

SQUIRE ARDEN.

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ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

“WHAT are the joy bells a-ringing for, Simon?” said an old woman, coming briskly out to the door of one of the pretty cottages in the pretty village of Arden, on a pleasant morning of early summer, when all the leaves were young, and the first freshness of the year was over the world. “There’s ne’er a one married as I knows on, and it aint Whitsuntide, nor Holmfirth fair, nor——”

“It’s the young Squire, stoopid,” said the old clerk, gruffly, leaning his arms upon the little paling of the tiny garden and looking at her. “He’s come home.”

What he really did say was “he’s coom whoam;” but the reader will be so kind as take it for granted that Simon Molyneaux was an old Lancashire man, and talked accordingly, without giving a pen not too familiar with the dialect the trouble of putting in all the o’s that are necessary. Simon said coom, and he said loove, and moother;

but as there is no moral meaning in the double letter, let us consent to leave it out.

“The young Squire!” said the old woman, with a start.

She was a tidy fresh old woman, with cheeks of a russet colour, half brown half red, yet soft, despite all their wrinkles—cheeks that children laid their little faces up to without feeling any difference of texture; and eyes which had stolen back during these years deeper into their sockets, but yet were bright and full of suppressed sunshine. She had a little shawl pinned over her print gown, and a great white apron, which shone in the sun, and made the chief light in the little picture. Simon’s rugged countenance looking at her was all brown, with a deep dusky red on the tops of the cheekbones; his face was as full of cross-hatching as if he had been an old print. His eyes were deeper than were hers, but still at the bottom of the wrinkled caves they abode in had a spark of light in each of them. In short, there was sufficient resemblance between them still to show that Simon and Sarah were brother and sister. A young woman of four and twenty came to the door of the next cottage at the sound of his voice, and opening it, went in again, as if her duty was done. She was Simon’s daughter and housekeeper, who was not

fond of gossip, and the two kindred households were next door to each other. It was a very pretty village, much encouraged to keep itself tidy, and to cultivate flowers, and do everything that is proper in its condition of life, by the young lady at the Hall. The houses had been improved, but in an unobtrusive way. They were not painfully white-washed, but showed here and there a gleam of red brick in a thin place. The roses and the honeysuckles were not always neatly trained, and there was even an old shawl thrust into a broken pane in the window of Sally Timms, who was so much trouble to Miss Arden with her untidy ways. Old Simon had nothing but wallflower and southernwood (which was called lad's love in that region), and red and white daisies in his garden. But next door, if you came at the proper season, you might see picottees that were exhibited at the Holmfirth flower show, and floury auriculas, such as were the height of the fashion in the floral world a good many years ago. In short there was just that mixture of perfection and imperfection which kept the village of Arden a natural spontaneous village, instead of an artificial piece of luxury, cultivated like any other ornament, in consequence of the very close vicinity of the Hall gates.

“The young Squire!” said old Sarah again, who

had been shaking her head all the time we have taken to interpolate this bit of description; and she did it still more emphatically now when she repeated her words, "Poor lad—poor lad! Eh, to think the joy bells should be rung in Arden Church along o' *him!* He never came home yet that I hadn't a good cry for't afore the day was done. Poor lad!"

"Thee needn't cry no more," said Simon, "along of him. He's come to his own, and ne'er one within twenty miles to say him nay. He came home last night, when folks were a' abed; but he's as bright as a May morning to look at him now."

"He was allays bright," said Sarah, wiping her eyes with her apron, an action which disturbed the whole picture, breaking up the lights, "when he was kepp like the lowest in the house, and 'ad the nose snapped off his face, he'd cry one minute and laugh the next, that's what he'd do. He never was long down, wasn't Mr. Edgar. Though where he got that, and his light hair, and them dancing eyes of his, it's none o' us that can say."

"It was off his mother he got 'em, as was natural," said the old clerk. "I saw her when old Master he brought her home first, and she was as fair as fair. But, Squire or no Squire, I'm going to my breakfast. Them bell-ringing boys they're at."

the Arden Arms already, drinking the Squire's sovereign, the fools, instead of laying it up for a rainy day. If they had the rheumatiz as bad as me they'd know what it was to have a penny laid by; but I don't know what young folks is coming to, I don't," said Simon, opening his own gate, and hobbling towards the open door. He had a large white handkerchief loosely tied about his shrivelled brown throat, and an old black coat, which had been an evening coat of the old Squire's in former days. Simon preferred swallowtail coats, chiefly because he thought they were more dignified, and became his position; but partly also because experience had taught him that coats which were only worn in the evening by their original proprietor had a great deal more wear in them than those which the Squire or the Rector walked about in all day.

Sarah went in also to her own cottage, where for the moment she was all alone. She spread down her white apron, and smoothed out the creases which she had made when she dried her eyes; but, notwithstanding, her eyes required to be dried again. "Poor lad," she said at intervals, as she "tidied" her already tidy room, and swept some imperceptible dust into the fireplace. The fire was made up. The cat sat winking by it. The kettle feebly murmured on the hob. It was not the mo-

ment for that kettle to put itself in evidence. It had made the breakfast, and had helped in the washing of the solitary cup and saucer, and it was only just now that it should retire into the background till the afternoon, when tea was again to be thought of. Its mistress was somewhat in the same condition. She walked round the room two or three times, trying apparently to find some piece of active work which required to be done, and poked into all the corners. "I done my scouring only yesterday," she said to herself in a regretful and plaintive tone; but, after a little interval, added energetically, "and I cannot settle down to plain sewing, not to-day." She said this as if somebody had commanded her to take to her plain sewing, which lay all ready in a basket on the table, and the command had roused her to sudden irritation. But it was only the voice of duty which gave that order. Even after this indignant protest, however, Sarah took her work, and put in three stitches, and then picked them carefully out again. "I think I'm a losing of my seven senses," she said to herself plaintively. "It aint no use a struggling." And with that the old woman rose, tied on her big old bonnet, and set out through Arden village in the sunshine on her way to Arden Hall.

To see that pretty rural place, you would never

have supposed it was within a dozen miles of the great, vulgar, bustling town of Liverpool — nay, within half a dozen miles of the straggling, dreary outskirts of that big beehive. But yet so it was; from the tower of Arden Church you could see the mouth of the Mersey, with all its crowds of ships; and, but for the haughty determination of the old Squire to grant no building leases on his land, and the absence of railway communication consequent thereupon, no doubt Arden would have been by this time full of villas, and would have sent a stream of commercial gentlemen every morning out of its quiet freshness by dint of a ten o'clock train. But there was no ten o'clock train, and no commercial gentlemen, and no bright shining new villas; but only the row of houses, half whitewash half red brick, with lilac bushes all in flower, and traveller's joy bristling over their porches, and all the little gardens shining in the sun. The Church was early English; the parsonage was red brick of Queen Anne's time. And there was a great house flush with the road, disdaining any petty interposition of garden between it and the highway, with white steps and a brass knocker, and rows upon rows of brilliant dazzling windows, which was the doctor's house. The parson and the doctor were the only gentlemen in Arden village; there was nobody else above the rank of an ordinary

cottager. There was a little shop where everything was sold ; and there was the post office, where stationery was to be had as well as postage stamps ; and the Arden Arms, with a little green before it, and a great square sign-post standing out in the midst. A little way beyond the Church, which stood on the other side of the road, opposite but higher up than the Arden Arms, were the great Hall gates. They had a liberal hospitable breadth about them which was suggestive somehow of guests and good cheer. Two carriages could pass, the village folks said, with natural pride, through those wide portals, and the breadth of the great splendid old avenue, with its elms and limes, was in proportion. There were two footpaths leading on either side of the avenue, like side aisles in a great cathedral, under the green-arched splendour of meeting trees ; and so princely were the Ardens, with all their prejudices, that not only their poor neighbours, but even Liverpool folks pic-nicing, had leave to roam about the park, and take their walks even in the side aisles of the avenue. The Squire, like a great monarch, was affable to the populace—so long as it allowed that it was the populace, and kept in its right place.

Up one of these side walks old Sarah trudged, with her white apron disturbing all the lights, and with many homely musings in her old head, which

had scarcely a right to the dignified title of thoughts. She was thinking to herself—"Eh, my word, but here's changes! Master o' all, him that was never made no more of nor a stranger in his own father's house; nor half so much as a stranger. Them as come on visits would get the best o' all, ponies to ride, and servants to wait upon 'em, and whatever they had a mind for:—and Mr. Edgar put into that bit of a room by the nursery, and never a horse, nor a penny in his pocket. I'd just like to know how it was. Eh, my word, what a queer feel it must have! You mind me, he'll think he hears oud Squire ahind him many and many a day. And an only son! And I never heard a word against Madam, and Miss Clare always the queen of all. Bless him! none on us could help that; but I was allays one as stood up for Mr. Edgar. And now he's master o' all! I wonder is she glad, the dear? Here's folks a coming, a man and a maid; and I canno' see who they are with my bad eyes. Eh, but I could once see as good as the best. I mind that time I was in Cheshire, afore I came home here—Lord bless us, it's Miss Clare and the young Squire!"

The young pair were coming down under the trees on the same path, and Sarah stopped short in her thinkings with a flutter, as if they must have

divined the subject of them:—Two young people all in black, not lighting up the landscape as they might have done had their dress been as bright as their faces. The first thing that struck the observer was that they were utterly unlike; they had not even the same little family tricks of gait or gesture, such as might have made it apparent that they were brother and sister. The young lady was tall and slight, with a great deal of soft dignity and grace; dignity which might, however, grow imperious on occasion. Her face was beautiful, and regular, and full of sweetness; but those fine lines could set and harden, and the light young figure could erect itself, if need were, into all the severity of a youthful Juno. Her hair was very dark, and her eyes blue—a kind of beauty which is often of the highest class as beauty, but often, also, indicates a character which should attract as much fear as love. She was soft now as the opening day, leaning on her brother's arm with a certain clinging gesture which was not natural to her, lavishing upon him her smiles and pretty looks of affection. Old Sarah, looking on, divined her meaning in a moment. "Bless her!" the old woman said to herself, with a tear in the corner of her eye, which she dared not lift the apron to dry. Hard injustice and wrong had been Edgar's part all his life. His

sister was making it up to him, pouring upon him all the sunshine she could collect into her moist eyes, to make him amends for having thus lived so long in the dark.

Clare Arden might have stepped out of one of the picture frames in the hall, so entirely was her beauty the beauty of her family; but her brother was as different as it is possible to imagine. He was scarcely taller than she was, not more than an inch or two, instead of towering over her as her father had done. He had light brown, curly, abundant hair, frizzing all over his well-shaped, well-poised head; and brown eyes, which sparkled, and danced, and laughed, and spoke, and defied you not to like them. They had laughed and danced in his worst days, irrepressibly, and now, notwithstanding the black band on his hat, they sent rays about like dancing fauns, all life, and fire, and active energy. He looked like one whom nobody could wrong, who would disarm the sourest critic. A stranger would have instantly taken it for granted that he was the favourite child of the house, the one whose gay vagaries were always pardoned, and whose saucy ways no father or mother could well withstand. How such a being could have got into the serious old-world house of Arden nobody could make out. It was supposed that he was like his

mother; but she had been in delicate health, poor lady, and had lived very little at Arden Hall. The village folks did not trouble their head with theories as to the cause of the old Squire's dislike to his only son, but the parson and the doctor had each a very decided opinion on the subject, which the reader shall learn further on, and make his own conclusions from. For, in the meantime, I cannot go on describing Edgar Arden. It is his business to do that for himself.

"Who is coming?" he said. "Somebody whose face I know; a nice old woman with a great white apron. But we must go on to see the village, and all your improvements there."

"There are no improvements," said his sister. "Oh, Edgar, I do hope you hate that sort of thing as I do. Let us keep it as it was. Our own people are so pleasant, and will do what we want them. The only thing I was afraid of you for was lest you should turn radical, like the rest of the young men. But then you have not been in the way of it—like the Oxford men, you know."

"I don't know about the Oxford men," said Edgar, "but I am not so sure I haven't been in the way of it." He had the least little touch of a foreign accent, which was very quaint from those most Saxon lips. He was just the kind of young

man whom, anywhere abroad, the traveller would distinguish as an undeniable Briton; and yet his English had a touch of something alien in it—a flavour which was not British. He laughed as he spoke, and the sound startled all the solemn elms of Arden. The Ardens did not laugh much; they smiled very sweetly, and they liked to know that their smile was a distinction; but Edgar was not like the Ardens.

“How you laugh,” said Clare, clinging a little closer to his arm, “It is very odd, but somehow I like it. Don’t you know, Edgar, the Ardens were never people to laugh? We smile.”

“So you do,” said Edgar, “and I would rather have your smile than ever so much laughing. But then you know I am not half an Arden. I never had a chance. Here is our old woman close at hand with her white apron. Why, it is old Sarah! You kind old soul, how are you? How does it go?” And he took both her hands into his and shook them till old Sarah lost her breath. Then a twinkle like a tear came in to Edgar’s laughing eye. “You gave me half-a-crown when I left Arden last,” he said, still holding her hands, and then in his foreign way he kissed her first on one brown cheek and then on the other. “Oh, Master Edgar!” cried old Sarah, out of breath; while Clare looked on very sedately, not quite knowing what to say.

CHAPTER II.

“It was kind of you to come and see my brother,” said Clare at length, with something of that high and lofty sweetness which half implies—“it was kind, but it was a piece of presumption.” She meant no harm to her old nurse, whom she was fond of in her heart, and who was besides a privileged person, free to be fond of the Ardens; but Edgar had been badly used all his life, and his sister was more proud on his behalf than if he had been the worshipped heir, always foremost. She drew herself up just a little, not knowing what to make of it. In one way it was right, and she approved; for even a king may be tender to his favoured dependents without derogation—but yet, certainly it was not the Arden way.

“Miss Clare, you don’t think that, and you oughtn’t for to say it,” said old Sarah, with some natural heat; “but I’ve been about the house ever since you were born: and staying still to-day in my little place with my plain-sewing was more nor I

could do. If there had been e'er a little maid to look to—but I ain't got none in hands now."

"I beg your pardon, Sarah," said Clare promptly; "and Mrs. Fillpot has something to say to you about that. If you will go up to the house and speak to her, now that you have seen Edgar, it will be very nice of you. We are going down to the village to see some of his old friends."

"The young master don't know the village, Miss Clare, as he ought to have done," said old Sarah, shaking her head. She had said such words often before, but never with the same result as now; for Clare was divided between allegiance to the father whom she loved, who was dead, and whom she could not now admit to have ever done any wrong—and the brother whom she loved, who was there by her side, and of whose injuries she was so keenly sensible. The blood rushed to her cheek—her fine blue eyes grew like steel—the lines of her beautiful face hardened. Poor old Sarah shrank back instinctively, almost as if she expected a blow. Clare's lips were formed to speak when her brother interrupted her, and probably the words would not have been pleasant which she was about to say.

"The more reason I should know it now," he said in his lighthearted way. "If it had not been so early, Sarah, you should have come back and made

me some tea. What capital tea she used to make for you in the nursery, Clare, you lucky girl! It is Miss Arden's village I am going to see, Sarah. It shall always be hers to do what she likes with it. You can tell the people nothing is changed there."

"Edgar, I think we should go," said Clare, restraining him with once more that soft shade of possible haughtiness. "Stay till we come back, Sarah;" and with a little movement of her hand in sign of farewell, she led her brother away. "You must not tell your plans to that sort of person," she said with a quick breath, in which her momentary passion found relief.

"What! not your old nurse, Clare?" he cried. "You must not snub the old woman so. We had better make a bargain in time, we who are so different. You shall snub me when you please for my democratic ways, but you must not snub the others, Clare."

"What others?"

Edgar made no direct answer. He laughed and drew his sister's arm close within his own. "You are such a pretty picture with those great-lady looks of yours," he said; "they make me think of ruffs and hoops, and dresses all covered with pearls. What is a farthingale? I am sure that is what you ought to wear."

“ You mean it is out of fashion to remember that one is well born, and of an old family,” said Clare with energy, “ but you will never bring me to see that. One has enough to do to keep one’s proper place with all those encroachments that are going on, without one’s own brother to take their part. But oh! forgive me, Edgar ; I forgot : I will never say another word,” she said, with the tears rushing to her eyes.

“ What did you forget ? ” he said gently—“ that I have been brought up as never any Arden was before me, and am not an Arden at all, so to speak ? Perhaps on the whole it is better, for Arden ways are not the ways of our time. They are very splendid and very imposing, and, in you, dear, I don’t object to them, but——”

“ Oh, Edgar, don’t speak so ! ” said his sister, with a certain horror.

“ But I must speak so, and think so, too,” he said. “ Could not you try to imagine, Clare, among all the many theories on the subject, that this was what was meant by my banishment ? It is as good a way of accounting for it as another. Imagine, for instance, that Arden ways were found to be a little behind the generation, and that, hard as it was, and, perhaps, cruel as it was——”

“ Edgar——I don’t say it is not true ; but oh, don’t say so, for I can’t bear it ! ”

“I shall say nothing you can't bear,” he said softly, “my kind sister! you always did your best for me. I hope I should not have behaved badly anyhow; but you can't tell what a comfort it is that you always stood by me, Clare.”

“I always loved you, Edgar,” she cried, eagerly; “and then I used to wonder if it was my fault—if I got all the love because I was like the family, and a girl—taking it from you. I wish we had been a little bit like, do you know—just a little, so that people should say—‘Look at that brother and sister.’ Sometimes one sees a boy and a girl so like—just a beard to one and long hair to the other, to make the necessary difference; and then one sees they belong to each other at the first glance.”

“Never mind,” said Edgar with a smile, “so long as we resemble each other in our hearts.”

“But not in our minds,” said Clare, sorrowfully. “I can see how it will be. You will always be thinking one thing when I am thinking another. Whatever there may be to consider, you and I will always take different views of it. You are for the present, and I am for the past. I know only our own Arden ways, and you know the ways of the world. It is so hard, Edgar; but, dear, I don't for a moment say it is your fault,” she said, holding his arm clasped between her hands, and looking up,

with her blue eyes at their softest, into his face. He looked down upon her at the same time with a curious, tender, amused smile. Clare, who knew only Arden ways, was so sure they must be right ways, so certain that there was a fault somewhere in those who did not understand them—but not Edgar's fault, poor fellow! He had been brought up away from home, and was to be pitied, not blamed. And this was why her brother looked down upon her with that curious amused smile.

“No,” he said, “it was not my fault; but I think you should take my theory on the subject into consideration, Clare. Suppose I had been sent off on purpose to inaugurate a new world?”

Clare gave a little shudder, but she did not speak. She was troubled even that he could joke on such a matter, or suggest theories, as if it had been a mere crotchet on the part of her father, who was incapable of anything of the kind; but she could not make a direct reply, for, by tacit mutual consent, neither of them named the old Squire.

“Let us think so at least,” he answered gaily, “for the harm is done, I fear; and it would not be so bad to be a deserter from Arden ways, if one had been educated for that purpose, don't you think? So here we are at the village! Don't tell me anything. I remember every bit of it as well as if I

had been here yesterday. Where is the old lathe-and-plaster house that used to stand here?"

"To think you should recollect it!" said Clare, her eyes suddenly lighting up; and then in an apologetic tone—"It was so old. I allow it was very picturesque and charming to look at; but oh, Edgar, you would not blame me if you knew how dreadfully tumble-down and miserable it was inside. The rain kept coming in, and when the brook was flooded in winter it came right into the kitchen; and the children kept having fevers. I felt very much disposed to cry over it, I can tell you; but you would not have blamed me had you seen how shocking it was inside."

"I wonder if Mistress Arden, in a ruff and a farthingale, would have thought about the drainage," he answered, laughing. "Fancy my blaming you, Clare! I tell you it is your village, and you shall do what you like with it. Is that Mr. Fielding at his gate? Let us cross over and shake hands with him before we go any further. He is not so old, surely, as he once was."

"It is we who are old," said Clare, with the first laugh that had yet come from her lips. "He is putting on his gloves to go and call on you, Edgar. The bell-ringers must have made it known everywhere. Mr. Fielding and Dr. Somers will come

to-day, and the Thornleighs and Evertons to-morrow, and after that everybody; now see if it does not happen just as I say!"

"Let us stop the first of these visits," said Edgar, and he went forward holding out his hand, while the parson at the gate, buttoning his grey gloves, peered at him through a pair of short-sighted eyes. "It will be very kind of you to name yourself, Sir, for I am very short-sighted," the Rector said, looking at him with that semi-suspicion which is natural to a rustic of the highest as well as the lowest social position. The newcomer was a stranger, and therefore had little right and no assignable place in the village world. Mr. Fielding, who was short-sighted besides, peered at him very doubtfully from the puckered corners of his eyes.

"Don't you know me?" said Edgar; and "Oh, Mr. Fielding, don't you know Edgar?" came with still greater earnestness from the lips of Clare.

"It is not possible!" said Mr. Fielding, very decidedly; and then he let his slim umbrella drop out of his fingers, and held out both his hands. "Is it really you, my dear boy!" he said. "Excuse my blind eyes. If you had been my own son I would not have known you. I was on my way to call. But though this is not so solemn or so correct it will do as well. And Clare: Will you come in and

have some breakfast? It cannot be much past your breakfast hour."

"Nor yours either," said Clare; "it is so naughty of you and so wrong of you to sit up like that, when you might just as well read in daylight, and go to bed when everybody else does. But we don't follow such a bad example. We mean to have breakfast always by eight o'clock."

Mr. Fielding gave a little sigh, and shook his venerable head. "That is all very pretty, my dear, and very nice when you can do it; but you know it never lasts. Anyhow, don't let us stand here. Come in, my dear boy, come in, and welcome home again. And welcome to your own, Edgar," he added, turning quickly round as he led them into his study, a large low room, looking out upon the trim parsonage garden. He put out both his hands as he said this, and grasped both those of Edgar, and looked not at all disinclined to throw himself upon his neck, "Welcome to your own," he repeated fervently, and his eyes strayed beyond Edgar's head, as if he were confronting and defying some one. And then he added more solemnly, "And God bless you, and enable you to fill your high position like a man. Amen. I wonder what the old Doctor will say now."

"What should he say?" said Edgar, fun dancing

in his bright brown eyes ; “and how is he ? I suppose he is unchangeable, like everything here.”

“Not unchangeable,” said Mr. Fielding, with a slight half-perceptible shake of his head at the levity, one of those momentary assumptions of the professional which most old clergymen indulge in now and then ; “nothing is unchangeable in this transitory world. But old Somers is as steady as most things,” he added, with a responsive glance of amusement. “We go on quarrelling, he and I, but it would be hard upon us if we had to part. But tell me about yourself, Edgar, which is more interesting. When did you get home ?”

“Late last night,” said Edgar. “I came straight through from Cologne. I began to get impatient as soon as I had settled which day I was to reach home, and came before my time. Clare was in bed, poor child ; but she got up, fancy, when she heard it was me.”

“Of course she did ; and she wants a cup of chocolate now,” said the old parson, “when her colour changes like that from red to white, you should give her some globules instantly, or else a cup of chocolate. I am not a homœopathist, so I always recommend the chocolate. Mrs. Solmes please, Miss Clare is here.”

“Shall I make two, sir ?” said the housekeeper,

who had heard the unusual commotion, and put her head in softly to see what was the matter. She did not quite understand it, even now. But she was too highly trained a woman, and too good a servant to take any notice. The chocolate was her affair, while the identity of the new comer was not.

“Don’t you know my brother, Mrs. Solmes?” cried Clare. “He has come home. Edgar, she takes such good care of dear Mr. Fielding. I don’t know how he managed without her before she came.”

Edgar was not failing in his duty on the occasion. He stepped forward and shook hands with the radiant and flattered woman, “as nat’ral as if I had known him all his life,” she said in the kitchen afterwards; for Mrs. Solmes was a stranger and foreigner, belonging to the next parish, who could not but disapprove of Arden and Arden ways, which were different from the habits of Thornleigh parish, to which she belonged. Edgar made her quite a little speech as he stood and held her hand—“Anybody who is good to Mr. Fielding is good to Clare and me. He has always been so kind to us all our lives.”

“He loves you like his own children, sir,” said Mrs. Solmes, quickly; and then she turned and went away to make the chocolate, not wishing to presume; while her master walked about the room, rubbing

his hands softly, and peering at the young man from amid the puckers of his eyelids with pleased and approving satisfaction. "It is very nicely said," cried Mr. Fielding, "very nice feeling, and well expressed. After that speech, I should have known him anywhere for an Arden, Clare."

"But the Ardens don't make pretty speeches," said Clare, under her breath. She never could be quite sure of him. Everything he did had a spontaneous look about it that puzzled his sister. To be in Arden, and to know that a certain hereditary course of action is expected from you is a great advantage, no doubt, yet it sometimes gives a certain sobriety and stiffness to the external aspect. Edgar, on the contrary, was provokingly easy, with all the spontaneousness of a man who said and did exactly what he liked to do and to say. Clare's loyalty to her race could not have permitted any such freedom of action, and it puzzled her at every turn.

"We must send for old Somers," said Mr. Fielding. "Poor old fellow, he is very crotchety and fond of his own notions; but he's a very good fellow. We are the two oldest friends you have in the world, you young people; and if we might not get a little satisfaction out of you I don't know who should. Mrs. Solmes," this was called from the study door in a louder voice, "send Jack over with my compliments

to Dr. Somers, and ask him to step this way for a minute. No, Edgar, don't go; I want to surprise him here."

"But no one says anything about Miss Somers," said Edgar; "how is she?"

"Ah, poor thing," said Mr. Fielding, shaking his head, "she is confined to bed now. She is growing old, poor soul. For that matter, we are all growing old. And not a bad thing either," he added, pausing and looking round at the two young figures so radiant in life and hope. "You children are sadly sorry for us—but fading away out of the world is easier than you think."

Edgar grasped Mr. Fielding's hand, not quite knowing why, with the compunction of youth for the departing existence to which its own beginning seems so harsh a contrast, and yet with a reverential sympathy that closed his lips. Clare, on the contrary, looked at him with something almost matter-of-fact in her blue eyes. "You are not so old," she said quietly. "We thought you looked quite young as we came to the door. Please don't be angry, but I used to think you were a hundred. You have grown ever so much younger these last three years."

"I should be very proud if I were a hundred," said Mr. Fielding, with a laugh; but he liked the grasp of Edgar's hand, and that sympathetic glance

in his eyes. Clare was Clare, the recognised and accustomed princess, whom no one thought of criticising ; but her brother was on his trial. Every new look, every movement, spoke for or against him ; and, so far, everything was in his favour. "Of course, he is like his mother's family," the old Rector said to himself, "more sympathetic than the pure Ardens, but with all their fine character and best qualities. I wonder what old Somers will think of him. And here he comes," he continued aloud, "the best doctor in the county, though he is as crotchety as an old magician. Somers, here's our young squire."

CHAPTER III.

DR. SOMERS came in, with a pair of eagle eyes going before him, as it seemed, like pioneers, to warn him of what was in his way. The Rector peered and groped with the short-sighted feeble orbs which lurked amid a nest of wrinkles, but the Doctor's brilliant black eyes went on before him and inspected everything. He was a tall, straight, slim, but powerful old man, with nothing superfluous about him except his beard, which in those days was certainly a superfluity. It was white, and so was his hair; but his eyes were so much darker than any human eyes that were ever seen, that to call them black was not in the least inappropriate. He had been the handsomest man in the county in his youth, and he was not less so now—perhaps more, with all the imposing glory of his white hair, and the suavity of age that had softened the lines in his face—lines which might have been a little hard in the fulness of his strength. It was possible to think of the Rector as, according to his own words,

fading away out of the earth, but Dr. Somers stood like a strong tower, which only a violent shock could move, and which had strength to resist a thousand assaults. He came into the sober-toned rectory, into that room which was always a little cold, filled with a soft motionless atmosphere, a kind of abiding twilight, which even Clare's presence did not dispel—and filled it, as it seemed, swallowing up not only the Rector, but the young brother and sister, in the fulness of his presence. He was the light, and Mr. Fielding the shadow in the picture; and, as ought always to be the case, the light dominated the shadow. He had taken in everything and everyone in the room with a devouring glance in the momentary pause he made at the door, and then entered, holding out his hand to the newcomer—"They meant to mystify me, I suppose," he said, "and thought I would not recognise you. How are you, Edgar? You are looking just as I thought you would, just as I knew you would. When did you come home?"

"Last night, late," said Edgar, returning cordially the pressure of his hand.

"And did not wait to be waited on, like a reigning monarch, but came to see your old friends, like an impatient good-hearted boy? There's a fine fellow," said the Doctor, patting him on the

shoulders with a caress which was quite as forcible as it was affectionate. "I ought to like you, Edgar Arden, for you have always justified my opinion of you, and done exactly what I expected you would do, all your life."

"Perhaps it is rash to say that I hope I shall always justify your opinion," said Edgar, laughing, "for I don't know whether it is a good one. But I don't suppose I am very hard to read," he added, with a warm flush rising over his face. He grew red, and he stopped short with a certain sense of embarrassment for which he could scarcely account. He did not even try to account for it to himself, but flushed all over, and felt excessively hot and uncomfortable. The fact was, he was a very open-hearted, candid young fellow, much more tempted to wear his heart upon his sleeve than to conceal it; and, as he glanced round upon his three companions, he could see that there was a certain furtive look of scrutiny about all their eyes: not furtive so far as the Doctor was concerned, who looked through and through him without any concealment of his intention. But Mr. Fielding had half-turned his head, while yet he peered with a tremulous scrutiny at his young guest; and Clare's pretty forehead was contracted with a line of anxiety which Edgar knew well. They were all

doubtful about him—not sure of him—trying to make him out. Such a thought was bitter to the young man. His colour rose higher and higher, and his heart began to beat. “I do not think I am very difficult to read,” he repeated, with a forced and painful smile.

“Not a bit,” said the Doctor; “and you are as welcome home as flowers in May: the first time I have said that to you, my boy, but it won’t be the last. Miss Clare, my sister would be pleased if you told her of Edgar’s return. She will have to be prepared, and got up, and all sorts of things, to see him; but, if you were to tell her, she would think it kind. Ah, here’s the chocolate. Of course in this house everything must give place to that.”

“I will go over to Miss Somers for ten minutes,” said Clare, “thank you, Doctor, for reminding me; and, dear Mr. Fielding, don’t let Edgar go till I come back.”

“I should like to go too,” said Edgar. “No? Well, I won’t then; but tell Miss Somers I will come to-morrow, Clare. Tell her I have brought her something from Constantinople; and have never forgotten how kind she used to be—how kind you all were!” And the young man turned round upon them—“It is a strange sensation coming back and feeling myself at home among the faces I have known

all my life. And thank you all for being so good to Clare.”

Clare was going out as he spoke, with a certain shade of reluctance and even of pride. She had been told to go, and she did not like it; it had been implied that she had forgotten a duty of neighbourship, and to Miss Somers, too, who could not move about, and ascertain things for herself; and Clare did not like to be reminded of her duties. She turned round, however, at the door, and looked back, and smiled her acknowledgment of what her brother said. These two old men had been very kind to her. They had done everything that the most attached old friends could do at the time of her father's death. That was a whole year ago; for old Squire Arden had made a stipulation that his son was not to come back, nor enter upon the possession of his right, till he was five-and-twenty—a stipulation which, of course, counted for nothing in the eye of the law, but was binding on Edgar, much as he longed to be at his sister's side. Thus, his father oppressed him down to the very edge of his grave. And poor Clare would have been very forlorn in the great house but for her old friends. Miss Somers, who was not then so great an invalid, had gone to the Hall, to be with the girl during that time of seclusion, and she had been as a child to all

of them. A compunction smote Clare as she turned and looked round from the door, and she kissed her hand to them with a pretty gesture. But still it was with rather an ill grace that she went to Miss Somers, which was not her own impulse. Compulsion fretted the Arden soul.

“I brought Clare into the world, and Fielding has been her head nurse all his life,” said the Doctor, “no need for thanking us on that score. And now all’s yours, Edgar. I may say, and I’m sure Fielding will say, how thankful we both are to see you. You could not have been altogether disinherited, as the property’s entailed; but I never was easy in my mind about it during your father’s lifetime. The old Squire was a very peculiar man; and there was no telling——”

“Doctor,” said the young man, once more with a flush on his cheek, “would you mind leaving out my father’s name in anything that has to be said?—unless, indeed, he left any message for me. He liked Clare best, which was not wonderful, and he thought me a poor representative of the Ardens, which was natural enough. I have not a word to say against him. On the whole, perhaps, I have got as much good of my life as if I had been brought up in England. I have never been allowed to forget hitherto that my father did not care for me—let me forget it now.”

"Exactly," said the Doctor, looking at him with a certain curious complacency; and he gave a nod at Mr. Fielding, who stood winking to get rid of a tear which was in the corner of his eye. "Exactly what I said! Now, can you deny it? By Jove! I wish he had been my son! It is what I knew he would say."

"Edgar, my dear boy," said the Rector, "every word does you credit, and this more than all. Your poor father was mistaken. I say your poor father, for he evidently had something on his mind just before he died, and would have spoken if time had been allowed him. I have no doubt it was to say how sorry he was. But the Ardens are dreadfully obstinate, Edgar, and he never could bring himself to do it. It is just like you to say this. Clare will appreciate it, and I most fully appreciate it. It is the best way; let us not dwell upon the past, let us not even try to explain. Your being like your mother's family can never be anything against you—far from it. I agree in every word you say."

This speech, flattering and satisfactory as it was, took the young man a little by surprise. "I don't know what being like my mother's family has to do with it," he said, with momentary petulance; but then his brighter spirits gained the mastery. "It is best never to explain anything," he continued,

with a smile. "There is Clare calling me. I suppose I am to go to Miss Somers, notwithstanding your defence, Doctor." And he waved his hand to Clare from the window, and went out, leaving the two old men behind him, following him with their eyes. He was glad to get away, if truth must be told; they were fighting some sort of undisclosed duel over his body, Edgar could see, and he did not like it. He went across the village street, which was very quiet at that end, to the Doctor's great red brick house, and as he did so his face clouded over a little. "They have got some theory about me," he said to himself; "am I never to be rid of it? And what right has any one to discuss me and my affairs now?" Then the shade gradually disappeared from his face, and in spite of himself there glided across his mind a sudden comparison between the last time he had been at Arden and the present. Then he had a boy's keen sense of injustice and unkindness eating into him. It had not cut so deeply as it might have done if his temperament had been gloomy; but still it had galled him. He had felt himself contemned, disliked, thrust aside—his presence half clandestine—his wishes made of no account—his whole being thrust into a corner—a thing to hide, or at least to apologise for. Now, he was the master of all. The bells had rung for his

home - coming; everything was changed. The thought made his head swim as he walked along in the serene stillness, with the swallows making circles about, and the bees murmuring round the blossomed trees. He had been living an uncertain wandering life, not always well supplied with money, not trained to do anything, an innocent vagabond. Now there was not a corner of his life upon which some one interest or another did not lay a claim. He had the gravest occupations on his hands. He might make for himself a position of high influence and importance in his county; and could scarcely be insignificant if he tried. And all this had come to him without any training for it. His very habits of mind were not English; even in the midst of these serious thoughts the village green, which was at his left hand, beyond the Church and the Rectory, caught his eye, and a momentary speculation came across him, whether the village people danced there on Sundays? whether the fairs were held there, or the tombola, or something to represent them? and then he stopped and laughed at himself. What would Mr. Fielding say? Thus Edgar had come to be Squire Arden without even the habit of being an Englishman. The sense of injustice which had weighed upon him all his life might have embittered his beginning now, had his mind been less elastic.

But nature had been so good to him that he was able to toss these dreary thoughts aside, as he would have tossed a ball, before he went in to see Miss Somers. "Things will come right somehow," he said to himself. Such was his light-hearted philosophy; while Clare stood grave and silent at the door to meet him, with a seriousness which would have been more in accordance with his difficulties than with hers. What troubled her was the question—Would he be a radical, and introduce innovations, ignore the mightiness of his family, conduct himself as if his name were anything else than Arden? This sufficed to plant the intensest seriousness, with almost a cast of severity in it, upon the brow of Clare.

"Didn't I tell you exactly how it would happen?" said the Doctor, when Edgar was gone; "no sentiment to speak of—utter absence of revengeful feelings: settling down as if it was the most natural thing in the world—by-gones to be by-gones, and a fair start for the future. Didn't I tell you? That boy is worth his weight in gold."

"You certainly told me," said Mr. Fielding, faltering, "something very like what has come to pass; but I don't receive your theory, for all that. No, no; depend upon it, the simplest explanation is always the best. One can see at a glance he is like

his mother's family. Poor thing! I don't think she was too happy; and that must have intensified old Arden's remorse."

"Old Arden's fiddlestick!" said the Doctor. "I wouldn't give *that* for his remorse. He had his reasons you may be sure. Character has been my favourite study all my life, as you know; and if that frank, open-hearted, well-dispositioned boy ever came out of an Arden's nest, I expect to hear of a dove in an eagle's. He has justified every word I ever said of him. I declare to you, Fielding, I am as fond of him as if he were my own boy."

"Poor fellow!" said Mr. Fielding, shaking his head, as if that was not so great a compensation as might have been desired. "He will get into dozens of scrapes with these strange ways of thinking; and he knows nothing and nobody—not a soul in the county—and probably will be running his head against some stone wall or other before he is much older. If I had been twenty years younger I might have tried to be of use to him, but as it is——"

"As it is we shall both be of use to him," said the Doctor, "never fear. Of course, he will get into a hundred scrapes; but then he will struggle out again, and no harm will come of it. If he had been like the Ardens he might have escaped the scrapes,

but he would have missed a great deal besides. I like a young man to pay his way."

"It appears to me, Somers, that you are a radical yourself," said the Rector, shaking once more his feeble old head.

"On the contrary, the only real Tory going. The last of my race,—the Conservative innovator," said Dr. Somers. "These old races, my dear Fielding, are beautiful things to look at. Clare, for instance, who is the concentrated essence of Ardenism—and how charming she is! But that order of things must come to an end. Another Squire Arden would have been next to impossible: whereas this new-blooded sanguine boy will make a new beginning. I don't want to shock your feelings as a clergyman: but the cuckoo's egg sometimes comes to good."

