

William will never consent—he will never consent to it," she cried.

"That's none of my business—nor my child's," said Spears. He forgot the respect with which she had inspired him. "Here's the difference between your class and mine, my lady," he said with some scorn. "I consider the one thing needful in a marriage is love—on both sides. In our rank of life we don't consider much more. We don't ask questions about a girl's ancestors or her fortune. Most likely there's none of either sort, as in this case—but where there is love, what more is wanting? You will never persuade me to interfere."

"Marriage!" she repeated, in a voice of dismay. Of course that was what it must come to. She cast a look of dismay and almost horror at the girl who would, if this were so, take her own place, and hold her position in the world. She rose up suddenly from her rude seat, feeling that her limbs still failed her, but that in any case she could stay no longer here. "Oh, there is a great deal more wanting—a great deal more," she cried. "Life is not so simple for us. A woman should know what she undertakes—what weight she will have on her

shoulders. There are other things to be taken into consideration in such a life as ours."

"You think so," said Spears. What he intended to be a superior smile dwindled into something like a sneer. He did not like this assertion, which he could not contradict. After all, it was true enough that his own existence was far more elementary and primitive than the other, and he did not like the thought.

"You do not know," said Lady Markham, "you cannot understand the difficulties of people who are looked up to by a whole district, who have the comfort of others, the very life of many in their hands. But why should I speak of this?" she said. "I thought you understood, but you do not understand. Now it is war between us, as you said. I want to harm no one, but I must do what I can for my boy."

She made them a curtsey which (for she could not be uncivil) included both father and daughter, then drew down her veil with a trembling hand and hurried away.

Spears went after her to the door. He was furious at this calm assertion of something higher, larger, and more elevated in her different rank; yet he could not help

a certain reverence, an unwilling worship of the lady, of whom he had once said regretfully that nothing like her was ever produced in his own. He went to the door, and gazed after her as she went along, her steps still hurried and agitated, but her natural grace coming back to her. "Looked up to by a whole district—the comfort of others, their very life in her hands." Ah! there might be something in that after all. He felt in his own veins a fulness, a swell of rising blood as of a man able to bear others upon his shoulders, and fearing no responsibility. That should come in the new world to which he was bound. There he too would cease to be a single unit among other isolated individuals, and would become a head also, a leader, the first of a community. He felt as if she had dared him to it, and he would achieve it. But as he stood there half-angry, half-stimulated, he was aware of his daughter behind him, straining on tiptoe to look over his shoulder—and turned round, looking at her with a new principle of judgment and discrimination in his eyes.

"Was it really Lady Markham? Is she Mr. Markham's mother?" said Janet, breathless with excitement. "Oh, how pretty she must have been, father! She's

not a bit nicely dressed, not what I would call equal to her situation. But she looks a real lady. Don't you think you would know she was a real lady, whatever she had on?"

"I don't know what you mean by a real lady. You are quite as silly as the rest, you little fool."

"Oh, but you do know," cried Janet. "Miss Stichel puts on lovely things, but she never has that look. Was that the lady that was so kind to you in the country? —in that beautiful grand house?"

"Did I say she was kind to me?" said Spears, melting a little. "Well, yes, I suppose she was."

"And was it really," said Janet, drooping her head, after she had cast one keen glance at her father's face, "really—about nothing but Mr. Markham's nonsense that she came here?"

"Janet," said her father, taking her by the hand—his mind had wandered from the great question of the moment, but her words brought it suddenly back. He looked tenderly and anxiously into the girl's face, which sank before his gaze, but only with an easy blush and pleasant embarrassment. "I don't want to be inquisitorial. I don't want to pry into what is perhaps too

delicate for a man's ear. But tell me if you can what you mean by Mr. Markham's nonsense? He has always seemed very serious to me. Try and tell me if you can —try and speak to me as you would have spoken if your mother had been here."

