THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER

MRS. OLIPHANT

THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER

AND

THE FUGITIVES

"Lady, you come hither to be married to this count?"
"I do."

—*Much Ado about Nothing.*

THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER

AND

THE FUGITIVES

BY

MRS OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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TO

A. W. KINGLAKE, Esq.,

THE GRACIOUS, KIND, AND

GENTLE READER,

WHOM IT IS THE PRIDE OF A HUMBLE NOVELIST

TO PLEASE,

This Little Book

IS INSCRIBED.

NOTE.

IT is perhaps necessary to explain that the following story was published in serial form under the title of 'Lady Jane,' but the subsequent use of a similar title for another work has suggested the expediency of a change of name.

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THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

HER PARENTS.

THE Duchess was a very sensible woman.

This was her character, universally acknowledged. She might not perhaps be so splendid a person as a duchess ought to be. She had never been beautiful, nor was she clever in the ordinary sense of the word; but she was in the full sense of the word a sensible woman. She had, there is no doubt, abundant need for this faculty in her progress through the world.

Hers had not been a holiday existence, notwithstanding her high position at the head of one of the proudest houses and noblest families in England. It is a sort of compensation to us for the grandeur of the great to believe that, after all, their wealth and their high position do them very little good.

"The village maidens of the plain
Salute me lowly as they go,
Envious they mark my silken train,
Nor think a countess can have woe.

The simple nymphs! they little know
How far more happy's their estate,
To smile for joy than sigh for woe,
To be content than to be great."

So we all like to believe. But after all, it is highly doubtful whether there is more content, as the moralists of the eighteenth century imagined, in a cottage than in a palace; and the palace has the best of it in so many other ways. The Duchess had met with many vexations in her life,

but no more than we all meet with, nor of a severer kind; and she had her coronet, and her finery, and her beautiful ducal houses, and the devotion of all that surrounded her, to the good. So while we have no occasion to be envious, we have none, on the other hand, to plume ourselves upon the advantages of humble position. Duchess or no duchess, however, this lady had sense, a precious gift. And she had need to have it, as the following narrative will show.

For the Duke, on his side, did not possess that most valuable quality. He was far more proud than a duke has any occasion to be. On that pinnacle of rank, if on any height imaginable, a man may permit himself to think simply of his position, and to form no over-estimate of his own grandeur. But the Duke of Billingsgate was very proud, and believed devoutly that he himself and his family tree, and the

strawberry-leaves which grew on the top of it, overshadowed the world. He thought it made an appreciable difference to the very sunshine; and as for the county under his shadow, he felt towards it as the old gods might have felt towards the special lands of which they were the patrons tutelary. He expected incense upon all the altars, and a sort of perpetual adoration. It would have pleased him to have men swear by him and dedicate churches in his honour, had such things been in accordance with modern manners: he would have felt it to be only natural. He liked people to come into his presence with diffidence and awe; and though he was frank of accost, and of elaborate affability, as an English gentleman is obliged to be in these days, talking to the commonalty almost as if he forgot they were his inferiors, he never did forget the fact, and it offended him deeply if they appeared to forget it in word or

deed. He was very gracious to the little county ladies who would come to dine at the Castle when he was in the country, but he half wondered how they could have the courage to place a little trembling hand upon his ducal arm, and he liked those all the better who did tremble and were overcome by the honour. He had spent enormously in his youth, keeping up the state and splendour which he thought were necessary to his rank, and which he still thought necessary though his means were now straitened. And it cannot be denied that he was angry with the world because his means were straitened, and felt it a disgrace to the country that one of its earliest dukedoms should be humiliated to the necessity of discharging superfluous footmen and lessening the number of horses in the stables. He thought this came, like so many other evils, of the radicalism of the times. Dukes did not need to

retrench when things were as they ought to be, and a strong paramount Government held the reins of State. The Duke, however, retrenched as little as was possible. He did it always under protest. When strong representations on the part of his agents and lawyers induced him against his will to cut off one source of expense, he had a great tendency to burst out into another on an unforeseen occasion and a different side — a tendency which made him very difficult to manage and a great trouble to all connected with him.

This was indeed the chief cross in the life of the Duchess; but even that she took with great sense, not dwelling upon it more than she could help, and comforting herself with the thought that Hungerford, who was her eldest son, had great capabilities in the opposite direction, and was exactly the sort of man to rebuild the substantial fortunes of the family. He

had already done a great deal in that way by resolutely marrying a great heiress in spite of his father's absurd opposition. The Duke had thought his heir good enough for a princess, and had something as near hysterics as it would be becoming for a duke to indulge in when he ascertained that obstinate young man's determination to marry a lady whose money had been made in the City; but Hungerford was thirty, and his father had no control over him. There was, however, something left which he had entirely in his own hands, his daughter—Lady Jane. She had all the qualities which the Duke most esteemed in his race. She resembled in features that famous duchess who had the good fortune to please Charles II., but with a proud, and reserved, and stately air, which had not distinguished that famous beauty. The repose of her manners was such as can be seen only on