"Somers," said the Rector, solemnly, "I have told you often that I knew Mrs. Arden well. She was a good woman; as unlikely to go wrong as any woman I ever knew. You do her horrible injustice by such a supposition. Besides, think: he was always with her wherever she went—there could not have been a more devoted husband; and to imagine that all the while he had such a frightful wrong on his mind—it is simply impossible! besides, she was the mother of Clare."

“That covers a multitude of sins, of course,” said the Doctor, “but you forget that I know all your arguments by heart. I don’t pretend to explain everything. It is best never to explain, as that boy says—wise fellow! Half the harm done in the world comes of explanations. But to return to our subject. I never said he found it out at once; perhaps—most likely—it was not discovered in her lifetime. Her papers might inform him after her death. It is curious that when there is anything to conceal, people do always leave papers telling all about it. If you will give me any other feasible explanation I don’t stand upon my theory. Like his mother’s family—bah! Is that reason enough for a man to shut his heart against his only boy? Besides, he is not like any one I know. I wish I could light upon any man he was like. It might furnish a clue——”

“When you are on your hobby, Somers, there is no stopping you,” said the Rector, with a look of distress.

“I am not alone in my equestrian powers,” retorted the Doctor, “you do quite as much in that line as I do; but my theory has the advantage of being credible, at least.”

“Not credible,” said Mr. Fielding, with gentle vehemence. “No, certainly not credible. Nothing

would make it credible—not even to have heard with your ears, and seen with your eyes.”

“I never argue with prejudiced persons,” answered the Doctor, with equal haste and heat; and thus they parted, with every appearance of a quarrel. Such things happened almost daily between the two old friends. Dr. Somers took up his hat, gave a vague nod of leave-taking, and issued forth from the rectory gate as if he shook the dust from his feet; but all the same he would drop in at the rectory that evening, stalking carelessly through an open window as if, Mrs. Solmes said, who was not fond of the Doctor, the place belonged to him. He went across the street with more than his usual energy. His phaeton stood at his own door, with two fine horses, and the smartest of grooms standing at their heads. Dr. Somers was noted for his horses and the perfection of his turn-out generally, which was a relic of the days when he was the pride of the neighbourhood, and, people said, might have married into the highest family in the county had he so willed. He was still the handsomest man in the parish, though he was no longer young; and he was rich enough to indulge himself in all that luxury of personal surroundings which is dear to an old beauty. Edgar, who was standing at one of the twinkling windows, watched the Doctor get into his carriage

with a mixture of admiration and relief. On the whole, the young man was glad not to have another interview with his old friend; but his white hair and his black eyes, his splendid old figure and beautiful horses, were a sight to see.

CHAPTER IV.

“ I AM not quite in a state to receive a gentleman,” Miss Somers was saying when Edgar went in, with a little flutter of timidity and eagerness. “ But it is so kind of you to let me know, and so sweet of dear Edgar to want to come. I told my brother only last night I was quite sure—— But then he always has his own way of thinking. And you know why should dear Edgar care for a poor creature like me? I quite recognise that, my dear. There might be a time in my young days when some people cared—— but as my brother says—— And just come from the Continent, you know !”

“ May I come in ?” said Edgar, tapping against the folding screen which sheltered the head of the sofa on which the invalid lay.

“ Oh, goodness me ! Clare, my love, the dear boy is there ! Yes, come in, Edgar, if you don't mind—— But I ought to call you Mr. Arden now. I never shall be able to call you Mr. Arden. Oh, goodness, boy ! Well, there can't be any harm in

his kissing me ; do you think there can be any harm in it, Clare ? I am old enough to be both your mothers, and I am sure I think I love you quite as well. Of course, I should never speak of loving a gentleman if it was not for my age and lying here so helpless. Yes, I do feel as if I should cry sometimes to think how I used to run about once. But so long as it is only me, you know, and nobody else suffers—— And you are both looking so well ! But tell me now how shall you put up with Arden after the Continent and all that ? I never was on the Continent but once, and then it was nothing but a series of fêtes, as they called them. I was saying to my brother only last night—— ; for you know you never would visit the Pimpernels, Clare——”

“ Who are the Pimpernels ? and what have they to do with it ? ” said Edgar. “ But tell me about yourself first, and how you come to be on a sofa. I never remember to have seen you sitting still before all my life.”

“ No, indeed,” said Miss Somers, her soft pretty old face growing suddenly grey and solemn, “ that is what makes old Mercy think it’s a judgment ; but you wouldn’t say it was wicked to be always running about, would you now ? It’s wrong to follow one’s own inclinations, to be sure, but so long as you don’t harm anybody—— There

are the Pimpernel girls, who play croquet, from morning till night—not that I mean it's wicked to play croquet—but poor Mr. Denbigh gets just a little led away I fear sometimes; and if ever there was a game intended for the waste of young people's time——”

“Never mind the Pimpernels,” said Clare, with a slightly imperative note in her voice. “It is Edgar who is here beside you now.”

“Oh, yes—dear fellow; but do you know I think my mind is weakened as well as my body? Do I run on different from what I used, Edgar? I was talking to my brother the other night—and he busy with his paper—and ‘how you run on!’ was all he said when I asked him—— You know he might have given me a civil answer. I fear there is no doubt I am weakened, my dear. I was speaking to young Mr. Denbigh yesterday, and he says he said to the Doctor that if he were him he would take me to some baths or other, which did him a great deal of good, he says; but I could not take him away, you know, nor give anybody so much trouble. He is such a nice young man, Edgar. I should like you to know him. But, then, to think when I ask just a quiet question, ‘how you do run on!’ he said. Not that I am complaining of him, dear——”

“Of young Mr. Denbigh?” said Clare.

“Now, Clare, my love—the idea! How could

I complain of young Mr. Denbigh, who is always the civillest and nicest—— Of course, I mean my brother. He says these German baths are very good; but I would not mention it to him for worlds, for I am sure he would be unhappy if he had to leave home only with me.”

Edgar and Clare looked at each other as Miss Somers, to use her own expression, ran on. Clare was annoyed and impatient, as young people so often are of the little follies of their seniors; but Edgar's brown eyes shone with fun, just modified by a soft affectionate sympathy. “Dear Miss Somers,” he said, half in joke half in earnest, “don't trouble yourself about your mind. You talk just as you always did. If I had heard you outside without knowing you were here, I should have recognised you at once. Don't worry yourself about your mind.”

“Do you think not, Edgar?—do you really think not? Now that is what I call a real comfort,” said Miss Somers; “for you are not like the people that are always with me; you would see in a moment if I was really weakened. Well, you know, I could not make up my mind to take him away—could I? For after all it does not matter so much about me. If I were young it would be different. Dear Edgar, no one has been civil

enough to ask you to sit down. Bring a chair for yourself here beside me. Do you know, Clare, I don't think, if you put it to me in a confidential way, that he has grown. He is not so tall as the rest of you Ardens. I was saying to my brother just the other day—I don't care for your dreadfully tall people; for you have always to stoop coming into a room, and look as if you were afraid the sky was falling. And oh, my dears, what a long time it is since we have had any rain!"

"Any rain?" said Edgar, who was a little taken by surprise.

"What the farmers will do I can't think, for you can't water the fields like a few pots of geraniums. That last cutting you sent me, Clare, has got on so well. Do you mean to keep up all the gardens and everything as it used to be, Edgar? You must make her go to the Holmfirth flower show. You did not go last year, Clare, nor the year before; and I saw such a pretty costume, too, in the last fashions-book—all grey and black—just the very thing for you. You ought to speak to her, Edgar. She has worn that heavy deep mourning too long."

"Don't, please," said Clare, turning aside with a look of pain on her face.

"My dear love, I am only thinking of your good. Now is it reasonable, Edgar? She looks

beautiful in mourning, to be sure; but it is more than a year, and she is still in crape. I would have put on my own light silk if I had known you were coming. I hate black from my heart, but it is the most useful to wear, with nice coloured ribbons, when you get old and helpless. I don't know if you notice any change in my appearance, Edgar? Now how odd you should have found it out! I have plenty of hair still—it is not that; but one gets so untidy with one's head on a pillow without a cap. Mrs. Pimpernel has quantities of hair; but a married lady is quite different—they can wear things and do things—— Did you observe, Edgar, if ladies wear caps just now abroad?"

"They wear a great many different things," said Edgar, "according to the different countries. I brought Clare a yashmak from Constantinople to cover her head with, and an Albanian cap——"

"My dear," said Miss Somers, sitting upright with horror, "the idea of Clare wearing a cap at nineteen! That shows one should never speak to a man about what is the fashion. Just look at her lovely hair! It will be time enough for that thirty years hence. I cannot think how you could like to live among the Turks. I hope you did not do as they do, Edgar. It may be all very nice to look at, but having a quantity of wives and that sort of

thing must be very dreadful. I am sure I never could have put up with it for a day; and then it goes in the very face of the Bible. I hope you are going to forget all that sort of thing now, and settle down quietly here."

"Miss Somers," said Edgar, with mock solemnity, "if I had left a quantity of wives at Constantinople, is it possible that you could calmly advise me to forget them, and marry another here?"

Miss Somers sat up still more straight on her sofa, and showed signs of agitation. "I am sure I would not advise you to what was wrong for all the world," she said. "Oh, Edgar, my poor boy, what a dreadful position! You might ask the Rector—— But if they were heathens, you know, in a Christian country do you think it would be binding? Clare, dear, suppose you step into the drawing-room a minute, till we talk this dreadful, dreadful business over. Oh, you poor boy! It seems wicked for me, an unmarried lady, even to think of such things; but if I could be of any use to you—— Edgar! that kind of poor creatures," said Miss Somers, putting her face close to his, and speaking in a whisper, "people buy them in the market, you know, as we read in books. Listen, my dear boy. It is not nice, of course, but——"

"What?" said Edgar, bending an eager ear.

“You could sell them again, don’t you think? Poor souls, if they are used to it, they wouldn’t care. Good gracious, how can you laugh, with such a burden on your mind? I am thinking what would be the best, Edgar, for you.”

The old lady was so anxious that she put her soft wrinkled old hand upon his, holding him fast, and gazing anxiously into his face. “You young men have such strange ways of thinking,” she said, looking disapprovingly at him; “you treat it as if it was a joke, but it is very, very serious. Clare, my love, just go and speak to old Mercy a moment. I cannot let him leave me, you know, until we have settled on something to do.”

“He is only laughing at you,” said Clare, with indignation. “How can you, Edgar? Dear Miss Somers, do you really believe he could be so wicked?”

“Wicked, my dear?” said Miss Somers, with a look of experience and importance on her eager old face, “young men have very strange ways. The less you know about such things the better. Edgar knows that he can speak to me.”

“But Clare is right,” said Edgar, smothering his laugh. “I did not mean to mystify you. I brought nothing more out of Constantinople than pipes and embroideries. I have some for you, Miss Somers.

Slippers that will just do for you on your sofa, and a soft Turkish scarf that you might make a turban of——”

“What should I do with a turban, my dear boy?” said the invalid at once diverted out of her solemnity, “though I remember people wearing them once. My mother had a gorgeous one she used to wear when she went out to dinner—you never see anything so fine now—with bird of paradise feathers. Fancy me in a turban, Clare! But the slippers will be very nice. There was a Mr. Templeton I once knew, in the Royal Navy, a very nice young man, with black hair, like a Corsair, or a Giaour, or something—— That was in my young days, my dears, when I was not perhaps quite so unattractive as I am now. Oh, you need not be so polite, Edgar; I know I am quite unattractive, as how could I be otherwise, with my health and at my age? He was a very nice young man, and he paid me a great deal of attention; but dear papa, you know—he was always a man that would have his own way——”

Here Miss Somers broke off with a sigh, and the story of Mr. Templeton, of the Royal Navy, came to an abrupt conclusion, notwithstanding an effort on the part of one of the listeners to keep it up. “Was Mr. Templeton at Constantinople?” Edgar asked,

bringing the narrator back to her starting-point ; but it was not to be.

“Oh, what does it matter where Mr. Templeton was?” said Clare. “Edgar has come down to see the village, Miss Somers, and all the poor people ; and I must take him away now. Another time you can tell us all about it. Edgar, fancy, it is nearly twelve o’clock.”

“It is so nice of you to come and chatter to me,” said the invalid. She was a little fatigued by the conversation, the burden of which she had taken on herself—by Edgar’s (supposed) difficulties about the wives, and by that reference to Mr. Templeton of the Royal Navy. “You may send old Mercy to me,” she said with a sigh as she kissed Clare ; for old Mercy was the tyrant whom Miss Somers most dreaded in the world. It was a sad change from the presence of the young people to see that despot come into the room, in the calm confidence of power. “Now, lie down a bit, do, and rest yoursel’,” Mercy said, peremptorily, “or we’ll have a nice restless night along o’ this, and the Doctor as cross as cross. Lie down and rest, do.”

Meanwhile the brother and sister went downstairs, she relieved, he much softened, and full of a tender compassion. “If that would do her any good, you and I might take her to the German baths some

day," said the soft-hearted Edgar, "if she is able to go. Such a restless little being as she was, it is hard to see her lying there."

"I hope I am not hard-hearted," said Clare, "but I think she is very well where she is. It is not as if she suffered much. We have lost almost an hour with her chatter. We shall never get back in time for luncheon if we talk to other people as long."

"But there are not many other people like Miss Somers," said Edgar, with a passing shade of gravity. He in his turn was grieved now and then by something Clare did or said. But in a few minutes they returned to their interrupted stream of talk, and began to discuss the village, and the plans for the new cottages, and the enlargement of the schools, and the restoration of the Church, and many other matters of detail. The two went from house to house, the village gradually becoming aware of them, and turning out to all the doors and the windows. The women stopped in their cooking, and the men, jogging home for their early dinners, ranked themselves in rows here and there, and stood and gaped; the children formed themselves into little groups, and looked on awestricken. Such was Edgar's first entry as master into the hereditary village. He made himself very "nice" to all the bystanders, and was as cordial as if he had been

canvassing for their votes, Clare thought, who stood by in her position as domestic critic, and noted everything. It was odd to see what trifles he remembered, and what a memory he had for names and places. If he had been canvassing he could not have been more ingratiating, more full of that grace of universal courtesy which, in a general way, is only manifest at such times. And yet, it was not as a candidate for their favour, but as their sworn hereditary sovereign, that he came among them. Clare, her mind already in a tumult with all the events and all the talk of the morning, could not but acknowledge to herself that it was very strange.

CHAPTER V.

EDGAR ARDEN had lived hitherto, as we have said, a very desultory wandering sort of life. He had been at school in Germany during his earlier years, and afterwards at Heidelberg, at the University, where he had seen a great many English afar off, and vaguely found out the difference between their training and ways of thinking and those in which he had himself been brought up. When he had first come to the age when a boy begins to inquire into his own position, and when it no longer becomes possible to take everything for granted, he had been told first that it was for his health that he had been sent away from home; and when he had fully satisfied himself that his health could no longer be the reason, other causes had been suggested to him equally unsatisfactory. It was his father who was in bad health, and could not be troubled with a lively boy about him; but then there were schools in England as well as in Germany, which would have settled that matter: or the German education

was superior, which was a theory his tutor strongly inclined to, but which did not seem to Edgar's lively young intelligence quite justified by the opinion visibly entertained by the English travellers whom he met. His first visit to England, after he was old enough to understand, made matters a great deal more clear to him. Injustice and dislike are hard to conceal from a young mind, even under the most specious disguises—and here no disguise was attempted. The Squire received his boy with a coldness which chilled him to the heart, saw as little of him as he possibly could, endured his presence with undisguised reluctance, and made it quite apparent to poor Edgar that, unlike all the other sons he had ever seen in his life, he was only a vexation and trouble to his father. The fact that his father was his enemy dawned vaguely upon him at a much later period; for it is hard in extreme youth to think that one has an enemy. A vague sense of being hustled into corners, and shut out of the life of the family, such as it was, had been the cloud upon his earlier days. He had felt that only in Clare's nursery did he hold that position of chief and favourite to which surely the only son of the house was entitled. And little Clare accordingly became the one bright spot in the house which he still by instinct called home.

He had returned when he was seventeen, and again after he came of age—though not to be received with any rejoicings at that later period, as became the birthday of the heir. His birthday was over when he came home, and Clare, a girl of sixteen, thrust her little furtive present into his hand with a full sense that her brother was not to the Squire what he was to her. But at this period something occurred which enlightened Edgar as to his father's feelings towards himself in the cruellest way; it enlightened him and yet it threw a confusion darker than ever over his life. The day after his arrival Mr. Arden sent for him, and elaborately explained to him that he wished for his aid in breaking the entail of certain estates, of which the young man knew nothing. It was the longest interview that had ever taken place between the two; and the Squire made very full explanations, the meaning of which was but indistinct to the youth. Edgar had all the impatient and reckless generosity which so often accompanies a buoyant temperament; his sense of the sweets of property was small; and he knew next to nothing about the estates. Had he known much there is little doubt that he would have done exactly as he did; but, however, he had not even that safeguard; and the consequence was that he took his father's word at

once, responded eagerly and promptly to the proposal, and gave his consent to denude himself of the property which had been longest in the family, the little estate from which the name of Arden first came, and which every Arden acquainted with his family history most highly prized. Edgar, however, knew very little about his family history; and with the foolish disinterestedness of a boy he acquiesced in all his father suggested. But after the necessary arrangements in respect to this were concluded Edgar caught a glance from his father's eye which went to his heart like an arrow. It was in the hunting-field, where, untrained as he was, he had acquitted himself tolerably well; and he was just about to take a somewhat risky fence when he saw that look which he never forgot. The Squire had reined in his own horse, and sat like a bronze figure under a tree watching his son. And as plain as eyes could tell Edgar read in his father's look a suppressed inappeasable enmity, which it was impossible to mistake; his father was watching intently for the spring—was it possible he was hoping that a fall would follow? How it was that Edgar got over the fence he never could tell; for to his hopeful, all-believing temper such a sudden glimpse into the darkness was like a paralysing blow. He kept steady on his saddle, and somehow, without any

conscious guidance on his part, the horse accomplished the leap; but Edgar turned straight back, and went home with such a sense of misery as he had never experienced before. He was too wretched to understand the calls sent after him—the questions with which he was assailed. He could not even reply to Clare's wondering inquiries. His father hated him—that was the discovery he had made. To suspect that anybody hated him would have given Edgar a shock; but to know it beyond all doubt, and to feel that it was his father who regarded him with such fierce enmity, made his very heart sink within him. He went away next day, giving no explanation of his desire to do so. Nor did the Squire make any inquiries. It was a mutual relief to them to be free of each other. Before his departure his father informed him that he would henceforward receive a much more liberal allowance—an intimation which Edgar received without thinking what it meant—without caring what sense was in the words. And that was the last he had seen of the Squire. Nobody but himself knew of this incident. It was nothing—an impression—a fancy; but in all Edgar's life nothing had happened that was so bitter to him. The effect had not lasted, for his mind was essentially elastic, and he was young, and free to amuse himself as he

would. Fortunately, the kind of amusements he preferred were innocent ones; for he had no guide, no one to control or restrain him, and not even the shadow of parental authority. His father hated him—a horrible freedom was his inheritance—nobody cared if he were to die the next day—nay, on the contrary, there was some one who would be glad.

This impression, which had been swept out of his mind by years and changes, came back upon him with singular force as all at once his eye fell on the great portrait of old Squire Arden, painted when he was Master of the Hounds, in sporting costume, which hung in the hall. He stopped short before it as he went in with his sister on the first day of his return, and felt a shudder come over him. Perhaps it was the costume and attitude which moved his memory; but there seemed to lurk in his father's face, as he entered the house of which that father had been unable to deprive him, the same look which once had fallen upon him like a curse. He stopped short and grew pale, in spite of all his attempts to control himself. "Would you think it cruel, Clare," he said suddenly in his impulsive way, "if I were to ask you to transfer that portrait to some other place? It has a painful effect upon me there."

“This is your house, Edgar,” answered Clare. On this point her sweetness abandoned her. She knew he had been badly used; but she knew at the same time that her father had been all love and kindness to herself. Therefore, as was natural, Miss Arden took it for granted that somehow it must be Edgar’s fault.

“That is not the question,” he said. “I can understand by my own what your feelings must be on the subject. But it cannot harm him to remove it, and it does harm me to have it stay. If you will make this sacrifice to me, Clare——”

“Edgar, I tell you this is your house,” she said, with the tears rushing to her eyes; and ran in and left him there, in a sudden passion of grief and anger. Her brother, left alone, looked somewhat sadly round him. He was very destitute of those impulses of self-assertion which come so naturally to most young men; on the contrary, his impulse was to yield when the feeling of anyone he loved ran contrary to his own: he was a little sorrowful at Clare’s want of sympathy, but it did not move him to act as master. “What harm can it do me now?” he said, going up and looking closely at the portrait. It came natural to him to reason himself out of his own fancies, and to give place to those of others. “It would be wounding her only to satisfy my

caprice," he added after a while; "and why should I be indulged in everything, I should like to know?" Poor boy! up to this moment he had never been indulged in anything all his life. He stayed a long time in the hall, now walking about it, now standing before the portrait. It haunted him so that he felt obliged to face it, and defy the look; and he could not but think with a sigh what a comfort it would be to get quit of it, to take it down and turn it somewhere with its face to the wall. But then he remembered that though he was the master he was more a stranger in the house than any servant it contained; and what right had he to cross his sister, and go in the face of every tradition, and offend every soul in the place, by taking down that picture, which looked malevolent to nobody but him? "God forgive you!" he said at last, shaking his head at it sorrowfully as he went slowly upstairs. He could not feel himself free or safe so long as it remained there. If anything happened to him—supposing, for instance (this grim idea crossed his mind in spite of himself)—supposing it might ever happen that he should be carried into that hall, wounded or mangled by any accident, would the painted face smile at him, would the eyes gleam with a horrible joy? And it was his father's face. Edgar shuddered, he could not help it, as he went

slowly up the great stairs. As he went up, some one else was coming down, making a gleam of reflection in the still air. It was old Sarah, with her white apron, making a curtsy at every step, and finding that mode of progress difficult. Edgar's mobile countenance dressed itself all in smiles at the appearance of this old woman. Clare would have thought it strange, but it came natural to her brother; though, perhaps, on the whole, it was Clare, her own special charge and nursling, who was most fond of old Sarah, as, indeed, it became her to be.

"Have you been waiting for us?" he said. "My sister has gone to look for you, I suppose."

"Not gone to look for me, Mr. Edgar," said Sarah, petulantly; "run upstairs in one of her tantrums, as I have seen her many a day. You'll have to keep her a bit in hand, now you've come home, Mr. Edgar."

"*I* keep her in hand!" cried Edgar, struck with the extreme absurdity of the suggestion; and then he tried hard to look severe, and added—"My dear old Sarah, you must recollect who Miss Arden is, and take care what you say."

"There's ne'er a one knows better who she is," said old Sarah, "she's my child, and my jewel, and the darlin' of my heart. But, nevertheless, she's an Arden, Mr. Edgar. All the Ardenses as ever was

has got tempers—except you ; and for her own good, the dear, you should keep her a bit in hand ; and if you say it was her old nurse told you, as loves her dearly, it wouldn't do no harm.”

“ Am I the only Arden without a temper ? ” said Edgar, gaily ; “ it's odd how I want everything that an Arden ought to have. But my sister is queen at Arden, Sarah ; always has been ; and most likely always will be.”

“ Lord bless you, sir, wait till you get married,” said Sarah, nodding her head again and again, and beaming at the prospect. “ Eh ! I'd like to live to see that day ! ”

“ It will be a long day first,” said Edgar, with a laugh, meaning nothing but a young man's half-mocking, half-serious denial of the coming romance of his existence ; “ though I promise you, Sarah, you shall dance at my wedding—but at Clare's first, which is the proper arrangement, you know.”

“ If he was a good gentleman, Sir, and one as was fond of her, I shouldn't care how soon it was,” she said. “ Eh, my word, but I'll dance till I dance you all off the floor ! ”

“ But you must not go without something to remind you of your first visit to us,” he said ; and he took out his purse from his pocket with the lavish liberality of his disposition. “ Look, there is

not very much in it. Buy something you like, Sarah, and say to yourself that it is given you by me."

"No, Mr. Edgar; no, Sir. Oh, good Lord, not a purse full of money, as if that was all I was thinking of! I didn't come here, not for money, but to see Miss Clare and you."

"It is because it is your first visit to us," repeated Edgar, and he gave her a kind nod, and went lightly past to his rooms. All his gloomy thoughts and superstitions had been driven out of his mind by this momentary encounter. His light heart had risen again like a ball of feathers. The glooms and griefs that lay in his past he shook off from him as lightly as thistledown. He thought no more of his father's grim face in the hall—did not even look at it when he went downstairs. Was it that his mind was a light mind, easily blown about by any wind? or that God had given him that preservative which He gives to those whom He has destined to bear much in this world? At so early a moment, when his life lay all vague before him, this was a question which nobody could answer. There was one indication, however, that his elasticity was strength rather than weakness, which was this—that he had not forgotten what had moved him so strongly, but was able, his sunny nature helping him, to put it away.

CHAPTER VI.

THE first day at Arden had been play; the second, work began again, and the new life which was so unfamiliar to the young Squire came pouring in upon him like a tide. In the morning he had an appointment with the family solicitor, who was coming, full of business, to lay his affairs before him, and to inaugurate his curiously changed existence. In the evening, his old friends in the village were coming to dine with this equally old friend, and Edgar felt that he would, without doubt, have a great deal of good advice to encounter, and probably many reminiscences which would not be pleasant to hear. None of these very old friends knew in the least the character of the young man with whom they had to do. They saw, as everybody did, his light-heartedness, his cheerful oblivion of all the wrongs of the past, and quiet commencement of his new career; but they did not know nor suspect the thorns that past had left in his mind—the haunting horror of his father’s look, the aching

wonder as to the meaning of treatment so extraordinary, which had never left him since he caught that glance, coupled with a strange consciousness that some time or other he must find out the secret of this unnatural enmity. Edgar, though he was so buoyant as almost to appear deficient in feeling to the careless observer, kept this thought lying deep down in his heart. He would find it out some time, whatever it was; and though he could not frame to himself the remotest idea what it was, he felt and knew that the discovery, when it came, would be such as to embitter if not to change his whole existence. No one had any clue to the cause of the Squire's behaviour to his son. To Clare it had seemed little more than a preference for herself, which was cruel to her brother, as shutting him out from his just share in his father's heart, but not of any great importance otherwise; and at least one of the theories entertained on the subject outside the house of Arden was such as could not be named to the heir. Therefore, he had not a single gleam from without to assist him in resolving this great question; yet he felt in the depths of his heart that some time or other it would be resolved, and that the illumination, when it came, could not but bring grief and trouble in its train.

“I never saw this Mr. Fazakerley,” he said, as

Clare and he sat alone over their breakfast on that second morning. Already it had become natural to him to be the master of the great house, of all those silent servants, the centre of a life so unlike anything that he had known. His mind was very rapid, went quickly over the preliminary stages, and accustomed itself to a hundred novelties, while a slower fancy would but have been having its first gaze at them; but the absolutely New startled him to a greater degree than it ever could have startled a more leisurely imagination. "I don't know him a bit," he repeated, with a half laugh, in which there was more nervousness than amusement. "What sort of a man is he? I always like to know——"

"Mr. Fazakerley!" said Clare, with a soft echo of wonder, "why, all the Ardens have known all the Fazakerleys from their cradles. He must have had you on his knee a hundred times, as I am sure he had me."

"I don't think so," said Edgar, suppressing, because of the servants, any other question, "or, if I ever saw him I have forgotten. Why must we have business breaking in upon us at every turn? I am afraid I like play."

"I am afraid you have had too much play," Clare said, looking at him with those eyes of young wisdom, utterly without experience, which look so

soft yet judge so hardly ; “ but, Edgar, you must remember you are not a wanderer now. You have begun serious life.”

“ I wonder if life is as serious as you are, Clare,” he said, looking at her with that half-tender, half mocking look, which Clare did not quite understand nor like ; “ or whether this lawyer and his green bag will be half as alarming as those looks of yours. I may satisfy him ; but I fear I shall never come up to your mark.”

“ Don’t speak so, please,” said Clare. “ Why shouldn’t you come up to my mark ? I like a man to be very high-minded and generous, and that you are, Edgar ; but then I like people to have proper pride, and believe in their own position, and feel its duties. That is all—and I like people to be English —, and it would be so nice to think you were going to show yourself a true Arden, in spite of everything.” This was said at a fortunate moment, when Wilkins, the butler, was at the very other end of the great room, fetching something from the side-board, and could not hear. She leant across the table hastily, before the man turned round, and added, in a hurried tone, “ Don’t discuss such things before the servants, Edgar ; they listen to everything we say.”

“ I forgot,” he said ; “ I never had servants before

who knew English. You don't recollect that English has always been a grand foreign language to me."

"The more's the pity!" said Clare, with a deep sigh. This sentiment made her beautiful face so long, and drooped the corners of her mouth so sadly, that her brother laughed in spite of himself.

"But it is possible to live out of England for all that," he said; "and I know people in Germany that would have the deepest sympathy with you. The Von Dummkopfs think just the same of themselves as the Ardens do, and look down just as much upon outsiders. I wonder how you would like the Fraulein Ida? They have twenty quarterings in their arms, and blood that has been filtered through all the veins worth speaking of in Germany for ever so many centuries; but then the Von Dummkopfs are not so rich as we are, Clare."

"As if I ever thought of that!" she said. "Who is Fraulein Ida? I have no doubt I shall like her—if she is nice. But, Edgar, though I would not say a word against your German friends, it would be so much nicer if you would marry an English girl. I should be able to love her so much more."

"Softly," said Edgar; "don't go so fast, please. I have not the least intention of marrying any one; and I don't admire the Fraulein Ida. I want nobody but my sister, as long as she will keep faithful

to me. Let us have the good of each other for a little now, without any one to interfere."

"Edgar, no one can interfere," said Clare hurriedly. "Now that man is gone, oh, Edgar! I must say one word for poor papa. I know he was hard upon you, dear; but he never interfered—never said a word—never tried to keep me from loving you. Indeed, indeed, he never did! I know I was cross yesterday about that picture. If you don't like it, it shall come down; it is only right it should come down. But oh, Edgar, he was so kind, he was so good to me!"

Edgar had risen before the words were half said, and stood by her, holding her tenderly in his arms. "My dear little sister!" he said, "you have always been the one star I had to cheer me. You shall hang all the house with his picture if you like. I forgive him all my grievances because he was good to you. But, Clare, he hated me."

"No, Edgar, not hated," cried Clare, raising to him her weeping face. "Oh, not hated; but he loved mamma so, and you were so like her, he never could bear——"

Her voice faltered as she spoke. It was all she could say, but she did not believe it. As for Edgar, he shook his head with a smile that was half bitter half sad.

"I know better," he said; "but it is a question we need not discuss. Believe the gentle fiction, dear, if you can. But I will never say a word again about any picture. Let it be. It would be hard if your brother could not put up with anything that was dear to you. Now tell me about Mr. Fazakerley, and what he is going to say."

"Edgar, it all belongs to the same subject," said Clare, drying her eyes. "I am glad you have spoken. I should not have had the courage to begin. There is something about the Old Arden estate; they told me, but I would not listen to them—would not hear anything about it till you came back. They said it was your doing as well as his; I don't understand how that can be. They said you wanted it to be settled on me; but why, Edgar, should it be settled on me? It is neither right nor natural," said Clare, her blue eyes lighting up, though tears still hung upon the eyelashes. "Arden, that gave us our name—that was the very beginning of the race—why should you wish to give it to me?"

"Is it given to you!" said Edgar, with a certain sense of bewilderment creeping over him. "I am afraid I have been like you—I have not understood, nor thought on the subject indeed for that matter. There was something about breaking the entail

between him and me; but I did not understand anything about it. I never knew—Clare, I can't make it out," he said, suddenly sitting down and gazing at her. "Why did he hate me?"

Then they looked at each other without a word. Clare's great blue eyes, dilated with grief and wonder, and two big tears which filled them to overflowing, were fixed upon her brother's face. But she had no elucidation to give. She only put out her hands to him, and took his, and held it close, with that instinctive impulse to tender touch and contact which is more than words. She followed her brother with her eyes while he faced this new wonder. "Well," he was saying to himself, "of course you must have known he meant something by breaking the entail. Of course it was not for your sake he did it. What could it be for? You never asked—never thought. Of course it could only be to take it from you. And why not give it to Clare? If not to you, of course it must go to Clare; and but for that she could not have had it. It is very well that it should be so. It is best; is it not best?" Thus he reasoned according to his nature, while Clare sat watching him with wistful dilated eyes. While he calmed himself down she was rousing herself. Her agitation rose to the intolerable pitch, while his was slowly coming down

to moderation and composure. The sudden cloud floated away from him, and the light came back to his eyes. "I begin to see it," he said slowly. "Don't be vexed, Clare, that I did not see it all at once. It is not that I grudge you anything; he might have given you all, and I don't think I should have grudged it. It is the mistrust—the preference. It is so strange. One wonders what it can mean."

"Yes," said Clare, impulsively, "I wonder too. But, more than that, Edgar; you did not know—you did it in ignorance; and I will never, never, take advantage of that! I was bewildered at first; but it is your right, and I will never take it from you——"

Then it was he, who had been robbed of his birthright, who had to exert himself to reconcile her to his loss. "Nay, that is nonsense," he said. "It is done, and it cannot be done over again. The will must not be interfered with: it is my business to see to that. No, Clare; don't try to make me do wrong. Nothing we can say will change it, nor anything you can do either. What has been given you is yours, and yours it must remain."

"But I will not accept it," said Clare; "I will give it all back the moment I come of age. What! rob you and your children, Edgar—all the

Ardens that may come after you! That is what I will never do."

"It is time enough to think of the Ardens who may come after me," said Edgar, with an attempt at a laugh. But Clare was not to be pacified so easily. He drew closer to her side, and sat down by her, and took her hand, and spoke softly in her ear, arguing it out as if the question had not been a personal one. "It startled me at first," he said; "it was strange, very strange, that he should think of taking this, as you say, Clare, not only from me, but from all the Ardens to come; but then you were the dearest to him, and that was quite natural. And it must have been my fault that he did not tell me. I never asked any questions about it—never thought of inquiring. He must have taken me for a kind of Esau, careless of what was going to happen. If I had shown a little more interest, no doubt he would have told me. Of course, he must have felt it would have been for your advantage had I known all about it, and been able to stand by you. I am so glad you have told me now. You may be sure he would have done so had I behaved myself properly. So, you see, it was my fault, Clare. I must have been ungracious, boorish, indifferent. It is clear it was my fault."

"Mr. Fazakerley, sir, is in the library," said Wilkins, opening the door. There was a certain

breath of agitation in the air about the two young people which the servants had scented out; and the eager eyes of Wilkins expressed not only his own curiosity, but that of the household in general. "He was a patting of her and a smoothing of her down," was the butler's report downstairs, "and Miss Clare in one of her ways. I daresay they have quarrelled already, for she is her father's daughter, is Miss Clare." The brother and sister were quite unconscious of this comment; but though they had not quarrelled, the conflict of feeling had risen so high that Mr. Fazakerley's arrival was a relief to both. "I must go and see him," Edgar said, loosing his sister's hand, and laying his own tenderly upon her bowed head. "Don't let it trouble you so much. You will see it as I do when you think of it rightly, Clare."

"Never!" Clare cried among her tears. Edgar shook his head, with a soft smile, as he went away. Of course, she would come to see it. Reason and simple sense must gain the day at last. So he thought, feeling perfectly persuaded that such were his own leading principles—calm reason and sober sense. Edgar rather prided himself upon their possession; and thus fortified with a conviction of what were the leading characteristics of his own mind, went to meet the family lawyer, and hear all about it in a sober and business-like way.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FAZAKERLEY was a little brown man, with a wig—a man who might have appeared on any stage as the conventional type of a crafty solicitor. He was very much like a fox, with little keen red-brown eyes, and whiskers which were grizzled, yet still retained the reddish colour of youth. His wig, too, was reddish-brown, and might have been made out of a foxskin, so true was it to the colour and texture of that typical animal. As may be divined from the fact of his outward appearance, he was not in the very least like a fox or a conventional solicitor, but was a good, little, kind, respectable sort of man, chiefly distinguished for his knowledge of Lancashire families—their intermarriages, and the division of their properties and value of their land; on which points he was an infallible guide. He came forward to meet the young Squire with both his hands extended, and a smile beaming out of every wrinkle of his brown face. “Welcome home, Mr. Edgar,” he said; “welcome home, welcome to your own house,”

with a warmth and effusion which betrayed that there was more than the usual occasion for such a welcome. He shook the young man's hand so long, and so energetically, swaying it between both of his, that Edgar felt as if it must come off. "You don't remember me, I can see," said Mr. Fazakerley. "I never happened to be at home while you were at Arden; but I know you well, and how nobly you have behaved. So you must think of me as your old friend, and one always ready to serve you—me and everybody belonging to me—you must indeed."

"Thanks," said Edgar, taken by surprise; "a thousand thanks. I never knew how rich I was in friends till now. Clare has just been telling me I ought to have known you all my life."

"So you ought, and so you should, but for—ah—circumstances, Mr. Edgar," said the lawyer, "circumstances of a painful character—over which we had no control. Miss Clare said that, did she? And quite right too. Your sister is a very sweet young lady, Mr. Edgar. You may be proud of her. I don't know her equal in Lancashire, and that is saying a great deal, for we are proud of our Lancashire witches. I have two daughters of my own, pretty girls enough, and I am very proud of them, I can tell you; but I don't pretend that they come

within a hundred miles of Miss Arden. You must not think me an impudent old fellow to talk of her so, for, as she says, I have known her all her life."