This touched her heart, for she was not a bad girl. She began to cry a little. "She would not have asked me—she would have understood," she said. "Oh, father, what can I tell you beyond what I have told you? Besides, what does it matter what I say? He must have spoke himself, or what brought the lady here?"

This seemed conclusive to Spears too. It did not occur to him that "Mr. Markham's nonsense" must mean something more than what Paul had said to his mother. He put his arm round his child, and drew her close to him. "You should not say 'he must have spoke,' Janet—though it would seem indeed as if he had said something. She wanted me to order him off. Tell me, my girl, are you really—fond of this young fellow?" he said, with persuasive tenderness. "Don't turn your face away, there is nothing to be ashamed of. I thought you were but a child, and lo! you are

a woman with lovers after you," he went on, with a smile that was pathetic. "I can't say I like it, but it's nature, and I won't complain."

"Oh don't, father," said Janet, drawing herself away. "Don't! How can I tell you—or any one?" There was just enough of feeling to give a natural air of pretty reserve and delicacy to the girlish shrinking, the quick movement she made to conceal her face from his eyes. Her voice was tremulous, her cheeks suffused with the blush of excitement and pleasant confusion. After a pause she turned half round and asked, as if avoiding a more difficult question, "Is it a very grand house? Will it come to him after? Will he be a *Sir* too?"

"If it lasts till his time," said the revolutionary, "which let us hope it will not. The chances are, that all these detestable distinctions will be swept away long before, and the wrongs of the poor be made an end of. The country will not bear it much longer."

"Oh!" cried Janet, forgetting her bashfulness, and turning upon him a face full of eager vehemence and indignation. "I am sick of hearing of the country! What harm does it do the country? Will they have a penny the more for taking away his money? Why

shouldn't I be a lady as well as any one else? To have a grand house, and a man in livery to walk behind me is what I should like above everything! I hope it will last till our time. I don't believe there will be any difference. Oh, father, won't you just give up making speeches and holding meetings, and let things be?"

"Janet!" he cried, with a flash of anger; but it seemed ludicrous, after all, to attach any importance to what such a child said. He laughed a confused and disconcerted laugh. "That doesn't come well from my daughter! And what do you know about such things? You are a little goose, and that is all about it. Besides, what does it matter? We are all going to Queensland —he, too. There will not be many grand houses, or men in livery, you baby! to be found there."

"Oh!" cried Janet, growing pale with disappointment and dismay; "but you don't think he will have to go there *now?*"

"Why not *now?* There is more reason than ever now, it appears to me."

"Oh!" cried Janet again—that stock English monosyllable expressing a whole gamut of dissatisfaction and

surprise. "I thought that would only be because he thought his people would object, and didn't know what we—I—would say. He would rather go than be separated—rather than lose—us; it is easy to understand. But when he's been and told, and when his mother has come here, and when it's all in the way of being settled—Oh!" cried Janet again, with natural vehemence, "what in all the world should he go for now? Would any one go that could help it? and him that has everything he can set his face to, and sure to come into a fortune, and all made easy for him. What in all the world should he go for *now?*"

Spears stood and looked at her with a confusion that was almost stupidity. He was indeed stupefied by this extraordinary speech. Was it really what it seemed to be, a revelation of an unknown character, a new creation altogether—or was it merely the silly babble of a child?

"My girl," he said, with a tone of severity, yet still keeping the half of his smile, so confused and uncertain was he, not knowing what to think; "what is this you are saying? It is not like a child of mine. What if

I were to say—as I have a good right—he *shall* come to Queensland or he shall not have you?"