the highest levels of society. Her face would wear an unchanged expression for days together, and for almost as long a period the echoes around her would be undisturbed by anything like the vulgarity of speech. She was a child after her father's own heart. Though it is a derogation to a family to descend through the female line, his Grace could almost have put up with this, had it been possible to transfer the succession from Hungerford and his plebeian wife to that still, and fair, and stately maiden. Jane, Duchess of Billingsgate (in her own right). He liked the thought. He felt that there would be a certain propriety even in permitting the race to die out in such a last crowning flower of dignity and honour. But no day-dream, as he knew, could have been more futile; for the City lady had brought three boys already to perpetuate the race, and there was no

telling how many more were coming. Hungerford declared loudly that he meant to put them into trade when they grew up, and that his grandfather's business was to be Bobby's inheritance. Bobby! He had been called after that grandfather. Such a name had never been heard before among the Altamonts. The Duke took very little notice of any of the children, and none whatever of that City brat. But, alas! what could he do? There was no shutting them out from a single honour. Bobby would be Lord Robert in spite of him, even at the head of his City grandfather's firm.

But the marriage of Lady Jane was a matter still to be concluded, and in that her father was determined to have his own way. There had not been the violent competition for her beautiful hand which might have been expected. Dukes are scant at all times, and there did not

happen at that time to be one marriageable duke with a hand to offer; and smaller people were alarmed by the grandeur of her surroundings, by the character of her papa, and by her own stateliness of manner. There were a few who moved about the outskirts of the magnificent circle in which alone Lady Jane was permitted to appear, and cast wistful glances at her, but did not venture further. The Marquis of Wodensville made her a proposal, but he was sixty, and the Duke did not think the inducement sufficient to interpose his parental authority; and Mr Roundel, of Bishop's Roundel, made serious overtures. If family alone could have carried the day, the claim of this gentleman would have been supreme, and his Grace did not lightly reject that great commoner, a man who would not have accepted a title had the Queen

herself gone on her knees to him. But he showed signs of a desire to play this big fish, to procrastinate and keep him in suspense, and that was a treatment which a Roundel was not likely to submit to. Other proposals of less importance never even reached Lady Jane's ears; and the subject gave him no concern. It is true that once or twice Lady Hungerford had made a laughing remark on the subject of Jane's marriage, which was like her underbred impertinence. But the Duke never did more than turn his large light-grey eyes solemnly upon her when she was guilty of any such assault upon the superior race. He never condescended to reply. He did very much the same thing when the Duchess with a sigh once made a similar observation. He turned his head and fixed his eyes upon her; but the Duchess was used to him and was not

overawed. "I cannot conceive what you can mean," he said.

"It is not hard to understand. I don't expect to be immortal, and I confess I should like to see Jane settled."

"Settled!" his Grace said — the very word was derogatory to his daughter.

"Well, the term does not matter. She is very affectionate and clinging, though people do not think so. I should like to make sure that she has some one to take care of her when I die."

"You may be assured," said the Duke, "that Jane will want no one to take care of her as you say. I object to hear such a word as clinging applied to my daughter. I am quite capable, I hope, of taking care of her."

"But, dear Gus, you are no more immortal than I am," said his wife. He disliked to be called by his Christian name in any circumstances, but Gus had

always driven him frantic, as, indeed, it is to be feared the Duchess was aware. She was annoyed too, or she would not have addressed him so.

The Duke looked at her once more, but made no reply. He could not say anything against this assertion: had there been anything better than immortality he would have put in a claim for that, but as it is certainly an article of belief that all men are mortal, he was wise enough to say nothing. Such incidents as these, however, disturbed him slightly. The sole effect of his wife's interference was to make him look at Lady Jane with more critical eyes. The first time he did so there seemed to him no cause whatever for concern. She had come in from a walk, and was recounting to her mother what she had seen and heard. She had a soft flush on her cheek, and was if anything too animated

and youthful in her appearance. She had met the great Lady Germaine, who had brought a party to see the Dell in the neighbourhood of Billings Castle. The Duke did not care for intruders upon his property, but it had been impossible to refuse permission to such a leader of fashion as Lady Germaine. "There were all the Germaines, of course, and May Plantagenet, and — Mr Winton," said Lady Jane. She made a scarcely perceptible pause before the last name. The Duke took no notice of this, nor did he even remark what she said. "No longer young!" he said to himself, "she is too young," and dismissed Lady Hungerford's gibes and the Duchess's sigh with indignation. He did not even think of it again until next season, when Jane came to breakfast late one morning after a great ball, and made a languid remark in answer to her

mother's question. "There was scarcely any one there," she said with something between a yawn and a sigh: half London had been there; but still it was not what his daughter said that attracted his attention. He saw as he looked at her a slight, the very slightest, indentation in the delicate oval of Lady Jane's cheek. The perfection of the curve was just broken. It might only have been a dimple, but she was not in the mood which reveals dimples. There went a little chill to the Duke's heart at the sight. *Passée?* Impossible; years and years must go before that word could be applied to his daughter; but still he felt sure Lady Hungerford must have remarked it: no, it was not a hollow; but no doubt with her vulgar long sight she must have remarked it, and would say everywhere that dear Jane was certainly going off. The Duke never took

any notice apparently of these sallies of his daughter-in-law, but in reality there was nothing of which he stood in so much dread.