In this way Mr. Fazakerley chatted on, doing, as it were, the honours of his own house to Edgar, inviting him to sit down, and gradually beginning to arrange before him on the table a mass of papers. Then he changed the subject; gave up Clare, whose trumpet he had blown for about half-an-hour; and began a disquisition upon "your worthy father," at which Edgar winced. And yet there was nothing in it to hurt him; it was not full of inferences which he could not understand, like the sayings of Mr. Fielding and Dr. Somers. It had not a hidden meaning, like so much that Clare said on the same subject. Mr. Fazakerley was in his way very straightforward. "I won't attempt to disguise either from myself or from you that there was much in his conduct that was very extraordinary," said the lawyer, "very extraordinary—so much so, that monomania is the only word that occurs to me. Monomania—that is the only explanation, and I don't know that it is a satisfactory explanation; but it is the best we can make. We need not enter into that matter, Mr. Edgar, for it is very unintelligible; but the question is—Why did you give

in to any arrangement about breaking the entail without my advice?"

"I did what my father wished me to do," said Edgar, with a deep colour rising over his face. "It appeared to me that in so doing I could not but be right."

"You were very wrong, Mr. Edgar," said the lawyer. "What! rob your children because it pleased your father! Your father was a very worthy man—an excellent landlord—a good staunch Tory—everything a country gentleman need wish to be; but he was only one of the family, Mr. Edgar, only the head of it in his time, as your son will be. You had no more right to consult the one than the other. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you were wrong."

"My son is not born yet, nor, so far as I can see, any chance of him," said Edgar, laughing, "so he could scarcely be consulted."

"That is all very well," said Mr. Fazakerley, bending over his papers. "I do not object to a laugh; but at the same time it was very foolish, and worse than foolish—wrong. I don't blame you so much, for of course you were taught to be generous, and magnanimous, and all that; but your worthy father, Mr. Edgar, your worthy father—it was more than wrong."

Mr. Fazakerley shook his head for at least five minutes while he repeated these words; but Edgar made no reply. If he could have found the shadow of an excuse for the old Squire, or even perhaps if it had not been for that look which he remembered so distinctly, he would have said something in his defence. But his mouth was closed, and he could not reply.

“If it had been any other part of the estate, or if Miss Clare had not been well provided for already, I could have understood it,” the lawyer continued; “but she is very well provided for. Monomania, Sir, it could be nothing but monomania; and to give up Old Arden was quite inconceivable—permit me to say it, Mr. Edgar—on your part.”

“I did not know much about old Arden,” said Edgar, shyly putting forth this excuse for himself, almost with a blush. It was not his fault; but he looked much as if it had been a voluntary abandonment of his duty.

“The more shame to—ah,” said Mr. Fazakerley, with a frown, feeling that his zeal had led him too far; and then he paused, and coughed, and recovered himself. “The thing to be done now is to set it right as far as possible,” he went on. “We may be quite sure that Miss Clare, as soon as she knows of it, will be but too eager to aid us. She is only a

girl, but she has a fine spirit, and hates injustice. What I would suggest to you would be to effect an exchange. Old Arden lies in the very centre of the property, besides being the oldest part of it, and all that. I don't insist upon the sentimental reasons; but the inconvenience would be immense—especially when Miss Clare marries, as of course she will soon do. I advise you to offer her an equal portion, by valuation, of some other part of the estate—say the land between this and Liverpool—which she could make untold wealth of——”

“I don't think we must interfere with the existing arrangement,” said Edgar. “Pray don't think of it. My father must have had some reason. I can't divine it, nor perhaps any one; but some reason he must have had.”

“Reason—nonsense! Caprice, monomania,” said Mr. Fazakerley, getting excited. “That was the reason. He indulged himself so that at the last every impulse became irresistible. That is my theory. I don't ask you to accept it, but it is my way of explaining the matter. One day or other he looked at Miss Clare, and perceived how like she was to the family portraits (she is an Arden all over, and you are like your mother's family), and he said to himself, no doubt, ‘Old Arden must be hers.’ Some such train of ideas must have passed

through his mind. And nobody ever opposed him. You did not oppose him, not knowing any better. He had come to take it for granted that he must have his own way. It is very bad for a man, Mr. Edgar, to have everything his own way. It led your worthy father on to a great piece of injustice and even folly. But, now that the time has come when the folly of it is apparent—if we give her acre for acre of the land near Liverpool——”

“ Why should you take so much trouble ? ” said Edgar. “ If such was his desire, it is my duty to see it carried out. And I do not insist on the compactness of the property. Why should I ? I who am the one who knows least about it. If this division pleased my father——”

“ Tut, tut, ” said the lawyer, “ pleased a man who was a monomaniac and had a fixed idea ! I had formed a higher opinion of your good sense and judgment ; but to stand out for a piece of nonsense like this ! Miss Clare herself would be the first to say otherwise. When dead men do justly and wisely by those they leave behind them, I am not the man ever to interfere. I hold a will sacred, Mr. Edgar, within fit bounds ; but when a dead man’s will wrongs the living——”

“ He is dead, and cannot stand up for it, ” said

Edgar, who was very pale; "and it was his own to do as he liked."

"There's the fallacy," cried Mr. Fazakerley triumphantly, "there is just the fallacy. It was not his own. He had to get you to help him, and cheated you in your ignorance. Besides, even had he not required your help, which convicts him, it still was not his own. He was but one in the succession. What is the good of an old family but for that? Why, it is the very bulwark and defence of an aristocracy. I ought to know, for I see enough of the reverse. You may say the money these fellows make in Liverpool is their own—they may do what they like with it; and so they do, and the consequences are wonderful. But Squire Arden, good heavens, what was the good of him, what was the meaning of him, if he dismembered his property and broke it up! My dear Mr. Edgar, you are a charming young fellow, but you don't understand——"

"Well," said Edgar, warming under the influence of the lawyer's half-whimsical vehemence, "perhaps you are right, but it does not matter entering into that now. Before Clare marries——"

"There is no time like the present," said Mr. Fazakerley. "When she marries she will have other things in her mind, and her husband, that is

to be, might interfere. Besides, that land near Liverpool is the most valuable part of the property. You have nothing to do but build villas upon it, or let other people build villas, and you will make a fortune. Your worthy father would never hear of it; but it really was a prejudice, and a waste of opportunity——”

“Do you want me to fly in his face in everything, and do just what he did not wish to be done?” said Edgar, with a smile, which he tried to suppress.

Mr. Fazakerley shrugged his narrow brown shoulders. “New monarchs, new laws,” he said. “I don’t see why you should be bound by his fancies. He did not show much respect for yours, if you had any. No, I mean to suggest very important modifications, if you will permit me, in the management of the estate. Perhaps, if we were to have up Tom Perfitt and the map, and go over it——”

Edgar consented with a sigh, which he also suppressed. It was not that he disliked the initiation into his real work in life, or objected to throw off the idleness in which he had spent all these years. On the contrary, he had chafed again and again over the inaction—the wretched aimlessness of his existence. But there was something in this sudden plunge into all its new responsibilities and trials,

and, more than all, in this posthumous conflict with the will and inclinations of the father who had hated him, which sent a thrill through his mind, and moved his whole being. And in this life which was about to begin there was a mystery concealed somewhere—the secret of his own existence, which some time or other would have to be found out. Nobody seemed to feel this, not even those who were the most fully conscious that an explanation was wanted of the old Squire's ceaseless enmity to his son. They all took it for granted that it was over; that the Squire's death had ended everything; and that the heir who had succeeded so tranquilly would reign in peace in his unkind father's stead. But Edgar's mind was not so easily satisfied. It seemed to him that on this road which he was entering there stood a great signpost, with a shadowy hand pointing to the secret, and he shrank, knowing that secret would bring him trouble. However, to oppose this visionary sense of risk and danger to Mr. Fazakerley and his papers or to Perfitt and his map would have been folly indeed. So Perfitt, who was the Scotch steward, came, and the young Squire was drawn unconsciously within the charmed circle of property, and began to feel his heart beating and his head throbbing with a certain exhilarated sense of importance and responsibility.

When he heard of all that was his, he, who never up to this moment had possessed anything but his personalities, a curious feeling of power came over him. He was young, and his mind was fresh, and the emotions of nature were still strong in him. He had seen a great deal of the world, but it had not been that phase of the world which makes a young man *blasé*. He sat and listened to the discussion of rents and boundaries, of what ought to be done with one farm and another, of the wood that ought to be cut, and the moor that ought to be reclaimed, with a puzzled yet pleasant consciousness that, discuss as they liked, they could not decide without him. He knew so little about it that he had to content himself with listening; but the talk was as a pleasant song to him, pleasing his new-born sense of importance. "You'll understand fine, Sir, when once you've been over the estate with me," said Perfitt, with a certain condescension which amused Edgar mightily. They seemed to him to be playing at government, suggesting so many things which they had no power to carry out, which must wait for his approval. All his graver anticipations floated away from him in his sense of the humour of the situation. He made mental notes in his mind as they settled this and that, saying to himself, "Wait a little; I will not have it so" with

a boyish delight in the feeling that he could put all their calculations out by any sudden exercise of his will. If this was very childish in Edgar, I don't know what excuse to make for him. It was so amusing to him to feel himself a great man, with supreme power in his hands—he who had never been master of anything all his life.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT day was a long day. Just before luncheon the Thornleighs called, as Clare had expected. The Thornleighs were next neighbours to the Ardens in the county; and in the general estimation they were more fashionable than the Ardens, in so much that Mr. Thornleigh had married Lady Augusta Highton, a daughter of the Duke of Grandmaison; whereas the late Mr. Arden had married a wife whose antecedents were very little known, and who had been dead for years. So that while the Thornleighs had a house in town, and went a great deal into society, the Ardens had not budged for years from Arden Hall, and were very little known in the great world. This, however, was counterbalanced by the fact that while Clare was quite fresh and unworn, the five Thornleigh girls were rather too well known, and were talked about with just that shade of *ennui* which so speedily creeps over a fashionable reputation. "One sees them everywhere," said the fastidious rulers of that capricious world; and as there

were five of them, it was not easy to invite them to those choicest little gatherings in which Fashion is worshipped with the most perfect rites, and distinctions are granted or withdrawn. None of the Thornleigh girls were yet married, and many people were disposed to censure Lady Augusta for bringing out little Beatrice, who was just seventeen, while she had still Ada, and Gussy, and Helena, and Mary on her hands. How could she ever expect to be able to take them all out—people said?—which was very true.

But, however, the thing was done, and could not be mended. Lady Augusta was not a match-maker, in the usual sense of the word; neither were her daughters trained to the pursuit of elder sons or other eligible members of society, as it is common to suppose such young women to be. But it cannot be denied that as a reasonable woman, much concerned about the wellbeing of her children, Lady Augusta now and then allowed, with a sigh, that if Gussy and Ada were comfortably married it would be a very good thing, and a great relief to her mind. "Not to say that they could take their sisters out," she would sometimes say to herself, with a sigh reflecting upon all the cotillions to which little Beatrice, in the fervour of seventeen, would no doubt subject her mother. And it would be vain to

attempt to deny that a little thrill of curiosity was in Lady Augusta's mind as she drove up the avenue to Arden. Edgar was their nearest neighbour, he was young and "nice," so far as anybody knew—for, of course, he had been met abroad from time to time by wandering sons and cousins, and reports of him had been brought home—and just a suitable age for Gussy, or, indeed, for any of the girls, should the young people by any chance take a fancy to each other. I cannot see why Lady Augusta should be condemned for having this speculation in her mind. If she had been quite indifferent to the future fate of her daughters she would have been an unnatural woman. It was her chief business in the world to procure a happy life for them, and provide them with everything that was best; and why—a good husband being placed, by common consent, foremost in the list of those good things—a mother's efforts towards the securing of him should not be thought the very highest and best of her occupations, it is very hard to say. As a matter of fact, everywhere but in England it is her first and most clearly recognised duty. And I for one do not feel in the least disposed to sneer at Lady Augusta. She went with her husband to look at this young man with a sense that one day he might be very important to her. It is possible that Edgar might not have liked it had

the idea occurred to him that he was thus already a subject of speculation, and that his tenderest affections—the things which belong most exclusively to a man's personal being—were already being directed, whether potentially or not, by the imagination of another, into channels as yet totally unknown to him. I believe such a thought is not pleasant to a young man. But still it was quite natural—and, indeed, laudable—on the part of Lady Augusta, and demands neither scorn nor condemnation. She had made Mr. Thornleigh give up a morning's consultation with the keeper on some interesting young moorland families and the general prospects of the game, in order that no time might be lost in making this call. Of course, she said nothing to him as he sat rather sulkily by her side, thinking all the time of the young pheasants; but on the whole, perhaps, the mother's were not the least elevated thoughts.

“I am so very glad to be the first to welcome you home, Mr. Arden,” she said. “We don't know each other yet—at least we two individuals don't know each other; but the Ardens and the Thornleighs have been friends these hundreds of years. How many hundreds, Clare? You girls are so dreadfully well-informed now-a-days, I never dare open my lips. And I hope now your sister will go

out a little more, and come to us a little more. She has been such a little hermit all her life."

"She shall not be a hermit now, if I can help it," said Edgar. And he was pleased with the kindness of the elder woman, who was still a handsome woman, and gracious in her manner, as became a great lady. He sat down by her, as was his duty, but without thinking it was his duty—another sign of the spontaneousness which puzzled Clare, and gave Edgar's simple ways their greatest charm.

And the fact was that Lady Augusta, without in the least meaning it, was captivated by the young man. "He is not the least like an Arden," she said to her husband, as they drove away; "he has not their stiffness, any more than their black hair. I think he is charming. There is something very nice in a foreign education, you know. One would not choose it for one's own boys; but it does give a certain character when you meet with it by accident. Young men in general are so frightfully like each other," she added, with a sigh. Mr. Thornleigh gave a half articulate grunt, being full of calculations about the partridges; besides, the young men did not trouble him much. He was not called upon to remember which was which, and to hear them say exactly the same things to his girls ball after ball. Lady Augusta's sigh turned into a half yawn

as she glanced back upon all her experiences. He was just about the age and about the height for Gussy. Gussy was a small, little thing, and Edgar was not tall. He would not answer at all for the stately Helena, who was five feet ten. And then, if the mother had a weakness, it was for little Gussy of all her children. And it would be so nice to have her settled so near. "But just because it is so nice, and would be so desirable, of course it will never come to pass," she said to herself, with another sigh. She had left an invitation behind her, and had made up her mind it should not be her fault if it came to nothing. Thus Edgar was assailed by altogether unexpected dangers the very day after his return.

And then there was the dinner in the evening, which was not so pleasant to think of as the dinner to which the brother and sister had been invited at Thorne. There were only three gentlemen—the Rector, and the Doctor, and Mr. Fazakerley—all twice as old as Edgar, and all patronising and explanatory. They knew his affairs so much better than he did, that it was not wonderful if they alarmed him. So long as Clare sat at the other end of the table her brother did not mind, for she was used to them, and used to having her own way with them; but Edgar felt it would be hard upon him when he was left to their tender mercies. He

was very anxious to detain Clare, so as to shorten the awful hour after dinner. "Why should you go away?" he said, "wait till we are all ready. Are we such bears in England that ladies can't stay with us for an hour? We don't mean to smoke; that is the only thing that need send you away."

"Smoke!" said Mr. Fielding, with horror. "Edgar, I hope you don't mean to introduce these new-fangled foreign ways. I shall have to retire with the ladies if you do. I detest smoke, except in the open air."

"That is one of his old-fashioned notions," said Dr. Somers, "but you must have a smoking-room fitted up: then the ladies can't object. The old Squire resisted such an innovation. He was of the antique school, like Fielding here, and hated everything that was new."

"Just the reverse of our young friend," said Mr. Fazakerley. "I and Tom Perfitt have been giving him a great many ideas to-day. You will find Tom a very satisfactory fellow, I am sure. He is broad Scotch, and he is fond of having his own way, but he knows every inch of the land, and what is best for it. If you do any amateur farming you could not have a better man. If that sort of thing ever was anything but ruinous, Tom is the man to make it pay."

“I must take a little time to think what I am going to do,” said Edgar, “and to make acquaintance with the place. You forget that I don’t know Arden, though you all do. Clare, why should you go away?”

“I am going to make you some tea,” said Clare, with a smile, as she went away. And she took no notice of his appealing look. She was half vexed, indeed, that he should have suggested such an innovation. It was a bad symptom for the time to come. Why should not Edgar be content, as everybody else was, with the usual customs of society? She was annoyed that he should show his foreign breeding even before his old friends. It seemed to her that Dr. Somers’ keen eye launched a gleam of mockery at her as she went out. They would laugh at him, even these old gentlemen; and of course other people would laugh still more.

“Let her go,” the Doctor said, as the door closed behind the young mistress of the house. “Don’t disturb the customs of your country, Edgar. It is all very well just now when you are young; but the time will come, my boy, when you will prefer having an hour’s serious talk, without any women to interfere with it. And they like it themselves, my dear fellow; they like a moment to put their

hair straight and their ribbons, and have their private gossip. Don't train Clare into evil ways."

"I think they are much pleasanter ways," said Edgar; but he was put down by acclamation. To suggest an innovation in Arden of all places in the world! the three old men looked at him as if he were a natural curiosity, and studied his unusual habits with a mixture of amusement and alarm.

"I don't object to young men being fond of ladies' society," said Mr. Fielding, in his gentle voice; "it is a great preservative to them; but still not too much, not too much, my dear boy. Your sister, of course, will be a kind of guardian angel to you; but you know there are a great many Liverpool people about with large families—nice people enough, and of course they will be very friendly, if you will let them; and pretty girls, and all that. But you must be careful, you must be very careful. You must remember a great deal depends on the circle you collect round you at first."

"I don't see how I can collect a circle round me," said Edgar, laughing. "I have always supposed it was the great ladies who did that—Lady Augusta, for instance, who called here to-day——"

"My dear fellow," said Dr. Somers, "take care of that woman. She has five daughters, and she will play the pretty comedy of the spider and the

fly with you for the amusement of the county, if you don't mind. If you let yourself be drawn into her net, you will have to marry one of the girls, and that is a severe price to pay for a few dinners. You must take care what you are about."

"The Miss Thornleighs are nice girls," said Mr. Fazakerley, "but they will have very little money. Young Thornleigh has been dreadfully extravagant at Oxford. I know for certain that his father has paid his bills three times. Of course they have so much under the marriage settlements; but when there are five, and only a certain sum to be divided, there can't be very much for each."

"She has Edgar booked for one, you may be sure," said the Doctor, "and a very nice thing, too—for them. Next neighbours, and a fine old place, and a nice young fellow. For my part, I think Lady Augusta is quite right."

"If you don't mind," said Edgar, "I'd rather not have myself suggested as the subject of anybody's calculations. Suppose one of the Miss Thornleighs should do me the honour to marry me hereafter, do you think I should like to remember how you talked of it? I am aware I have ridiculous notions——"

Dr. Somers laughed; Mr. Fazakerley chuckled, interrupting the young man's speech; but Mr.

Fielding, who was of a gentler nature, peered at him through his short-sighted old eyes with kindly sympathy. "Edgar, I think you are quite right," he said. "We all talk about women in a most unjustifiable way. The Miss Thornleighs are very nice girls, and never gave any one reason to speak of them without respect—nor their mother either, that I know of; but we all talk as if they were put up to auction, and you might buy which you please. You are quite right."

"I do not know whether I am right or not," said Edgar, with some vehemence; "but I know I should punch any man's head who spoke so of Clare."

"Clare! Ah, that's different," said the Doctor; "where Clare is concerned, I give you full leave to punch anybody's head——"

"Miss Clare is an heiress," said Mr. Fazakerley. "She is as great a prize in the matrimonial market as her brother. If I took the liberty to speak on such a subject at all, I should represent her, not as the huntress, but the hunted. Penniless girls are in a very different position; and why should we blame them? It is their natural way of providing for themselves, after all."

"Then, money is everything," said Edgar, "and to provide for one's self one's first duty. I have not

been very well brought up, you know, but I thought I had heard something better than that."

"Don't be too severely virtuous, my boy," the Doctor said, pushing back his chair. "You may be sure that, from the savage to the swell (two classes not so far apart), to provide for one's self is one's highest duty. Love, &c., are very nice things, but your living comes first of all. Now, come, we are getting metaphysical; let us join Clare."

CHAPTER IX.

“TELL me something about the Thornleighs,” Edgar said on the morning of the day they were to dine at Thorne. “I like to know what sort of people I am about to make acquaintance with. Are they friends of yours, Clare?”

“Pretty well,” Clare answered, with just that little elevation of her head which Edgar began to know. “What is the use of describing them when you will see them to-night, and then judge for yourself? Ada is nice. She is the eldest of all, and she talks very little. I like her for that. Gussy is short, with heaps of light hair; and Helena is very tall, and rather dark, like her father. They are not at all like each other—not much more like each other than you and me.”

“That is a consolation,” said Edgar, with a smile.

“Not so much as you think, for they are like in their ways; and then you can tell in a moment which side of the house they belong to,” said Clare, with a shade crossing her face. “Whereas, Edgar—

don't be vexed with me for saying so—but you are not even—like mamma.”

“How do you know?” said Edgar, a little sharply; for that he was like his mother had been one of the established principles of his life.

“I have a little miniature in a bracelet. Nobody knows of it, I think, but myself. She must have been fair, to be sure; but you are not *very* like her, Edgar. You are not vexed? Of course, you must be like her family. But Helena Thornleigh is like her father, and Ada and Gussy are like Lady Augusta. You can't mistake it; and then they all have little ways of speaking, and little movements: if you are going to like any of them, I wish it may be Ada. She is really nice. But Gussy is a chatter-box, and Helena is superior; and as for Mary and Beatrice——”

“Is it certain that I must like one more than another?” said Edgar. “I mean to like them all, as they are our next neighbours. Is there any reason why I should confine myself to one?”

“Oh, I suppose not,” said Clare, with a suppressed laugh; “only somehow one always thinks where there are girls—— Look! Edgar; here is some one coming up the avenue. Who can it be? The servant is in livery, and I don't recognise the carriage, nor anything. It can't be the Thorpes, or the

Mandevilles, or the Blundells; and it can't be the Earl, for he is in town. Look! they don't see us, and I do so want to make them out."

"The servants are in purple and green, and there is an astounding coat of arms on the panel," said Edgar. "You must know that—arms as big as a saucer—and somebody very big inside." The two were in a little morning room which opened from the great drawing room, where they could see the avenue and even the flight of steps before which the carriage stopped. Clare uttered an exclamation of horror as she stood gazing out at the new comers. She seemed to her brother to shiver with sudden dismay. "It cannot be possible!" she said. What could she mean? Perhaps it was some secret enemy whom she recognised but he did not know; somebody, perhaps, connected with the secret which more or less weighed on Edgar's life.

"Who is it?" he said, in serious alarm, coming close to her. "Any one we have reason to be afraid of? Don't tremble so. Nobody can harm you while I am here."

"On the contrary, they would never have ventured had not you been here!" said Clare, with vehement indignation. "They never could have had the presumption—— Edgar, it is an insult!

We ought to send and say we are not at home. There are some things one ought not to bear——”

“Who are they ?” he asked, beginning to perceive that there was no serious cause for fear.

But Clare’s flushed and indignant countenance showed no signs of softening. “I knew they were presuming, but I never could have imagined anything so bad as this,” she cried. “Edgar, it is the Pimpernels !”

“The Pimpernels ?” Edgar repeated, confused and wondering ; but before he could ask another question the door was thrown open, and Wilkins appeared in front of the invading party. Wilkins’ face was a study of suppressed consternation and dismay. He did his office as if he were going to the stake, stern necessity compelling him in the shape of those three solid figures behind. “Mr., Mrs., and Miss Pimpernel,” said Wilkins, with a voice in which the protest of a martyr was audible behind the ordinary formality. Edgar did not know anything about the Pimpernels. He saw before him a large man, made larger by light summer costume, which magnified his breadth and diminished his height, with sparkling jewelled studs in his shirt, and a great coil of watch-chain spreading across his buff waistcoat ; and a large lady, enveloped in black silk and lace, which somehow, though so totally

different, seemed to have the same effect of enlarging and setting forth her amplitude of form. Behind these two there appeared, seen by intervals, the slim figure of a tall girl, with a pretty blushing face. Nothing could have made Edgar uncivil—not even the terrible fact, had he known it, that Mr. Pimpernel was a Liverpool cotton-broker, such a man as had never before made his appearance in the capacity of visitor within the stately shades of Arden. But he was not aware of that awful fact. He knew only that Clare had been moved by horror at the sight of them, and that she stood now at as great a distance as possible, and made a very solemn curtsey, and looked as if she were assisting at a funeral. The Pimpernels, who had produced this melancholy effect, were themselves so utterly unlike it, at once in manners and appearance, that the situation affected Edgar rather with comic than with solemn feelings.

“I am very glad to see you, and to welcome you home, Mr. Arden,” said Mr. Pimpernel, when they had all sat down in the form of a semicircle, of which Edgar and Clare formed the base. “I can’t pretend to be an old neighbour, but we have been here long enough to take an interest in the county. I have always taken a great interest in the county, as my wife knows.”

“Yes, indeed,” said that ample woman. “Since ever we settled here Mr. Pimpernel has quite thrown himself into Arden ways. We were so very lucky in getting the Red House—the only one in the neighbourhood. It is wicked to say so, but I felt so much obliged to poor Mr. Dalton when he died and let us have it—I did indeed. It was quite obliging of him to die.”

Upon this Miss Pimpernel laughed shyly, and Mr. Pimpernel smiled; and Edgar, seeing it was expected of him, would have smiled too had he not encountered Clare’s stormy countenance, without a gleam of light upon it. It embarrassed him sadly, poor fellow; for of course he did not want to wound his sister, and yet he could not be uncivil. “I am such a stranger in my own country,” he said, “that I really don’t know where the Red House is. I know only the village, and nothing more.”

“It is the sweetest village,” said Mrs. Pimpernel. “We were so glad to hear that there were no building sites to be given, though, of course, in one way it must have been a sacrifice. It is selfish of us, because we have been so fortunate as to secure the only house; but the moment you begin to build villas you spoil the place. It never would have been the same sweet old place again. Mr. Pimpernel drives over every morning to Farnham Green, the

station. Of course, he could not do it unless he was able to afford horses; but we *are* able to afford them, I am glad to say. I don't know if you have ever remarked his Yankee waggon, with two beautiful bright bays? I hope I am not horsey, which is very unladylike, but I do like to see a fine animal. It is next to a pretty girl, my husband always says."

"The only thing wanting in Arden is a little society," said Mr. Pimpernel; "and I hope, Mr. Arden, that your happy return, and the new life you must bring with you, will change all that. We hoped you would perhaps dine with us on Monday week? Young Newmarch is coming, the Earl's eldest son, a very nice young fellow—quite a man of his century; but of course you must know him better than I do; and we expect some young Oxford men with my son, who is at Christchurch. My wife wanted to write, but I think it is always best to settle such things by word of mouth."

"I am afraid Miss Arden may think all this a little abrupt," said Mrs. Pimpernel, taking up the strain when her husband paused. "Of course, if it had not been for the change, and Mr. Arden coming, as it were, fresh to the place, it was not our part to call first; but all this last year I have done nothing but think of you, so lonely as you must have been. I have said to Alice a hundred times—'How I wish

I could go and call upon that poor dear Miss Arden.' But I never knew whether you would like it. I am sure, many and many a time, when I have seen all my own young ones so merry about me, I have thought of you. 'If we could only have her here, and cheer her up a little,' I used to say——"

"It was kind of you to think of my sister. I am very much obliged to you," said Edgar, warmly. Clare made a little bow, and after her brother had spoken murmured something vaguely under her breath.

"I know what it is to have no mother," continued the large lady, "and to be left alone. I was an only daughter myself; and when I looked at all mine, and me spared to them, and thought 'Oh, that poor dear girl, all by herself!' I could have cried over you; I could, indeed."

"You were very kind," said Edgar once more, and Clare uttered another faint murmur, as if echoing him, unable to originate any sentiment of her own.

"But I fear Miss Arden has poor health," Mrs. Pimpernel continued, fixing her eyes, which had been contemplating the company in general, upon Clare. And Mr. Pimpernel, who had been inspecting the room with some curiosity, looked too at the young lady of the house; and the slim daughter gave her

a succession of shy glances, so that she was hemmed in on every side, and could no longer meet with silence, or with her haughty little bow, those expressions of friendly interest.

“Indeed I am very well—quite well,” she said. “I must have been getting sympathy on false pretences. There is no lack of society had I wanted it. It was my choice to be alone.”

“Oh, my dear, *that* I have no doubt of,” said Mrs. Pimpernel; “in your position, of course, you can pick and choose; but still, when you are not in good spirits, nor feeling up to much exertion—However, I do hope you will waive ceremony, and come in a friendly way with your brother to dine at the Red House on Monday. It would give me so much pleasure. And Alice has been looking forward to making your acquaintance for so long.”

“Oh, yes; for a very long time,” said pretty Alice, under her breath. She was as pretty as Clare herself, though in a different way; and sat a little behind her mother, looking from one to the other of her parents, like a silent chorus, softly backing them with smiles and sympathy. When she caught Edgar’s eyes during this little performance, she blushed and cast down her own, and played with the fringe of her parasol; and with a certain awe now and then, her looks strayed to Clare’s

beautiful, closed-up, repellent face. She was shy of the brother, but downright frightened for the sister; and besides these two sentiments, and a faith as yet unbroken in her father and mother, showed no personal identity at all.

"I do not go out at present," said Clare, looking at her black dress; upon which Mrs. Pimpernel rushed into remonstrance and entreaty. Edgar sat looking on, feeling almost as much bewildered as Alice; for, notwithstanding her black dress, Clare had shown no particular unwillingness to go to Thorne.

"For the sake of your health you ought not to shut yourself up," urged Mrs. Pimpernel; "a young creature at your age should enjoy life a little; and for the sake of your friends, who would be so glad to have you—and for your brother's sake, my dear, if you will let me say so—I speak freely, because I have daughters of my own."

"Thanks, you are very kind," said courteous Edgar; while his sister shut her beautiful lips close. And then there was a pause, which was not comfortable. Mrs. Pimpernel began to smooth the gloves which were very tight on her plump hands, and Mr. Pimpernel resumed his inspection of the room.

"That is a Turner, I suppose," he said, pointing to a very poor daub in a dark corner. "I hope you are fond of art, Mr. Arden. When you come to the

Red House I can show you some rather pretty things."

"It is not a Turner; it is very bad," said Edgar. "We have no pictures except portraits. I don't think the Ardens have ever taken much interest in art."

"Never," said Clare, with a little emphasis. She said so because she had heard a great deal about Mr. Pimpernel's pictures, and felt it her duty to disown all participation in any such plebeian taste; and then she recollected herself, and grew red, and added hurriedly—"The Ardens have always had to think of their country, Edgar. They have had more serious things to do."

"But I am not much of an Arden, I fear, and I am very fond of pictures," said Edgar carelessly, without perceiving the cloud that swept over his sister's face.

"Then I assure you, though I say it that shouldn't, I have some pretty things to show you at the Red House," said Mr. Pimpernel. Thus it came to be understood that Edgar had accepted the invitation for Monday week, and the party rose,—first the mother, then Alice, obedient to every impulse, and finally Mr. Pimpernel, who extended his large hand, and took into his own Clare's reluctant fingers. "I hope we shall soon see you with your brother," he

said, raising his other hand, as if he was pronouncing a blessing over her. "Indeed, I hope so," said Mrs. Pimpernel, following him with outstretched hand. Alice put out hers too, but withdrew it shyly, and made a little curtsey, like a school girl, Clare thought; but to her brother there was something very delicate, and gentle, and pretty in the girl's modest withdrawal. He went to the door with them to put Mrs. Pimpernel in her carriage, and came back to Clare without a suspicion of the storm which was about to burst upon his head.

CHAPTER X.

CLARE was standing by the table with her hands clasped tightly, her mouth shut fast, her tall figure towering taller than usual, when Edgar, all unconscious, returned to her. She assailed him in a moment, without warning. "Edgar, how can you—how could you?" she said, with an impatient movement, which, had she been less fair, less delicate, less young, would have been a stamp of her foot. Her tone and look and gesture were so passionate that the young man stood aghast.

"What have I done?" he asked.

"What have you done? You know as well as I do. Oh, Edgar, you have given me such a blow! I thought when you came home, and we were together, that all would be well; but to see you the very first day—the very first opportunity—throw yourself into the arms of people like these—people that never should have entered this house——"

"Who are they? What are they? Have they done us any harm?" said the astonished Edgar. "If

they are enemies you should have told me. How was I to know?"

"Enemies!" said Clare, with increasing indignation; "how could such people be *our* enemies? They are a great deal worse—they are the vulgar rich, whom I hate; they are trying to force themselves in among us because they are rich; they are tradespeople, pretending to be our equals, venturing to ask you to dinner! Oh, Edgar, could not you see by my manner that they were not people to know?"

"I saw you were very rude to them, certainly," he said. "But, Clare, that goes against me; even—may I say it?—it disappointed me. I do not understand how a lady can be rude."

Once more she repeated his last word with a certain contempt. "Rude! The man is a tradesman. They have thrust themselves into the village; and now they have seized an opportunity—which was in reality no opportunity—to thrust themselves into the house. Edgar, I have no patience; I ought not to have patience. They have been impertinent. And you as civil as if they were the best people in the county—and going to dine with them! I did not expect this."

"I am sorry, Clare, if it hurts you," he said. "They seemed very kind; and how could I help it? Besides, you made them very uncomfortable, and I

owed them amends. And you know I am but an indifferent Arden; I have not any horror of trade."

"You told them so!" said Clare—"you took people like these into your confidence, and confessed to them that you were not an Arden like the rest of us! Oh, please, Edgar, don't! you might think how unhappy it makes me. As if it was not enough——"

"What, Clare?"

"Oh, can't you understand?" she cried. "Is it not enough to *see* that you are not a thorough Arden; that you don't care for the things we care for, nor hate the things we hate. But to have to hear you say so as if it did not matter!—it is the grief of my life."

And she threw herself into a chair, and cried—weeping a sudden shower of passionate tears, which were so hot and rapid that they seemed to scorch her, yet dried as they fell. Her brother came and stood by her chair, putting his hand softly on her bent head. Edgar was sorry, but not only because she wept. He was grieved, and perplexed, and disappointed. A half smile came over his serious face at her last words. "My poor Clare—my poor Clare," he repeated softly, smoothing the dark glossy locks of her hair. When the thunder shower was over he spoke, with a voice that sounded more manly

and mature and grave than anything Clare had heard from him before.

“You must take my character and my training a little into consideration,” he said. “If I had been brought up like you I might have thought with you. But, Clare, though I love you more than anything in the world, and would not vex you for all Arden, still I cannot change my nature. Arden is only a very small spot in England, dear, not to speak of the world; and I can’t look at the big world through Arden spectacles. You must not ask it of me; anything else I will do to please you. I will give up dining with these people if you wish it. Of course I don’t care for their dinner; but they looked as if they wanted to be kind——”

“They wanted to come to Arden, to know you and me, and get admittance among the county families,” said Clare in one breath.

“Well, perhaps. I suppose we are all mean wretches more or less,” he said. “Suppose we give up the Pimpernels; but you must not ask me to avoid everybody who has anything to do, or to content myself with the old groove. For instance, I like pictures, though you say the Ardens don’t——”

“That is not what I meant,” said Clare, with a blush; “I meant——”

“You meant opposition, and to snub that fat,

good-tempered man ; and you only made me uncomfortable—*he* did not feel it. But I like pictures, Clare, and the people who paint them. I have known a great many in my life ; and when I like any man I cannot pause to ask what is his pedigree, or what is his occupation. Putting aside the Pimpernels, you must still make up your mind to that.”

“But you will put aside the Pimpernels?” said Clare, with pleading looks.

“I will see about it,” said Edgar. It was the first time he had not yielded, and Clare felt it. She felt too that a shade of real difference had stolen between them—almost of separation. She had been unreasonable, and had put herself in the wrong ; and he had set up a principle of action, erected as it were his standard, and made it clearly apparent what he would and what he would not do. She went away to her own room with a certain soreness in her heart. She had committed herself. Certain words of her own and certain words of his came back to her with the poignant shame of youth—what she had said about the pictures, and what Edgar had said of her rudeness, and of the antagonism which only made him uncomfortable. She had made herself ridiculous, she thought—that worst of all offences against one’s self. It seemed to the proud Clare as if neither she nor any one else

could forget how ridiculous she had made herself; and more than ever with tenfold force of enmity she hated those unlucky Pimpernels.

It was brilliant daylight, the sun was setting, and the air full of light and sweetness, when they set off upon their drive to Thorne. Clare was all black, as her mourning demanded—black ornaments, black gloves—everything about her as sable as the night—a dress, which was not perhaps so becoming to her dark hair and pale complexion as it would have been to pretty Alice Pimpernel, or the fair-haired Gussy, whom Edgar was going (though he did not know it) expressly to see. Probably Clare did not waste a thought on the subject, for she was young and entirely fancy free, a condition of things which frees a girl from any keen anxiety in respect to her appearance. She was wrapped in a large white cloak, however, which relieved the blackness, and brought out the delicate pale tints of her face as only white can do; and Edgar, as he took his place by her side, found himself admiring her as if he had seen her for the first time. The high, proud features, so finely cut, the perfect roundness of youth in the cheek, the large, lovely blue eyes, were of a kind of beauty which you may like or dislike as you please, but which it is impossible to ignore. Clare was beautiful, there was no other word for it

Not pretty, like that pretty Alice ; and her proud looks and air of reserve enhanced her beauty, just as the sweet wistful frankness of the simpler girl added a charm to hers. " I don't suppose I shall see any one like my sister where we are going," Edgar said, with that admiring affection which is so pleasant in a brother.

" No, indeed, they are all quite a different style," Clare answered with a laugh, turning aside the compliment, which nevertheless pleased her. This did much to restore the former delightful balance of affairs between them. About half-a-mile from the village they came upon a house, just visible through the trees, a very old solid mass of red brick, shining with a subdued glow in the midst of the green wealth of foliage, which looked the greener for its redness, and heightened its native depth of colour. There was a fine cedar on the lawn, and many great old trees within the enclosure, which was so arranged that it might be taken for a park. Edgar gave an inquiring glance at his sister, who answered him by shaking her head, and putting up her hands as if to shut out the hateful vision.