"You would not have any right to say such a thing," said Janet, with decision. "Don't you tell us we've all got the right, both men and girls, to do what is best for ourselves and to judge for ourselves? and would you be the tyrant to take that from us? Oh, no, father, no! I never would have said a word but for this. Many a one has said to me, 'What are you going for? I wouldn't go a step in your place. I'd take a situation, and stay where all my friends are.' That's been said to me—times and times; and I've always said 'No. Where father goes I must go.' But, all the same, I always hated going. For one thing, I know I should be ill all the way. I hate a ship; and I hate living in the country, where you would never see so much as a street-lamp, nor hear anything but cows mooing, and sheep baaing; but I would have gone and never said a word. Only now," cried Janet, with rising vehemence, "what *would* be the good of me going, or of *him* going? If I was married I shouldn't be of no use to you; and what in all the world should take *him* there, if it wasn't following after me?"

Her father stood and gazed at her stupefied. His very jaw dropped with wonder. She had never made so long a speech in her life; but now that she had spoken, it was all as clear, as definitely settled and arranged, as pitiless in its reasonableness, as if, instead of a girl of twenty, she had been a philosopher laying down the law. All her timidity was gone. She looked him full in the face while she ended her lengthened argument. As for Spears, the very power of speech seemed to be taken from him. A sound like a laugh, harsh and jarring, came from him when she ended.

"So that's how it is?" he said, and turned and went back to his bench like a man who did not know what he was doing. Janet was glad enough to be thus released. She who had known her own sentiments all along was not startled by them as he was; but she felt that it was best now she had uttered them to let them have time and quiet to work their necessary effect. She turned to the eight-day clock, which had been ticking solemnly all this time in the corner, with a half shriek.

"Good gracious!" she cried, "it's past nine, and me still here. Whatever will Miss Stichel say?"

CHAPTER XV.

LADY MARKHAM walked away quickly, tingling in every nerve. She felt herself insulted and betrayed. She had gone to this poor man as if he had been a gentleman, with full confidence in him, and he had not iustified her faith. A poor gentleman would have felt the impossibility, would have seen that a girl of no importance, without money, or rank, or connections, could not expect to marry Paul Markham, the heir of all the family honours. A person of any cultivation would have felt this, had there been the best blood in England in his veins. But this clown did not feel it; this common workman, woodcarver, tradesman, he did not see it. He ventured to look her in the face and tell her that they must make up their minds to it.

Lady Markham was angry; she could not help it. And there was an additional sting in the situation from

the fact that she felt she had brought it upon herself. She had taken an injudicious step. In her desire to relieve her own mind, she had compromised Paul. Her own alarms, her suspicion and doubt, had realised themselves. She blamed Spears all the more bitterly that in her heart she wanted not to be obliged to blame herself. But by and by the needle veered round to that point of the moral compass which in a candid mind it is so ready to stop at, self-accusation. Why did she give this man the occasion of insulting her, and the girl the occasion of defying her? It was her own fault. She ought not, above all, to have compromised her son. This became the most terrible thought of all as she dwelt upon it. Instead of doing good she had done harm; instead of relieving Paul from the influence of the demagogue, she had riveted and strengthened his connection with the demagogue's family who were worse, much worse than himself. Was it possible that Paul, *her* son, the brother of Alice, could have chosen from all the world such a girl as Janet Spears? Her heart thrilled with the wonder of it, the disappointment of it. Was that all he could find in woman? and she herself had helped to cement the tie between them.

How could she ever forgive herself? She walked along quickly, recovering her outward composure, but more and more troubled in mind as she thought upon what she had done. Why did she go? how, she asked herself, being, like most women, ready to distrust herself and give in to the common opinion on the subject whenever anything went wrong with her—how could she forget that it was always dangerous for a woman to interfere? She was in the very deepest of these painful thoughts, angry with herself, and deeply distressed by the apparent consequences of her ill-advised mission, when, turning the corner of the little street which brought her into one of the larger thoroughfares, she suddenly, without any warning, found herself face to face with Paul. The surprise was so great that she had no time to put on any defences, to prepare for questions and astonishment on his side. They met without a moment's warning, the two people who might have been supposed least likely to encounter each other at such a time and place.

"Paul!" she cried, with a sensation of fright. And he stopped, looked at her sternly, and cast a jealous inquiring look along the street by which she had so evidently come.