The Duchess on her side was well acquainted with that hollow. It *was* a hollow, very slight, sometimes disappearing altogether; but there it was. She had awakened to a consciousness of its existence one day suddenly, though it had evidently taken some time to come to that point. And since then it had seldom been out of the Duchess's mind. She had no doubt that other people had discovered it before now, and made malicious remarks upon it: for if she observed it who was so anxious to make the best of her child, what would they do whose object was the reverse? But what did it matter what any one said? There it was, which was the great thing. It spoke with a voice which nobody could

silence, of Jane's youth passing away, of her freshness wearing out, of her bloom fading. Was she to sit there and grow old while her father wove his fictions about her? It had given the Duchess many a thought. She knew very well what all this princely expenditure would lead to. Hungerford would not be much the worse; he had his wife's fortune to fall back upon, and perhaps he would not feel himself called upon to take on himself the burden of his father's debts after he was gone. But for the Duke himself, if he lived, and his family, the Duchess, looking calmly on ahead, knew what must happen. Things would come to a crash sooner or later, and everything that could be sacrificed would have to be sacrificed. Rank would not save them. It might put off bankruptcy to the last possible moment, but it would not avert it altogether; and

the moment would come when everything must change, and a sort of noble exile, or at least seclusion in the country, if nothing worse, would be their fate. And Jane? If she were to be left to her father's disposal, what would be the end of Jane? She would have to descend from her pedestal, and learn what it was to be poor—that is, as dukes' daughters can be poor. The grandeur and largeness of her life would fall away from her, and no new chapter in existence would come in to modify the old, and make its changes an advantage rather than a drawback. The Duchess said to herself that to go against her husband was a thing she never had done; but there was a limit to a wife's duty. She could not let Jane be sacrificed while she stood aside and looked on. This was the question which the Duchess had to solve. She was brought to it gradu-

ally, her eyes being opened by degrees to other things not quite so evident as that change in the oval of Jane's perfect cheek. She found out why it was that her daughter had yawned or sighed, and said, "There was nobody there," of the ball to which half London struggled to get admittance. On the very next evening Lady Jane paid a humdrum visit to an old lady who was nobody in particular, and came home with a pretty glow, and no hollow visible, declaring that there had been a delightful little party, and that she had never enjoyed herself so much. The Duchess felt that here was a mystery. It was partly the 'Morning Post' that helped her to find it out, and partly the unconscious revelations of Jane herself in her exhilaration. The 'Morning Post' made it evident that a certain name was not in the list of the fine people who had figured at my Lady Germaine's

ball, and Lady Jane betrayed by a hundred unconscious little references that the bearer of that name had been present at the other little reunion. The Duchess put this and that together. She, too, no doubt would have liked to see her daughter a duchess like herself; but, failing that, she preferred that Jane should be happy in her own way. But the question was, had Jane courage enough to take her own way? She had been supposed to have everything she wanted all her life, and had been surrounded by every observance; but, as a matter of fact, Jane had got chiefly what other people wanted, and had been secretly satisfied that it should be so. Would she once in her life, against her father and the world, be moved to stand up for herself? But this was what the Duchess did not know.

CHAPTER II.

HERSELF.

A PRINCESS royal is always an interesting personage. The very title is charming—there is about it a supreme heiress-ship, if not of practical dominion, at least of the more delicate part of the inheritance. She has the feminine rule, the kingdom of hearts, the homage of sentiment and imagination. Even when she grows old the title retains a sweet and penetrating influence, and in youth it is the very crown of visionary greatness, an elevation without any vulgar elements. Lady Jane was the Princess Royal of her father's

house. There had been just so much poetry in his pride as to make him feel this beautifying characteristic of feminine rank to be an addition (if any addition were possible) to his dukedom. And she had been brought up in the belief that she was not as other girls were, nor even as the little Lady Marys and Lady Augustas who in the eyes of the world stood upon a similar eminence. She stood alone—the blood of the Altamonts had reached its cream of sweetness, its fine quintessence in her veins. Hungerford was very well in his way. He would be Duke when his time came. The property, and lands, and titles would be vested in him; but he had no such visionary altitude as his sister. He himself was quite aware of the fact: he laughed, and was very well content to be rid of this visionary representativeship, but he fully recognised that Jane

was not to be considered as an ordinary mortal, that she was the flower and crown of so many generations, the last perfection to which the race could attain. And with infinite modesty and humility of mind Lady Jane too perceived her mission. She became aware of it very early, when other girls were still busy with their skipping-ropes. It was a great honour to fall upon so young a head. When she walked about the noble woods at Billings and dreamed as girls do of the world before her, this sense of rank was never absent from her mind: impossible to foresee what were the scenes through which it might lead her. She heard a great deal of the evil state of public affairs —the decadence of England, the advance of democracy, the approaching ruin in which everything that was great and noble must soon be engulfed; and Lady Jane took it all seriously, and felt it very