" So that is the Red House?" said Edgar. " I had forgotten all about it. It is a nice house enough. If I should ever happen to be turned out of Arden, I should like to live there."

“What nonsense you do talk!” said Clare. “Who can turn you out of Arden, unless there was a revolution, as some people think?”

“I don’t think there will be a revolution. But have we no cousins who might do one that good turn?” he said, laughing. “How? Oh, I can’t tell how. It is impossible, I suppose.”

“Simply impossible,” said Clare with energy. “We are the elder branch. The Ardens of Warwickshire were quite a late offshoot. You are the head of the name.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said Edgar; “and I am sure it is a very proud position. Does that Red House belong to us, Clare? But if it had belonged to us, I suppose you would not have let it to those respectable—I mean objectionable—Pimpernels?”

“Don’t speak of the Pimpernels,” she said. “Oh, Edgar, if you only knew how much I dislike those sort of people—not because they are common people—on the contrary, I am very fond of the poor; but those presumptuous pushing *nouveaux riches*—don’t let us speak of them! We have got a cousin—only one; and if you were not to have any children, I suppose the estates would go to his son. But I hope they never will.”

“Why?” said Edgar. “Is there any reason to suppose that his son would be less satisfactory than

mine? I hope he is less problematical. Tell me about him—who is he—where is he? I feel very curious about my heir.”

“And I hate to hear you speak in such a careless way,” said his sister. “Why should you show so much levity on so serious a subject? Arthur Arden is a great deal older than you are. I dislike him very much. Pray, don’t speak of him to me.”

“Another subject I must not speak of!” said Edgar. “Why do you dislike him? Is it because he is my heir? You need not hate a man for that.”

“But I do hate him,” said Clare, with a clouded brow; and the rest of the way to Thorne was gone over in comparative silence. The jars that kept occurring, putting now one string, now another out of tune, vibrated through both with an unceasing thrill of discord. There was no quarrel, and yet each was afraid to touch on any new subject. To be sure, it was Clare who was in the wrong; but then, why was he so light, so easily moved, so free from all natural prejudices, she said to herself? Men ought not to run from one subject to another in this careless way. They ought to be more grave, more stately in their ways of thinking, not moved by freaks of imagination. Such levity was so different from the Arden disposition that it looked almost like something wrong to Clare.

Thorne was a great house, but not like Arden. It stood alone, not shadowed by trees, amid the great green solitude of its park; and already lights were glimmering in the open windows, though it was still day. The servants were closing shutters in the dining-room, and the table gleamed inside under the lamplight, making itself brightly visible, like a picture, with all its ornaments and flowers. It was Lady Augusta's weakness that she could not bear to dine in daylight. In the very height of summer she had to support the infliction; but as long as she could she shut out the intrusive day. Edgar felt his head swim as he walked into the cool green drawing-room after his sister into the midst of a bevy of ladies. He was fond of ladies, like most well-conditioned men; but the first moment of introducing himself into the midst of a crowd of them fluttered him, as was quite reasonable. There was Ada, the quiet one, on a sofa by herself, knitting. Edgar discriminated her at once. And that, no doubt, was Gussy, with the prettiest tiny figure, and a charming little rose-tinted face, something between an angel and a Dresden shepherdess. "That will be my one," he said to himself, remembering with natural perversity that Ada was Clare's favourite. That little indication was enough to raise in the young man's mind a certain disinclination to Ada.

And he did not know that Lady Augusta had already decided upon the advisability of allotting to him her second daughter. He could not see the others, who were busied in different corners with different occupations. It was the first English party of the kind he had ever been at, and he was very curious about it. And then it was so perfectly orthodox a party. There was the nearest squire and his wife, one of the great Blundell family; and there was a younger son of the Earl's, with his young wife; and the rector of the parish, and a man from London. Such a party is not complete without the man from London, who has all the news at his finger-ends, and under whose manipulation the biggest of cities becomes in reality that "little village" which slang calls it. "Will you take in my daughter, Mr. Arden?" said Lady Augusta; and Edgar, without any thought of his own dignity, was quite happy to find Gussy's pretty curls brushing his shoulder as they joined the procession into the dining-room. He thought it was kind of his new friends to provide him with such a pleasant companion, while Clare was making herself rather unhappy with the thought that he should have taken in, if not the Honourable Mrs. Everard, at least Mrs. Blundell, or, at the very least, Ada, who was the Princess Royal of the House of

Thorne. "I am so glad all the solemn people are at the other end of the table," Gussy whispered to him, as they took their places. "Mr. Arden, I am sure you are not solemn. You are not a bit like Clare."

"Is Clare solemn?" asked Edgar, with a half sense of treachery to his sister; but he could not refuse to smile at Gussy's pretty up-turned face.

"I love her dearly; she is as good as gold," said Gussy, "but not such fun as I am sure you are. If you will promise never to betray me to mamma, I will tell you who everyone here is."

"Not if I went to the stake for it," said Edgar; and so his first alliance was formed.

CHAPTER XI.

“You know mamma, of course,” said Edgar’s pretty cicerone. “I suppose I need not enter into the family history. You know all us Thornleighs, as we have known you all our lives.”

“I am ashamed of my ignorance; but I have never been at home to have the chance of knowing the Thornleighs,” said Edgar. “Don’t imagine it is my fault.”

“No; it is quite romantic, I know,” said Gussy. “You have been brought up abroad. Oh yes; I know all about it. Mr. Arden nearly died of losing your mother, and you are so like her that he could not bear to look at you. Poor dear old Mr. Arden, he was so nice. But I thought you must have known us by instinct all the same. That is Ada sitting opposite. I must begin with us young ones, for what could I say about papa and mamma? Everybody knows papa and mamma. It would be like repeating a chapter out of Macaulay’s history, or that sort of thing. Harry is the eldest, but he is not at home.

And that is Ada opposite. She is the good one among us. It is she who keeps up the credit of the family. Poor dear mamma has plenty to do with five girls on her hands, not to speak of the boys. And Ada looks after the schools, and manages the poor people, and all that. All the cottagers adore her. But she is not *fun*, though she is a dear. There is not another boy for ever so long. We girls all made a rush into the world before them. I am sure I don't know why. As if we were any good!"

"Are not you any good?" said Edgar, laughing. He was not used to advanced views about women, and he thought it was a joke.

"Of course, we are no good," said Gussy. "We are all very well so long as we are young—and some of us are ornamental. I think Helena is very ornamental for one; but we can't do anything or be anything. You should hear what she says about that. Well, then, after Ada there is nothing very important—there is only me. I am the chattering one, and some people call me the little one, or the one with the curls. I have not any character to speak of, nor any vocation in the family, so it is not worth while considering me. Let us pass on to Helena. That is Helena, the one who is so like papa. I think she is awfully handsome. Of course, I don't

mean that I expect you to think so, or to say so; but all her sisters admire her very much. And she is as clever as a dozen men. All the boys put together are not half so clever as she is. She ought to have been in Parliament, and that sort of thing; but she can't, for she is a girl. Don't you think it is hard? Well, I do. There is nothing she could not do, if she only had the chance. That is the Rector who is sitting beside her. He is High, but he is Broad as well. He burns candles on the altar, and lets us decorate the church, and has choral service; but all the same he is very philosophical in his preaching. Helena thinks a great deal of that. She says he satisfies both the material and intellectual wants. Do you feel sleepy? Don't be afraid to confess it, for I do myself whenever anybody uses long words. I thought it was my duty to tell you. For anything I know, you may be intellectual too."

"I don't think I am intellectual, but I am not in the least sleepy," said Edgar; "pray go on. I begin to feel the mists clear away, and the outlines grow distinct. I am a kind of Columbus on the shores of a new world; but he had not such a guide as you."

"Please wait a little," said Gussy, shaking her pretty curls, "till I have eaten my soup. I am so fond of white soup. It is a combination of every

sort of eatable that ever was invented, and yet it does not give you any trouble. I must have two minutes for my soup."

"Then it is my turn," said Edgar. "I should like to tell you all my difficulties about Arden. Clare is not such an able guide as you are. She does not tell me who everybody is, but expects me to know. And when one has been away from home all one's life, instinct is a poor guide. Fancy, I should never have known that you were the chattering one, and Miss Thornleigh the good one, if you had not told me! I might have supposed it was the other way. And if you had been at Arden I never should have made such a dreadful mistake as I made this morning."

"Oh, tell me! what was it?" said Gussy, with her spoon suspended in her hand, looking up at him with dancing eyes.

"I hope you will not think the worse of me for such a confession. I was so misled as to say I would go and dine with a certain Mr. Pimpernel——"

"Oh, I know," said Gussy, clapping her hands, and forgetting all about her soup. "I wish I could have seen Clare's face. But it is not at all a bad house to dine at, and I advise you to go. He is a cotton-merchant or something; but, you know, though it is all very well for Clare, who is an only

daughter and an heiress, we can't afford to stand on our dignity. All the men say it is a very nice house."

"Then I have not behaved so very badly after all?" said Edgar. "You can't think what a comfort that is to me. I rather thought I deserved to be sent to the Tower."

"I should not think it was bad at all," said Gussy. "I should like it of all things; but then I am not Clare. They have everything, you know, that can be got with money. And such wine, the men say; though I don't understand that either. And there are some lovely pictures, and a nice daughter. I know she is pretty, for I have seen her, and they say she will have oceans of money. Money must be very nice when there are heaps of it," Gussy added softly, with a little sigh.

Edgar paused for a moment, taken aback. He had not yet met his ideal woman; but it seemed to him that when he did meet her, she would care nothing for money, and would shrink from any contact with the world. A woman was to him a soft, still-shadowy ideal, surrounded by an atmosphere of the tenderest poetry, and celestial detachment from earth and its necessities. It gave him a gentle shock to be brought thus face to face with so many active, real human creatures, full of personal wants and wishes, and to identify them as the maiden-

queens of imagination. Clare had not helped him to any such realisation of the abstract woman. There was no sort of struggle in her being, no aspiration after anything external to her. It was impossible to think of her as capable of advancement or promotion. Edgar himself was by no means destitute of ambition. He had already felt that to settle himself down with all his energies and powers into the calm routine of a country gentleman's life would be impossible. He wanted more to do, something to aim at, the prospect of an expanding existence. But Clare was different. She was in harmony with all her surroundings, wanted nothing, was adapted to every necessity of her position—a being totally different from any man. It seemed to Edgar that so all women should be—passive, receiving with a tender grace, which made their acceptance a favour and honour, but never acquiring, never struggling; regarding, indeed, with horror, any possibility of being obliged to struggle and acquire. Gussy, though she charmed him, gave him at the same time a gentle shock. That it should be hard for Helena not to be able to go into Parliament, and that this fair creature should sigh at the thought of heaps of money, sounded like sacrilege to him. He came to a confused pause, wondering at her. Gussy was as keen as a needle

notwithstanding her chattering, and she found him out.

“Do you think it is shocking to care for money?” she said.

“N-no,” said Edgar, “not for some people. I might, without any derogation; but for a lady — You must remember I don’t know anything about the world.”

“No,” said Gussy, “of course you don’t; but a lady wants money as much as a man. We girls are dreadfully hampered sometimes, and can’t do what we please because of money. The boys go and spend, but we can’t. It is a little hard. You should hear Helena on that. I don’t mind myself, for I can always manage somehow; but Helena gives all sort of subscriptions, and likes to buy books and things; and then she has to keep it off her dress. Papa gives us as much as he can afford, so we have nothing to complain of; for, fancy five girls! and all to be provided for afterwards. Of course, we can’t go into professions like the boys. I don’t want to change the laws, as Helena does, because I don’t see how it is to be done; so then the only thing that remains is to wish for heaps of money—quantities of money; and then everybody could get on.”

Edgar was very glad to retire into an *entrée*

while this curious statement of difficulties was being made. It seemed so strange to him, with all his own wealth, to hear any of his friends wish for money without offering his purse. Had Gussy been Gus, he would have said—"I have plenty; take some of mine," with all the ready goodfellowship of youth. But he dared not say anything of the kind to the young lady. He dared not even suggest that it was possible: this wonderful difference was beyond all aid of legislation. Accordingly, he was silent, and ate his dinner, and was no longer the agreeable companion Gussy expected him to be. She did not like her powers of conversation to be thus practically undervalued, nor was she content, as her sister Helena would have been, with the feeling that she had made him think. Gussy liked an immediate return. She liked to make her interlocutors, not think, but listen, and laugh, and respond, giving her swift repayment for her trouble. She gave her curls another shake, and changed the subject, having long ere this got done with her soup.

"I have not half finished my *carte du pays*," she resumed; "don't you want to hear about the other people, or have you had enough of Thorne? I feel sure you must be thinking about your new friends. If I ride over to see Clare the day after your dinner, will you tell me all about the Pimpernels? I do so

want to have a credible account of them, and the Lesser Celandine, and all——”

“Who is the Lesser Celandine?”

“Oh, please, do not look so grave, as if you could eat me. I believe you are a little like Clare after all. Of course it is the pretty daughter: they say she is just like it; peeps from behind her leaves—I mean her mamma—and never says a word. Don’t you think all girls should do so? Now, confess, Mr. Arden. I am sure that is what you think, if you would allow yourself to speak.”

“I don’t suppose all girls should follow one rule any more than all boys,” said Edgar, with polite equivocation; and then Gussy returned to her first subject, and gave him sketches of everybody at the table. Mr. Blundell, who was stupid and good, and his wife, who was stupid and not very good; and the Honourable pair, who were close to their young historian—so close, that she had to speak half in whisper, half in metaphor. “They have both been so dreadfully taken in,” Gussy said. “She thought his elder brother was dying; and he thought she was as rich as the Queen of Sheba; whereas she has only got a little money, and poor Newmarch is better again. Hush, I can’t say any more. Yes, he is better; and they say he is going to be married, which would be dreadfully hard upon them. How wicked

it is to talk like this!—but then everybody does it. You hear just the same things everywhere till you get to believe them, and are so glad of somebody fresh to tell them to. Oh yes, there is *that man*. If you were to listen to him for an hour, you would think there was not a good man nor a good woman in the world. He tells you how all the marriages are made up, and how she was forced into it, and he was cheated; or how they quarrelled the day before the wedding, and broke it off; or how the husband was trapped and made to marry when he did not want to. Oh, don't you hate such men? Yet he is very amusing, especially in the country. I don't remember his name. He is in some office or other—somebody's secretary; but there are dozens just like him. We are going to town next week, and I shall hate the very sight of such men; but in the country he is well enough. Oh, there is mamma moving; do pick up my glove for me, please."

Thus Gussy was swept away, leaving her companion a little uncertain as to the impression she had made upon him. It was a new world, and his head swam a little with the novelty and the giddiness. When the gentlemen gathered round the table, and began to talk in a solid agricultural way about steady-going politics, and the state of the country, and the prospects of the game, he found

his head relieved a little. Clare had given him a glance as she left the room, but he had not understood the glance. It was an appeal to him not to commit himself; but Edgar had no intention of committing himself among the men as they drank their wine and got through their talk. He was far more likely to do that with Gussy, to make foolish acknowledgments, and betray the unsophistication of his mind. But he did not betray himself to Mr. Blundell and Mr. Thornleigh. They shook their heads a little, and feared he was affected by the Radical tendencies of the age. But so were many of the young fellows, the Oxford men who had distinguished themselves, the young dilettante philanthropists and revolutionists of the time. If he sinned in that way, he sinned in good company. There was Lord Newmarch, for instance, the Earl's eldest son, and future magnate of the county, who was almost Red in his views. Edgar got on very well with the men. They said to each other, "Old Arden treated that boy very badly. It is a wonder to see how well he has turned out;" and the ladies in the drawing-room were still more charitably disposed towards the young Squire. There was thus a certain amount of social success in Edgar Arden's first entrance into his new sphere.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER the dinner at Thorne there was nothing said between Edgar and Clare about that other humbler invitation which had caused the first struggle between them. She took Mr. Fielding into her confidence, but she said nothing more to her brother. As for the Rector, he was not so hard on the Pimpernels as was the young lady at the Hall. "They are common people, I allow," he said. "They have not much refinement, nor—nor education perhaps; and I highly disapprove of that perpetual croquet-playing, which wastes all the afternoons, and puts young Denbigh off his head. I do not like it, I confess, Clare; but still, you know—if I may say exactly what I think—there are worse people than the Pimpernels."

"I don't suppose they steal," said Clare.

"My dear, no doubt it is quite natural, with your education and habits—but I wish you would not be quite so contemptuous of these good people. They are really very good sort of people," said Mr.

Fielding, shaking his head. She looked very obdurate in her severe young beauty as the Rector looked at her, bending his brows till his eyes almost disappeared among the wrinkles. "They find us places for our boys and girls in a way I have never been able to manage before; and whenever there is any bad case in the parish——"

"Mr. Fielding, that is our business," said Clare, almost sharply. "I don't understand how you can talk of our people to anybody but Edgar or me."

"I don't mean the people here," said Mr. Fielding meekly, "but at the other end of the parish. You know that new village, which is not even on Arden land—on that corner which belongs to old Stirzaker—where there are so many Irish? I don't like to trouble you always about these kind of people. And when I have wanted anything——"

"Please don't want anything from them again," said Clare. "I don't like it. What is the good of our being lords of the manor if we do not look after our own people? Mr. Fielding, you know I think a great deal of our family. You often blame me for it; but I should despise myself if I did not think of our duties as well. All that is our business. Please—please don't ask anything of those Pimpernels again!"

"Those Pimpernels!" said Mr. Fielding, shaking

his head. "Ah, Clare! they are flesh and blood like yourself, and the young lady is a very nice girl; and why should I not permit them to be kind to their fellow-creatures because you think that is your right? Everybody has a right to be good to their neighbours. And then they find us places for our boys and girls."

"I have forgotten about everything since Edgar came," said Clare, with a blush. "I have not seen old Sarah since the first day. Please come with me, and I will go and see her now. What sort of places? They are much better in nice houses in the country than in Liverpool. The girls get spoiled when they go into a town."

"But they get good wages," said Mr. Fielding, "and are able to help their people. I have not told you of this, for I knew you were prejudiced. Old Sarah has a lodger now, a relation of Mr. Perfitt—an old Scotchwoman—something quite new. I should like you to see her, Clare. I have seen plenty of Scotch in Liverpool, both workmen and merchants; but I do not understand this old lady. She is a new type to me."

"I suppose being Scotch does not make much difference," said Clare, discontentedly. "I do not like them much for my part. Is she in want, or can I be of any use to her? I will go and see her in that case——"

“Good heavens!” cried Mr. Fielding, in alarm, “Want! I tell you she is a relation of Perfitt’s, and they are all as proud as Lucifer. I almost wonder, Clare,” he added more softly, dropping his voice, “that you, who are so proud yourself, should not have more sympathy with the pride of others.”

“Others!” cried Clare, with indignation, and then she stopped, and looked at him with her eyes full. If they had not been in the open air in the village street she would have eased herself by a burst of tears. “I am all wrong since Edgar came home,” she cried passionately out of the depths of her heart.

“Since Edgar came home? But my dear child—my dear child!” cried Mr. Fielding, “I thought you were so proud of your brother.”

“And so I am,” said Clare, hastily brushing away the tears. “I know he is good—he is better than me; but he puts me all wrong notwithstanding. He will not see things as I do. His nature is always leading him the other way. He has no sort of feeling—no—Oh! I don’t know how to describe it. He puts me all wrong.”

“You must not indulge such thoughts,” said the Rector, with a certain mild authority which did not misbecome him: “He shows a great deal of right feeling, it appears to me. And we must not dis-

cuss Edgar's qualities. He is Edgar, and that is enough."

"You don't need to tell me that," cried Clare, with sudden offence; and then she stopped, and controlled herself. "I should like to go and see this old Scotchwoman," she added, after a moment's pause. What she had said was true, though she was sorry for having said it. Edgar, with his strange ways of thinking, his spontaneousness, and freedom of mind, had put her all wrong. She had been secure and certain in her own system of life so long as everybody thought with her, and the bonds of education and habit were unbroken. But now, though she was still as strong in her Ardenism as ever, an uneasy, half-angry feeling that all the world did not agree with her—nay, that the person of most importance to her in the world did not agree with her—oppressed Clare's mind, and made her wretched. It is hard always to bear such a blow, struck at one's youthful convictions. It is intolerable at first, till the young sufferer learns that other people have really a right to their opinions, and that it is possible to disagree with him or her and yet not be wicked. Clare could not deny that Edgar's different views were maintained with great gentleness and candour towards herself—that they were held by one who was not an

evil-minded revolutionary, but in every other respect all that she wished her brother to be. But she felt his eyes upon her when she said and did many little things which a few weeks ago she would have thought most right and natural; and even while she chafed at the tacit disapprobation, a secret self-criticism, which she ignored and struggled against, stole into the recesses of her soul. She would not acknowledge nor allow it to be possible; but yet it was there. The natural consequence was that all her little haughtinesses, her airs of superiority, her distinctions between the Ardens and their class and all the rest of the world, sharpened and became more striking. She was half-conscious that she exaggerated her own opinions, painted the lights whiter and the shadows more profound, in involuntary reaction against the new influences which began to affect her. She had not noticed the Pimpernels, though she knew them well by sight, and all about them; but she had no active feeling of enmity towards them until that unfortunate day when they ventured to call, and Edgar, in his ignorance, received them as if they had been the family of a Duke. Since then Clare had come to hate the innocent people. She had begun to feel rabid about their class generally, and to find words straying to her lips such as had struck her as in very bad taste when old Lady Summerton

said them. Lady Summerton believed the poor were a host of impostors, and trades-people an organised band of robbers, and attributed to the *nouveaux riches* every debasing practice and sentiment. Clare had been disgusted by these opinions in the old days. She had drawn herself up in her youthful dignity, and had almost reproved her senior. "They are good enough sort of people, only they are not of our class," Clare had said; "please don't call them names. One may be a Christian though one is not well-born." Such had been her truly Christian feeling while yet she was undisturbed by any doubt that to be well-born, and especially to be born in Arden, was the highest grace conceded by heaven. But now that doubt had been cast upon this gospel, and that she daily and hourly felt the scepticism in Edgar's eyes, Clare's feelings had become as violent as old Lady Summerton's. The sentiment in her mind was that of scorn and detestation towards the multitude which was struggling to rise into that heaven wherein the Ardens and Thornleighs shone serene. "The poor people" were different; they made no pretences, assumed no equality; but the idea that Alice Pimpernel came under the generic title of young lady exactly as she herself did, and that the daughter of a Liverpool man might ride, and

drive, and dress, and go everywhere on the same footing as Clare Arden, became wormwood to her soul.

Mr. Fielding walked along by her side somewhat sadly. He was Clare's godfather, and he was very proud of her. His own nature was far too mild and gentle to be able to understand her vehemence of feeling on these points; but he had been grieved by it often, and had given her soft reproofs, which as yet had produced little effect. His great hope, however, had been in the return of her brother. "Edgar must know the world a little; he will show her better than I can how wrong she is," the gentle Rector had said to himself. But, alas, Edgar had come home, and the result had not been according to his hope. "He is young and impetuous, and he has hurried her convictions," was the comment he made in his grieved mind as he accompanied her along the village street. Mr. Fielding blamed no one as long as he could help it; much less would he blame Clare, who was to him as his own child. He thought within himself that now the only chance for her was Life, that best yet hardest of all teachers. Life would show her how vain were her theories, how harsh her opinions; but then Life itself must be harsh and hard if it is to teach effectual lessons, and it was painful to anticipate any harshness for

Clare. He went with her, somewhat drooping and despondent, though the air was sweet with honeysuckle and early roses. The summer was sweet, and so was life, at that blossoming time which the girl had reached; but there were still scorching suns, as well as the winds of autumn and the chills of winter, to come.

Old Sarah had more ways than one of gaining her homely livelihood. The upper floor of her cottage, on which there were two rooms, was furnished out of the remains of some old furniture which an ancient mistress had bequeathed to her; and there at distant intervals the old woman had a lodger, when such visitors came to Arden. They were homely little rooms, low-roofed, and furnished with the taste peculiar to a real cottage, and not in the least like the ideal one; but people in search of health, with small means at their disposal, were very glad to give her the ten or twelve shillings a week, which was all she asked. Down below, in the rooms where Sarah herself lived, she was in the habit of receiving one or two young girls, orphans, or the children of the poorest and least dependable parishioners, to train them to household work and plain sewing. It was Clare's idea, and it had worked very well; but for some time past Clare had neglected her *protégées*. Edgar's arrival and all the dawning

struggles of the new life had occupied and confused her, and she had left her old nurse and her young pupils to themselves. She could scarcely remember as she went in who they were, though Sarah's pupils were known in the parish as Miss Arden's girls. There were two on hand at the present moment in the little kitchen which was Sarah's abode. One stood before a large white-covered table ironing fine linen, while the old nurse sat by in her big chair, spectacles on nose, and a piece of coarse needlework in hand, superintending the process, with many comments, which, added to the heat of the day and the irons, had heightened Mary Smith's complexion to a brilliant crimson. The other sat working in the shady background, the object of Mary's intensest envy, unremarked and unreprieved. It was the unfortunate clear-starcher who had to make her bob to the gentlefolks, and called forth Miss Arden's questions. "I hope she is a good girl," Clare said, looking at Mary, who stood curtseying and hot, with the iron in her hand. "She is none so good but she might be better, Miss Clare," said old Sarah; "I don't know none o' them as is; but she do come on in her ironing. As for collars and cuffs and them plain things, I trust her by herself."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Clare, "and I hope Jane is as satisfactory; but we have not time

to talk about them to-day. Mr. Fielding says you have a new lodger, whom he wishes me to go and see. Is she upstairs? Is she at home? Does she like the place? And tell me what sort of person she is, for I am going to see her now."

Sarah got up from her chair with a bewildered look, and took off her spectacles, which she always did in emergencies. "I beg your pardon, Miss Clare," she said with a curtsy, "but— She ain't not to say a poor person. I don't know as she'd—be pleased— Not as your visit, Miss, ain't a compliment; but—"

"The Scotch are very proud," said Mr. Fielding, in his most deprecating tone; "they are dreadfully independent, and like their own way. And, besides, she does not want anything of us. She is not, as Sarah says, a poor person. I think, perhaps, another day—"

"Then why did you bring me here to see her?" said Clare, with some reason. Was it to read her a practical lesson—to show her that she was no longer queen in Arden? A flush of hasty anger came to her pale cheek.

"I only meant——" Mr. Fielding began; "all that I intended was—— Why, here is Edgar! and Mr. Perfitt with him. About business, I suppose, as

you two are going together. My dear boy, I am so glad you are taking to your work."

"We have been half over the estate," said Edgar, coming in, and putting down his hat on Mary Smith's ironing table, while she stood and gaped at him, forgetting her curtsy in the awe of so close an approach to the young Squire; "but Perfitt has some one to visit here, and I have come to see Sarah, which is not work, but pleasure. I did not expect to find you all. Perfitt, go and see your friend; never mind me. Oh, I beg your pardon," said Edgar, standing suddenly aside. They all looked up for the moment with a little start, and yet there was nothing to startle them. It was only Sarah's Scotch lodger, Mr. Perfitt's relative, who had come into the little room.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHE was a woman of about sixty, with very dark eyes and very white hair—a tall woman, quite unbent by the weight of her years, and unshaken by anything she could have met with in them ; and yet she did not look as if she had encountered little, or found life an easy passage from the one unknown to the skirts of the other. She did not look younger than her age, and yet there was no sentiment of age about her. She was not the kind of woman of whom one says that they have been beautiful, or have been pretty. She had perhaps never been either one or the other ; but all that she had ever been, or more, she was now. Her eyes were still perfectly clear and bright, and they had depths in them which could never have belonged to them in youth. The outline of her face was not the round and perfect outline which belongs to the young, but every wrinkle had its meaning. It was not mere years of which they spoke, but of many experiences, varied knowledge, deep acquaintance with that hardest of

all sciences—life. Not a trace of its original colour belonged to the hair—slightly rippled, with an irregularity which gave a strange impression of life and vigour to it—which appeared under her cap. The cap was dead white too, tied under her chin with a solid bow of white ribbon; and this mass of whiteness brought out the pure tints of her face like a picture. These tints had deepened a little in tone from the red and white of youth, but were as clear as a child's complexion of lilies and roses. The slight shades of brown did but mellow the countenance, as it does in so many painted faces. The eyes were full of energy and animation, not like the eyes of a spectator, but of one accustomed to do and to struggle—acting, not looking on. The whole party assembled in old Sarah's living-room turned round and looked at her as she came in, and there was not one who did not feel abashed when they became conscious that for a moment this inspection was not quite respectful to the stranger. So far as real individuality and personal importance went, she was a more notable personage than any one of them. The Rector, who was the nearest to her in age, drew a little aside from before the clear eyes of this old woman. He had been a quiet man, harboured from all the storms, or almost all the storms of existence; but here was one who had gone through

them all. As for Edgar, there was something in her looks which won his heart in a moment. He went up to her with his natural frankness, while the others stood looking on doubtfully. "I am sure it is you whom Perfitt has been talking to me about," he said. "I hope you like Arden. I hope your granddaughter is better. And I trust you will tell Perfitt if there is anything than can be done to make you more comfortable; my sister and I will be too glad——"

Here Clare stepped forward, feeling that she must not permit herself to be committed. "I am sure Sarah will do her very best to make you comfortable," she said, with great distinctness, not hurrying over her words, as Edgar did—and not disposed to permit any vague large promises to be made in her name. She was not particularly anxious about the stranger's comfort; but Edgar was hasty, and would always have his way.

"I am much obliged to ye both," said the newcomer, her strong yet soft Scotch voice, with its broad vowels, sounding large and ample, like her person. She gave but one glance at Clare, but her eyes dwelt upon Edgar with curious interest and eagerness. No one else in the place seemed to attract her as he did. She returned the touch of his hand with a vigorous clasp, which startled even him. "I hear

ye're but late come hame," she said, in a deep melodious tone, lingering upon the words.

"Yes," said Edgar, somewhat surprised by her air of interest. "I am almost as much a stranger here as you are. Perfitt tells me you have come from the hills. I hope Arden will agree with the little girl."

"Is there some one ill?" said Clare.

"My granddaughter," said the stranger, "but no just a little girl—little enough, poor thing—the weakest I ever trained; but she's been seventeen years in this world—a weary world to her. Her life is a thread. I cannot tell where she got her weakness from—no from my side."

"Na; not from your side," echoed Perfitt, who had been standing behind. "But Mr. Arden has other things ado than listen to our clavers about our family. I'll go with you, with his leave, up the stair."

"Has Dr. Somers been to see her?" said Clare. "If she is Mr Perfitt's relation, perhaps we could be of some use; some jelly perhaps, or fruit——"

"I am much obliged to the young lady, but I'll not trouble anybody," was the answer. "Thank ye all. If I might ask the liberty, when Jeanie is able, of a walk about your park——"

She had turned to Edgar again, upon whom her

eyes dwelt with growing interest. Even Mr. Fielding thought it strange. "If she wants anything, surely I am the fit person to help her," Clare could not help saying within herself. But it was Edgar to whom the stranger turned. He, too, was a little surprised by her look. "The park is open to everybody" he said; "that is no favour. But if you would like to go through the gardens and the private grounds—or even the house—Perfitt, you can arrange all that. And perhaps you might speak to the gardener, Clare?"

"Whatever you wish, Edgar," said his sister, turning away. She was displeased. It was she who ought naturally to have been appealed to, and she was left out. But the new-comer evidently was honestly oblivious of Clare's very presence. She had no intention of disrespect to the young lady, or of neglecting her claims; but she forgot her simply, being fascinated by her brother. It was him whom she thanked with concise and reserved words, but a certain strange fulness of tone and expression. And then she made the party a little bow, which took in the whole, and turned and led the way up the narrow cottage stair—Perfitt following her—leaving them all considerably puzzled, and more moved than Clare would have allowed to be possible. "If this is your Scotch-

woman," she said, turning to the Rector, "I don't wonder you found her original;" and Clare went hastily out of the cottage, without a word to Sarah, followed by the gentlemen, who did not know what to say.

"Listen to her story before you begin to dislike her," said Edgar. "Perfitt told me as we came along. It appears she had her daughter's family thrown on her hands a great many years ago. She has a little farm in Scotland somewhere, and manages it herself. When these children came to her, she set to work as if she had been six men. She has brought up and educated every one of them,—not to be ploughmen, as you would think—but educated them in the Scotch way; one is a doctor, another a clergyman, and so on. If you don't respect a woman like that, I do. Perfitt says she never flinched nor complained, but went at her work like a hero. And this is a granddaughter of another family whom she has taken charge of in the same way."

"I felt sure she was something remarkable," said Mr. Fielding, "I told Clare I had never seen any one quite like her; now, didn't I? Scotch, you know—very Scotch; but to me a new type."

"I think I prefer the old type," said Clare, with a feeling of opposition, which she herself scarcely understood; "one knows what to do with them; and

then they are civil, at least. I am going to see some now," and she turned back suddenly, waving her hand to her companions, and went on past Sarah's cottage to pay her visits. The people she was going to see were quite of the old type. They had no susceptibilities to *menagér*, no over-delicate feelings to be studied. They were ready to accept all that could be procured, and to ask for more. Clare knew, when she entered these cottages, that she was about to hear a long list of wants, and to have it made apparent to her that the comfort, and health, and happiness of her pensioners was entirely in her hands. It was more flattering than the independence of the stranger, who wanted nothing; but yet the contrast confused the mind of the girl, who had never had anything of the kind made so clearly apparent to her before. One of her old women had an orphan granddaughter too; but her complaints were many of the responsibility this threw upon her, and the trouble she had in keeping her charge in order. "Them young lasses, they eats and they drinks, and they're never done; when a cup o' tea would serve me, there's a cooking and a messing for Lizzy; and out o' evenings when I just want her; and every penny a going for nonsense. At my time o' life, Miss, it ain't bother as one wants; it's quiet as does best for ou'd folks."

“But she has nobody to take care of her except you,” said Clare, pondering her new lesson.

“Eh, Miss! They ben’t good for nothing for taking care o’ young ones ben’t ou’d folks.”

Clare turned away with a little disgust. She promised to supply all the wants that had been indicated to her, and they were many. But she did it with less than her usual kindness, and a sensation of indignation in her mind. How different was this servile dependence and denial of all individual responsibility from the story she had just heard! She was wrong, as was natural; for the old egotist was in reality very fond of her Lizzy, and only made use of her name in order to derive a more plentiful supply from the open hand of the young lady. Had there been no young lady to depend on, probably old Betty would have made no complaint, but done her best, and grudged nothing she had to her grandchild. Clare, however, was too young and inexperienced in human kind to know that what is bad often comes uppermost, concealing the good, and that there are quantities of people who always show their worst, not their best, face to the world. She went away in suppressed discontent, revolving in her mind without knowing it those questions of social philosophy with which every alms-giver must more or less come in contact. It was right for the

Ardens, as lords of the manor, to watch over their dependents; of that there could be no doubt. Clare would have felt, as one might imagine a benevolent slaveholder to feel, had there been any destitution or unrelieved misery in her village: but the question had never occurred to her whether it was good for the people to be so watched over and taken care of? Supposing, for instance, such a case as that of Mr. Perfitt's relative, Sarah's lodger. Was it best for a woman in such circumstances to toil and strive, and deny herself all ease and pleasure, and bring up the children thus cast upon her with the sweat of her brow, according to that primeval curse or blessing which was not laid upon woman? Or would it be better to appeal to others, and make interest, and establish the helpless beings in orphan schools and benevolent institutions? The last was the plan which Clare had been chiefly cognisant of. When any one died in the village, it had been her wont to bestir herself instantly about their children, as if the responsibility was not upon the widow or the relatives, but upon her. She had disposed of them in all sorts of places—here one, and there another; and she had found, in most cases, that the villagers were but too willing to transfer their burdens to the young shoulders which were so ready to undertake them. But was that the best?

If Edgar had enunciated this new doctrine in words, no doubt she would have combated it with all her might, and would have been very eloquent about the duties of property and the bond between superiors and inferiors. But Edgar had not said a word on the subject, probably had not thought at all about it. He was as liberal as she was, even lavish in his bounty, ready to give to anybody or everybody. He had said nothing on the subject; but he had told the story of that strange new-comer, who was (surely) so out of place, so unlike everything else in the little Arden world.

Clare passed by Sarah's house again as these thoughts went through her mind. The window of the upper room was a broad lattice window with diamond panes, half concealed by honeysuckles, which were not in very good trim, but waved their long branches in sweet disorder over the half-red half-white wall, where the original bricks, all stained with lichens, peered through the whitewash. The casement was open, and against it leaned a little figure, the sight of which sent a thrill through the young lady's heart. The face looked very young, and was surrounded by softly curling masses of hair, of that ruddy golden hue which is so often to be seen in children's hair in Scotland, and which is almost always accompanied by the sweetest

purity of complexion. It was a lovely face, like an angel's, with something of the half-divine abstraction about it of Raphael's angel children. She had never seen anything so strangely visionary, fair, and wild, like something from another world. Clare stood still and gazed, forgetting everything but this strange beautiful vision. The stranger's eyes were turned towards Arden, to the great banks of foliage which stood up against the sky, hiding the house within their depths. What was she thinking of? whom was she looking for? or was she thinking of, looking for no one, abstracted in some dream? Clare's heart began to beat as she stood unconscious and gazed. She was brought back to herself and to the ordinary rules of life by seeing that the old woman had come to the window, and was looking down upon her with equal earnestness. Then she went on with a little start, trembling, she could not tell why. Was it a child or a woman she had seen? and why had she come here?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day after these events occurred the dinner at the Pimpernels. Miss Arden had made no further allusion to it in her brother's presence. He had said he would stay away if she exacted it, but Clare was much too proud to exact. She stood aside, and let him have his will. She was even so amiable as to fasten a sprig of myrtle in his coat when he came to bid her good night. "That is very sweet of you, as you don't approve of me," he said, kissing the white hand that performed this little sisterly office. They were two orphans, alone in the world, and Edgar's heart expanded over his sister, notwithstanding the many doubts and difficulties which he was aware he had occasioned her.