"Mother! what are you doing here?" he said.

"I came out—to take a walk, as it was so fine a morning," she said, forcing a smile. Then Lady Markham came to herself and perceived the folly of false pretences. "No—I will not try to deceive you, Paul. I have been visiting Mr. Spears," she said.

"Visiting Spears!"

"Yes; what is there wonderful in that?—you brought him to visit me. Other people may blame me for it, but I don't see how you can. I had a kind of faith in him."

"You *had;* has it been disappointed then, mother, your faith?"

"Yes," she said with a sigh. "No doubt it was foolish. A man of his class—must feel like his class no doubt. It was foolish on my part."

"What was there," said Paul, with a sort of contempt which he hid under exaggerated politeness, "that Lady Markham could want with a man of his class—with a demagogue and Radical?"

"Paul," she said, her voice faltering a little, "it does not become you, however wise and superior you may feel yourself, to assume this tone to your mother. This is to change our positions altogether. I have done

a thing which has proved ill-advised and may turn out badly, but I did it for the best. I will not hide it from you who are the chief person concerned. I went to ask him to use his influence with you, my own having failed, to induce you to think a little of your actual duties to your family. He did not take the same view of it as I do, which perhaps was natural; and I saw, though without wishing it," she added, in a still more tremulous tone, "the—young woman——"

"What young woman?" His voice was angry, almost threatening. He came a step nearer, and stood over her with a cloud upon his face. "What young woman is it? whom do you mean?"

"It is a poor thing to make a mystery of it when it has gone so far. I confess my mistake, and why should you conceal your intentions on your side? This can only have the effect of making everything worse. I was made to see her against my will, and to hear from her own lips——"

"Mother!" cried Paul, violently, stopping her. Then he said, endeavouring again to calm himself, "I have heard often that it is only women who can be thoroughly cruel to other women."

"Then you have heard what is false, Paul, what is entirely and cruelly false; though you boys toss about such accusations at your pleasure, insulting the women who bear with you, and suffer for you. I tell you because I feel it would have been wiser had I taken no part in the matter; had I kept away; said nothing, and done nothing."

"And I tell you—" cried Paul, in vehement indignation; then he stopped short and cried out with an anxious voice, "Mother, what is it you have done?"

"Everything that is unwise," she said. "I have been rebuffed by your friend. I will tell you the truth, Paul. When he said that he had no wish to have you as a fellow emigrant, I, in my folly, asked, Was it his daughter? And she was not so reticent as you are. She owned that it was so. She was more frank than you are; and to do him justice I will allow that her father looked as much surprised as I."

"She owned it was so!" Paul's face became ghastly in the morning light. Then after a minute's blank silence, he said, with a harsh laugh, "Surprised? Yes, her father might be surprised; but why you? You seem to have been the only person who knew all about it, who

had got it all cut and dry to be produced at a moment's notice. Oh, mother!" he cried, bitterly, "your morning's work will cost me dear—it will cost me dear!"

Lady Markham stood with bowed head to receive her son's reproaches. "I was wrong," she said; "I was wrong. Oh, Paul, my dearest boy, come home with me; let us talk it all over; let us think of everything! If you knew how hard it is for me to oppose you! and all the more when your heart is engaged. Am I one to set myself against love?" She blushed as she looked at him with a woman's reverence for the centre of all affections, and a mother's shamefacedness in opening such a subject with her son. "But, Paul, there are so many things—oh, so many things to think of! and you are so young—and——"

"Mother, stop!" he said, "your arguments have nothing to do with me; they are wrong altogether. If my life is spoiled, it will be your doing; not mine, but yours—not mine, but yours."

Lady Markham lifted her head with the surprise and something of the indignation of a person unjustly accused. "This is going too far," she said. "I have been wrong, but to throw the total blame upon me is

unreasonable. In this, as in other things, nobody could harm you; nobody could make your position worse, if you had not risked and lost it yourself."