possible that her fate might be that of a virgin martyr to the cruel forces of revolution. For one time of her life her favourite literature was the memoirs of those great and noble ladies, full of charity and romance, who cast a pathetic glory upon the end of the old *régime* in France, and died for crimes of which they were no way guilty, paying the long arrears of oppression which they had done all they could to modify. Jane took, as was natural, the political jeremiads of her father and his friends with the matter-of-fact faith of youth, and she did not think that even the guillotine was impossible. If it came to her lot—as, according to all she heard, seemed likely—to maintain the cause of nobility to the last, she was ready to walk to the scaffold like Marie Antoinette, holding her head high, and smiling upon her assassins; or if it were possible to save the country by

another kind of self-devotion, she was prepared, though with trembling, to inspire a nation or lead an army. These were the kind of dreams she entertained at fifteen, which is the time when a girl is most alive to the claims of patriotism, and can feel it possible that she too may be a heroine. Older, she began to be less certain. Facts came in and confused fancy. She saw no indications such as those which her books said had been seen in France; everything was very peaceable, everybody very respectful wherever she went. The common people looked at her admiringly when by chance she drove with her mamma through the crowded streets. They seemed all quite willing to acknowledge her position. She was greeted with smiles instead of groans, and heroism seemed unnecessary.

Then there came a time when Lady Jane felt that it would probably be her

mission to be, if not a martyr, a benefactress to the world. It would be right for her to move half royally, half angelically, through all the haunts of wretchedness, and leave comfort and abundance behind. She imagined to herself scenes like the great plague, times of famine and fever, in which her sudden appearance, with succour of every kind about her, would bring an immediate change of affairs and turn darkness into light. She did not know—how should she?—what squalor and wretchedness were like, and this great and successful mission never in her thoughts so much as soiled her dress, and had nothing disgusting or repulsive in it. But by-and-by, gradually there came a change also upon this phase of mind. A princess royal has always the confidence that in her own ministrations there must be a secret charm; but still she could not shut her eyes to the fact that

in her mother's charities all was not plain sailing. And it became apparent to her also, with a considerable shock, that there were many things which the Duchess wished but had not means to do; which had a painful effect upon Lady Jane's dreams, and cut them short, confusing her whole horizon, and arresting her imagination. She then paused, with considerable bewilderment, not quite perceiving where the mission of her rank would lead her. It must give her distinct duties, and a sphere above the common quiescence of life—but what? Lady Jane was perplexed, and no longer saw her way. Vulgar contact with the world was impossible to her; she shrank from the public organisation of charity. Something else surely, something of a more magnanimous kind, was to be hers to do. But in the meantime she did not know what, and stood as it were upon the

battlements of the castle wall looking out, somewhat confused, but full of noble sentiment and desire to perform the finest functions for the advantage of the world.

This was the aspect which pride of birth took in the pure and high-toned spirit of the Duke's daughter. She accepted undoubtingly the creed of her race, and never questioned the fact that she was something entirely removed from the crowd, elevated above the ordinary level of humanity. The Duchess had little of this inborn conviction, but yet a duchess is a duchess, and unless she is of a quite remarkable order of intelligence, it is very unlikely that she should be able to separate herself from the prejudices of her rank. As a matter of fact, the members of a duke's household are not ordinary mortals. Limits which are natural to us have nothing to do with

them. It must require a distinct independence and great force of mind to realise that they are just of the same flesh and blood as the scullery-maid and the shoe-boy; nay—for these are extravagant instances out of their range of vision—even as the groom of the chambers and the housekeeper, who are entirely devoted to their service. To doubt this, accordingly, never entered the mind of Lady Jane; but anything resembling personal pride had no existence in her. She did not know what it meant. There is no such beautiful scope for pure humility of spirit as in the mind of a creature thus fancifully elevated. It never occurred to her that it was her own excellence which gave her this place. She was unfeignedly modest in every estimate of herself, docile, ready to be guided, deferring to everybody. Never had there been so obedient a child to nurses and

governesses, nor one who accepted reproof more sweetly, nor sought with more anxious grace to gain approbation. It was difficult to rouse her to the exercise of her own judgment at all. "Do you think so?" she would say to the humblest person about her, with a sincere desire to please that person by accepting his or her view rather than her own. Some people thought she had no opinion of her own at all, but that was a mistake—though the pain it gave her to cross, or vex, or contradict (in fact: in words she never was guilty of such a breach of charity) any one, made her act upon her own opinion only in the very direst necessity. But when her gentle foot struck against the limits of the sphere which she thought boundless, Lady Jane remained for a long time perplexed, confused, not knowing what the object might be which was to fill her life. It was during this period