"Why should I disapprove?" she said. "You are a man; you are not so easily affected as a girl; but only please remember, Edgar, they are not people that it would be nice for you to see much of. They are not like us."

"Not like you, certainly," said light-hearted

Edgar. "I rather liked to see you, do you know, beside them; you looked like a young queen."

Clare was pleased, though she did not care to confess it. "It does not require much to make one look like a queen beside that good, fat Mrs. Pimpernel," she said, with more charity than she had ever before felt towards her recent visitors. "If you are not very late, Edgar, perhaps I shall see you when you come home."

And she watched him as he drove his dogcart down the avenue with a less anxious mind. "He is not like an Arden," she said to herself; "but yet one could not but remark him wherever he went. He has so much heart and spirit about him; and I think he is clever. He knows a great deal more than most people, though that does not matter much. But still I think perhaps he would not be so easily carried away after all."

Edgar, for his part, went away in very good spirits. He liked the rapid sense of motion, the light vehicle, the fine horse, the swiftness which was almost flight. He rather liked making a dive out of the formal world which had absorbed him, into another hemisphere; and he even liked, which would have vexed Clare had she known it, to be alone. He would not suffer himself to think so, for it seemed ungrateful, unbrotherly, unkind; but

still a man cannot get over all the habits of his life in three weeks, and it was a pleasure to him to be alone. He seemed to have thrown off the burden of his responsibilities as he swept through the village and along the rural road to the Red House. He expected to be amused, and he was pleased that in his amusement he would be subject to no criticism. Criticism is very uncomfortable, especially when it comes from your nearest and dearest. To feel in your freest moments that an eye is upon you, that your proceedings are subject to lively comment, is always trying. And Edgar had not been used to it. Thanks to the sweetest temper in the world, he took it very well on the whole. But this night he certainly did feel the happier that he was free. The Pimpernels greeted him with a cordiality that was almost overpowering. The father shook both his hands, the mother pounced upon him and introduced him to a dozen people in a moment, and as for poor Alice, she blushed, and smiled, and buttoned her gloves, which was her usual occupation. When the business of the introduction was over Edgar fell back out of the principal place, and took a passing note of the guests. A dozen names had been said to him, but not one had he made out, except that of Lord Newmarch, who was a tall, spare young man in spectacles, with a

thin intellectual face. There were two men of Mr Pimpernel's stamp, with vast white waistcoats, and heads slightly bald—men very well known upon 'Change, and holding the best of reputations in Liverpool—with two wives, who were ample and benign, like the mistress of the house; and there were two or three men in a corner, with Oxford written all over them, curiously looking out through spectacles, or as it were out of mists, at the other part of the company. Lord Newmarch did not attach himself to either of these parties. It was not very long indeed since he had been an Oxford man himself, but he was now a politician, and had emerged from the academical state.

There was one other among the guests who attracted Edgar's attention, he could not tell why—a tall man about ten years older than himself, with black hair, just touched in some places with grey, and deep-set dark-blue eyes, which shone like a bit of frosty sky out of his dark bearded face. The face was familiar to him, though he felt sure he had never seen this individual man before; and though he kept himself in the background there was an air about him which Edgar recognised by instinct. Among the old merchants and the young Dons—men limited on one hand within a very material universe, and on the other by the still

straiter limitations of a purely intellectual sphere —this man looked, what he was, a man of the world. Edgar came to this conclusion instinctively, feeling himself drawn by an interest which was only half sympathy to the only individual in the party who deserved that name. Chance or Mrs. Pimpernel arranged it so that this man was placed at the opposite end of the table at dinner, quite out of Edgar's reach. Mr. Arden of Arden had to conduct one of the most important ladies present to dinner, and was within reach of Mrs. Pimpernel with Alice on his other hand; but the stranger who interested him was at the foot of the table, being evidently a person of no importance. It was only Edgar's second English party, and certainly at this moment it was not nearly so pleasant as the dinner at Thorne, with pretty Gussy telling him everything. Mrs. Buxton, who sat between him and Lord Newmarch, was too anxious to attend to her noble neighbour's conversation to give very much attention to Edgar. Now and then she turned to him indeed, and was very affable; but her subject was still Newmarch, and they were too near to that personage to make the discussion agreeable. "You should hear Lord Newmarch on the education question," the lady said; "his ideas are so clear, and then they are so charmingly expressed. I consider his style

admirable. You don't know it? How very strange, Mr. Arden! He contributes a good deal to the *Edinburgh*. I thought of course you must have been acquainted with his works."

"I never read any of them," said Edgar; and I trust I never shall, he felt he should have liked to have said; but he only added instead, "I have spent all my time wandering to and fro over the face of the earth, which leaves one in the depths of ignorance of everything one ought to know."

"Oh, do you think so?" said Mrs. Buxton. "For my part, I think there is nothing like travelling for expanding the mind. Lord Newmarch published a charming book of travels last year—From Turnstall to Teneriffe. Turnstall is one of his family places, you know. It made quite a commotion in the literary world. I do think he is one of the most rising young men of the age."

"Do you admire Lord Newmarch very much?" Edgar whispered to Alice, who was eating her fish very sedately by his side. Poor Alice grew very red, and gave a little choking cough, and put down her fork, and cleared her throat. She looked as if she had been caught doing something which was very improper, and dropped her fork as if it burned her. And it was a moment before she could speak. "Oh yes, Mr. Arden," was the reply she made,

giving a shy glance at him, and then looking down upon her plate.

"But don't you think he looks a little too much as if the fate of the country rested on his head?" said Edgar, valiantly trying again. "Tell me, please, is he a bore?"

"Oh no, Mr. Arden!" said Alice, and she looked at her plate again. "Does she want to finish her fish, I wonder?" Edgar asked himself; and then he turned to Mrs. Buxton, to leave his younger companion at liberty. But Mrs. Buxton had tackled Lord Newmarch, and they were discussing the question of compulsory education, with much authoritative condescension on the gentleman's part, and eager interest on the lady's. Edgar was not uninterested in such questions, but he had come to the Red House with a light-hearted intention of amusing himself, and he sighed for Gussy Thornleigh and her gossip, or anything that should be pleasant and nonsensical. Alice had returned to her fish, not that she cared for the fish, but because it was the only thing for her to do. If Edgar had but known it, she was quite disposed to go on saying, "Oh yes, Mr. Arden," and "Oh no, Mr. Arden," all the time of dinner, without caring in the least for the *entrees*, or even for the jellies and creams and other dainties with which the

banquet wound up. But then he did not know that, and could not but imagine that her fish was what she liked best.

In his despair, however, he caught Mrs. Pimpernel's eye, who was looking bland but disturbed, saying "There is no doubt of that," and "Education is very necessary," and "I am sure I am quite of Lord Newmarch's opinion," at intervals. She was amiable, but she was not happy with that wise young nobleman at her right hand, and such an appreciative audience as Mrs. Buxton beside him. Edgar glanced across at her, and caught her look of distress. "I do not care anything about education," he said, firing a friendly gun, as it were, across her bows. "I hate it when I am at dinner." And then Mrs. Pimpernel gave him a look which said more than words.

"Oh, fie," she said, leaning across the corner, "you know you should not say that. Do you think we English are behind in light conversation, Mr. Arden? For more important matters I know we can defy anybody," and she gave Lord Newmarch an eloquent look, which he returned with a little bow; "but I daresay," said Mrs. Pimpernel, with that cloud of uneasiness on her brow, "we are behind in chitter-chatter and table-talk."

"I like chitter-chatter," said Edgar; "and besides,

I want to know who the people are. Who is that pretty girl on Mr. Pimpernel's left hand? You must recollect I know nobody, and am quite a stranger in my own place."

"Oh, Mr. Arden, that is Miss Molyneaux, Mrs. Molyneaux's eldest daughter," said the gracious hostess, indicating the lady on her left hand, who smiled and coloured, and looked at Edgar with friendly eyes. "She *is* pretty—such a complexion and teeth! Did you notice her teeth, Mr. Arden? They are like pearls. My Alice has nice teeth, but I always say they are nothing to compare to Mary Molyneaux's. And that's Mr. Arden, your namesake, beside her. He is considered a very handsome man."

"Do you approve of personal gossip, Mr. Arden?" said Mrs. Buxton, breaking in; but Edgar was too much interested to be stopped, even by motives of civility.

"Mr. Arden, my namesake! Then that explains it." He said these last words, not aloud, but within himself, for now he could see that the face which this man's face recalled to him was that of his own sister, Clare. It gave him the most curious sensation, moving him almost to anger. A stranger whom he knew nothing of, who was nothing to him, to resemble Clare! It looked like profanity, desecration.

After all, there was something evidently in the Arden blood—something entirely wanting to himself—a secret influence—which he, the first of the name, did not share.

“Not only your namesake,” said Lord Newmarch, in his thin voice, much to Mrs. Buxton’s disgust. The young lord was very philosophical, and full to overflowing with questions of political importance, and the progress of the world, and all the knowledge of the nineteenth century; but still he was patrician born, and could not resist a genealogical question. “Not only your namesake. He is old Arthur Arden’s son, who was your father’s first cousin. He is the nearest relative you have except your sister; and, as long as you don’t have sons of your own, he is the next heir.”

“Ah!” said Edgar, as if he had sustained a blow. He could not explain how it was that he received the information thus. Why should he object to Arthur Arden, or be anything but pleased to see the next in the succession—the man who, of all the men in the world, should be most interesting to him? “The same blood runs in our veins,” he tried to say to himself, and gazed down curiously at the end of the table, raising thereby a little pleasurable excitement in the bosom of Mrs. Molyneaux, who sat opposite to him. “He is struck with my

Mary," the mother thought; and Edgar was so good a match that it was no wonder she was moved a little. Fortunately, Mary knew nothing about it, but sat by the other Arden, and chattered as much as Gussy Thornleigh had done, and could not help thinking what a pity it was so handsome a man, and one so like the family, should not be the true heir. "I have been over Arden Hall, and you are so like the portraits," Mary Molyneaux was saying at that very moment, while Lord Newmarch explained who her companion was to Edgar. "The present Mr. Arden is not a bit like them. I can't help feeling as if you must be the rightful Squire."

"I have got only the complexion, and not the lands," said Mr. Arthur Arden. "It is a poor exchange. And this is the first time I ever saw my cousin. He does not know me from Adam. We are not a very friendly race; but I know Clare."

"Oh, Miss Arden? Don't you think she is quite beautiful—but awfully proud?" said the girl. "She will not know the Pimpernels; though all the best people have called on them, she will never call. Don't you think it is horrid for a girl to be so proud?"

"She has the family spirit," said her kinsman, with a look which Mary, in her innocence, did not

comprehend. The talk at the table at Thorne was more amusing, but perhaps there was a deeper interest in what was then going on at the Red House.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was impossible for Edgar not to look with interest upon this other Arden, who was so like his family, so like his own sister, with the very same air about him which the portraits had, and in which the young man felt he was himself so strangely wanting. Perhaps if Gussy Thornleigh had been by his side, or even that pretty Miss Molyneaux, who was entertaining his unknown relation, his eyes and thoughts would not have been so persistently drawn that way. But between Alice Pimpernel, who said, "Oh no, Mr. Arden," and "Oh yes, Mr. Arden," and Mrs. Buxton, who was collecting the pearls which dropped from the lips of Lord Newmarch, the dinner was not lively to him; and he caught from the other end of the table tones of that voice which somehow sounded familiar, and turns of the head full of that vague family resemblance which goes so far in a race, and which recalled to him not only his sister whom he loved, but his father whom he did not love. How strange it was that he should have

been so entirely passed over amid all those family links that bound the others together! It proves, Edgar said to himself, that it is not blood that does it, but only association, education, the impressions made upon the mind at its most susceptible age. He reasoned thus with himself, but did not find the reasoning quite satisfactory, and could not but feel a mingled attraction and repulsion to the stranger who was his nearest relation, his successor if he died, and surely ought to be his friend while he lived. When the ladies left the room, and the others drew closer round the table, he could no longer resist the impulse that moved him. It was true that Clare had expressed anything but friendly feelings for this unknown cousin; but anyhow, were he bad or good, it was Edgar's duty, as the chief of the family, to know its branches. It did not seem to him even that it was right or natural to ask for any introduction. After a little hesitation he changed his place, and took the chair by Arthur Arden's side. "They tell me you are of my family," he said, "and your face makes me sure of it—in which case, I suppose, we are each other's nearest relations, at least on the Arden side."

The landless cousin paused for a moment before he replied to the young Squire. He looked him all over with something which might have seemed

insolence had Edgar's nature led him to expect evil. "I suppose, of course, you are my cousin the Squire," he said, carelessly, "though I certainly should never have made you out to be an Arden by your face."

"No; I am like my mother they tell me," said Edgar; but for the first time in his life he reddened at that long understood and acknowledged fact. There was nothing *said* that insulted him, but there was an inference which he did not understand, which yet penetrated him like a dagger. It was unendurable, though he had no comprehension what it meant.

"I never knew rightly who Mrs. Arden was," said Arthur; "a foreigner, I believe, or at least a stranger to the county. I don't think I should like my eldest son to be so unlike me if I were a married man."

"Mr. Arden, I don't pretend to understand your meaning; but if you wish to be offensive perhaps our acquaintance had better end at once," said Edgar, "I have no desire to quarrel with my heir."

Another pause followed, during which the dark countenance of the other Arden fluctuated for a moment between darkness and light. Then it suddenly brightened all over with that smile for which the Ardens were famous. "Your heir!" he said. "You are half a lifetime younger than I am,

and much more likely to be my heir—if I had anything to leave. And I don't want to be offensive. I am a bitter beggar; I can't help myself. If you were as poor as I am, and saw a healthy boy cutting you out of everything—land, money, consideration, life——”

“Don't say so,” cried open-hearted Edgar, forgetting his offence; “on the contrary, if I can do anything to make life more tolerable—more agreeable—— I am just as likely to die as any one,” he continued, with a half comic sense that this must be consolatory to his new acquaintance; “and I have my sister to think of, who in that case would want a friend. Why should not we be of mutual use to each other? I now; you perhaps hereafter——”

“By Jove!” cried the other, looking at him keenly. And then he drank off a large glass of claret, as if he required the strength it would give. “You are the strangest fellow I ever met.”

“I don't think so,” said Edgar, laughing. “Nothing so remarkable; but I hope we shall know each other better before long. There is not much attraction just now in the country, but in September, if you will come to Arden——”

“Do you know Miss Arden can't bear me?” said his new friend.

“Can't bear you!” Edgar faltered as he spoke—

for as soon as his unwary lips had uttered the invitation he remembered what Clare had said.

“Yes; your sister hates me,” said Arthur Arden. “I cannot tell why, I am sure. I suppose because my father and yours fought like cat and dog—or like near relations if you choose, which answers quite as well. I am not at all sure that he did not send you abroad to be out of our way. He believed us capable of poisoning you—or—any other atrocity,” he added, with a little harsh laugh.

“And are you?” said Edgar, laughing too, though with no great heart.

“I don’t think I shall try,” said his new kinsman. “My father is dead, and one is less courageous than two. By Jove! just think what a difference it would make. Here am I, a poor wretch, living from hand to mouth, not knowing one year where my next year’s living is to come from, or sometimes where my next dinner is to come from, for that matter. If ever one man had an inducement to hate another, you may imagine it is I.”

This grim talk was not amusing to Edgar, as may be supposed; but, as his companion spoke with perfect composure, he received it with equal calm, though not without a secret shudder in his heart. “I think we might arrange better than that,” he said. “We shall have time to talk it over later; but, in my

opinion, the head of a family has duties. It sounds almost impertinent to call myself the head of the family to you, who are older, and probably know much more about it; but——”

“You are so,” said Arthur Arden, “and fact is incapable of impertinence. Talking of the country having no attractions, I should rather like to try a June at Arden. I suppose you bucolics think that the best of the year, don't you? roses, and all that sort of thing. And I happen to have heaps of invitations for September, and not much appetite for town at the present moment. If it suits you, and your sister Clare does not object too strenuously, I'll go with you now.”

This sudden and unexpected acceptance of his invitation filled Edgar with dismay. September was a totally different affair. In September there would be various visitors, and one individual whom she disliked need not be oppressive to Clare. But now, while they were alone, and while yet all the novelty of his situation was fresh upon Edgar, nothing, he felt, could be more inappropriate. Arthur Arden swayed himself upon his chair, leaving one arm over the back, with careless ease, while his cousin, suddenly brought to a stand-still, tried to collect himself, and decide what it was best to do. “Ah, I see,” Arthur said, after a pause, still

with the same carelessness, "I bore you. You were not prepared for anything so prompt on my part; and Madam Clare——"

"I cannot allow my sister's name to be mentioned," cried Edgar angrily, "except with respect."

"Good heavens, how could I name her with greater respect? If I said Madam Arden, which is the proper traditional title, you would think I meant your grandmother. I say Madam Clare, because my cousin is the lady of the parish: I will say Queen Clare, if you please: it comes to about the same thing in our family, as I suppose you know."

"As I suppose you don't know," was in this arrogant Arden's tone; but it was lost upon Edgar, whose mind was busy about the problem how he could manage between Arthur's necessities and Clare's dislike. The party was in motion by this time to join the ladies, and Lord Newmarch came up to the two Ardens in the momentary breaking up.

"I want very much to see more of you," he said, addressing himself to Edgar. "I see you two cousins have made acquaintance, so I need not volunteer my services; but I am very anxious to see more of you. I daresay there are many things in the county and in the country which you will find a little

puzzling after living so long abroad ; and I hope to get a great deal of information from you about Continental politics. My father is in town, so I cannot ask you to Marchfield, as I should like to do ; indeed, I am only off duty for a week on account of this great social assembly in Liverpool. How shall I manage to see a little of you ? I go back to Liverpool with the Buxtons to-night."

"I cannot promise to go to Liverpool," said Edgar ; "but if you could come to us at Arden——"

"That would be the very thing," said the young politician, "the very thing. I could spare you from the 1st to the 5th. I must be back in town before the 7th for the Irish debate. My father has Irish property, and of course we poor slaves have to come up to the scratch ; though, as for justice to Ireland, you know, Arden——"

"I fear I don't know much about it ; shall we join the ladies ?" said Edgar, a little confused by finding his hospitality so readily embraced.

"I shall be very happy to give you the benefit of my experience," said Lord Newmarch ; "there are some things on which it is necessary a young landed proprietor should have an opinion of his own. Yes, by all means, let us go upstairs. There is a great deal in the present state of the country that I should be glad to talk to you about.

We have become frightfully empirical of late; whether the Government is Whig or whether it is Tory, it seems a condition of existence that it should try experiments upon the people; we are always meddling with one thing or another—state of the representation—education—management of the poor——”

Such were the words that came to Arthur Arden's ears as his cousin disappeared out of the dining-room under the wing of Lord Newmarch, being preached to all the way. The kinsman, who was a fashionable vagabond, looked after them with a smile which very much resembled a sneer. “Thank heaven, I am nobody,” he said to himself, half aloud. He was the last in the room, and no one cared whether he appeared late or early in Mrs. Pimpernel's fine drawing-room; no one except, perhaps, one or two young ladies, who thought “poor Mr. Arden” very handsome and agreeable, but knew he was a man who could never be married, and must not even be flirted with overmuch. If he was bitter at such moments, it was not much to be wondered at. He was more mature, and much better able to give an opinion than Edgar, better educated, perhaps a more able man by nature; but Edgar had the family acres, and therefore it was to him that the politician ad-

dressed himself, and whom everybody distinguished. Arthur Arden persuaded himself, as he went his way after the others to the drawing-room, that it was almost a good bargain to be quit of Lord Newmarch and his tribe, even at the price of being quit of land and living at the same time; but the attempt was rather a failure. He would have appreciated political power, which Edgar was too ignorant to care for; he would have appreciated money, which Edgar evidently meant to throw away, in his capacity of head of the family, on poor relations and other unnecessary adjuncts. What a strange mistake of Providence it was! "He would have made a capital shopkeeper, or clerk, or something," the elder Arden said to himself, "whereas I——; but, at all events, we shall see what effect his proceedings will have upon saucy Clare."

CHAPTER XVI.

It would be difficult to imagine anything more uncomfortable than were Edgar's feelings as he drove home that evening. He had tried with much simplicity to avoid his kinsman Arden, thinking, in his inexperience, that if he did not repeat his invitation, or if no further conversation took place between them as to that visit in June, that the other would take it for granted, as he himself would have been quick to do, that such a visit was undesirable. Edgar, however, had reckoned without his guest, who was not a man to let any such trifling scruples stand in the way of his personal comfort. He was on the lawn with some of the other gentlemen when Edgar got into his dogcart, and shouted to him quickly, "I shall see you in a few days," as he drove past. Here was a pleasant piece of news to take back to Clare. And Lord Newmarch was coming, who, though a stranger to himself, was none to his sister, and might possibly be, for anything Edgar knew, as distasteful to her

as Arthur Arden himself. He laughed at his own discomfiture, but still was discomfited; for indifference to the feelings of anybody connected with him was an impossibility to the young man. "Of course, I am master, as people say," he suggested to himself, with the most whimsical sense of the absurdity of such a notion. Master—in order to please other people. Such was the natural meaning of the term according to all the laws of interpretation known to him. It was Clare who was queen at the present moment of her brother's heart and household; but even if there had been no Clare, Edgar would still have been trying to please somebody—to defer his own wishes to another's pleasure, by instinct, as nature compelled him. It is a disposition which gives its possessor a great deal of trouble, but at least it is not a common one. And the curious thing was that he did not blame Arthur Arden for pushing his society upon him, as anybody else would have done. It was weakness on his own part, not selfishness on that of his kinsman. Had he been driven to reason on the subject, Edgar would have indeed manifested to you clearly how his own yielding temper was the greatest of sins, as tempting others to be selfish. "Of course it is my own fault" had been his theory all his life.

But he was very uncomfortable about it in this case. Up to this time, when he had been injudiciously amiable he alone had been the sufferer; but now it was Clare who must bear the brunt. When he reached the village he threw the reins to the groom, and jumped out of the dogcart. "If Miss Arden is downstairs let her know that I have gone for an hour's chat to Dr. Somers'," he said; and so started on, with his cigar, in the moonlight, feeling the stillness and solitude a relief to him. How free his old life had been! and yet he had felt himself wronged and injured to be left in enjoyment of so much freedom. Now he was hampered enough, surrounded by duties and responsibilities which he understood but dimly, with one of those terrible domestic critics by his side who had the power which only love has to wound him, and who subjected him to that terrible standard of family perfection which in his youth he had known nothing of, and the rules of which even now he did not recognise. Edgar sighed, and took his cigar from his lips, and looked at it as if he expected the kind spirit of that soothing plant to step forth and counsel him; but receiving no revelation, sighed and put it back again, and thrust his hands into his pockets, and passed along the silent village street with his disturbed thoughts. All was

silent in Arden: the doors closed which stood open all day long, and only here and there a faint light twinkling. One in John Horsfall's cottage, in the little room where Lizzie, his eldest daughter, was dying of consumption; one in old Simon the clerk's window, downstairs, where his harsh-tempered but conscientious Sally was busy with the needlework which she did, as all Arden knew, "for the shop." "The shop" meant a certain famous place for baby-linen in Liverpool, which demanded exquisite work—and Sally alone of all the neighbourhood was honoured with its commissions. In her aunt Sarah's cottage, next door, the upper window showed a faint illumination, and stood open. These were all the signs of life which were visible in Arden. The old people, and the hard-working out-door people who began the day at five in the morning, were all safe in bed, enjoying their well-won repose. The moon was shining brightly, with all the soft splendour of the summer—shining over Arden woods, which looked black under her silver, and making the little street, with its white lines of broken pavement before each door, as bright as day. Edgar's footsteps rang upon the stones as he crossed those little strips of white one by one. The sound broke the silent awe and mystery of the night, and with his usual sympathetic feeling he did his best to

restrain it. He had thrown away his cigar, and had taken off his hat to refresh himself with the cool sweet air, when he heard a cry from the window above. It was the window of old Sarah's Scotch lodger. He looked up eagerly, for her aspect had awakened some curiosity in his mind. But what he saw was a little white figure leaning out so far that its balance seemed doubtful, spreading out its hands, he thought, towards himself as he stood looking up. "My Willie! my Willie!" cried the voice; "is it you at last? Oh, he's here, he's here, whatever you may say. Willie! Willie! How could he rest in his grave, and me pining here?"

Edgar rushed forward in the wildest alarm. The little creature leaned over the window-sill, with arms stretched out, and hair streaming about her, till he felt that any moment she might be dashed upon the pavement below. The cry of "Willie!" rang into the stillness with a wild sweetness which went to the listener's heart. It sounded like the very voice of despair. "Take care, for God's sake," he cried, instinctively rushing into the little garden below the window and holding out his arms to catch her should she fall. Just then, however, she was caught from behind. The grandmother's face looked suddenly out, ghastly pale and stern in its emotion.

"I have her safe, sir, thanks to you," said the serious Scotch voice, every word of which sounded to Edgar like a chord in music full of a hundred mingled modulations. "Willie, my Willie!" cried the younger voice, rising wilder and shriller; and then there followed a momentary rustle, as of a slight struggle, and then the sharp decisive closing of the window. He could see nothing more. But it was not possible to pass on calmly after such an incident. After a moment's indecision, Edgar tapped lightly at old Sarah's window, which was dark. The sounds upstairs died into a distant murmur of voices, and downstairs all was still. Old Sarah, if she heard, took no notice of his summons; but young Sarah, her niece, who was working in the next cottage, roused herself and came to the door. "It's best to take no notice, sir, if you'll take my advice," said Sally, with a piece of white muslin wrapped round her arm, which shone in the moonlight. "It's nought but the mad lass next door."

"Mad! is she mad?" said Edgar eagerly.

"Poor lass! they do say as it's a brother; but I don't hold for making all that fuss about brothers," said Sally. "T'ou'd dame, she's a proud one, and never says nought she can help; and the poor wench ain't dangerous or that, but as mad as mad, in special when the moon's at the full. Don't you

take no notice, sir, for there never was a proud un like t'ou'd dame. T' poor lass had an only brother as died, and she's ne'er been hersel' since. That's what they say."

"But she looks like a child," said Edgar, not knowing what to do; for already complete silence and darkness seemed to have fallen over the cottage. Old Sarah did not wake, or if she waked, kept still and made no sign, and the light had disappeared from the upper window. It was hard to believe, to look at the perfect stillness of the summer night, that any such interruption had ever been.

"She do, Squire," said Sally; "but seventeen they say, and some thinks her mortal pretty—t'ou'd Doctor for one, as was awful wild in his own time, I've heerd say. But Mrs. Murray she watches her like a dragon. It's t'ou'd lady as is my sort. I don't hold with prettiness nor fuss, but them as takes that care of their own——"

Sally jumped aside with a sudden cry, as the door of the next house softly opened, and Mrs. Murray herself suddenly appeared. In the moon-light, which blanched even Sally's dingy complexion, the old woman looked white as death; but probably it was as much an effect of the light as of the scene she had just gone through. She laid her hand very gently, with a certain dignity, upon Edgar's arm.

“Sir,” she said, “you’ll excuse my poor bairn. Willie was her brother, that we lost a year back. He was lost at sea, and the poor thing looks for him night and day. He was in a Liverpool ship; that’s why we’re here. She took you for him,” the grandmother continued, and then made a pause, as if to recover her voice. Tears were glistening in her eyes. Her voice thrilled and changed even now, it seemed to Edgar, like chords. She touched his arm again with her hand, a soft, yet firm, momentary touch, which was like a caress. And then, all at once, “You’re like him. Good night,” she said.

It was as if she could not trust herself to say more. And Edgar stood gazing at the vacant spot where she had stood, while Sally peered round the porch of her own house, straining to see and hear. “She’s a queer ’un, t’ou’d dame,” said Sally, with a little gasp of disappointed excitement; and she stood at her door with the muslin twisted about her hand, and gazed after him when he went away up the village with a hasty good night. Edgar heard her close and bolt her door as he hurried on to the Doctor’s. Poor rural fastenings, what could they shut out? not even a clever thief, did any such care to enter—much less pain, trouble, sorrow, madness, or death.

Dr. Somers' study was a great contrast to the splendour and silence of the night. It was lighted by a green reading-lamp, which threw its illumination only on the table, and it was full of smoke from a succession of cigars. The Doctor was seated in a large old-fashioned elbow-chair, with a high back and sides, covered with dark leather, against which his handsome head stood out. On the table stood a silver claret-cup, and a rough brown bottle of seltzer-water—such were his modest potations. He had a medical magazine before him on the table, but it was a novel which was in his hand, and which he pitched away from him as Edgar entered. "Some of Letty's rubbish," he explained, as he threw it on the sofa in the shade, and welcomed his young guest. "Bravo, Edgar! Now this is what I call emancipating yourself from petticoat government. These sisters of ours are as bad as half-a-dozen wives."

"You don't seem to have suffered much under yours," said Edgar; "and mine, I assure you——"

"Oh, yes; yours, I assure you," cried the Doctor, "is exactly like the rest—would not curtail any of your pleasures for the world; in short, would entreat you to amuse yourself, and be heartbroken at the thought of keeping you at home for her; but once let her find out that you have wings and can fly, and see what she says. I know them all."

Edgar sat down, and cast a hurried glance round the room as the Doctor spoke. He asked himself quite involuntarily whether, after all, a cigar in Dr. Somers' study was so much more delightful than Clare's society and her pretty surroundings, and was not by any means so certain on that point as the Doctor was. But if he smiled within himself he suffered no evidence of it to escape, and for this night, at least, he had a definite object in his visit. "I did not know if I should find you," he said. "What has become of the old whist party, of which I used to hear so much?"

"Ah, the whist party," said the Doctor, with a sigh. "Poor Letty made an end of that. She was always willing to do her best, though she never was anything of a player; and she bore abuse like an angel. But that won't do now, you know. And young Denbigh is the most abject spoon I ever saw. When he is not dangling after Alice Pimpernel, he is writing verses to her, I believe. The boy is capable of any folly, and revokes as soon as look at you. Croquet is the food of love; and that is what the degenerate cub has abandoned whist for. No wonder the race deteriorates day by day."

"That is just what I wanted to speak to you about," said Edgar; "I have just come from the Pimpernel's."

CHAPTER XVII.

“LET us be correct and categorical,” said Dr. Somers. “That is just what you wanted to talk to me about? Which? Love, or croquet, or the Pimpernels?”

“Neither,” said Edgar, with a little impatience. “These are things altogether out of my way; and I must ask you to be serious, for what I have to ask is grave enough. Can you tell me anything about my cousin Arthur Arden? and why my sister dislikes him? and why——”

“Whew!” said Dr. Somers, with a prolonged whistle. “You might well tell me to be serious. Why, and why, and why? Have you met Arthur Arden? And if so, did nobody warn you that he was the worst enemy you ever had in your life.”

“He might very easily be that, and not scare me much,” said Edgar, with his careless, almost boyish, smile.

“You silly lad!” said the Doctor. “You simpleton! You think you never had an enemy in your life, and feel as if this would be something new. I

wonder if I ought to enlighten you? You remember your father, Edgar? Which was he, enemy or friend?"

"Dr. Somers," said Edgar, gravely, "I have already told you that nothing shall induce me to discuss my father."

Dr. Somers said "Humph!" with sudden confusion, and filled himself out a large bumper of wine and seltzer water. "That shows a fine disposition on your part," he said; "but whether it is safe or expedient to ignore such things you must judge for yourself. Perhaps I know more about it than you do, and it seems to me you have had an enemy or two. But, anyhow, take care of Arthur Arden, for he will be the worst."

"I don't think I am afraid."

"No; I don't suppose you are," said the Doctor, looking at him between two puffs of his cigar; "but whether that is wise or not is a different matter. Why does Clare hate him? Why, I suppose, because he once made love to her, and offered 'his hand,' as people say, with nothing in it. Was not that enough?"

"Surely not enough to make her hate him," said Edgar, "but enough to make it horribly embarrassing. Was that all? Don't people say it is the highest compliment, &c. I am sure I have read something like that in books."

“And so have I,” said the Doctor; “and I suppose it is the highest compliment, &c. Women don’t generally hate us because we love them, or think we love them. Clare has been petted and spoiled all her life. But still Arthur Arden is a handsome fellow——”

While Dr. Somers went on thus philosophically, Edgar winced and shifted about in his chair. He was not susceptible about himself, but he was intensely sensitive in respect to his sister. Clare was not to him an abstract woman, to be discussed by general rules, but an individual whom he would fain have drawn curtains of profoundest respect about, and veiled from every vulgar gaze. There is no doubt that this is one of the first primitive instincts of love. The Turk is the truest symbol of humanity so far, and there is no man, worth calling a man, who would not be satisfied in his inmost heart if he could shut up his womankind from every rash look or doubtful comment. Edgar beat a tune on the table with his fingers, blew clouds of smoke about him in his restlessness, shuffled and swayed himself about in his chair; but what could he do to stop the disquisitions of the man who had known Clare all her life?

“Arthur Arden is a handsome fellow, and a clever fellow,” continued Dr. Somers. “If he had

impressed a girl's imagination, I for one should not have been surprised. My own theory is that he did, and that it was her liking for him, combined with her sense of his enmity to you——”

“Good heavens! what has that to do with it?” cried Edgar, thankful of some means of expressing his impatience. “How could he show enmity to me when he had never seen me? and what did it matter if he had? That has nothing to do with Clare.”

“It had a great deal to do with Clare,” said the Doctor. “If I tell you what my theory is, of course you will understand I don't mean to hurt your feelings, Edgar. I think he must have proposed some sort of compromise to your father to exclude you quietly——”

“To exclude——me!” Edgar stopped him with an impatient gesture. “Dr. Somers, you speak in riddles. How could I be excluded? What compromise was possible? This is something so astounding that I must ask what it means in so many words——”

“Oh, of course it was absolute folly,” said the Doctor, with confusion. The truth was, he had taken Edgar for a fool, and it seemed to him as if anything could be said to so amiable, so good-tempered, so unsuspecting a simpleton. He paused and

grew red, notwithstanding his ordinary composure and knowledge of the world. "I speak of the mad notions of a self-willed man, who thought persistence would overcome everything," he went on, embarrassed. "Of course there was no compromise possible. You were the only son, and the undoubted heir. But, going upon some notion of his own that the Squire hated—I mean was not fond of you—— In short, Edgar, I warned you you were not to think I wanted to wound your feelings—and that Arthur Arden was the worst enemy you ever had in your life."

"You have given me a glimpse of something worse still," said Edgar. "You have insinuated the possibility that his enmity might have been of importance—that there was some harm possible. What could he do? What could—since you force me to speak of that—my father have done? The estates were entailed. If he could have cut me off by will, I am not so simple as to doubt that he would have done it. But being, as I am, heir of entail——"

"Yes, yes," said Dr. Somers eagerly; "of course you are heir of entail; of course it was all nonsense; you can't imagine for a moment—— But then there are such very curious things in law and family history. Men sometimes take an unaccountable aver-

sion—— Did I ever tell you the story of the Agostinis, a very strange thing that excited everybody when I was at Rome ?”

Edgar gave a little wave of his hand in impatience. What were the Agostinis or their story to him ?

“That was almost a case in point,” said the Doctor. “There was supposed to be no heir, and the estates had gone to the daughter (of course there was no law of entail to complicate the matter), when all at once starts up a young man, who had been bred in a public hospital, and yet was proved beyond dispute to be the Duchess Agostini’s son. She was living, though her husband was dead, and could not deny it. The proof, indeed, was so strong that he won his suit, and is now the Duke, and head of one of the oldest houses in Italy. Brought up in an orphan hospital, and just as nearly shut out from all inheritance for ever—just as near——”

“But I suppose there was some explanation,” said Edgar, interested in spite of himself ; “mere aversion of a father could not surely go so far as that ?”

“Oh, yes, there was a reason given,” said the Doctor, more and more confused, “something about the mother—some little speck, you know, on her character : one must not inquire too closely into those family stories. But he won his suit, and now

he is Duke Agostini—the hospital boy! You may imagine what a sensation it made in Rome.”

“Something about his mother,” Edgar repeated vaguely, under his breath, with eyes in which a strange light suddenly sprang up. Then he bit his lip, and restrained himself. Dr. Somers, watching closely, saw that he had made an impression much more serious than he intended. He did not, indeed, intend to make any impression. He meant only, in the wantonness of fancied power, to make an experiment, to pique Edgar’s curiosity, to give him, perhaps, a passing thrill of alarm and wonder, such as an operator might give, half in jest, to curious spectators round an electric machine; but, unfortunately, the operation had been too successful, the shock overmuch. The young man said nothing farther, but sat moody, with the cigar between his fingers, and let the Doctor talk. Dr. Somers said a great deal more, but with the sense that Edgar was not listening, and that he might as well have been a hundred miles off for any companionship there was between them. And though he had in general a very good opinion of himself, for once in his life the Doctor was abashed, and felt that he had gone too far. He tried to draw the young man’s attention to other matters—to local interests—to Lord Newmarch and his enlightened views. “I may be a

Radical myself," said the Doctor, "but I do not belong to that school of Enlightened Youth. Newmarch is very appalling to me; and if you don't mind, Edgar, you'll find he wants to make up to Clare *too*."

"Too! is there any other?" said Edgar, with a certain languid haughtiness which was more like the Ardens than anything that had ever been seen in him before, and which gave Dr. Somers a thrill almost as sharp and sudden as that he had produced in the young Squire. Could it be possible, at this moment, of all others, that his theory was to prove itself wrong?"

"I should think there were others," he said, with an attempt at carelessness. "Flowers like Clare do not grow in every garden, not to speak of the *dot* which you and your father endowed her with. I suppose nothing has been done about that as yet; or have you been so wise as to take old Fazakerley's advice?"

"I think I shall go home," said Edgar abruptly, and he got up, and lighted his cigar by the Doctor's candle. "There was something I wanted to speak to you about, but it has gone out of my head."