There were few passengers in the streets, silent and semi-deserted as always in summer, and yet more because it was still so early. The two figures which stood there together breaking the sunshine were almost the only people visible, and the closeness of the discussion between them had hitherto been witnessed by nobody; just at this point, however, some one issued suddenly from the gate of one of the colleges near, and came down the steps into the street. They were scared by the appearance of any one in this dreary city, and it was not expedient that the warmth of their conversation should be apparent to others.

"Walk along with me," she said. "Do not let us stand here."

Paul looked round him for a moment on either hand. On one side was the narrow street in which Spears lived, the line of colleges and better houses on the other. Lady Markham's face was turned towards the better side. This was enough to decide him, foolish as he was. He turned the other way.

"What is the good of discussing—of talking over? All the harm is done that can be done," he said, with a wave of his hand. Then he crossed the road quite suddenly, leaving his mother standing looking after him. Very miserable was the young man as he went away. He went down Spears' street, but he had no intention of going to see Spears. Everything seemed, against him. The best thing for him to do, he thought, would be to get out of sight of everybody—to fly from the evils of fate that were gathering round his feet. What had he done to be caught like this in a tangle which he had not himself sought, from which indeed he had always done his best to keep free? It was no doing of his: chance and his parents had done it, and the detestable conventionalities of society, which made it impossible for a man to be civil to a girl out of his own class without laying himself open to remark. If he had not met her here, yesterday, so innocently, without premeditation! Already, by the folly of everybody concerned, this girl had got to be *her* to the young man; no name needed to distinguish the creature in whose hands some blind hazard seemed to have placed his life. Blind hazard—aided by his father and mother. How

bitter were his thoughts as he went on. What was he to do? She had owned to it. Half he hated her for being so foolishly deceived, half his heart melted to her for the deception which only some latent tenderness could have produced. Must he wring the girl's heart by making it all plain to her, and humble her in her own eyes? or must he accept a position he had not sought, which he no more desired than they desired it, and of which he saw all the inappropriateness, all the disadvantages? As he went on with that cruel question in his mind, there rose out of the morning air, appearing not much less suddenly than his mother had done, running towards him, the figure of the girl of whom he was thinking. To Paul it was as if his thoughts had taken shape. She came towards him, not seeing him, with all the ease of motion which unconsciousness gives —tall and graceful in her plain black gown. The girl's head was full of a subdued triumph, but for the moment all she was consciously thinking of was how to get to her shop as quickly as possible. She ran like another Atalanta, skimming along the unlovely street, her feet scarcely seeming to touch the ground. This sudden apparition filled Paul with excitement. She

had changed to him altogether since yesterday, when she was nothing but Spears' daughter. Now she was suddenly identified, separated from all the world, and become herself. How could he help but be interested in her? She had owned to it. To what had she owned? It seemed for the moment almost a relief, bitterly as he resented her introduction into his life, to turn to her, who knew none of the complications involved, who was unaware of his fury and indignation against everybody round him—to turn to her, whose mind must be entirely single and simple, torn by no conflict. He did not know why he wanted to speak to her, what he wanted to say to her; but he stepped into her way with a certain imperiousness, making her stop short in her rapid career. Janet, thus arrested, gave a sudden cry. She stopped, the breath coming quick on her lips, and put her hand to her breast; her heart gave a sudden leap, the colour flew over her face in a sudden wave of crimson.

"Oh, Mr. Markham!" she said.

"Where are you going so fast?" Somehow it seemed to him, with a half-consolatory sense of proprietorship, that here was a creature who belonged to

him, who would find no fault with him as the others did, who was his. He put himself in her way, stopping her—not as if by accident, but of set purpose—assuming the right which she for her part never resisted. There were troubles and difficulties with every one else; but with her no difficulties, no troubles. She acknowledged his sway at once, stopped herself, blushed, and drooped her head. There was no question of approving or disapproving here. She answered his voice instantly, like a slave. There are many people who only see a thing in its best aspect when it becomes their own. For the moment Paul Markham became one of those. He had never thought her so handsome before; perhaps indeed in all her life she had never been so handsome as when she stopped all blushing and glowing at his call, acknowledging in her every look the proprietorship which it gave him a sort of pleasure to claim. "Where are you going so fast?" he said.