that her cheek, though still so young, began to own the slightest possible departure from the oval. It might have been only the touch of a finger—but there it was. A slight line over Lady Jane's eyes appeared about the same time. She had become anxious, almost wistful, wondering and perplexed. What was she to do with her life? England (though, as they all said, going to destruction) showed no signs of immediate ruin. In all likelihood the guillotine would not be set up in Lady Jane's time, and there would be no occasion for any sacrifice on her part. She looked abroad into the world, and saw no need of her. She shrank, indeed, from any actual step, notwithstanding her dreams and her conviction that something great ought to come of her; and if she had attempted to take any step whatever, she knew that the Duke and the Duchess, and Hungerford and Susan,

and all the connections and retainers to the hundredth degree, would have rushed with dismay to prevent her. Was it possible that by sitting calmly upon her elevated seat, and smiling sweetly or frowning (as best she could) as the occasion required, she was doing all she was called upon to do? In that case Lady Jane acknowledged to herself with a sigh, that it was scarcely worth while being a princess royal at all.

The reader will think it strange that all this time no idea of marriage, or of the great preliminary of marriage, had entered her head. Perhaps it would be rash to say that this was the case. But she had known from an early period that there were very few people in the world who could pretend to Lady Jane Altamont's hand. She laughed when it was proposed to her to marry the Marquis of Wodensville. "Oh no, papa, thank you," she said.

"We have made alliances with his family before now. He has some of the best blood in England in his veins," said the Duke.

"Oh no, papa, thank you," said Lady Jane. She did not ask any one's advice on this point. When there was that negotiation with Mr Roundel, of Bishop's Roundel, she was more interested, but not enough to disturb her equilibrium when it was found he had gone off in disgust, and married his sister's governess. "I thought he could not be pure blood," the Duke said. Lady Jane smiled, and, it is to be feared, thought so too. The worst of high rank is that it destroys perspective. She could not see the gradations below her in the least. She knew the difference between her father's rank and that of a prince of the blood; and she knew exactly how countesses and marchionesses ought to go in to dinner;

but of the difference between governesses and housekeepers and other attendants she knew little. The one and the other were entirely out of her sphere. Her own old governess, whose name was Strangford, she had always called Stranghy and been extremely fond of—but then she was fond of all her old attendants, and thought of them much in the same way. Then Lord Rushbrook, who was a Cabinet Minister, had presented himself to her. She did not wish to marry him, but she felt that here was something which was not rank (for he was only a baron), and yet was equal to rank. It was almost the first gleam of such enlightenment that came into her mind.

About this time, however, it certainly began to enter into Lady Jane's head that it is a general thing to marry, and that this is the way in which most women solve the problem of their life. Perhaps

because of the "offers" she had received: perhaps because she had met at Lady Germaine's, quite promiscuously, on one of the many occasions on which she went there, a — gentleman. She had met a great many gentlemen there and elsewhere before; but on the particular occasion in question, she had gone by accident, without design, and with no expectation of meeting any one. Fate thus lies in wait for us, round a corner, when we think of it least. The gentleman was nobody in particular. He had never been meant to meet the Duke's daughter. Indeed, had Lady Germaine had but the slightest prevision of what was coming, she would have locked him into a closet, or tripped him over into the river, rather than permitted such a thing to happen in her house. But she did not know any more than other mortals, and the train was laid by the Fates without any

sort of connivance on the part of any human creature. They all fell blindly, stupidly, accidentally into the net.

It was perhaps then, we say, when Lady Jane declined, either by her own will or her father's, her other matrimonial prospects, or perhaps when she met the aforesaid gentleman, that it first really occurred to this high and visionary maiden to take into consideration that which is the leading incident in the lives of most women, the event which decides the question whether their lives shall be lonely and in great measure objectless, or busy and full of interest and occupation. Generally it is at a very early age that girls first approach this question. But Lady Jane had been a stately little person even in her cradle. She had not chosen to be kissed and caressed as most children are. She had been gently proud and reticent through all her girlhood. She had no

youthful intimates to breathe into her mind this suggestion—no girl-friend about to be married to initiate her into the joyous fuss, the importance, the applauses and presents, the general commotion which every wedding produces. She had, indeed, been present at a marriage, but never at one which touched her at all in her immediate circle. So that Lady Jane was nearly eight-and-twenty when it occurred to her as possible that she too might marry and carry out in her own person the universal lot. At first she had been shocked at herself, and had driven the thought out of her mind with a delicacy which cannot but be called false, though she was not conscious of its fictitious character. But the idea came back: it caught her at unawares, it came over her sometimes with soft, delicious suggestions. When she met a young mother with her children, a sigh

that was as soft as the west wind in spring would come out of Lady Jane's heart. How happy was that woman! how delightful all the cares that beset her, the calls from this one and that, the constant demand upon her! *She* had no time to ask what her life was worth, no leisure to speculate how she could best fulfil its duties: all that and many another question was solved for her. Lady Jane watched the happy mother with an interest which was almost envy. And there were other thoughts which crossed her fancy too, and awakened much that was dormant in her. Once when she was sitting by her mother it suddenly came into her mind to contrast the Duchess's life with her own. She looked at her Grace's fair and genial presence, and watched her going over her accounts, and settling the affairs of her great house. There were many lines on the Duchess's