"Nothing about your health, I hope," said the Doctor anxiously. "You look quite well——"

"Oh, no, nothing about my health," he said, with

a short laugh, and went out, leaving Dr. Somers in a state of great discomfort, saying to himself that he had not meant it, and that he could not have imagined such a good-tempered careless fellow would have taken anything up so quickly. "It was nothing," he said to himself. "I did not even imply that his circumstances were the same; in short, I did not say a word to offend—any one; nonsense! Who is Edgar Arden, I wonder, that one should study his feelings to such an extent? Good heavens, didn't he insist upon being told?" Thus the Doctor excused and accused himself, and felt extremely uncomfortable, and at last went to bed, not feeling able to drown his remorse either in his seltzer water or his novel. "If Fielding had done anything as idiotic," was his comment as he went upstairs, "or poor Letty—but I, that pretend to some sort of discretion!" His folly had at least this salutary effect.

Meanwhile Edgar walked home very fast, as if some one were pursuing him. It was his thoughts which were pursuing him, rushing and driving him on. The avenue had never looked so stately in the moonlight, nor the woods so mysteriously sweet. All the soft perfumes of the night were in the air; the smell of the fresh earth and the dew, the fragrance that breathed out of here and there an old

hawthorn, still covered with blossom, beginning to brown and fade in the daylight, but still sweet in the darkness. The front of the house lay in a great shadow made of its own roof and the big trees behind; but lights were twinkling about, as they ought to be in a house which expects its master. Was it possible that Arthur Arden could have turned him out, could have replaced him there? Could it be that Clare knew such a thing was possible? "Something about his mother." Edgar did not himself realise what horror it was which had thus breathed across him. What could it be about his mother? Could there be anything about her which gave to any man the right of a possible insinuation? He did not remember her, and had not even a portrait of her, but was like her, people said. And therefore his father had hated him. Edgar's brain burned as this strange thought whirled and fluctuated about him; he was its victim, he did not entertain it voluntarily. His father hated him because he was like her; but yet, was not she the mother, too, of the beloved Clare?

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was perhaps fortunate for Edgar that he did not see his sister that night. She had waited for him till the return of the groom with the dogcart, and then she had gone upstairs. Probably she had gone with a little irritation against him for delaying his return, Edgar felt; and a momentary impatience of all and everyone of the new circumstances which made his life so different came upon him. What if Dr. Somers' suggestion had come true, and he had been shut out of the succession? Why, then, this bondage on one side or other, this failure in satisfying one and understanding another, this expenditure of himself for everybody's pleasure, would not have been. "I should have been brought up to a profession, probably," he said to himself, "or even a trade;" and for the moment, in his impatience, he almost wished it had been so. But then he looked out upon the park, lying broad in the moonlight, and the long lines of trees which he could see from his open window, and felt that he would be

a coward indeed who would give up such an inheritance without an effort. The lands of his fathers. Were they the lands of his fathers? or what did that terrible insinuation mean?

Clare was cloudy, there could be no doubt of it, when she met her brother next morning. She thought he might have come back earlier. "What is Dr. Somers to him?" she said to herself, and concluded, like a true woman, that he must have fallen in love with Alice Pimpernel. "If he were to marry *that* girl I should certainly keep Old Arden," she said to herself; for it seemed almost impossible to imagine that, seeing Alice was the last girl in the world who ought to attract him, he should have been able to resist falling in love with her. And thus she came down cloudy, and found Edgar with a face all overcast by the events of the previous night, which confirmed her in all her fears. "Of course, he does not like to speak of her," Clare said to herself. Poor Alice Pimpernel! who was too frightened for Mr. Arden even to raise her eyes from her plate.

"Had you a pleasant party?" she said, with a half angry sound in her voice.

"Not very pleasant," said Edgar. "I suppose that is why I am so tired this morning; but yet I met some people who interested me."

“Indeed!” said Clare, with polite wonder. “Tell me who you took in to dinner? and who was next you? and in short all about it? One would think it was I who had been at a party last night, and you who had stayed at home.”

“I took in Mrs. Buxton, whoever she may be—and I sat next Miss Pimpernel—and the one was philosophical, and the other was—— Is there not some word that sounds pretty, and that means inane? She is a very nice girl, I am sure. She said, ‘Oh, yes, Mr. Arden,’ and then, ‘Oh, no, Mr. Arden.’ If I had not kept up the proper alternations I wonder what the poor girl would have said?”

“But you did?” said Clare, with all her cloud removed. Had she but known who was at that party beside Alice Pimpernel!

“Oh, yes, I did. And there was Lord Newmarch, who is coming here on the 1st to make my acquaintance. I hope you don’t mind. He was so anxious to see me, poor fellow, that I could not deprive him of that pleasure. I hope, Clare, you don’t mind.”

“Not in the least,” she said, in her most genial mood. “If you will not be shocked, I rather like him, Edgar. He means well; and then if he is a Radical, it is in a kind of dignified superior way.”

“So it is,” said Edgar; “very superior, and very dignified—not to say instructive—but we might get too clever, don’t you think, if we had too much of it? There was some one else there, about whom you must pardon me, Clare. I was led into giving him an invitation—without thinking. It did not occur to me till after——”

Edgar grew very red making his excuses, and Clare grew pale listening. She made a great effort over herself, and clasped her hands together, and looked at her brother with a forced smile. “Why should you hesitate?” she said. “Edgar, you are master; I wish you to be master. Whoever you choose to ask ought to be welcome to me.”

“I do not wish to be master so long as I have my sister to consult,” he said; “but this was a mistake, an inadvertence, Clare. You can’t guess? It was Arthur Arden whom I met at the Pimpernels!”

“Ah!” Clare said, growing paler and paler. But she made no observation, and kept listening with her hands clasped fast.

“I asked him to come in September, remembering you had said you did not like him much; but he offered himself for June. I did not accept his proposed visit; but from what I saw and what I hear it seems likely he will come.”

“No doubt he will come,” said Clare; and then

her hands separated themselves. She had heard all that she had to fear. "If I hate him it is not for myself," she added hurriedly, "but for you Edgar. He did all he could to injure you."

"So I have heard. But how could he injure me?" said her brother, feeling that it was now his turn.

"Edgar, I hate to speak of it. You can't understand my love for poor papa. Arthur tried to set him against—— It was——his fault. No, Edgar, no, I don't mean that—it was not his fault; but he tried to make things worse. That is why I hate——no, I don't hate. If you don't mind Edgar—— You kind, good, sweet-tempered boy——!"

And here, in a strange transport, which he could not understand, Clare took his hand, and held it close, and pressed it to her heart, which was beating fast. She looked up at him with tears in her eyes, with a curious admiration. "You are not like us other Ardens," she said. "We ought to learn of you; we ought to look up to you, Edgar. You can forgive. You don't keep on remembering and thinking over everything that people have done and said against you. You can put it away out of your mind. Edgar, dear, I hate myself, and I love you with all my heart."

"Do you, Clare; do you, indeed, Clare?" he

said, and went to her side, and kissed her with brotherly tenderness. "God do so to me and more also," he said to himself, if I ever forget her good and her happiness; or, at least, if he did not say the words, such was the sentiment that passed through his mind. He was so much moved that he felt able to ask a question he had been hesitating over all the morning. "Clare," he said softly, bending over her, and smoothing her dark hair. His voice had a certain sound of supplication in it which struck her strangely. She thought he was about to ask something hard to do—perhaps a renunciation, perhaps a sacrifice. "Clare, can you tell me anything about our mother? Do you know?"

"About mamma?" said Clare, with a sense of disappointment. "Edgar, you frighten me so; I thought you were going to ask me something that was very hard. About mamma? Of course I will tell you all I know."

"And there is a portrait—you said there was a portrait—I should like to see that too."

"Yes, Edgar, I will run and get it. Oh, I wonder if you would have been very like her—if she had lived? I sometimes think it would have been so much better for us all."

"Do you think so?" said Edgar, with a sadness

which he could not control. Would it have been better? But, at all events, Clare knew of nothing evil that concerned their mother. He walked about the room slowly while she went to seek the portrait, and finally paused at the great window, and gazed out. It had the same view over the park which he had looked at last night under the moonlight. Now, in the morning, with a certain ache of strange doubtfulness, he looked at it again. The feeling in his mind was that it might all dissolve as he looked, and melt away, and leave no sign—that, and the house, and the room he stood in, with all their appearance of weight and reality. Such things had been; at least, surely that was what Dr. Somers' story meant about those Agostini. What was it? "Something about the mother." A mist of bewilderment had fallen over him, and he could not tell.

Clare's entrance with a little case in her hand roused him. She came up, and put her arm within his where he stood, and, thus hanging on him, opened the case, and showed him the miniature, which formed the clasp of a bracelet. It was the portrait of a face so young that it startled him. He had been thinking and talking of his mother, which meant something almost venerable, and this was the face of a girl younger, ever so much younger, than himself. "Are you sure this is her?" he said in a

whisper, taking it out of his sister's hand. "Of course it is her; who else could it be?" she answered, in the same tone. "She is so young," said Edgar, apologetically. He was quite startled by that youthfulness. He held it up to the light, and looked at it with wondering admiration. "This child! Could she be my mother, your mother, Clare?"

"I suppose everybody is young some time. She must have looked very different from that when she died."

"Will it ever seem as strange, I wonder," said Edgar, still little above a whisper, "to somebody to look at your portrait and mine? How pretty she must have been, Clare. What a sweet look in her eyes! You have that look sometimes, though you are not like her. Poor little thing! What a soft innocent-looking child."

"Edgar," said his sister, half horrified, for she had little imagination, "do you remember you are speaking of mamma?"

He gave a strange little laugh, which seemed made up of pleasure and tears. "Do you think I might kiss her?" he said under his breath. Clare was half scandalized half angry. He was always so strange; you never could tell what he might do or say next; he was so inconsistent, not bound by sacred laws like the Ardens; but still his sister herself was

a little touched by the portrait and the suggestions it made.

“She would not have been old now if she had been living, not too old for a companion. Oh, Edgar, what a difference it would have made! I never had a real companion, not one I was thoroughly fond of; only think what it would have been to have had her——”

“With that face!” Edgar said, with a sigh of relief, though Clare could not guess why he felt so relieved. Then—“I wonder if she would have liked me,” he said, softly. “Clare, there has been a kind fiction about my mother. I am not like her. I don’t think I am like her. But she looks as innocent as an angel, Clare.”

“Why should not she be innocent?” said Clare, wondering. “We are all innocent. I don’t see why you should fix upon that. What strikes me is that she must have been so pretty. Don’t you think it is pretty? How arched the eyebrows are and dark, though she is so fair.”

“But I am not like her,” he said, shaking his head. How strange it was. Was he a waif of fortune, some mere stray soul whom Providence had made to be born in the house of Arden, quite out of its natural sphere? It gave him a little shock, and yet somehow he could feel no sharp disappointment

on the day he had made acquaintance with this innocent face.

“Do you think not?” said Clare, faltering. “Oh, yes; you are like her. See how fair she is, and you are fair, and the Ardens are all dark; besides, you know, poor papa—— Don’t change like that, Edgar, when I mention his name. He was the only one who knew her, and he said——”

“Did he ever say I was like my mother?” said Edgar, while the sweetness and softness had all gone out of his voice.

“I am not sure that he ever said it in so many words. But, Edgar! Why, everybody here—— What could it be but that? And see how fair she is, and you are fair——”

Edgar Arden shook his head. The face in the miniature was not sanguine and ruddy, like his, but a pensive face; locks too fair to be called golden surrounding it, and soft blue eyes. Everything was soft, gentle, tender, composed, in the young face. Even Clare’s grave beauty, though in itself so different, was less unlike her than Edgar’s warm vitality, the gleams of superabundant life, which showed as colour in his hair and as light in his eyes. “I am not like her,” he said to himself, as he closed the little case and gave it back to his sister; but the shadow which had been upon him all the morning

had disappeared for ever. Whatever was the secret of his story, it was not like the story of the Agostini. Once and for ever he dismissed that dread from his breast.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was, however, some time before Edgar got over the painful impression made upon his mind by what Dr. Somers had said. He had known very well for the greater part of his life that his father did not love him; but the idea that doubt had ever fallen upon his rights, that there had been a possibility of shutting him out from his natural inheritance, had never entered his mind. Of course there was really no such possibility; but still the merest suggestion of it excited the young man. It seemed to hint at a deeper secret in his own existence than anything he had yet suspected. He had been able to take it for granted with all the carelessness of youth that his father disliked him. But why should his father dislike him? What reason could there be? And then that story of the Agostini returned to him. Edgar pondered and pondered it for days, and rejected the suggestions conveyed in it, feeling from the moment he had seen his mother's picture a certain fierce sentiment of rage against Dr. Somers

as her maligner. But yet this explanation being evidently a false one, and his mother cleared of all shadow of shame or wrong, there remained the strange thought that there must be some clue to the mystery; and what was it? If it had been within the bounds of possibility that the Squire could have doubted his wife's faithfulness, that of course would have explained a great deal. But the evidence of the portrait was quite conclusive that any such suspicion was out of the question. Edgar was young and fanciful, and ready to accept the evidence of a look, and every natural sentiment within him rose up in defence of his mother. But he could not help asking himself, even though the question seemed an injury to her—what if it had been possible? Had she been another kind of woman and, capable of wickedness, what in such horrible circumstances would it have been a man's duty to do? He had of course heard such questions discussed, like everybody else in the world, as affecting the husband and wife, the immediate parties. But imagine a young man making such a discovery, finding himself out to be a spurious branch thus arbitrarily engrafted upon a family tree; in a position so frightful, what would it be his duty to do? Edgar roamed about the woods which were his, putting to himself in every point of view this

appalling question. A man could take no single step in such circumstances without taking upon him the responsibility of heaping shame upon his mother, and giving up her cause. It would be her whom he would cover with disgrace, much more than himself. He would have to decide a question which nobody but she could decide, and to give it against her, his nearest and dearest relation. Could any one willingly assume such an office? And, on the other hand, how could he retain a name, an inheritance, a position to which he had no right, and probably exclude the rightful heir? "Thank heaven," said Edgar fervently, "*that* can never be my case. The son of the woman to whom God gave so angelic a countenance can never have to blush for his mother. Whatever records came to light, *she* never shall be shamed." He gave up whole days to this question, pondering it again and again in his mind. The sight of the portrait gave him for that one day an absolute certainty that such was not his position: and this force of conviction carried him through the second and even the third day; but then as the first impression waned a horrible chill of doubt stole slowly over him. That hypothesis, terrible as it was, could it but be believed, explained so much. It explained the Squire's dislike to himself at once

and vindicated the unhappy old man. It explained why he was kept at so great a distance, brought up in so strange a way; and oh, good God! if such could be the case, what was Edgar's duty? His brain began to whirl when he got so far; and then he would work his way back again through all the arguments. Dr. Somers had calculated when he threw abroad this winged and barbed seed that Edgar was too easy-minded, too careless and good-natured and indifferent to let it rest in his thoughts; and to hide his consciousness of it, to be blank as a stone wall to any allusion which might recall it, was clearly now the first duty of Mrs. Arden's son. If he could but be absolutely sure of it one way or other; if he could put it utterly out of his mind, on the one hand, or—a horrible alternative, which nevertheless would be next best—know absolutely that it was true! But neither of these things seemed possible to Edgar. He had to submit to that doubt which was so fundamental and all-embracing—doubt as to his own very being, the foundations upon which his life was built—and never to breathe a whisper of it to any creature on the face of the earth. A hard task.

It may be thought that Clare must have observed her brother's abstraction, his silent wanderings and musings, and the look of thought and care which

he could not banish from his face ; but the truth was that Clare herself was occupied by a hundred reflections. She had told her brother she hated Arthur Arden, and at the moment it was true ; but now that Edgar, for whose sake she hated him, had condoned his offences, and asked him to the house, Clare, if her pride would have let her, might have confessed that she loved Arthur Arden, and it would have been equally true. He had exercised over her when she had seen him last that strange fascination which a man much older than herself often exercises over a girl. She had been pleased by the trouble he took to make himself agreeable, flattered by the attentions which a man of experience knows how to regulate according to the age and tastes of the subject under operation, and had felt the full charm of that kindred not near enough to be familiar, but yet sufficiently near to account for all kinds of mysterious affinities and sympathies which he knew so well how to make use of. He was a true Arden—everybody said so. And Clare, who was an Arden to the very finger tips, felt all the force of the bond. She had sighed secretly, wishing that her brother might have been like him. The tears had come into her eyes with affectionate pity that such a genuine representative of the family should be so poor ; and again a little glow of generous warmth

had followed, as a faint dream of how it might be made up to him stole across her mind. A man of such excellence and such grace—so distinguished by blood and talent, and all the qualities that adorn a hero, who could doubt that it would be made up to him? Honour would fall at his feet for the lifting up, and if wealth should be wanting, why then somebody whom Clare would try to love would endow him with everything that heart could desire, and herself best of all. She had nourished these notions until she had heard from Arthur himself, with one of the inadvertencies common to men whose consideration for others, however elaborate outside, does not come from the heart, of his opposition to her distant brother. He had taken it for granted that she must share her father's opinion on the subject. "Why, you do not know him!" he had said, in his astonishment, when he became aware of his mistake. "I love my brother with all my heart," was all the answer Clare had made. Something of the magniloquence of youth was in this large assertion; but the poor girl's heart was very sore, and the struggle she had with herself in this wild sudden revulsion of feeling was almost more than she could bear. He was Edgar's enemy, this man who had been too pleasant, only too tender to herself, and she hated him! She had walked

away from him at that painful moment, and when they met afterwards had only looked at him from behind the visor of cold pride and icy stateliness which the Ardens knew so well how to use. But the feeling in her heart was only hatred because it had been so nearly love.

And now that the tables had been so strangely turned, now that Arthur was coming to Arden as Edgar's guest, Clare was seized with a sudden giddiness of mind and heart, which made the outer world invisible to her, or at least changed, and threw it so awry that no clear impression came to her brain. As Edgar's friend— She could not feel quite sure whether her feelings were those of excited expectation and delight or of alarm and terror. And she was not sure either what to think of her brother. Was he magnanimous beyond all the powers of the Arden mind to conceive, as had been her first idea; or was he simply careless, insensible—not capable of the amount of feeling which came natural to the Ardens? This second thought was less pleasant than the first, and yet in one way it was a kind of relief from an overpowering and scarcely comprehensible excellence. "He does not feel it," Clare said to herself; but surely Arthur would feel it; Arthur would be moved by a forgiveness so generous. Even now, when

Edgar was fully aware what his kinsman had done against him, it did not occur to him to withdraw his invitation or forbid his enemy to the house. Such a sublime magnanimity could not fail to impress the mind of the other. But yet, Clare recollected that Arthur was a true Arden, and the Ardens were tenacious, not addicted to forgiving or giving up their own way, as was her strange brother. Arthur might come, concealing his enmity, watching his foe's weak points and the crevices in his armour, and laying up in his mind all these particulars for future use. Such a proceeding was not so foreign to the Arden mind as was that magnanimity or indifference—which was it?—that made Edgar a wonder in his race. If her cousin was to do this, what horrible thing might happen? Between Arthur's watchfulness and Edgar's unwariness, Clare trembled. But then, would not she be there to guard the one and keep the other in check?

Thus, Clare was so fully occupied with thoughts of her own that she did not notice the change in her brother's looks, nor his sudden love of solitude. When Mr. Fielding expressed to her his fear that Edgar was ill, the thought filled her with surprise. "Ill! Oh, no, there is nothing the matter with him," she said. "Here he comes to speak for himself: he looks just the same as usual. Edgar, you

are not ill? Mr. Fielding has been giving me a fright."

"I am not ill in the least," he said, "but I wanted to see you. Are you going into the village? I will walk there with Mr. Fielding, Clare, and you can pick me up on your way."

"You see there is not much the matter with him; he is always walking," said Clare, waving her hand to the Rector. "I will call for you, Edgar, in half-an-hour;" and she went away smiling to put on her riding-habit. The brother and sister were going to Thornleigh to pay their homage before Lady Augusta should go away.

"Of course I understand you don't want to alarm Clare," said the Rector, when they were on their way down the avenue; "but, my dear boy, you are looking very poorly. I don't like the change in your look. You should speak to the Doctor. He has known you more or less all your life."

"The Doctor! I do not think he knows much about it," said Edgar, with vehemence. "But I am not ill. I am as well as ever I was." Then he made a little pause; and then, putting his hand on his old friend's arm, he said impulsively, yet trying with all his might to hide the force of the impulse, "Mr. Fielding, you have always been very good to me. I want you to help me to recollect

what happened long ago. I want you to tell me something about—my mother.”

Old Mr. Fielding's short-sighted eyes woke up amidst the puckers which buried them, and showed a diamond twinkle of kindness in each wrinkled socket. He gave a look of benign goodness to Edgar, and then he turned and sent a glance towards the village which might almost have set fire to Dr. Somers' high roof. “Yes, Edgar,” he said quickly, “and I am very glad you have asked me. I can tell you a great deal about your mother.”

“You knew her, then?” cried the young man, turning upon him with eager eyes.

“I knew her very well. She was quite young, younger than you are; but as good a woman, Edgar, as sweet a woman as ever went to heaven.”

“I was sure of that!” he cried, holding out his hand; and he grasped that slim hand of the old Rector's in his strong young grasp, till Mr. Fielding would fain have cried out, but restrained himself, and bore it smiling like a martyr, though the water stood in his eyes.

“Somers never saw her,” said Mr. Fielding, waving his hand towards the village. “He was in Italy at the time; but ask his sister, or ask me. Ah, Edgar! in that, as in some other things, the old parson is the best man to come to. Why, boy, it is

not you I care for! How do I know you may not turn out a young rascal yet, or as hard as the nether millstone, like so many of the Ardens? but I love you for *her* sake."

CHAPTER XX.

“YOUR mother was very young,” Mr. Fielding continued, “and early matured as marriage makes a girl. She was a little old-fashioned, I think, as well as I can remember, through being driven into maturity before her time. When a girl is married, not over happily——”

“Was her marriage not happy?” Edgar interrupted, with a cloud on his face.

“I should not have said that. I mean, you know, her being so young. Why, I don’t think she was as old as Clare when they came back here with you a baby——”

“I was born abroad,” said Edgar, half in the tone of one making an inquiry, half as asserting a fact.

“If you would try not to interrupt me, please,” said Mr. Fielding, piteously. “You put me off my story. Yes, you were born abroad. They came home in October, and you had been born in the end of the previous year. They took everybody a good

deal by surprise. In the first place, few people knew there was a baby; and no one knew when your father and mother were coming. There were no bells rung for you, Edgar, when you came home first, and the old wives have a notion—but never mind that.”

“Tell me the notion,” said Edgar.

“Oh, nothing—about mischief to the heir for whom no bells are rung. That’s all; and heaven be praised, no mischief has come to you, Edgar. They came quite suddenly and the baby. Your father never made a fuss about babies. That is to say, my dear boy,” said the old Rector, lowering his voice, “if it will not grieve you; from the very beginning *that* had begun.”

Edgar gave a little nod of his head, sudden and brief, understanding only too clearly; and Mr. Fielding stopped to grasp his hand, and then went on again.

“If I could have helped it, I would not have mentioned it; but, of course, it must be referred to now and then,” continued the Rector. “Instead of being proud of you, as a man, if he is good for anything, always is, he never seemed able to bear the fuss. To be sure, some men don’t. They will not be made second even for their own child. Your mother——”

“My mother was fond of me at least?” said Edgar, turning away his head, and cutting at the weeds with the light cane in his hand, doing his best to conceal his excitement and emotion.

“Your mother, poor child!—but that of course, that of course, Edgar; how could she be otherwise than fond of her first-born? Your mother’s entire life was absorbed in an attempt to satisfy her husband. I saw the whole process; and it made my heart bleed. She was a passive, gentle, little creature—not like him. She shrank from the world, and all that was going on in it. She liked melancholy books and sad songs, and all that—one of the creatures doomed to die young. And he was so different! She used to strain and strain her faculties trying to please him. She would try to amuse him even in her innocent way. It was very hard upon her, Edgar. You are an active, restless sort of being yourself; but, for heaven’s sake, don’t worry your wife when you get one. Let her follow her own constitution a little. She tried and tried till she could strive no longer: and when Clare was born, I think she was quite glad to be obliged to give in, and get a little rest in her grave. Of course, she was not here all the time. They used to come and go, and never stayed more than a month or two. You were left behind very often. The Doctor never saw

her," Mr. Fielding added pointedly, "till just before she died. He had newly come back and got settled in his house. He never saw her but on her death-bed. He knew nothing about her; but I—you may think I am bragging like a garrulous old talker as I am—but I saw a great deal of her one way or another. I think she felt she had a friend in me."

"Thanks!" Edgar said below his breath. He was too deeply moved to look at his old friend, nor could he trust himself to speak.

"I buried her," said the old clergyman in his musing way. "You know the place. It was all I could do to keep from crying loud out like a child. I lost my own wife the same way; but the child died too. That is one reason, perhaps, why I am so fond of Clare. When you come to think of it, Edgar, this world is a dreary place to live so long in. A year or two's brightness you may have, and then the long, long, steady twilight that never changes. They are saved a great deal when they die early. What with her natural weakness, and what with you, it would have been hard upon her had she lived. However, it is lucky for us that life and death are not in our power."

"I hate myself for thinking of myself when you have been telling me of—her," said Edgar. "But—my fate, it appears, was the same from the begin-

ning. It could not arise from anything—found out?”

“There was nothing that could be found out,” Mr. Fielding answered, almost severely. “Your mother was as good a woman as ever lived—too good. If she had been less tender and less gentle it would have been better for her—and for her son as well. Yes, there is such a thing as being too good.”

“Am I like her?” said Edgar suddenly, looking for the first time in the Rector’s face.

Mr. Fielding looked at him with critical gravity, which by-and-bye melted into a smile. “If black and white put together ever produced red,” he said, “I should be able to understand you, Edgar. But I can’t somehow. It must be one of the old Ardens asserting his right to be represented; that sometimes occurs in an old family; some great-grandfather tired of letting the other side of the house have it all their own way; for you know that dark beauty came in with the Spanish lady in Queen Elizabeth’s time. You must be like your mother in your disposition—for you are not a bit of an Arden. The difference is that you don’t take things to heart much—and she did.”

“Don’t I take things much to heart?”

“My dear boy, you ought to know better than I do. I should not think you did. The world comes

more easily to you ; and then, a man—and a young man in your position—can't be kept down as she was. I am not blaming your father, Edgar. He meant no harm. To him it seemed quite proper and natural. Men should mind when they have a life and soul to deal with ; but they never do until it is too late. Yes, of course, you are like her," Mr Fielding added ; "I can see the marks of her bonds upon you. She taught herself to give in, and submit, and prefer another's will to her own ; and you do that same for your diversion, because you like it. Yes, my boy, you carry the marks of her bonds—you are the son of her heart."

"That is a delusion," said Edgar. "I always please myself." But he was soothed by the kind speech of the old man, who was a friend to him, as he had been to his mother, and her story had moved him very deeply. She, too, had suffered like himself. "Thanks for telling me so much," he added, humbly. "I never heard anything about her before. And Clare has a little picture, which she showed me. I have been thinking a very great deal about her for the last two or three days."

"What has made you think of her more than usual?" asked Mr. Fielding, with some sharpness. Edgar paused, unwilling to answer. It seemed to him that the Rector knew or divined how it was.

He had made several allusions to the Doctor, as if contradicting beforehand an adverse authority. But Edgar felt it impossible to allow that he had heard of any suspicion against his mother. He made a dash into indifferent subjects—the management of the estate, the building of the new cottages. Mr. Fielding was not deceived: but he was judicious enough to allow the conversation to be turned into another channel, and on this subject to ask no more.

CHAPTER XXI.

CLARE rode down the avenue about ten minutes later, the groom behind her leading Edgar's horse, and her own thoughts very heavy with a hundred important affairs.

The immediate subject in her mind, however, was one which was very clearly suggested by the visit which she was about to make; and when her brother joined her at the Rectory Gate, she led him up to it artfully with many seeming innocent remarks, though it was with a little timidity and nervousness that she actually introduced at last the real matter which occupied her thoughts.

"You will laugh, I know," she said, "but I don't think it at all a laughing matter, Edgar. Please tell me, without any nonsense, do you ever think that you must marry—some time or other? I knew you would laugh; but it is not any nonsense that is in my mind."

"Shouldn't I return the question, and ask you, 'Do you ever think that you must marry, Clare?'"

said Edgar, when his laugh was over. Clare drew up her stately head with all the dignified disapproval which so much levity naturally called forth.

“That is quite a different matter,” she said, impatiently. “I may or may not; it is my own affair; but you *must*.”

“Why must I? I do not see the necessity,” said Edgar, still with a smile.

“You must, however. You are the last of our family. Why, because it is your duty! Arden has not gone out of the direct line for two hundred and fifty years. You must not only marry, but you must marry very soon.”

“There remains only to indicate the lady,” said Edgar. “Tell me that too, and then I shall be easy in my mind.”

“Edgar, I wish you would not be so teasing. Of course, I don’t want to indicate the lady; but I will tell you, if you like, the kind of person she ought to be. She *must* be well born; that is quite indispensable; any other deficiency may be taken into consideration, but birth we cannot do without. And she must be young, and handsome, and good—but not too good. And if she had some money—just enough to make her feel comfortable——”

“This is a paragon of all virtues and qualities,”

said Edgar; "but where to be found? and when we find her, why should she condescend to me?"

"Condescend! Nonsense!" cried Clare. "You are just as good as she is;—so long as you are not carried away by a pretty face. It is so humbling to see you men. A pretty face carries the day with you over everything. Can you fancy anything more humiliating to a girl? She may be good, and wise, and clever, and yet people only want to marry her because her cheek has a pretty colour or her eyes are bright. I think it is almost as bad as if it were for money. To be married for your beauty! Every bit as bad—or even worse; for the money will last at least, and the beauty can't."

"But, my dear Clare, I don't want to marry—either for beauty or anything else," said Edgar.

"But you must marry," repeated his sister, peremptorily. "If you had set your heart upon it, Edgar, I would not mind Gussy Thornleigh. I should like Ada a great deal better; but of course they have the same belongings. I think she is rather frivolous, and a great chatterbox; but still if you like her best——"

"I don't like her best," said Edgar. "I don't like anybody best, except you. When you marry, then perhaps it will be time to think of it; but in

the meantime I am very happy. I think, Clare, you should let well alone."

"But it is not well," said Clare, with her usual energy. And then she added, under her breath, "Arthur Arden is your heir-presumptive. He will be the one who will be looked up to; and if you don't marry soon, people will think—Edgar, you had much better make up your mind."

This was said very rapidly, and with great earnestness. Was it a last attempt to stand by her brother, and resist the influence of the other, who, whether visibly or not, was her brother's antagonist? Edgar turned round upon her with tranquil wonder, entirely unmoved. She was excited, but he was calm. Arthur's pretensions, it was evident, were nothing to him.

"Well?" he said. "Of course Arthur Arden is my heir; and probably he would make a much better Squire than I. The only thing for which I have a grudge at him is that he is like you. I confess I detest him for that. He may have my land when his time comes and I am out of the way; but I don't like him to be nearer than I am to my sister. He is an Arden, like you."

"He *is* like the old Ardens," said Clare, with a faint smile; and then the conversation dropped. She did not care to prolong it. They went across

the cheerful country, still in the glory of the fresh foliage. The blossoms were beginning to fall, the first flush of spring verdure was past, but still the road was pleasant and the morning fine. Whether it was that Clare found enough to occupy her thoughts, or that she did not wish to disclose the confused state of feeling in which she was, it would be difficult to say ; but, at all events, she gave up the talk, which it was her wont to lead and direct. And Edgar, left to himself, ran over his recent experiences, and, for almost the first time since he had seen her, thought of Gussy Thornleigh. She was very " nice ;" she was a very different person to have at your elbow from that pretty Alice Pimpernell, whom Clare held in such needless terror. If a man could secure such a companion—so amusing, so pretty, so full of brightness, would not he be a lucky man ? Edgar let this question skim through his mind, with that sense of pleasant exhilaration which moves a young man who is sensible of the possibility of power in himself, the privilege of making choice, before any real love has come in to change the balance of feeling. He had not been made subject by Gussy, had not set his heart on her, nor transferred to her the potential voice ; and it half amused, half disturbed him to think that he probably might, if he chose, have for the asking that prettiest,

liveliest, charming little creature. He did not enter so deeply into the question as to realize that it was his position, his wealth, his name, and not himself which she would be sure to marry. He only felt that it was a curious, amusing, exciting thought. He was not used to such reflections; and, indeed, had he gone into it with any seriousness, Edgar, who had a natural and instinctive reverence for women, would have been the first to blush at his own superficial mixture of pleased vanity and amusement. But, being fancy free, and feeling the surface of his mind thus lightly rippled by imagination, he could not think of the young women with whom he had been brought into accidental contact since he came home without a certain pleasant emotion. They moved him to a sort of affectionate sentiment which was not in the least love, though, at the same time, it was not the kind of sentiment with which their brothers would have inspired him. Probably he would have been utterly indifferent about their brothers. With a sensation of pleasure and amusement he suffered his thoughts to stray about the subject: but he had not fallen in love. He was as far from that malady as if he had never seen a woman in his life; and, with a smile on his lip, he asked himself how it was that they did not move him simply as men did—or rather, how it was that

they affected him so differently? not with passionate or irreverent, far less evil thoughts, but with a soft sense of affectionateness and indulgent friendship, a mingling of personal gratification and liking which was quite distinct from love on the one hand, and, on the other, from any sentiment ever called forth by man.

Lady Augusta was at home, with all her girls, but on the eve of starting. They were going to town for the short season, which was all Mr. Thornleigh meant to give them that year. "Don't you think it is hard," Gussy said, confidentially, to Edgar, "that because Harry has got into debt we should all be stinted? If any of us girls were to get into debt, I wonder what papa would say. This is the last day of May, and we must be back in July—six weeks; fancy only six weeks in town, or perhaps not quite so much as that."

"But Clare does not go at all," said Edgar, "and I don't think she suffers much."

"Oh, Clare! Clare is a great lady, and not dependent upon anybody's pleasure. When one is mistress of Arden, and has everything one's own way——" Here, apparently, it occurred to Gussy that she was expressing herself too frankly, for she stopped short, and laughed and blushed. "I mean, when one is one's own mistress," she said, "and not

one of many, like us girls—it is quite different. If Clare chose to go to Siberia, instead of going to town, I think she would have her way. I am sure you would not oppose.”

“I never oppose anybody,” said Edgar; and it was curious how strongly inclined he felt to laugh and blush just as Gussy had done, and to ask her whether she would like to be mistress of Arden? “Why shouldn’t she, if she would like it?” he felt himself asking. It seemed absurd not to give her such a trifle if it really would make her so much more comfortable. Edgar, however, felt a little disposed to reason with her, to demonstrate that the position was not so very desirable after all. “But it is not so easy as you think,” he said, “for Clare finds it very difficult to manage me. I don’t think she ever had so hard a task. She has no time to think of town or the season for taking care of me.”

Gussy’s eyes lighted up with fun and mischief. “I wonder if I could manage you—were I Clare,” she said, laughing, and not without a little faint blush of consciousness. Perhaps Lady Augusta heard some echo of these last words, for she came and sat down by Edgar, entirely breaking up their *tête-à-tête*. Lady Augusta was very kind, and motherly, and pleasant. She inquired into Edgar’s

plans with genuine interest, and gave him a great deal of good advice.

“If I were you, I should take Clare to town,” she said. “I think it would do her good. To be sure, she is still in mourning, but she ought to be beginning to think of putting her mourning off. What is the use of it? It cannot do any good to those who are gone, and it is very gloomy for the living. To be sure, it suits Clare; but I think, Mr. Arden, you should take her to town. Besides, you ought not to shut yourself up at your age in the country all the year through; it is out of the question. My girls are grumbling at the short season we shall have. I daresay Gussy has told you. You must not mind her nonsense. She is one of those who say not only all, but more than they really mean to say.”

“Then I wish there were more of such people in the world, for they are very charming,” said Edgar heartily; and he thought so, and was quite sincere in this little speech. Lady Augusta was very friendly indeed as she shook hands with him. “Don’t forget that we expect to see you in town,” she said, as he went away. “He will be with us before ten days are over,” she said to Mr. Thornleigh, in confidence, with a nod of satisfaction: but her conclusion was made, unfortunately, on insufficient grounds.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE first of June was very bright and warm. The summer had set in with great ardour and vehemence, not with the vacillation common to English summers. There had been no rain for a long time, and the whole world began to cry out for the want of it. A long continuance of fair weather, though it fills an Englishman with delight out of his own country, is very embarrassing to him at home. He gets troubled in his mind about the crops, about the grass, about the cattle, and tells everybody in the most solemn of voices that "we want rain;" whereas when he has crossed the Channel it is the grand subject of his self-congratulations that you need not be always speculating about wet days, but can really believe in the weather. The weather had been thoroughly to be trusted all that month of May, and all the rural world was gloomy about it; but Edgar had not yet acquired English habits to such an extent, and he was glad of the serene continuous sunshine, the blue sky that made a perma-

ment background to his fine trees. It was the first time that he had been able to give hospitality, and it pleased him. When he had made sure that his sister did not object, he anticipated Lord Newmarch's visit with a certain pleasure. There would be novelty in it, and some amusement; and it was natural to him to surround himself with people, and feel about him that flow and movement of humanity which is necessary to some spirits. The Ardens could do without society as a general rule. They had stately feasts now and then, but for the greater part of their lives the stillness of the park that surrounded them, the gambols of the deer, or the advent of now and then the carriage of a county neighbour coming to pay a call, was all that was visible from their solemn windows. This was not at all in Edgar's way; and accordingly he was glad somebody was coming. It would have been a pleasure to him to have filled his house, to have put himself at everybody's service, to have felt the tide rising and swelling round him. To Clare it might be a bore, but it was no bore to her brother. Lord Newmarch drove out from Liverpool, where he had been attending the great social meeting, between five and six in the afternoon. Edgar saw him from a distance, and hurried home to meet his guest. "Newmarch is coming, Clare,"

he cried as he came into the little drawing-room in which Clare sat very demurely, with the silver and china shining on the little tea-table beside her, and her embroidery in her hand. It was not an occupation she cared for, but yet it was good for emergencies, and especially when it was necessary to take up that dignified position as the lady of the house. "Very well, Edgar; but you need not be excited about it," said Clare. What was Lord Newmarch that any one should care about his coming? She sat in placid state to receive her brother's visitor, secretly fretting in her heart to see that Edgar was not quite as calm as she was. "Can it be because he is a lord?" she said to herself, and shrank, and was half ashamed, not being able to realise that Edgar's fresh mind, restrained by none of the Arden traditions, would have been heartily satisfied to receive a beggar, had that beggar been pleasant and amusing. To be sure Lord Newmarch was not amusing; but he was instructive, which was far better—or at least so some people think.