"Oh, Mr. Markham, I am in a great hurry! I don't know what Miss Stichel will say: I never was so late before in my life!"

"What has kept you so late?"

He was far more imperious in his tone than he had

ever been when she was nothing to him. Then he had been courtly and polite, frightening the girl with a courtesy which she did not understand. She liked this roughness much better. It meant—it would be impossible to tell all it meant.

"I was kept by—visitors. Oh, Mr. Markham! don't keep me any longer now. I don't know what Miss Stichel will say to me. She will be so angry."

"She must not be angry. How does she dare to show her anger to you? You had visitors. I know: my mother."

"Oh, Mr. Markham!" Janet said again, faintly, drooping her head; and then there was a momentary pause.

"I know," he said.

He did not know, and could not tell afterwards by what impulse he did it. Some infatuation took possession of him. He took her hand in the middle of the street, in sight of any one that might be looking. There was nobody looking, which vexed Janet, but he did it without thought of that. It would have made no difference if all the world had been there.

"That is how it is, I suppose," he said, holding her hand. And then he added, somewhat drearily, "If

there is anything wrong in it, it is their own doing, there is always that to be said."

This somewhat chilled Janet, who expected a warmer address; but she reflected that the street was scarcely a place for love-making; and Miss Stichel, though not so important as usual, had still to be considered.

"Let me go, please, Mr. Markham," she said; "I mustn't be late: for whatever may happen afterwards I am still their servant at the shop."

He dropped her hand as if it burnt him, and grew red with anger and uneasy shame.

"This must not be," he said. "I will go and speak to Spears."

Though he was so firm in his democratic principles, the idea that any one connected with himself should be under the orders of a mistress galled him beyond bearing. It was a thing that could not be.

"It will not be for long," Janet said, cheerfully.

She, for her part, rather liked the shop. It was more cheerful than the other shop which was home.

"I cannot suffer it," he said, "for another day. I will speak to Spears."

This was all he said, but he kept standing there

looking at her with eyes which were more investigating than admiring. If he had nothing more to say than this, why should he keep her standing there and expose her to Miss Stichel's scolding? But she did not like to burst away as she would have done from a less stately wooer. She was much intimidated by a lover like Paul, though very proud of him. She stood with her eyes cast down, waiting till he should let her go free. The thing that would have made Janet most happy would have been that he should walk to the shop with her, showing that he was not ashamed of her, and give her the pride and glory of being seen by the other young ladies in company with the gentleman she was going to marry, the gentleman who had vowed that she should not remain there—not another day. This would have been the natural thing to do, Janet thought. But it did not seem to occur to Paul in the same light. He looked at her, examining her appearance with anxious and critical, yet with very sober and calm inspection. They were neither of them so happily fluttered, so excited as they might have been. She was not exacting, did not ask too much; and he was critical with the discrimination of a superior, a judge

whose powers of judgment were biassed by no glamour of partiality.

"We shall see each other later in the evening. I will not detain you longer," he said, in a tone of gentle politeness.

He even gave a little sigh of relief as he turned away. Janet, not knowing whether she was more sorry or glad to be liberated, cast more than one furtive glance behind her at his departing figure. But it did not seem to have occurred to Paul to look after her. He walked on stately and straight, turning neither to one side nor the other, towards Spears's shop. He had not meant to go, but neither had he intended any of the other things that had come to pass. Fate seemed to have got possession of him. He walked into the shop with the same straightforward steady tread, not as usual, that was impossible. Most likely there would have to be something said—but for that, too, he felt himself ready, if need were.