brow. She was an excellent economist on a great scale, as became her rank, but she had the disadvantage of being thwarted on every side by the prodigalities of her husband. It was not a happy moment at which to regard her; yet Lady Jane, looking at her mother, was suddenly moved to ask herself whether the Duchess would have been better, balancing all her outcomings and incomings serenely without any one to disturb her, had she never married. The question seemed a ludicrous one, but Lady Jane was prone to imaginations. She conjured up before herself a picture of this lady in a house where no one thwarted her; where there was no family to provide for, no Susan to keep a watchful eye upon what she was doing, no Jane to reflect upon her as an example of fate. She laughed to herself softly at the impossibility of this imagination.

"What are you laughing at?" the Duchess asked, pausing with her pen in her hand and a look which was indicative of anything but an easy mind.

"I was thinking — what if you had never married, mamma?"

The Duchess turned round upon her, opening her eyes wide with wonder. "What if I had never married? Are you taking leave of your senses?" she said. And indeed the idea was entirely ludicrous, for if she had never married where would Jane herself have been? Jane laughed again very softly, and a sudden wave of colour came over her face. She thought, though her mother was not very happy, that it was better to be less happy so, than more happy alone. It seemed to her that the absence of care would have made her Grace much less interesting. Her comely figure seemed to shrink and fall away as Jane

thought, looking at it—and then her mind slid imperceptibly from that fancy to a sudden realisation of herself. After all, she had been thinking of herself all her life, what she should do, how she should occupy herself, which theory of life was the best. But the young woman whom she had met among her children had got that problem solved for her; she had no time to think of herself at all: there were so many claims upon her, soft little arms, voices like the birds, as well as bigger appeals, more articulate; the chances were that from morning to night she had no leisure in which to speculate on what was best for herself. The Duchess, though a great lady, was in the same position. Even the least self-regarding whose hands are free, think more about themselves than the selfish, whose time and thoughts are taken up with other matters, can be able to do. This thought made a great impression

upon Lady Jane. Perhaps even these ideas would have moved her little had it not been for that encounter at Lady Germaine's—but it was long before she brought herself so far as to acknowledge that. She considered the question in the abstract form long before she approached it in the concrete. And thus she came candidly to conclude and acknowledge that the woman who is married has a career before her which the unmarried woman can scarcely command. It was a new idea to Lady Jane, but her mind was very candid, and she received this as she received every other conclusion justified by reason. It would be good that she should marry; and then she had met at Lady Germaine's—a gentleman. But who this gentleman was must be left for another chapter.

CHAPTER III.

HER LOVER.

It has never been fully explained how it was that a person so thoroughly experienced in the world as Lady Germaine should have permitted an acquaintance between Lady Jane and Mr Winton to ripen under her roof. That she should have introduced them to each other was nothing, of course; for in society every gentleman is supposed the equal of every other gentleman, though he has not a penny and his next neighbour may be a millionaire; and Lady Jane was gracious in her high-minded, maidenly way, as a princess

should be, to everybody, to the clergyman, and even to the clergyman's sons, dangerous and detrimental young persons who have to be asked to country houses, a perpetual alarm to anxious parents who have daughters. No *hauteur*, no exclusiveness was in Lady Jane. She was as much withdrawn above the young squire as the young curate, and there was no reason why Mr Winton, who was very personable, very well thought of, and in no sense of the word detrimental, should not pay his homage to the Duke's daughter. But there it should have stopped. When she saw that there was even the remotest chance that it might go further, Lady Germaine's duty was plain. She should have said firmly, "Not in my house." It was not to be supposed, indeed, that she could stop the course of mutual inclination, prevent Mr Winton from making love to Lady Jane,

or Lady Jane from listening. But what she could, and indeed ought to, have done, was to say plainly, "Meet where they will, it must not be in my house." Her duty to the Duke demanded this course of action. But it must be confessed that Lady Germaine was very independent—too independent for a woman—and that what she would not recognise was, that she had any duty at all to the Duke. He might be the head of society in the county, but what did Lady Germaine care? She laughed openly at the county society, and declared that she would as soon throw in her lot among the farmers of the district as among the squires, and that the Duke was an old—the pen of the historian almost refuses to record the language this daring lady used—an old humbug. She ventured to say this and lived. The Duke never knew how far she went, but he disapproved of her, and consid-

ered her an irreverent person. He would have checked his daughter's intimacy with her had he been able. But the Duchess did not see any harm in it. Her Grace's opinion was that a little enlivenment was what Jane wanted, and that even a slight exaggeration of gaiety would do her no harm. Lady Germaine's set was unimpeachable though it loved diversion, and diversion was above everything the thing necessary for Lady Jane. And there was this to be said for Lady Germaine, that the Duchess herself had the opportunity of stopping the Winton affair had she chosen. She must have seen what was going on. Poor Mr Winton could not conceal the state of mind in which he was; and as for Lady Jane, there was a certain tremor in her retired and gentle demeanour, a little outburst of happiness now and then, a liquid expression about the eyes, a softening of manner and coun-