Clare's placidity, however, vanished like a dream when she raised her astonished eyes and saw that two people had come into the room, and that one of them was Arthur Arden. The sudden wonder and excitement brought the blood hot to her cheeks. She gave Edgar a rapid angry look, which fortunately

he did not perceive, and then her cousin's voice was in her ear, and she saw dimly his hand held out to her. She had known, of course, that they must meet, but she had expected to have time to prepare herself, to put on her finest manners, and receive him in such a way that he should feel himself kept at a distance, and understand at once upon what terms she intended to receive him. But there he stood all at once before the dazzled eyes which were so reluctant to believe it, holding out his hand to her, assuming the mastery of the position. Clare's high spirit rose, though her heart fluttered sadly in her breast. She got up hastily, stumbling over her footstool, which was an admirable excuse for not seeing his offered hand. "Mr. Arden!" she exclaimed. "Forgive me for being surprised; but Edgar, you never told me that you expected Mr. Arden to-day."

"I did not know," said Edgar, with anxious politeness; "but he is very welcome anyhow, I am sure. We did not settle anything about the day."

"Newmarch drove me over," said Arthur. "I have been at Liverpool too, going in for science. At my age a man must go in for something. When one ceases to be interesting on one's own merits—— But Miss Arden, if I am inconvenient,

send me off to the Arden Arms. There never was man more used to shift for himself than I."

"It is not in the least inconvenient," said Clare, with her stateliest look; and she seated herself, and offered them tea. But she did not look again at her cousin. She addressed herself to his companion, and asked a hundred questions about his meeting, and all that had been discussed at it. Lord Newmarch was not in the least disinclined to communicate all the information she could desire. He sipped his tea, and he talked with that surprised sense of pleasure and satisfaction which the sudden discovery of a good listener conveys. He stood over her, his tea-cup in his hand, with the light, which was not positive sunshine, but a soft reflection of the blaze without thrown from a great mirror, glimmering on his spectacles as it did on the china—and expounded everything. "It was a very inconvenient time," he said, "but fortunately nothing very important was going on, and I was so fortunate as to secure a pair. So I do not feel that I have neglected one part of my duty in pursuing another. This was the most convenient moment for our foreign friends. The fact is, all great questions affecting the people should be treated internationally. That has long been my theory. Politics are a different thing; but social questions

—questions which affect the morality and the comfort of the entire human race——”

“But the measures which suit one portion of the race might not suit another,” said Clare, who was intensely British. “I don’t think I have any confidence in things that come from abroad.”

“Except brothers,” said Arthur Arden, almost below his breath.

Nobody heard him but Clare. It was said for her, with the intention of establishing that private intercourse which can run on in the midst of the most general conversation. But Clare had set herself stoutly against any such indulgence.

“Except brothers,” she said calmly, as if the observation had been her own.

“That is exactly my own way of thinking,” said the social philosopher, “but are not we all brothers? Am not I identical with my cousin in France and my brother in America so far as all social necessities are considered? I require to be washed, and clothed, and fed, and taken care of exactly as they do. We will never have a thorough and effectual system till we all work together. Though I am a Liberal in politics, I am not at all against the employment of force in a legitimate way. If I will not keep myself clean of my own accord, I believe I ought to be compelled to do it—not for my own

sake, but because I become a nuisance to my neighbours. If I do not educate my children as I ought, I should be compelled to do so. There are a great many things, more than are thought of in our philosophy, which ought to be compulsory. The individual is all very well, and we have done a great deal for him; but now something must be done for the race."

"If a man eats garlic, for instance, he should be compelled to give it up," said Arthur Arden. "I was in Spain last year, and I would give my vote for that. Insects ought to be abolished, and all that. If you get up a crusade on that subject, I will give you my best support. And then there are duns. To be asked to pay money is a horrible nuisance. I don't know anything that makes a man more obnoxious to his neighbour——"

"I don't see what advantage is to be gained by laughing at a serious subject," said Lord Newmarch, over his tea-cup. "There are a great many things that can scarcely be discussed in general society; though indeed ladies are setting us a good example in that respect. They are boldly approaching subjects which have hitherto been held unfit ——"

"Edgar, you will remember that we dine at half-past seven," said Clare, rising. Her usual paleness had given way to a little flush of excitement. It

was not Lord Newmarch and his questionable subjects that excited her. Lord Newmarch was a politician and a Social Reformer, and, as he himself thought, a man of intellect ; but Clare was perfectly able to make an end of him should it be necessary. It was the other man standing by, who made no pretension to any kind of superiority, who alarmed her. And he did more than alarm her. She was confused to the very depth of her being to see him standing there by her brother's side. Was he friend or foe ? Had he come back to Arden in love or in hatred ; for herself or for Edgar ? Arthur Arden had powers and faculties which were the growth of experience, and which are rarely possessed by very young men. He could look so that nobody could see him looking except the person at whom he gazed. He could express devotion, almost adoration, without the bystanders being a bit the wiser. He could flatter and persuade, and make use of a thousand weapons, without even addressing the object of his thoughts. And Clare, how she could not tell, had come to understand that strange language. She knew how much was meant for herself in all he said. She felt the charm stealing over her, the sense that here were skill and strength worthy a much greater effort brought to bear upon her, as if her approbation, her love, were the greatest prizes to be won upon earth.

There is something very captivating to the imagination of a young woman in this kind of pursuit; but this time she was forewarned, and had the consciousness of her danger. She hurried away, and took refuge in her own room, feeling it was her only stronghold. Then she tried to ask herself what her feelings really were towards this man, the very sight of whom had made her heart flutter in her bosom. He was poor, and she was rich; he had passed the limits of youth, and she was in its first blossom. He had no occupation, nothing to do by which he could improve or advance himself. It was even suspected that he had not passed through the troubles of life without somewhat tarnishing his personal character. The history that could be made of him was not a very edifying history, and Clare was aware of it. But yet— All these things were of quite secondary importance to her. The question that really absorbed her mind was—Had he come here for *her*? Was *she* his object? and if so, why? Clare knew well what everybody would say—that he came “to better himself;” that her fortune was to fill up the gap in his, and her young life to be absorbed in order to give sustenance and comfort to his worn existence. Could it be so? Could anything so humbling be the truth? Not merely to love and soothe, and make him happy; but her

money to maintain, herself to increase his personal comfort. Clare tried very hard to consider the matter fully in this light. But how difficult it was to do it! Just when she tried to remember how penniless he was, and how important her fortune would be to him, a certain look rushed back on her mind which surely, surely could have nothing to do with her fortune! And then Clare upbraided herself passionately for the gross and foul suspicion: but yet it would come back. Was he a man to love generously and fondly, as a woman likes to be loved? or would he think but of himself in the matter, not of her? If he loved her, it would not matter to her that he had nothing, or even that his past was doubtful, and his life half worn out: all that was nothing if it was true love that moved him; but— Old Arden was hers, and she was an heiress capable of setting him up again in the world, and giving to him honour and position such as in reality had never been his. And she felt so willing to do it. True, she had assured Edgar that she would not take Old Arden from him. But anyhow she would be rich, able to place her husband, when she married, in a position worthy of her name. If—

It may be supposed that to dress for dinner while these thoughts were buzzing through her brain was not the calm ceremony it usually is. And all this

commotion had arisen from the first glance at him, the mere sense of his presence. What would it be, then, when he had found time to put forth all his arts?

The reader will probably think it very strange that Clare Arden should not have been utterly revolted by the thought that it was possible her kinsman could mean to make a speculation of her, and a mere stepping-stone to fortune. But she was not revolted. She had that personal objection to being married for her money which every woman has; but had not she herself been the heroine of the story, she would rather have felt approval than otherwise for Arthur Arden. What else could he do? she would have said to herself. He could not dig, and begging, even when one is little troubled with shame, is an unsatisfactory maintenance. And if everything could be put right by a suitable marriage, why should not he marry? It was the most natural, the most legitimate way of arranging everything. For the idea itself she had no horror. All she felt was a natural prejudice against being herself the subject of the transaction.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“MAY I walk with you, if you are going to the village?” said Arthur Arden, when Clare met him in one of the side walks, two or three mornings after his arrival. She had not seen him until he was by her side, and all this time had avoided him strenuously, allowing herself to be deluged with Lord Newmarch’s philosophy, and feeling by instinct that to keep out of her cousin’s way as long as she was able would be her soundest policy. She would have abandoned her walk had she known that he was in the park waiting for her; but now it was too late to escape. Clare gave him a little bow of assent, feeling that she could not help herself; and she did not take any trouble to conceal her sentiments. The pucker came to her brow which Edgar knew so well, and the smile that just touched her lips was merely a smile of civility—cold and reluctant. She was, indeed, so far from disguising her feelings that Arthur, who was learned in such matters, drew a certain encouragement from her

frank discontent. He was clever enough to know that if this reluctance had been quite genuine, Clare would have taken some pains to restrain it. Her faint smile and only half-suppressed frown were the best warrants to him that she was not so perfectly indifferent as she had attempted to appear.

“You don’t want me?” he said, with a plaintive intonation. “I can see that very clearly; and you will never give me a chance of saying a word. But, Miss Arden, you must not be angry with me, if I have schemed for this moment. I am not going to say anything that will offend you. I only want to beg you to pardon me for what I once said in ignorance. I did not know Edgar then. What a fine fellow he is! I came disposed to hate him, and find fault with everything he did and said. But now I feel for him as if he were my younger brother. He is one of the finest young fellows I ever met. I feel that I must say this to you, at whatever cost.”

The blood rushed to Clare’s cheek, and her heart thumped wildly in her breast, but she did all she could to keep her stiff demeanour. “I am glad you acknowledge it,” she said, ungraciously; and then with a little rush of petulance, which was more agitation than anger—“If that was how you

thought of my brother—if you intended to hate him—why did you come here?”

A pause followed upon this hasty question—a pause which had the highest dramatic effect, and told immensely upon the questioner, notwithstanding all her power of self-control. “Must I answer?” said Arthur Arden, at last, subduing his voice, and permitting a certain tremulousness to appear in it—for he had full command of his voice; “I will, if I must; but in that case you must promise not to be angry, for it will not be my fault.”

“I do not want any answer,” said Clare, seeing her danger. “I meant, how could you come with that opinion of Edgar? and why should you have formed such an opinion of Edgar? He has done nothing to make any man think ill of him—of that, I am very sure. An old prejudice that never had any foundation; because he did not resemble the rest of us——”

“Dear Miss Arden, do not I confess it?” said her cousin, humbly. “The echo of a prejudice—that was all—which could never stand for a moment before the charm of his good nature. If there are any words which will express my recantation more strongly teach them to me, and I will repeat them on my knees.”

“Edgar would be much surprised to see you on

your knees," said Clare, who felt the clouds melting away from her face, in spite of herself.

"He need not see me," said Arthur; "the offence was not committed in his knowledge. I am in that attitude now, though no one can see it. Will not the Lady Clare forgive her poor kinsman when he sues—on his knees?"

"Pray—pray, don't be ridiculous!" said Clare, in momentary alarm; but Arthur Arden was not the kind of man to go the length of making himself ridiculous. Emotion which is very great has not time to think of such restraints; but he was always conscious of the limitations which it is wise to put to feeling. His homage was spiritual, not external; but still, he allowed her to feel that he might at any moment throw himself at her feet, and betray that which he had the appearance of concealing so carefully. Clare went on, unconsciously quickening her steps, surrounded by an atmosphere of suppressed passion. He did not attempt to take her hand—to arrest her in any way; but yet he spread round her that dazzling web which was woven of looks and tones, and hints of words that were not said.

"It is not anything new to me," she said, hurriedly. "I always knew what Edgar was. It is very sad to think that poor papa would never

understand him; and, then, his education—— One cannot wonder that he should be different. My grand anxiety is that he should marry suitably," Clare added, falling into a confidential strain, without knowing it. "He has so little knowledge of the world."

"Does he mean to marry? Lucky fellow!" said Arthur Arden, with a sigh.

"It does not matter much whether he means it or not," said Clare. "Of course he must. And then, he has such strange notions. If he fell in love with any girl in the village, I believe he would marry her as soon as if she were a Duke's daughter. It is very absurd. It is something wanting, I think. He does not seem to see the most ordinary rules of life."

"Lucky fellow, I say!" said Arthur Arden. "Do you know, I think it is angelic of me not to hate him. One might forgive him the houses and lands; but for the blessed power of doing what he pleases, it is hard not to hate him. Of course, he won't be able to do as he pleases. If nobody else steps in, Fate will, and baulk him. There is some consolation to be got out of that,"

"It does not console me to think so," said Clare. "But look—here is something very pretty. Look at them, and tell me if you think the girl is a great beauty. I don't know whether I admire her or not, with those wild, strange, visionary eyes."

The sight, which was very pretty, which suddenly stopped them as they talked, was that of Mrs. Murray and her granddaughter. They were seated under a hawthorn, the whiteness of which had begun to tarnish, but which still scented the air all round. The deeper green of the elms behind, and the sweet silken greenness of the limes in the foreground framed in this little picture. The old lady sat knitting, with a long length of stocking depending from her hands, sometimes raising her head to look at her charge, sometimes sending keen glances up or down the avenue, like sentinels, against any surprise. Jeanie had no occupation whatever. She lay back, with her eyes fixed on the sky, over which the lightest of white clouds were passing. Her lap was full of flowers, bits of hawthorn, and of the yellow-flowered gorse and long-plumed grasses—the bouquet of a child; but she was paying no attention to the flowers. Her eyes and upturned face were absorbed, as it were, in the fathomless blue of the sky.

“I hope she is better,” said Clare, in her clear voice. “I am very glad you can bring her out to enjoy the park. They say the air is so good here. Do you find it much milder than Scotland? I suppose it is very cold among the hills.”

“Cold, oh, no cold,” said Mrs. Murray, “but no

so dry as here among your fine parks and all your pleasant fields. Jeanie, do you see the young lady? She likes to come out, and does nothing, the idle thing, but look up at the sky. I canna tell what she finds there for my part. She tells me stories for an hour at a time about all the bits of fleecy clouds. Ye may think it idle, Miss Arden, and a bad way to bring up a young thing; but the doctors a' tell me it's the best for the pair bairn."

"I don't think it idle," said Clare, who nevertheless in her mind highly disapproved. "When one is ill, of course one must seek health first of all."

"Jeanie, do ye no see the young lady?" whispered the grandmother; but neither of them rose, neither attempted to make that curtesy of which Clare felt herself defrauded. When the girl was thus called, she raised her head and looked up in Clare's face with a soft child-like smile.

"I am better, thank you," she said, with a dreamy sense that only a question about her health could have been addressed to her. "I am quite better, quite better. I canna feel now that it's me at all."

"What does she mean?" said Clare, wondering.

"That was the worst of all," said Jeanie, answering for herself. "I never could forget that it was

me. Whatever I did, or wherever I was, it was aye me, me—but now the world is coming back, and that sky. Granny! do ye mind what you promised to say?”

“It was to tell you how thankful we are,” said Mrs. Murray, looking up from her knitting, yet going on with it without intermission, “that ye let us come here, Miss Arden. It is like balm to my poor bairn. When it’s no the body that’s ailing, but the mind, it’s hard to ken what to do. I’ve tried many a thing they told me to try—physic and strengthening meat, and all; but there’s nothing like the sweet air and the quiet—and many, many thanks for it. Jeanie, Jeanie, my darlin’, what has come to you?”

The girl had gradually raised herself upright, and had been seated with her eyes fixed in admiration upon Clare, who was as a goddess to the young creature, thus dreaming her way back into life; but there had been a rustle by Clare’s side which had attracted her attention. It was when she saw Arthur Arden that she gave that cry. It rang out shrill and wild through the stillness, startling all the echoes, startling the very birds among the trees. Then she started up wildly to her feet, and clutched at her grandmother, who rose also in sudden fright and dismay. “Look at him, look at him!” said

Jeanie—"that man! it's that man!"—and with every limb trembling, and wild cries bursting from her lips, which grew fainter and fainter as her strength failed, she fell back into the arms which were opened to support her. Arthur Arden started forward to offer his assistance, but Mrs. Murray waved him away with an impatient exclamation.

"Oh, if you would go and no come near us—oh, if you would keep out of her sight! No, my bonnie Jeanie—no, my darlin'! it's no that man. It's one that's like him, one ye never saw before. No, my bonnie bairn! Oh, Jeanie, Jeanie, have ye the courage to look, and I'll show ye the difference? Sir, dinna go away, dinna go away. Oh, Miss Arden, keep him still till my darling opens her eyes and sees that he's no the man."

Clare stood silent in her consternation, looking from one to the other. Did it mean that Arthur knew these strangers? that there was a secret, some understanding she had not been meant to know, some undisclosed wrong? She suspected her cousin; she hated that old, designing, artful woman; she feared the mad girl. "I can do nothing," she said hoarsely, with quivering lips, drawing apart, and sheltering herself behind a tree. And then she hated herself that her first movement was anger and not pity. As for Jeanie, her cries sank into moans, her

trembling increased, until suddenly she dropped so heavily on her grandmother's shoulder as to draw Mrs. Murray down on her knees. They sank together into the deep, cool grass—the young creature like one dead, the old woman, in her pale strength and self-restraint, holding her fast. She asked no help from either of the two astonished spectators, but laid the girl down softly, and put back her hair, and fanned her, with the gentleness of a nurse to an infant, murmuring all the while words which her nursling could not hear. "It's no him, my bonnie bairn; oh, my Jeanie, it's no him! It's a young gentleman, one ye never saw—maybe one of his kin. Oh, my poor bairn, here's it come all back again—all to do over again! Why did I bring her here?"

"What has *here* to do with it? what do you mean by calling Mr. Arden *that man*? what is the meaning of it all?" said Clare, coming forward. "I must know the meaning of it. Yes, I see she has fainted; but you are used to it—you are not unhappy about her; and I am unhappy, very unhappy, to know what it means."

The three women were by this time alone, for Arthur Arden had gone for help from the Hall, which was the nearest house, as soon as Jeanie fainted. Clare came forward, almost imperious, to

where the poor girl was lying. It was a thing the grandmother was used to, she said to herself. The old woman made no fuss about it, and why should she make any fuss? "I don't want to be cruel," she said, almost crying in her excitement; "if you are anxious about her, tell me so; but you don't look anxious. And what, oh, what does it mean?"

"It means our ain private affairs, that neither you nor any stranger has aught to do with," said Mrs. Murray, looking up with an air as proud as Clare's own. And then she returned in a moment to her natural tone. "I am no anxious because she has fainted. She will come out of her faint, poor bairn; but it's sore, sore work, when you think it's all passing away, that the look of a man she never saw before should bring it back again. I canna tell ye my private history, Miss Arden. I may have done wrong in my day, and I may be suffering for it; but I canna tell it a' to a stranger; and that is what it means—no an accident, but our ain private affairs that are between me and my Maker, and no one beside."

"But she knew Mr. Arden!" said Clare.

"The man she took him for is dead; he was a man that did evil to me and mine, and brought us to evil," said the grandmother, solemnly. "The life is coming back to her; and oh, if ye would but go

away, and keep yon gentleman away! If we were to bide here for a year, I could tell ye no more."

Wretched with suspicion, unbelieving and unhappy, Clare turned away. Had she been capable of feeling any additional blow to her pride, that dismissal would have given it; but her pride was in abeyance for the moment, swallowed up in wonder and anxious curiosity. "The man she took him for is dead"—was that true, or a lie invented to screen one who had betrayed poor Jeanie. The girl herself could not surely be deceived. And if Arthur Arden had wrought this ruin, what remained for Clare?

CHAPTER XXIV.

MRS. MURRAY was left alone with her grandchild, and she was glad. Though she was old, she was full of that patient strength which shows itself without any ostentation whenever the emergency which requires it arises. She was not sorry for herself, nor did she think much of her own age, or of what was due to her. She had long got over that phase of life in which a woman has leisure to think of herself. And there was no panic of alarm about her, such as might have come to the inexperienced. She knew her work, and all about it, and did not overwhelm herself with unnecessary excitements. She laid her child down in the grass, in the shade, laying her head upon a folded shawl. Jeanie had come out of her faint, but she lay in a state of exhaustion, with her eyes closed, unable to move or speak. The grandmother knew it was impossible to take her home in such a state of prostration. She seated herself so as to screen her charge from passers by, and resumed her knitting.

—a picture of calm and thoughtful composure—serious, yet with no trace of mystery or panic about her. What had happened to Jeanie was connected with their own affairs. It was a thing which nobody but themselves had anything to do with. She sat and watched the young sufferer with all that grave power of self-restraint which it is always so impressive to witness, asking neither help nor pity, knitting on steadily, with sometimes a tender glance from her deep eyes at the young fair creature lying at her side, and sometimes a keen look round to guard against intrusion. The work went on through all, and those thoughts which nobody knew of, which no one suspected. What was she thinking about? She had a breadth of sixty years to go back upon, and memories to recall with which nothing here had any connection. Or could it be possible that there might be a certain connection between her thoughts and this unknown place? Sometimes she paused in her work, and dropped her hands, and turned her face towards the house, which was invisible from where she sat, and fell into a deeper musing. “Would I do it over again if it were to do?” she said half aloud to herself, with an instinctive impulse to break the intense stillness; and then, making no answer to her own question, sat with her head dropped on her hand,

gazing into the shadowy distance. What was it she had done? It was something which touched her conscience—touched her heart; but she had not repented of it as a positive wrong, and could yet, it was clear, bring forth a hundred arguments to justify herself to herself. She paused, and leant her head upon her hand, and fixed her eyes on the distance, in which, unseen, lay the home of the Ardens. Her thoughts had strayed away from Jeanie. She mused, and she sighed a sigh which was very deep and long drawn, as if it came from the depths of her being. “The ways of ill-doers are hard,” she murmured to herself; and then, after a pause, “Would I do it again?” It was not remorse that was in her face; it was not even penitence; it was pain subdued, and a great doubt which it was very hard to solve. But there was no clue to her musing, either in her look or her tones. She took up her knitting with another sigh, when she had apparently exhausted, or been exhausted by that thought, and changed the shawl under Jeanie’s head, making her more comfortable, and looked at her with the tenderest pity. “Poor bairn!” she said to herself; “Poor bairn!” and then, after a long pause, “That she should be the first to pay the price!” The words were said but half aloud, a murmur that fell into the sound of the

wind in the trees and the insects all about. Then she went to work again, knitting in the deepest quiet—a silence so intense that she looked like a weird woman knitting a web of fate.

It was a curious picture. The girl with her bonnet laid aside, and her hair a little loosened from its smoothness, lying stretched out in the deep cool grass which rose all round her, and shaded by a great bough of hawthorn, laden with the blossom which was still so sweet. The white petals lay all about upon the grass, lying motionless like Jeanie, who was herself like a great white flower, half buried in the soft and fragrant verdure; while the old mother sat by doing her work, watching with every sense, ear and eye on the alert to catch any questionable sound. The girl fell asleep in her weakness; the old woman sat motionless in her strength and patience; and the trees waved softly over them, and the summer blue filled up all the interstices of the leafage. This was the scene upon which Arthur Arden came back as he returned from the house with aid and promises of aid. He had been interested before, and now, when he perceived that Clare was not to be seen, his interest grew more manifest. He came up hurriedly, half running, for he was not without natural sympathy and feeling. "Is she better?" he asked. "Miss

Arden's maid is coming, and the carriage to take her home; and, in the meantime, here is something." And he hastily produced a bottle of smelling-salts and some eau-de-cologne.

"She is better," said Mrs. Murray, stiffly. "I thank ye, sir, for all your trouble; but there's no need—no need! She is resting, poor lamb, after her attack. It's how she does always. But I would fain be sure that she would never see you again. Dinna think I'm uncivil, Mr. Arden; for I know you are Mr. Arden by your looks. You are like one that brought great pain and trouble to our house a year or two since. I would be glad to think that she would never see ye more."

"But that is a little hard," said Arthur Arden. "To ask me to go away and make a martyr of myself, without even telling me why. I must say I think that harsh. I would do a great deal for so pretty a creature," he added, carelessly drawing near the pretty figure, and stooping over her. Mrs. Murray half rose with a quick sense of the difference in his tone.

"My poor bairn is subject to a sore infirmity," she said, "and for that she should be the more pitied of all Christian folk. A gentleman like you will neither look at her nor speak to her but as you ought. I am asking nothing of you. It's my

part to keep my own safe. All I pray is that if you should meet her in the road you would pass on the other side, or turn away your face. That's little to do. I can take care of my own."

"My good woman, you are not very complimentary," said Arthur; and then he went and gazed down once more upon the sleeping figure in the grass. His gaze was not that of a pure-minded or sympathetic spectator. He looked at her with a half smile, noting her beauty and childish grace. "She is very young, I suppose?" he said. "Poor little thing! What did the man who was like me do to frighten her so? And I wonder who he was? The resemblance must be very great."

"He brought grief and trouble to our house," said Mrs. Murray, who had risen, and stood screening her child with a jealous mother's instinct. "Sir, I am much obliged to you. But, oh! if you would be kinder still, and go on your way! We are complaining of nothing, neither my bairn nor me."

"Your 'bairn,' as you call her, is mighty pretty," said Arthur Arden. "Look here, buy her a ribbon or something with this, as some amends for having frightened her. What, you won't have it? Nonsense! I shall probably never see her again. You need not be afraid of me."

"I am no afraid of any man," said Mrs. Murray;

“if you would leave us free in this spot, where we’re harming nobody. Good day to you, sir. Give your siller to the next poor body. It’s no wanted by me.”

“As proud as Lucifer, by Jove!” said Arthur Arden, and he put back his half-sovereign in his pocket, perhaps not unwillingly, for he had not many of them; and then he stood still for a minute longer, during which time the old woman resumed her knitting, and went on steadily, having dropped him, as it were, though she still watched him keenly from under her eyelids. He waited for some other opportunity of speech, but at length, half amazed half annoyed, swore “by Jove!” once more, and turned on his heel with little courtesy. Then he began to bethink himself of Clare, who had gone down the avenue, and whom he had missed. He was a man used to please himself, used to turn aside after every butterfly that crossed his path, and it was so long since he had engaged in the warm pursuit of anything that he had forgot the amount of perseverance and steadiness necessary for it. He had been almost, nay quite glad, when he saw that Clare was gone, and felt himself free for the moment to find out something about the pretty creature who lay in the grass like a Sleeping Beauty; but now that the careful guardian of the

sleeping beauty had sent him away, his mind returned to its original pursuit. Would Clare be angry; would she consider his desertion as a sign of indifference, an offence against herself? He chafed at the self-denial thus made necessary, and yet he was as anxious to secure Clare's good opinion as any man could be, and not entirely on interested motives. She was very dignified and Juno-like and stately. She would condemn him and all his ways did she know them. She would be intolerant of his life, and his friends, and his habits; and yet Clare attracted him personally as well as pecuniarily. He would be another man if he could succeed in persuading her to love him. It would make him rich, it would give him an established position in the world—and it would make him happy. Yes, there could not be any doubt on that subject, it would make him happy; and yet he was ready to be led astray all the same by any butterfly hunt that crossed his path.

As he hastened down the avenue, he met a little procession which was coming up, and which consisted of an invalid chair, drawn by a man, who paused every ten minutes to speak or be spoken to by the patient within, and followed by an elderly maid, who walked with a disapproving air under a huge umbrella. Arthur Arden was sufficiently

acquainted with the population of Arden to know at once who this was, and the voice which immediately addressed him was one which compelled his attention. "Mr. Arden, Mr. Arden," said the voice, "do stop and look at this beautiful chair; a present from Edgar. I was saying to my brother just the other day—— Ten minutes in the open air——only ten minutes now and then, if there was any way of doing it! And to think of dear Edgar recollecting. And the handsomest—— Now, is not he a dear fellow? All padded and cushioned, and as easy as a bed—— And the very best temper in the world, Mr. Arden, and always thinking of others. You will think me an old fool, but I do so love that boy."

"He is very lucky, I am sure, to inspire so warm a feeling," said Arthur, with mock respect.

"Lucky indeed! he deserves it, and a thousand times more. Of course I would not speak of such a thing as loving a gentleman," said Miss Somers, with a soft blush stealing over her pretty faded old face, "if it was not that I was so old and helpless. And dear Edgar is so nice and so kind. Fancy his coming to see me the very first day he was at home: a young man you know, that might have been supposed—— and, then this beautiful chair. I was saying to my brother just the other day—— but then some men are so different from others, and

never take the trouble even to give you an answer. To be sure, there are many things that put a gentleman out and try his temper that we ladies have not got to bear; but then, on the other hand—— And, as I was saying, it arrived all at once, two days ago, in a big packing-case—the biggest packing case, you know. My brother said, ‘It is for you, Lucy;’ and ‘Oh, good gracious, is it for me? and what is it, and who could have sent it? and how good of them to think of me;’ and then, when one is in the midst of one’s little flutter, you know, he tells you you are a little fool, and how you do run on!”

“That was unkind,” said Arthur, when she paused to take breath; “but will you tell me, please, have you seen Miss Arden? I left her going down the avenue.”

“Oh, Clare! she’s in the village by this time, walking so quick. I wonder if it is good to walk so quick, especially in the sun. When I was a young girl like Clare—— And then they say it brings illnesses—— She was in such a hurry; not a bit like Clare to walk so fast; and it makes you look heated, and all that. Mr. Arden, you will make me so happy if you will only look. It can draw out, and I can lie all my length when I get tired. The Queen herself, if she were an invalid—but I’m so glad she is not an invalid, poor dear lady; with all

those horrible death warrants to sign, and everything—Don't you think there should be somebody to do the death warrants when there is a lady for the Queen—I mean, you know, when there is a Queen? But if I were the Queen I could not have anything better. Isn't he a dear fellow! And the springs so good, and everything so light and nice and so pretty. You have not half seen yet how nice——”

“There is somebody a little in advance who will appreciate it a great deal better than I can,” said Arthur. “I must overtake Miss Arden. Yes—there; just a little further on.”

“Now, I wonder what he can mean by somebody a little in advance,” said Miss Somers, as Arthur went hastily on. “Can it be Edgar, I wonder—the dear fellow! or the Rector? or whom, I wonder? Mercy, please, if you don't mind the trouble, do you see anybody coming? Not that I mind who I meet. I am sure I should like to show dear Edgar's present everywhere. I wonder if it is Lady Augusta? I am sure, Mercy, you know I have always thought well of Lady Augusta——”

“I don't see nobody, mum,” said Mercy, cutting her mistress remorselessly short, “but them Scotch folks as lives in the village, and ain't no company for the quality; set them up, them and their pride!

John, Miss Somers wants to go a little quicker past them tramps and folks ; for they ain't no better, a poking into our parish," muttered Mercy, under her breath.

" Oh, no, John ; please, John—I want so much to see them," remonstrated Miss Somers. Fortunately, John wanted to see them too, and after a struggle with Mercy, who ruled her mistress with a rod of iron, the procession paused opposite to where Mrs. Murray sat. Mercy herself could not be more unwilling for any colloquy. The old Scotchwoman kept on her knitting, with her eyes steadily fixed upon it, as long as that was possible. She only moved when the invalid's eager voice had called her over and over again, " Oh, please, come and speak to me. I am Dr. Somers' sister, and a great invalid, and I have heard so much about you ; and just yesterday I was saying to my brother— Oh, please, do put down your knitting for a moment and come to me. I am so helpless, I cannot put my foot to the ground."

Mrs. Murray rose slowly at this appeal, and came and stood by the invalid's chair.

CHAPTER XXV.

“I HAVE heard so much about you,” said Miss Somers, eagerly. “I am so glad to have met you. The Doctor is always so busy he never gives me any answer when I speak; and you know when one is helpless and can’t budge—— I should have been in my room for ever but for Edgar, you know—I mean Mr. Arden—the dearest fellow!—who has sent me—— I don’t know if you understand such things; but look at it. This is the first time I have been out for two years. Such a handsome chair! the very best, you may be sure, that he could get to buy. And I know he is so interested in both—— Which is your grandchild? Goodness gracious me? Are not you frightened to death to leave her? She might catch cold; she might have something go up her ear—lying right down in the grass.”

“She’ll take no harm,” said the old woman, “and it’s kind, kind of you to ask——”

“Oh, I am always asking,” said Miss Somers; “but people are so very impatient. ‘How you do

run on!' is all my brother says. I hear your child is so pretty; and I am so fond of seeing pretty people. Once, when I was young myself—but that is such a long time ago, and, of course, you would not think it, and I don't suppose any traces are left—but people did say—— Well, well, you know, one ought never to be vain. She lies dreadfully still; are you not frightened to see her like that—so pale, you know, and so still? It always frightens me to see any one lie so quiet."

"She is sleeping, poor bairn," said Mrs. Murray. "She has had a fright, and a bit little attack—and now she's sleeping. The Doctor has been real kind. I canna say in words how kind he has been—and Mr. Arden. You're fond of Mr. Arden? I do not wonder at that, for he's a fine lad."

"There can't be anything wrong in saying I am fond of Edgar. No; I am sure there can't be anything wrong," said Miss Somers: "he is the dearest fellow! We were brought up so very strict, I always feel a little difficulty, you know, in saying, about gentlemen—— But then at my age, and so helpless as I am—— I have him up to my room to see me, you know, and I can't think there is any harm, though I would not for the world do anything that was considered fast, or that would make any talk. Why, I have known him from a baby—or

rather I ought to have known him. The Doctor was not here then. When one thinks of such a while ago, you know, everything was so very different. I was going to balls and parties and things, like other young people. Five and twenty years ago!—there was a gentleman that had a post out in India somewhere—but it never came to anything. How strange it would have been, supposing I had been all these five and twenty years in India! I wonder if I should have been helpless as I am now?—but probably it would have been the liver—it would have been sure to have been the liver. Poor dear Edgar, he never was like the Ardens. That was why they were so unkind.”

“Unkind!” said Mrs. Murray, with a sudden start.

“Oh, you must not say anything of it now,” said the invalid, frightened. “He is the Squire, and there is no harm done. The old Squire was not nice; he was that sort of hard-hearted man—and poor dear Edgar was never like an Arden. My brother has his own ways of thinking, you know, and takes things into his head; and he thinks he understands: he thinks it was something about Mrs. Arden. But that is all the greatest wickedness and folly. I knew her, and I can say—He was so hard-hearted—not the least like a father—and that made him think, you know——”

Mrs. Murray, who was not used to Miss Somers, and could not unravel the maze, or make out which *him* was the Squire and which the Doctor, gazed at her with wondering eyes. She was almost as much moved as Edgar had been. Her cheeks grew red, her glance eager. "I have no right to be asking questions," she said, "but there's a cousin of mine here that has long been in their service, and I cannot but take an interest in the family. Thomas Perfit has told us a' about the Ardens at home. If I was not presuming, I would like to know about Mr. Edgar. There's something in his kind eyes that goes to the heart of the poor. I'm a stranger; but if it's no presuming——"

"Yes; I suppose you are a stranger," said Miss Somers, who was too glad to have any one to talk to. "But I have heard so much about you, I can't think—— Oh, dear, no, you are not presuming. Everybody knows about the Ardens; they were always a very proud sort of stiff people. The old Squire was married when I was a young lady, you know, and cared for a little attention and to be taken notice of; though I am sure why I should talk of myself! That is long past—ever so long past; and his wife was so nice and so sweet. If she had been a great lady I am sure I should never have loved her so—— And the baby—but somehow no one

ever thought of the baby—not even his mamma. She had always to be watching her husband's looks, poor thing. On the whole, I am not sure that one is not happier when one does not marry. The things I have seen! Not daring to call their souls their own; and then looking down upon you, as if you were not far, far—— But poor dear Edgar never was petted like Clare. One never saw him when he was a child; and I do believe his poor dear papa hated him after—— I ought not to talk like this, I know, But he has come out of it all like—like—— Oh, he is the dearest fellow! And to be sure, he is the Squire, and no one can harm him now.”

“Maybe the servants should not hear,” said Mrs. Murray, whose face was glowing with a deep colour. The red was not natural to her, and seemed to burn into her very eyes. And she did not look at Miss Somers, but stood anxiously fingering the apron of the little carriage. John and Mercy were both close by—perhaps out of hearing, but no more.

“Oh, my dear woman, the servants know all about it,” said Miss Somers. “They talk more about it than we do; that is always the way with them. I might give a hint, you know; but they speak plain. No; he was not happy when he was a boy; he went wandering all about and about——”

“But that was for his education,” said the anxious inquirer, whose interest in the question did not astonish Miss Somers. To her it seemed only natural that the Ardens should be prominent in everybody’s horizon. She shook her head with such a continuous shake, that Mercy was tempted to interfere.

“You’ll have the headache, Miss, if you don’t mind,” said Mercy, coming forward; “and me and John both thinks that it ain’t what the Doctor would like, to see you a-sitting here.”

“It’s only for a minute,” said the invalid, humbly, “I want a little breath, after being so long shut up. You may think what it would be if you were shut up for two years. Would you tell John to go and gather me some may, there’s a dear good creature? I am so interested in these nice people; and my brother says—— Some may, please, John; not the brown branches that are going off—— I think I saw some there. Mercy, you have such good eyes, go and show him, please. There, now they are gone, one can talk. Old servants are a great blessing, though sometimes—— But it is all their interest in one, you know. His education was the excuse. I remember when I was young, Mary Thorpe—— They said it was to learn Italian; but if that young man had not been so poor—— It is

such a strange, strange world! If people were to think less of money, don't you think it would be happier, especially for young girls? I hope it is not anything of that kind with your poor little grandchild; but then she is so young——”

“You were speaking of Mr. Arden,” said Mrs. Murray, with a sigh; and then she added—“But he is the only heir, and all's his now.”