Spears was no longer working at the simple work of his picture-frames. He had thrown them into a heap—all the little bits of carved work which he had been glueing and fitting into each other—and with a

large sheet of paper on the table before him was drawing with much intentness and preoccupation. He had set the plume of the foxglove upright before him, and was bending his brows and contorting both limbs and features over his drawing as he had done over the lily he had designed for Alice. The handful of coloured gladiolus which had been lying on the table he had pushed impatiently aside, and they lay at his feet, here and there, scattered under the table and about the floor like things rejected, while he drew in the foxglove boldly with a blue pencil. All his soul seemed to be in his drawing. He scarcely took any notice of Paul—a half glance up, a hurried nod, and that was all. Presently, however, he took up one of the gladiolus stalks and laid it tentatively across the foxglove; then with a pshaw! of angry impatience tossed it away again.

"That won't do," he said, half to himself, "none o' that. Nature will not stand it. The free-growing, wild thing is grand, but that poor stiff, conventional rubbish, manufactured out of some gardener's brains, out of his bad dreams, is good for nothing; and it's everywhere the same, so far as I can see. Things must be wedded after their kind."

"Do you mean that for me, Spears?"

"Do I mean that for you? Which are you? the grand tower of the foxglove that's good for everything —strength and continuance and beauty—or that poor spiky trash? I don't know. I mean nothing that I don't understand."

Then there was silence once more. Paul took up some of the bits of uncompleted work and fixed them together. He would not open the subject, but he knew Spears well enough to know that it must have been some great agitation which had driven him away from his pot-boiling to the work of designing. That was not a work that would ever "pay." The frames answered the purpose of daily bread; but the designs into which all the rude artist's soul was thrown were not profitable. A few of the young men who were his friends had bought some plaques and panels of his finer original work; but such purchasers were few and far between; and to spend a whole morning making a design for one of these delicate unprofitable carvings showed that the workman had certainly for the moment lost command of himself.

After a few minutes, during which he measured the little lathes together and fitted them carelessly, Paul went quietly to the back of the room, and taking an old

coat which hung there put it on and sat down to do the work which the other had left undone. This was not a kind of work he had ever attempted before. He had been a student of carving, not because of any natural impulse towards the art, but partly for Spears's company, partly in order to be able to aid in some small way his struggle for a living. This eventful morning brought him a new impulse. While his master laboured impetuously at his drawing, Paul took the humbler work in hand. After all the distraction that had been in his mind, there was something in this homely effort that soothed him. Cast upon it on all hands, in all ways, it was a sort of relief to him to identify himself altogether with this other sphere, which he had chosen and sought out, yet into which he had never cast himself so completely, so fully, as his own family had cast him. He smiled at this within himself, as he began to work at Spears's everyday vulgar work. Well! if they would have it so, so be it! He had played with the notion of equality, of democratic simplicity, with the doctrine that it was every man's duty to earn his own living, and give up to humanity the full enjoyment of the land and accumulations of money, which no individual had a right to retain. All this he had held

hotly in theory; but in the meantime had lived in his college rooms, and according to his natural position—an anomaly which only now appeared to him in its full vividness. Yes, now he saw it. He smiled to himself, no longer with bitterness, with a lofty disdain of his own past, of all his traditions, of his family, which by way of opposition and resistance to his purpose and principles had pushed him over the verge on which he had been hesitating. Perhaps but for them he might still have hesitated before he took the final step. It was they who had decided it, who had given him the last impulse. He smiled with a sense of the weakness of efforts which thus naturally balked themselves, feeling superior in his calm certainty of decision to all these agitations. Yes, it was over; there was no longer any question of what might or might not be. His fate was settled; he was a member of Spears's family, not of Sir William Markham's. That sense of calm which follows a great decision, and at the same time of proud resignation which succeeds a sacrifice exacted, calmed his mind. Somehow, Paul could not have told how, he felt himself a sort of sacrificial offering to justice and nature, making the most eloquent of protests against wrong, tyranny, injustice, and everything

that was evil in society. With the dignity of a noble victim, and with a consciousness of innate, inborn, but most illogical superiority to fate, he drew the glue-pot and the tools towards him, and began to do the workman's work. Nothing could have been more illogical; for the superiority of labour was one of the first principles of his creed, and to make pictures-frames was a respectable occupation by which a man might live. Yet it was with a smile of unspeakable superiority that he began his first day's real work, enjoying the sensation of voluntary humility, of doing what it was beneath him to do.