tenance, which no mother's eyes could have overlooked. It was she who ought to have interfered. She could have controlled her own child no doubt, or she could have made it apparent to Mr Winton that his assiduities were disagreeable; but she did nothing of the sort. She had every appearance of liking the man herself. She talked to him apparently with pleasure, asked him his opinion, declared that he had excellent taste. After this why should Lady Germaine have been blamed? All she did was to form her society of the best materials she could collect. She was fond of nice people, and loved conversation. If men could talk pleasantly, and add to the entertainment of her household, when the time came for encountering the tedium of the country, she asked nothing about their grandfathers, nor even demanded whether they had a rent-roll, or money in the funds, or how they lived. Lively

young barristers, literary men, artists, people who it was to be feared lived on their wits, not to speak of those younger sons who are the plague of society, came and went about her house; which made it a house alarming to mothers, it must be allowed, but extremely lively, cheerful, and full of "go," which was what Lady Germaine liked. And as she openly professed that this was the principle upon which she went, the risks were at least patent and above-board which princesses royal were likely to meet with at her house.

It is now time to speak of the lover himself, who has hitherto been but hinted at. We must say, in the first place, that there was nothing objectionable about Mr Winton. He was not poor, nor was he *roturier*. He was a well-bred English gentleman, of perfectly good though not exalted family. On the Continent he

would have been said to belong to the *petite noblesse.* But after all it only wants an accession of fortune to make *la petite* into *la grande noblesse.* He was as far descended as any prince (which, indeed, may be said for the most of us), and had ancestors reaching up into the darkness of the ages. At least he had the portraits of these ancestors hanging up in the hall at Winton House; and unless they had existed, how could they have had their portraits taken? which is an unanswerable argument. Winton House itself was but a small place, it is true; but when his Indian uncle died and left him all that money, it was immediately placed in Mr Winton's power to make his house into a great one had he chosen; and for so rich a man to keep the old place intact was loyalty, or family pride, or at the worst eccentricity, and did by no means imply any shabbiness either

of mind or means. To make up for this he had a very handsome house in town, and there was no doubt at all on the question that he was a rich man, and able to indulge his fancy as he pleased. He would have been a perfectly good match for Lady Germaine's own daughter had she been old enough, or for Earl Binny's young ladies, or for almost any girl in the county, excepting always Lady Jane. She was the one who was out of his sphere. It was perfectly well known that the Duke would not hear of any son-in-law whose rank, or at least whose family, was not equal to his own, and it had long been a foregone conclusion with society that it was very unlikely Lady Jane would ever marry at all. Perhaps had Mr Winton fully foreseen the position, he would have retired too, before, as people say, his feelings were too much interested. But it is to be feared that the

idea did not occur to him until, unfortunately, it was too late.

Reginald Winton had been brought up in the most approved way at a public school, and at Oxford, and shaped into what was considered the best fashion of his time. It had been intended, as the old estate was insufficient to support two people, and his mother was then living, that he should go to the bar. But before he attained this end, the uncle's fortune, of which he had not the least expectation, fell down upon him suddenly, as from the skies. Then, of course, it was not thought necessary that he should continue his studies. He was not only rich, but very rich, and at the same time had all the advantages of once having been poor. He had no expensive habits. He did not bet, nor race, nor gamble; nor did he on the other hand buy pictures or curiosities, or sumptuous furniture (at least no more

than reason). He was full of intelligence, but he was not literary, nor over-learned, nor too clever. He was five feet ten, and quite sufficiently good-looking for a man of his fortune. He would have been favourably received in most families of gentry, nay, even of nobility, in England; but only not in the house of the Altamonts. Here was the perversity of fate. But he did not do it on purpose, nor fly at such high game solely because it was forbidden, as some people might have done. It is certain that he did not know who Lady Jane was when his heart was caught unawares. He took Lady Germaine aside and begged to be introduced to the young lady in white, without a suspicion of her greatness. It was at a moment when ladies wore a great deal of colour: when they had wreaths of flowers scrambling over their dresses and their heads, like a hedgerow in summer. Lady Jane's dress was white

silk, soft and even dull in tone. She had not a bow or a flower, but some pearls twisted in her smooth brown hair, which was not frizzy as nowadays, but shining like satin. She was seated a little apart with the children of the house, and to a man incapable of perceiving that this simple garment was of much superior value to many of the gayer fabrics round, she had the air of being economically as well as gracefully clothed. "How much better taste is that simple dress than all those furbelows!" he said. His opinion was, that she would turn out to be the rector's daughter. Lady Germaine gazed at him for a moment with the contempt which a woman naturally entertains for a man's mistake in this kind. "I like your simplicity," she said with fine satire which he did not understand;—and presented him on the spot to Lady Jane Altamont.