“Oh, yes, all is his—the dear fellow; but he is not the only heir; there is Clare, you know—— Don't you hate entails, and that sort of thing, that cut off the girls? We may not be so clever, though I am sure I don't know—— But we can't live without a little money, all the same. I say to my brother sometimes—but then he is so impatient. And Clare is wonderfully superior—equal to any man. I think, though I have seen her every day for years, I get on better with Edgar. It makes my poor head ache, I am such a helpless creature, not good for anything. If you could have seen me a few years back you would not know me. I was always running about: the ‘little busy bee;’ when I was young that is what they always used to call me. There was a gentleman that used to say—a Mr. Templeton, of the Royal Navy——but there were difficulties, you know—— Oh, yes; I remember, about Arden—— I do run on, I know; my brother

is always telling me I lose the thread, but why there should be a thread—— Yes, there is another Arden—Arthur Arden; you must have seen him pass just now.”

“The man that was so like——” said Mrs. Murray; and then she stopped, and shut up her lips tight, as if to establish even physical safeguards against the utterance of another word.

“He is very like his family—just the reverse of poor dear Edgar,” said Miss Somers; “but I don’t like him at all, and he is such a dear fellow—— If there had been no son, Arthur would have succeeded, and poor dear Clare would have been cut off, unless they were to marry. I sometimes think if they were to marry—— Was that your daughter stirring? I can’t think how you don’t die of fright to see her lying there so still. Do bring her to see me, please. I am never out of my room—except now, in this fine new chair, of course, I shall be going out every day. But it is so dreadful to have to be carried, and not to put your foot to the ground. Mercy says it is a judgment; but, you know, I cannot believe—— Of course, you must be a Calvinist, I suppose?”

“There’s many a judgment that never shows,” said the Scotchwoman; “you feel it deep in your heart, and you ken how it comes, but nobody in

this world is any the wiser. Of that I am well aware."

Miss Somers was a little frightened by the gravity of her companion's tone, and did not quite understand what she meant, and was alarmed by the sight of Jeanie lying still and white in the grass. She gave a little cough, which was an appeal to Mercy, and was seized with a sudden flutter of nervousness and desire to get away.

"Yes, yes; I have no doubt you know a great deal better," she said; "if one was to do anything very wicked—— I say to my brother sometimes—— I am on my way to Arden, you know, to show Edgar—— And Clare passed just now; did you see her? I mean Miss Arden, but it comes so natural to say Edgar and Clare. Oh, yes, I must go on; my brother might think—— And then Mercy does not like to be kept—— and John's work—— Good-bye. Please come and see me. If there was any room, I should offer to take your grandchild home, but a chair, you know—— I am so glad to have seen you. And do you think you should let her sleep there in the grass? Earwigs is the thing that frightens me; they might creep up, you know, and then—— Yes, Mercy, I am quite ready; oh, yes, quite ready. I am so sorry—— Please come to see me—— and the grass, and the

earwigs—— Oh, John, gently! Good-bye, good-bye!”

With these fragmentary words Miss Somers was drawn away, looking behind her, and throwing her good-byes after her with a certain guilty politeness. This Scotchwoman was superior, too, she said to herself, with a little shudder, and made her head ache almost as much as Clare did. Mrs. Murray, for her part, went back and sat down by Jeanie, who still slept, but began to move and stir with the restlessness of waking. The grandmother did not resume her work. She let her hands drop on her knees, and sat and pondered. The sound of the wheels which slowly carried the invalid along the path grew less and less, the air sank into quietness, the bees hummed, and the leaves stirred, murmuring in that stillness of noon, which is almost greater than the stillness of night. But the old woman sat alone with another world about her, conscious of other times and other things. She was in the woods of Arden, with the unseen house near at hand, and all its history, past and present, floating about her, as it were, an atmosphere new and yet old, strange yet familiar, of which she knew more and knew less than any other in the world. How and what she knew was known to nobody but herself; yet this very conversation had

opened to her a mass of unsuspected information, and new avenues of thought, each more painful than the other. She had to bring all the powers of her mind to bear upon the new questions thus set before her, and it was with a doubly painful strain that she brought herself back when the young creature at her feet opened her bright eyes, and with a confused gaze, slowly finding out where she was, came back to the life of dreams, which was her portion in this world so full of care.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHILE Miss Somers was discoursing thus with Mrs. Murray under the trees, Arthur Arden had pursued Clare to the village. He had lost the best possible opportunity, he felt. Just as he had been beginning to make an impression! He sped after her between the long lines of trees, swearing softly under his breath at the intruders. "Confound them!" he was saying; and yet in his secret thoughts there was a lurking determination to see that pretty little thing again, although the pretty little thing was nothing to him in comparison with Clare. He skimmed along, devouring the way, planning to himself how he should recover the ground he must have lost by his benevolent errand. "Putting one's self out of the way for other people is a deuced mistake," he said to himself. It was not a habitual weakness of his, so that he could identify the moment and recognise the results with undoubting accuracy, and a clear perception of the weakness and folly which had produced them. He must get

over this kind of impulse, he thought, and prove himself superior to all such frivolous distractions. A mere pretty face! with probably nothing in it. Arthur Arden remembered Clare, who was not pretty, but beautiful; whose face had a great deal in it, not to speak of her purse; who was to have Old Arden, the cradle of the race. If he could but secure Clare everything would come right with him; and accordingly no pretty face—nothing frivolous or foolish—must be allowed to intercept or block up his way.

Clare was going towards the village school when Arthur overtook her. She had been walking very fitfully, sometimes with great haste, sometimes slow and softly, losing herself in thought. He came up to her when she had fallen into one of these lulls of movement, and Arthur was satisfied to see that he was recognised with a start, and that the little shock of thus suddenly perceiving him brought light to her eyes and colour to her face.

“You, Mr. Arden!” she said, with a kind of forced steadiness. “I thought you were still occupied about—that—girl. I am so sorry, it seems uncivil, but I don’t really know her name. Was she better? It was good of you to interest yourself so much.”

“I did no more than any man must have done,” said Arthur. “Your maid promised to go, and gave

me salts, &c. But she was better, I think. The old woman seemed quite used to it. She was lying asleep in the grass—a very pretty picture. But the old woman is an old dragon. She fairly drove me away.”

“Indeed!” said Clare feebly, with white lips, feeling that the crisis of her fate might be near.

“I only looked at the child—pretty she is, you know, but a little dwarf—when the mother got up and drove me away. I dared not stay a moment longer; and she gave me my orders, to turn my head away if I met them, and never to show my face again. Droll, is it not? One surely should be permitted a little property in one’s own head and face.”

“Yes; but it is not every head and face that have the same effect.” And then Clare paused a little to collect her energy. She had the fortitude of a young princess and ruling personage, accustomed (for their good) to speak very freely to the persons under her, and even to ask questions which would have covered her with confusion had she looked at them in another point of view; but the queen of a community, however small, is not permitted to blush and hesitate like other girls. She made a pause, and collected all her energies, and looked her cousin in the face, not with any shyness,

but pale, with a passionate sense of her duty. She was so simple at bottom, notwithstanding all her stateliness, that she thought she could assume over him the same authority which she had over the lads of the village. "Mr. Arden," she said, with tremulous firmness, "you may think it is a matter with which I have nothing to do—you may think even that it is unwomanly in me to ask anything about it," and here a sudden violent blush covered her face; "but I have always considered myself responsible for the village, and—and entitled to interfere. One's position is of no use unless one can do that. I wish to know what you have to do with these people—what is—your business—with that poor girl?"

Clare's courage almost gave way before she concluded. She faltered and stumbled in her words; her face burned; her courage fled. If she could have sunk into the earth she would gladly have done it. This was very different from a village lad. She felt his eye upon her; she imagined the curious gleam that was passing over his countenance; she was almost conscious of putting herself in his power. And yet she made her speech, going on to the end, though her excitement was such that she felt quite incapable of paying any attention to the answer. She did not look at him, and yet she

divined the look of mingled wonder and offence and partial amusement that was in his face. There was something else besides—a look of less innocent meaning—the significant glance which such a man gives to the woman who has committed herself; but Clare was too innocent, too void of evil thought to divine that.

“My dear Miss Arden, you surprise me very much,” he said. “What could be my business with the girl? What could I have to do with such people? Your imagination goes more quickly than mine. I do not know what connection there could possibly be between us. Do you? I am at a loss to understand——”

Poor Clare felt herself ready to sink to the ground with shame and mortification; and then her pride blazed up in sudden fury. “How *can* you ask me? How dare you ask me?” she said, at the height of passion; and he was so quiet, so entirely in command of himself.

“Why should not I dare?” he said softly. “My cousin has always been very good to me, except once, when she mistook my meaning, as she does now. There is nothing I dare not tell you about myself at this moment.” He winced a little when he had said this, not intending to make so explicit a declaration; but yet went on courageously.

“About these poor people, there is really nothing in the world to say. I never saw them in my life before. The old woman said so, if you remember. I was like somebody who had disturbed their peace—very unlucky indeed for me, for I feel I shall be subject to all manner of false construction. But my cousin Clare can understand me, I think. Should I be likely to venture into her presence while carrying on a vulgar—— Such things should never so much as be mentioned in her hearing. I am ashamed to seem to imply——”

Clare had been driven to such a pitch of shame and passion that she could no longer endure herself. “I did not imply,” she said, “I asked—plainly—— I am the protector of everybody here. It is not for me to shut my eyes to things, though they may be a horror and shame to think of. I asked you—plainly—what you had been doing—why the sight of you had such an effect upon that poor girl?”

“I will answer the Princess, not the young lady,” said Arden, with mocking calm. “Your young subject has taken no scathe by me. I never saw her until this morning in your presence. I never should have known of her existence but for you; is that enough? or shall I appear in your Highness’s Court and swear to it? Such a question could scarcely be put by you to me; but from a Sovereign to a

stranger is a different matter. Have I cleared myself to the Princess Clare of Arden? Then let me be acquitted, and let it be forgotten. It wounds me to suppose——”

“You are to suppose nothing,” said Clare, with averted face. “I have asked you because I thought it was my duty, Mr. Arden, in my position—— I have spoken quite plainly—and—— I am going to visit the school. You will not find it at all amusing. I am sorry to have said anything—I mean I am sorry if I have been unjust. I am grieved—— Good morning. I will not trouble you more just now——”

“Mayn’t I wait for you?” said Arthur, in his gentlest tone. “If you could know how much higher I think of you for your straightforwardness, how much nobler—— No, please don’t stop me; there are some things that must be said——”

“And there are some things that cannot be listened to,” said Clare, waving her hand as she entered the porch. She escaped from him without another word, plunging into the midst of the children and the monotonous hum of their lessons with a sense that everything about it was simply intolerable, that she could bear no more, and must fall down at his feet or their feet, it did not much matter which. She could not see the trim little schoolmistress, her

own special *protégée* and pupil, who came forward curtesying and smiling. A haze of agitation and bewilderment was about her. The rows of pinafores children rising and bobbing their little curtseys to the young lady of the manor were visible to her as through a mist. "My head aches so," she said faintly. "Let me sit down for a little in the quiet; and oh, couldn't you keep them quite still for two minutes? The sun is so hot outside."

"Won't you go and sit down in my room, Miss Clare?" said the schoolmistress. "The children will be moving and whispering. It is so cool in my room. You have never been there since you had it built for me; and the jasmine has grown so, you would not know it. Please come into my room."

Clare followed mechanically into the little sitting-room, a tiny cottage parlour, with jasmine clustering about the window, and some monthly roses in a little vase on the table. "It is so sweet and so quiet here. I am so happy in my little room," said the schoolmistress; "and it is all your doing, Miss Clare: everything is so convenient. And then the garden. I am so happy here."

"Are you, indeed?" said Clare, sitting down in the little wickerwork chair, covered with chintz, which creaked under her, but which was at once soft and splendid in the eyes of her companion.

“ Never mind me, please ; go on with your work, and as soon as I am rested I will follow you to the school. Please leave me by myself, I want nothing now.”

And there she sat for half an hour all alone in that little homely quiet place. The window was open, the white curtain fluttered in the wind, the white stars of the jasmine gleamed—just one or two early blossoms—among the darkness of the foliage. And the roses were faintly sweet, and the atmosphere warm and balmy ; and in the distance a faint hum like that of the bees betrayed the neighbourhood of the school. Clare, who had all Arden at her command, and to whom the great rooms and stately passages of her home were a matter of necessity, felt grateful for this balmy, homely stillness. She took off her hat, and pushed her hair off her forehead, and gradually got the mist out of her eyes, and saw things clearly. Oh, how foolish she had been ! She, who prided herself upon her good sense. Edgar would not have committed himself so, she thought, though she was continually finding fault with him ; but she, who had so good an opinion of her own wisdom, she who was so proudly pure, and above the breath of evil, that she should have thus betrayed and made apparent her evil suspicions and wicked thoughts ! What must anyone think of her ?

“Your imagination goes faster than mine;” that was what he had said. And her imagination had jumped at something which should never be named in maidenly ears. Clare’s confusion and self-horror were so great that the longer she mused over them the more insupportable they grew. Her cheeks blazed with a hot permanent blush, though she sat alone. What could he think of her? what could anybody think of her? Such thoughts would never have entered Miss Budd’s head, whose life was spent between the noisy school and this quiet parlour, who was a good little creature, never interfering with anybody, doing her work and smiling at the world. “Why cannot I do that?” Clare said to herself, with the wild shame of youth, which feels its little sins to be indelible. She, Clare, did not seem to be able to help interfering with her brother, who knew better than she did—with everybody, down to this little Scotch girl, and even with Arthur Arden! Oh, how she hated herself, and what a fool she had been!

Clare was very lowly in her tone when she went into the school, with a bad headache and a pale face, and a spirit more subdued probably than it had ever been in her life before. It is very dreadful to make one’s self ridiculous, to show one’s self in a bad light, when one is young. The sense

of shame is so intense, the certainty that nobody will ever forget it. She passed a great many false notes in the singing, and big stitches in the needlework, and was altogether so subdued and gentle that Miss Budd was filled with astonishment. "She must be going to be married," sighed the schoolmistress, with a glow of sympathy and admiration in her eyes; for she was romantic, like so many young persons in her position, and full of interest, and a wistful, half-envying curiosity what that state of mind could be like. Miss Budd had seen a gentleman lingering about the school door; she had seen him pass and repass when she came back from the little parlour in which she had left Clare. She could not but volunteer one little timid observation, when Miss Arden's duties were over, and she attended her to the door. "The gentleman went that way, Miss Clare," said the schoolmistress, timidly stealing a glance from under her eyelashes. "What gentleman?" said Clare, with a start; and her self-control was not sufficient to keep the tell-tale blush from her cheeks. "Oh, my cousin, Mr. Arden," she went on, coldly. "He has gone back to the Hall, I suppose." And she pointedly went the other way when she left the school, taking a path which could only lead to Sally Timms' cottage, a woman who was quite out of Clare's good graces.

“Can it be a quarrel?” Miss Budd asked herself anxiously, as she went back to her scholars. And Clare went hurriedly, seeing there was nothing else for it, to visit Sally Timms. Nothing could well be imagined more utterly unsatisfactory than Sally Timms’s house, and her children, and her personal character. She was the favourite pest of the village, though she did not originally belong to it, or even to the neighbourhood. Her boys thieved and played tricks, and took every malady incident to boys, and were generally known to have brought measles and whooping-cough, not to say small-pox, into Arden. The two former maladies had passed through all the children of the place, in consequence of the wandering propensities of Johnny and Tommy, and their faculty for catching everything that was going. And the latter had been only kept off by the prompt removal of Sally herself to the hospital in Liverpool, from whence she had come back white and swollen, and seamed and scarred, to the utter destruction of the remnant of good looks which she had once possessed. She was a widow, as such people always manage to be, and had no established means of livelihood. She took in washing when she could get it. She would go messages to Liverpool when her boys were doing something else, always ready for any piece of variety. She had

some boxes of matches and bunches of twigs in her window for lighting fires, by which she sometimes turned a penny. Now and then she had been seen with a basket furnished with tapes and buttons, which she sold about the country, enjoying that, too, as a relief from the monotony of ordinary existence. In short, she was one of those wild nomads to be met in all classes of society, who cannot confine themselves to routine—who must have change and movement, and hold in less than no estimation the cleanliness and good order and decorums of life. She was very fond of gadding about, not very particular as to the laws of property, and utterly indifferent to ordinary comfort. It would be impossible for one person to disapprove more entirely of another than Clare disapproved of Sally Timms. And yet she was on her way to see her—there being only her cottage at the end of the village street which could lead her in an opposite direction from that taken by Arthur Arden—which was only too clear a sign, had she but known it, how important Arthur Arden was becoming to Clare.

How long the conversation lasted Miss Arden could not have told any one—nor indeed what it was about. Sally was saucy and she was penitent; but she was not hopeful; and Clare shook her head as she went away. She gave a little nod to John

Hesketh's wife, who was the model woman of the village, as she passed her cottage. "I have been talking to Sally Timms, but I fear there is nothing to be done with her," she said, stopping a second at the garden gate. "She's a bad one, Miss Clare, is Sally Timms," said Mrs Hesketh, disapprovingly. But neither of them were aware that Clare's visit was totally irrespective of Sally's welfare, spiritual or bodily; and was only a pretext to avoid Arthur Arden, who, nevertheless, was patiently waiting for her all this time at the great gate.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE conversation which Arthur Arden thrust upon Clare by persistently waiting for her in the avenue was not a satisfactory one. Though she could not refuse to accept his explanation that he knew nothing about the strangers, yet a sense of uneasiness and discomfort remained in her mind. When once it is suggested that such secrets exist in a world which looks all fair and straightforward, it is difficult for a young mind to throw off at once the shock of the suggestion. Clare looked at her cousin, who was so much older than herself, and who had been so much in the world, acquiring, no doubt experiences of which she knew nothing, and shrank just a little aside, closing herself up, and putting on all her defences. "How do I know what his life has been, what things may have happened to him?" she said to herself. With a certain mingling of attraction and repulsion, she glanced at him from under her eyelashes. He had lived a man's life, which is so different from a woman's; he had been

abroad in the world, swept along in the great current, driven from one place to another, from one society to another. And Clare felt that she could never tell what recollections he might have brought out of that great ocean in which he had been sailing, which was so unknown to her, and doubtless so distinct and clear to him. He might have left cares and sorrows behind him—nay, was it not certain that he must have left many a trace behind him, being such a man as he was? As she walked on beside him this feeling came over her so strongly that it swallowed up all other sentiments. She too had a little line of memories, innocent recollections, pangs of childish suffering, unjust reproofs, wounded self-love, and one great natural grief. It was like a little rivulet running under the bushes, hiding only the softest blameless secrets. But his must be like the sea, full of sunny islands and dark cliffs, with calms and storms in it, and havens and shipwrecks—things she could not possibly know of, except by some chance word now and then, and never could fully enter into. A certain admiration grew unconsciously in her mind, along with a great deal of dread and shrinking. What a fine thing it would be to be such a man! How wide his horizon in comparison with hers! How extended and varied his knowledge! Poor Clare! she shrank with

a chilled sense that she never could partake or share this vast extent of experience ; but it never occurred to her to inquire what kind of knowledge of the world is acquired at German gaming-tables. Clare's imagination was utterly ignorant of the Turf, and the *coulisses*, and the Kursaal. She had an idea much more elevated than reality of the Clubs, and took it for granted that a man who was an Arden, even though he was poor, must have entrance always into the best society. He for his part walked by her side with the real recollections bubbling in his mind of which she formed so flattering a vision. He was remembering various things that would not have borne telling, even to ears much less innocent than those of Clare. The girl, who knew nothing about it, surrounded him with a bright and wide and noble world, swelling higher and greater than her unassisted thoughts could penetrate—with tragedies in it, no doubt, and sins, but all on so large a scale ; whereas the meanest matters possible haunted Arthur's mind, the narrow stifling atmosphere of commonplace dissipation, the "Life" which is a round of poor amusements, varied only by the excitement of gain or loss, with now and then a flavour of vice, the only piquant element in the poor mixture. Thus Imagination and Fact went side by side, unable to divine each

other ; and Clare shrank, yet wondered, secretly inclining towards the man who was so little known to her, painfully attracted and repelled, averting her face for the moment, but drawing near in her heart.

Lord Newmarch could only spare three days to the Ardens, one of which was a Sunday. And he walked dutifully to church, carrying Clare's prayer-book, and placing himself by her side. "This is what I like," he said. "The only real remnant of anything worth preserving in the feudal system. Here are your brother and yourself, Miss Arden, at the head of your people, to take their part or plead their cause, or redress their wrongs ; here they can see you, and pay their homage ; they have the advantage of feeling that you too worship God in the same place ; they have the benefit of your example. This is the beautiful side of a country gentleman's life."

"But they see us, I assure you, on other days besides Sunday," said Clare.

"That I do not doubt. Forgive me, Miss Arden, but it is very charming to see your sense of duty. Women seem to me generally to be deficient in that point. I see it in my sisters. They will be wildly charitable whenever their feelings are touched, and that is easily enough done, heaven knows. Any cottager on the estate—or off the estate, for that

matter—who has a story to tell can accomplish it. But they have not that sense of duty to all, which is more or less impressed upon men who have dependents. Allow me to pay my tribute of admiration to one who is an exception to the rule.”

Clare made him a little curtsey in reply to his elaborate bow, and did not laugh, partly because she was wanting in the sense of humour, and partly because, to tell the truth, she agreed with him, and was so far conscious of her own excellence. And then he had suggested another line of reflection. “But your sisters”—she said, and hesitated, for it was not quite polite to say what she was going to say, that his sisters were young women of no family, with no feudal rights, and very different from a daughter of the house of Arden. It does not answer, however, to make this sort of speech to the son of an Earl, and Clare caught herself up.

“My sisters are comparatively little at Marchfield?” he suggested. “That is what you would say; and no doubt it is quite true; but still there is a deficiency in this point. There is no sense of duty. And I find it common among women. They do things from emotional motives, or because they like to do them, but not from that manly, serious sense—— I am not one of those who sneer at what are called women’s rights. For my part, I

should be but too happy, for instance, to have the assistance of your fine instincts and administrative powers in public business ; but, still, there are characteristic differences which cannot be overlooked——”

“Pray, don't think I care for women's rights,” said Clare, with a blush of indignation. “I hate the very name of them. Why should we be jested and sneered at for the sake of two or three here and there who make a talk ? Let us alone, please. I would rather suffer a great deal, for my part, than hear all this odious, odious talk !”

“Ah, you feel it in that way ?” said Lord Newmarch, impartially. “I cannot say I quite agree with you there, Miss Arden. You at present suffer nothing. You are young and rich, and——and every one you meet with is your slave,” the young philosopher added gallantly, after a pause. “But that is not the case with all women. Some of them are oppressed by unjust laws, some feel the necessity of a career——”

“Helena Thornleigh, for instance,” said Clare. “I have no patience with her. Thornleigh village is in pretty good order, thanks to Ada ; but only fancy a girl wanting a career, and all those dreadful cottages within a mile of her father's house ! Don't you know Chomely and Little Felton, on the way to

Thorne? They are frightful places. If the poor people were pigs, they could not be more uncomfortable. And what does Helena ever do to mend them? Why, there is a career ready to her hand."

"But what could she do to mend them?" said Lord Newmarch, "I don't suppose she has any money of her own."

"She has her father's," said Clare indignantly, and walked on, elevating her head, her heart swelling with a recollection of all the power her father accorded to her, and all the revolutions she had made.

"Ah," said Lord Newmarch, shaking his head, "there are fathers and fathers; and besides, Miss Thornleigh probably thinks that to gain a thing by wheedling her father, which her brother could do independently, is but a sign of bondage. She has a fine intellect, and a great deal of energy——"

"Then I would go and build them with my own hands!" said Clare, with that fine mixture of unreasoning Conservatism and Revolutionism which so often distinguishes a woman's politics. She was the strictest Tory in the world: a change of law or custom was a horror to her. She scorned the idea of a career for Helena Thornleigh with the intensest inconsiderate disdain. But she would have backed her up about the cottages to the fullest extent that

enthusiasm could go, and helped her to work at them had that been needful. Lord Newmarch put his head a little on one side and took a close view of her, which was not without meaning. Strong sense of duty, good fortune, enthusiasm in a certain way which might be most usefully trained, excellent old family, great personal beauty, youth. These were qualities most worthy of consideration. He could not feel that he had encountered any one yet who was quite so well endowed. She would do credit to the choice even of an Earl's son; she might further even a high political career. He made a mental note in his mind to this effect as they arrived at the church door.

Mr. Fielding was not very much of a preacher. He looked venerable in his surplice, with his white hair, and he read the service with a certain paternal grace, like a father among his children. He had baptised the great majority of his hearers, married them, had some share in all the great events of their life, and had given them all the instruction they had in sacred things. Accordingly, there was no one so appropriate as he to conduct their prayers, to read them the simple lesson of love to God and aid to man. His teaching seldom went any further. His was not the preaching which insists upon the authority of the Church, or the extreme importance

of the divisions of the ecclesiastical year. And though there were one or two points of doctrine which he held very strongly, it was only on very urgent pressure that he preached on them. His audience knew, or, at least, the instructed among his audience knew, that the Rector had been holding a very hot discussion with Dr. Somers when he produced one of his discourses upon Faith or Predestination. On such occasions Dr. Somers would himself be present, with his keen eyes confronting the gentle preacher in an attitude of war, and noting all the flaws in his armour; and it was well for Mr. Fielding that he was short-sighted and could not see his adversary. But on this Sunday there had been nothing to excite him. The June day was soft and balmy, and through the open door the peaceable blue sky and green boughs looked in to cool and lighten the atmosphere. A grave or two outside but made the sense of home more profound. The rustics worshipped with their dead around them, almost sharing their prayers, and eyes that wandered found nothing worse to look upon than the green grassy turf with its pathetic mounds below, and the deep blue, leading their thoughts to the unutterable, above. The line of educated faces in the Squire's pew, and Dr. Somers, like a humanised eagle, seeing everything,

were the only breaks in the usual audience. Here or there a farmer or two, with an ample wife more brilliant than her humble neighbours, headed a row of ruddy boys and girls—but these were as much rustics as the ploughmen round them. At the big door of the church, the west end, sat Perfitt and Mrs. Murray, two faces of a very different type. She looked on, rather than joined in the service, half disapproving, half interested; while he, with a certain matter-of-fact superiority, patronised and initiated the stranger, finding the places in the prayer-book for her, and thrusting it into her hand at every change. No one noted the two thus strangely introduced into a scene foreign and strange to at least one of them, except Edgar, who, perhaps, was not so attentive as he ought to have been to Mr. Fielding's sermon, and to whom the changes on the old Scotchwoman's face were interesting, he could not tell why. It seemed to him that he could divine what was passing through her mind, and he looked on with almost affectionate amusement at the listener, who was perhaps Mr. Fielding's only attentive hearer in all the congregation. The good folks about were dropping asleep in the unaccustomed quiet, or else looking straight before them with complacent composure, hearing the words addressed to them as they heard the

bees and insects, which made a slumberous pleasant hum about the place. That sound was natural to church, as the hum of bees and twitter of birds are natural which come so sweetly from the outer world. The hush, the warmth, the stray breath of air, now and then, the Sunday clothes, the hum of parson and bees together, the scent of the monthly rose laid on the prayer-book—all this was pleasant to the simple folk. They were doing their duty, and their hearts were at rest. But Mrs. Murray looked and commented, and sometimes softly shook her handsome Scotch head, and wondered if this was all the spiritual fare vouchsafed to the inhabitants of Arden. Edgar divined her thoughts as if he had known her all his life, and was more interested than if Mr. Fielding had been a much better preacher, though it would have been hard to tell why.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFTER this Sunday, and the thoughts it awoke in his mind, Lord Newmarch found that he could stay another day, and during that day he sought Clare's company with great perseverance. And it was not so difficult as might have been expected to secure it. Miss Arden, indeed, found her noble companion tiresome sometimes, but yet she agreed in a good many of his ways of thinking. His Radicalism did not jar upon her as did the Radicalism of other people. For Lord Newmarch was clear as to the duty of the upper classes to head and guide the new movement in which he devoutly believed. He had no desire to lessen the influence of his own order, or withdraw a jot of position or power from them. And Clare did not laugh at the social reformer, as her brother was tempted to do. She was even angry with Edgar for his amusement, and could not understand what called it forth. "He is serious, of course; but a man whose mind is full of such subjects ought to be serious," she

said, with a little displeasure. "I don't know what you find to laugh at in him." And she did not object to being talked to about the improvement of the country, and how the people could best be guided for their own good. Clare knew, no one better, that the people took a great deal of guiding. She had not the least objection to make their social existence the subject of laws, to condescend to minute legislation, and ordain how often they were to wash, and what clothes they were to wear. Why not? It was all for their own comfort, and not for anybody else's advantage. Thus Lord Newmarch and she had a good many topics of mutual interest. They squabbled over the question of education, but that only increased the interest of their talk; and it is not to be denied that his position as an actual legislator, a man not discussing an abstract question, but seeking information on a matter he would have personally to do with, increased his importance in her eyes. She battled stoutly against the impression which sometimes forced itself upon her mind that he was a bore, and did not decline to talk to him, nor show any desire to avoid him all through the following Monday. Arthur Arden looking on was dismayed. Even he was not clever enough in his own case to perceive, what he would have per-

ceived in any other, that Clare's avoidance of himself was the strongest argument in his favour. She did not avoid Lord Newmarch; and Arthur was in dismay. He took Edgar dolefully to the other end of the terrace, upon which the drawing-room windows opened, that Monday evening. Lord Newmarch had engaged Clare upon some of their favourite subjects, and the other two were thrown out, as people so often are by one animated dialogue going on in a small society. "That Newmarch has plenty to say," Arthur ejaculated, sulkily; and pulled his moustache, and secretly murmured at Clare, whose presence prevented even the consolation of a cigar.

"Yes; he will not soon exhaust himself I fear," said Edgar. "Clare will be too much accomplished with all this flood of information poured upon her. It is a triumph of good manners on her part not to look bored."

"Do you think she is bored?" said Arthur Arden, eagerly. "I fear she is not. See how interested she looks. Confound him! The fellow's father was a cheesemonger, or his grandfather—it comes to the same thing—and to see him sitting there! If I were you, Arden, I should not stand it. Being as I am, you know, only a poor cousin, it goes against me."

“Why would not you stand it?” asked Edgar, calmly.

“Because—why, look at your sister. He is a nobody—a prig, and the son of a man who has no more right to be an Earl than Wilkins has. But can’t you see he is making up to Clare? I can’t help saying Clare. Why, she is my cousin, and I have known her all her life. She is rich, and she is handsome, and she has the air of a great lady, as she ought to have. But, mark my words, the fellow is making up to her, and if you don’t mind something will come of it.”

“I suppose he is what people call a very good match,” said Edgar. “If Clare is not to be trusted to refuse the honour—though I think she is quite to be trusted—we shall have nothing to reproach each other with. He is a bore, but if she should happen to like him, you know——”

“Oh, confound your coolness!” said Arthur, between his teeth; and he left Edgar standing there astonished, and made the round of the house, and came back to him. During that round various thoughts and calculations had passed through his mind. Should he tell Edgar of his love for Clare? Should he thus commit himself without knowing in the least whether Clare cared for him or not? It might secure him a powerful auxiliary, and it might

lay him open to a rebuff which he could ill bear. The pause looked like a start of impatience, but it was in reality a most useful and important moment of deliberation. He had decided that boldness was the best policy by the time he came back to his cousin's side.

"You think me a strange fellow," he said, "making off from you like this, and showing so much temper about a matter which really does not seem to concern me in the least. But—I may as well make a clean breast of it, Arden—I am in love with Clare myself. Yes, you may well start—a penniless wretch like me, that am twice her age! But these things don't go by any rule. I don't ask you to approve of me; but I can't stand by calmly, and see other people using opportunities which I fear to use. That's enough. I am glad I have told you. I ought perhaps to have done so before I came into your house; but I thought I had got the better of it. Forgive me; I have no other excuse."

Edgar stood and looked at his cousin with unfeigned surprise. He watched him as he got through his speech with a wonder which was soon mingled with other emotions. He was not prejudiced either for or against him; but the more he said the less and less favourable became Edgar's countenance. "Does Clare know of this?" he inquired coldly, in

a tone which suffered surprise to be seen under a veil of indifference. Such a sentiment was the very last which Arthur had imagined possible. He could conceive his cousin angry, or he could conceive, what in his superficial eyes seemed equally probable, that Edgar would have embraced his cause at once with the impulsive readiness with which he had invited him to his house. But this chilling calm was utterly unexpected. Notwithstanding all his self-command, he stammered and faltered as he replied—

“No, I don’t suppose she does. She looks on me as an uncle, I have no doubt. Arden, you young fellows are lucky fellows, I can tell you, who know what you are born to. And you don’t know what injury you did me by not coming into the world ten years sooner. The foundations of my education were laid on the principle that I was the heir.”

“I beg your pardon, I am sure, for being born at all,” said Edgar, with a laugh in which there was not much mirth; “I could not help it, you know. But I cannot see how that can have done you much harm at ten years old. However, this is a very useless discussion. I don’t quite know what you expect me to say to you. Am I to make any decision? Is this a confidence that you make to me privately, or am I to consider that my consent is asked?”

“Confound it!” said Arthur Arden, “you look at me as cool as a judge, without a bit of sympathy in you. I did not look for this, at least. Flare up, if you please—treat it any way you like. I was driven to it by my feelings; if yours are so calm——”

“Were you?” said Edgar, gravely. “Perhaps I am wrong. I have no right to make light of any man’s feelings; but naturally it is my sister I must think of, not you. You talk of Newmarch as something not to be supported; but do you really think, Arden, that you yourself would be a better match for Clare?”

“I am a gentleman, at least, though I am not the son of a pasteboard Earl,” said Arthur, angrily. To tell the truth, it was hard upon him. Up to this moment it was he who had held the superior position, as the man of most age, and experience and knowledge of the world. But now he felt that he stood at the bar before this boy, and the change galled him. And then his resentment impaired at once his dignity and judgment, as may be supposed.

“He is a gentleman also, whatever his father may be,” said Edgar; “and though he is a bore he has a great many advantages to offer. He is rich and he has a good position, and some reputation, such as it is. I should not like to marry him myself, if the question were put to me; but Clare has

her own ambitions, and might choose to influence the world as the wife of a statesman. Why shouldn't she? These are all substantial advantages, whereas——”

“Whereas I am a miserable beggar, twice her age, with not even much to brag of in the way of reputation,” said Arthur Arden. “Say no more about it; I perceive the contrast sufficiently as it is.”

Edgar did not say any more; but looked so serious and unmoved by his cousin's impatience, that he occasioned Arthur a new sensation. To be set down by this boy, whom he had believed to be a simpleton and enthusiast! To meet the gravity of a look which became penetrating and keen the moment it was roused with such an interest—all this was utterly unexpected. He had feared Clare, but he had said to himself, with the contempt of a man of the world for Edgar's open temper and liberal heart, that he could twine her brother round his finger. Indeed, there had not seemed any particular credit in so doing. Anybody could do it, even a novice. The young man could be persuaded out of or into anything, and was not in reality worth considering at all. But now Arthur Arden paused, and changed his mind. The tables were turned—the simpleton had seen through the whole question at

once, and had calmly snubbed him, Arthur Arden, and put him back in his proper place. By Jove!—a fellow who had taken his inheritance from him, and who probably had no more real right to it than——. What a drivelling fool old Arden was to put up with it, and how hard a case for himself! All this fermented so strongly in Arthur's mind that he flung off the restraints which had hitherto confined him. He had been, by way of being very civil to Edgar since he came to the house, deferring to his wishes and consulting all his tastes; but if this was all that was to come of it! Accordingly, he left Edgar abruptly, and went and joined himself to Clare and her supposed admirer. "Here is Frivolity come to the rescue, in case my young cousin should become too wise," he said. "We don't want to have her made too wise. She is cleverer than all the rest of us by nature; and, Newmarch, I can't have her made more dangerous still by your art."

"Miss Arden instructs instead of needing to be instructed," said Lord Newmarch. "What astonishes me is the breadth of her views. She does not go into detail, as women generally do, but takes a broad grasp. I assure you, her feeling about the education of the people and the knowledge of their wants is marvellous. She knows the poorer classes as well as I flatter myself I know them, and her knowledge

can only come by intuition, whereas mine is the result of careful study and——”

“You ought to know them better, certainly,” said Arthur, with suppressed insolence. “As a race advances in the world it forgets the sentiments of the common stock it sprang from—and we Ardens are a long way off the original root.”

“Yes, very true,” said Lord Newmarch, with a little bow, “very much what I was saying. I am going to persuade your brother to make a run up to town with me,” he added, turning to Clare, and rising from his seat—into which Arthur threw himself without loss of time.

“Mr. Arden, how could you speak to him so? You were *rude* to him,” said Clare, the moment they were left alone.

“I meant to be,” said Arthur Arden, carelessly. “What right had he, I should like to know, to monopolise you? What right had he to cross his legs, and sit here talking to you all the evening? Besides, it is perfectly true; and why should I be expected to eat humble pie, and loiter at a distance, and see you appropriated? You might have a little pity on your kinsman, Lady Clare.”

“My kinsman ought not to be rude,” said Clare. But that was all the punishment she inflicted. Something warped her judgment and blinded her

clear eyes. She was not even angry at this piece of incivility, much as she prided herself upon the stateliness of the Arden manners, which Edgar could not acquire. And she sat on the terrace for ever so long after, and let him talk to her, compensating herself for the severity of the morning. And her brother looked on with a grave countenance, wondering much what he could or ought to do.

END OF VOL. I.