Thus they went on in silence for some time: Paul working clumsily enough, with a sense of the humour implied in his adoption of the trade, which made it amusing in its novelty and inappropriateness, but which was most unlike the steady devotion of a man who felt this work to he his duty; while Spears pursued his with a fury of invention which denoted the perturbation of his mind. He flung the drooping bells of the foxglove upon his paper and erected its splendid stalk with an energy and force which was like a defiance, holding the somewhat coarse blue pencil in his hand like a sword, screwing his mouth and putting his limbs into every contortion possible, as he sat, with his stool

pushed as far as might be from the table, and all the upper part of his person overhanging it. If it had been an eagle or a lion he was drawing the force and expression of his whole figure would have been more appropriate. As it was, the foxglove bristled with a kind of scornful defiance, yet drooped with something of melancholy, as an eagle might have done in all its pride of strength, yet with the pathos of all speechless creatures in its eyes. In this particular, though he was an actor, he was speechless as the eagle or the wildly noble flower. He had seen a sight which had taken all speech out of him, as it might have done from Shakespeare. He had seen a something unknown, a small, vulgar, incomprehensible spirit, to him unrecognisable, a thing out of his cognisance, looking at him through the eyes of his child. What could he say to such a revelation? Nothing. It took his voice from him and almost his breath. He had not been able to endure the placid work which left him free for thought. Say that his designing did not reach a very ethereal point of art; but it was the highest exercise of skill to him. He flung himself upon the paper, thrusting away all the painful enlightenments and contradictions of his life as he thrust away the gay-coloured spike of the

gladiolus. He would have crushed them under foot if he had been able, but this he could not do. They would not disappear from his memory as the others did from his table. Thus he worked on, with a fervour which was almost savage, while Paul, with a proud smile on his face, handled the glue-pot. After a while the mere sense of companionship mollified the elder man. He was wounded, and wanted just such soothing as the sight of his disciple sitting quietly by gave him. His work grew less firm, his hand less rigid; the great pencil ceased to dig into the paper with its violent lines. Insensibly the softening went on. First, he threw a hasty glance from beneath his bushy eyebrows at the young man tranquilly seated near him. Then his fiery inspiration slackened; he paused to look at his model, to devise the next line, and doing so let his eyes rest upon Paul with a growing softness. At last he got up, threw down his pencil, and coming up to his companion struck him on the shoulder.

"Well!" he said. "Boy! So that was how it was. You listened to the father—old fool! but your thoughts were with the girl. That was how it was." This was not the thing that gnawed at Spears's heart, but he put it forward by way perhaps of persuading

himself, as we all do sometimes, that it was the lesser matter that hurt him most.

Paul paused in his work, and looked up. His face was very serious, with none of that glow of happiness in it which belongs to an accepted lover—as the man beside him, who had been a true lover himself, was quick to see.

"Who said that? Not I, Spears—not I."

"Who said it? Well, I cannot tell you. The women among them; they have their own way of looking at things."

And then the two men paused, looking at each other. This was the moment in which it was natural that Janet's lover should make his own explanation to the father of the girl whom he loved. The whole life of two people at least, and of many more in a secondary point of view, hung upon Paul's lips, to be decided by the next impulse that might move him, by the next fantastic words which, out of the mist of unreal fact in which he had got himself enveloped, he might be moved to say.

END OF VOL. I.

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