How Winton opened his eyes! But

there was no reason why he should withdraw, and acknowledge the Duke's daughter to be out of his sphere. On the contrary, he did his best to make himself agreeable. And from that time to this, when everybody could see things were coming to a crisis, he had never ceased in the effort. It was the first time —except by Lord Rushbrook, who had done it politically—that this noble maiden had been personally wooed. The sense that she was as other women, had come into her heart with a soft transport of sweetness, emancipating her all at once from those golden bonds of high sacrifice and duty in which she had believed herself to be bound. She had not rebelled against them; but when it appeared now that life might be happiness as well as duty, and that all its delights and hopes were possible to her as to others, the melting of all those icicles that had been

formed around her, flooded her gentle soul with tenderness. She was not easily wooed; for nothing could be less like the freedom of manners which makes it natural nowadays for a girl to advance a little on her side, and help on her lover, than the almost timid though always sweet stateliness with which Lady Jane received his devotion. It was a wonder to her, as it cannot be to young ladies who flirt from their cradles. Love! She regarded it with awe, mingled with a touched and surprised gratitude. She was older than a girl usually is when that revelation is first made to her, a fact which deepened every sentiment. Winton did not, could not, divine what was passing in that delicate spirit. But he felt the novelty, the exquisite, modest grace of his reception. He had not been without experience in his own person, and had known what it was to be "encouraged." But here he

was not encouraged. It was romance put into action for the first time, a love-making that was as new, and fresh, and miraculous, and incomprehensible, as if no one had ever made love before. And thus the flood of their own emotions carried the pair on; and if Winton had never paused to think how the Duke would receive his addresses, it may with still greater certainty be assumed that Lady Jane had never considered that momentous question. They went on, unawakened to anything outside their own elysium, which, like most other elysiums of the kind, was a fool's paradise.

It was Lady Germaine at last, as she had been the means of setting the whole affair in motion, who brought it to a climax. He had not confided in her in so many words—for, indeed, he was too much elevated and carried away by this growing passion to bring it to the com-

mon eye; but he had so far betrayed himself on a certain occasion when reference had been made to Lady Jane, that his hostess and friend burst through all pretences and herself dashed into the subject. "Reginald Winton," she said almost solemnly, "do you know what is before you? How are you going to ask the Duke of Billingsgate, that high and mighty personage, to give you his daughter? I wonder you are not ready to sink into the earth with terror."

"The Duke of Billingsgate?" cried the young man, with a gasp of dismay.

"To be sure; but I suppose you never thought of that," she said.

He grew paler and paler as he looked at her. "Do you know," he said, "it never occurred to me till this moment. But what do I care for the Duke of Billingsgate? I think of nothing, since you will have it, but *her*, Lady Germaine."

"Innocent! do you think I have not known that for the last two months? When you want to hide anything, you should not put flags up at all your windows."

"Have I put flags up?" He looked at her with colours flying and an illumination in his eyes. He was pleased to think that he had exposed himself and proclaimed his lady's charms in this way, like a knight-errant. "I hope I have not done anything to annoy her," he added, in a panic. "Lady Germaine, you will keep my secret till I know my fate."

"Oh, as for keeping your secret—— but from whom are you to know your fate, if I may ask?" Lady Germaine said.

Reginald blushed like a girl all over his face—or rather he reddened like a man, duskily, half angrily, while his eyes grew more like illuminations than ever. He drew a long breath, making a dis-

tinct pause, as a devout Catholic would do to cross himself, before he replied, "From whom? from *her;* who else?" with a glow of excitement and hope.

Lady Germaine shook her head. "Oh, you innocent!" she cried; "oh, you baby! If there is any other word that expresses utter simplicity and foolishness, let me call you that. *Her!* that is all very well, that is easy enough. But what are you to say to her father?—oh, you simpleton!—her father,—that is the question."

"I presume, Lady Germaine," said the lover, assuming an air of superior knowledge and lofty sentiment—"I presume that if I am so fortunate as to persuade *her* to listen to me—which, heaven knows, I am doubtful enough of!—that in that case her father——"

"Would be easy to manage, you think?" she said, with scornful toleration of his folly.

The young man looked at her with that

ineffable air of imbecility and vanity which no man can escape at such a crisis, and made her a little bow of acquiescence. Her tone, her air, made him aware that she had no doubt of his success in the first instance, and this gave him a sudden intoxication. A father! What was a father? If she once gave him authority to speak to her father, would not all be said?

"Oh, you goose!" said Lady Germaine again; "oh, you ignoramus! You are so silly that I am obliged to call you names. Do you know who the Duke of Billingsgate is? Simply the proudest man in England. He thinks there is nobody under the blood royal that is good enough for his child."

"And he is quite right! I am of the same opinion," said Winton; then he paused and gave her a look in which, notwithstanding his gravity and enthusiasm,

there was something comic. "But then," he added, "the blood royal, that is not always the symbol of perfection, and then——"

"And then——? You think, of course, that you have something to offer which a royal duke might not possess?"

"Perhaps," said Winton, looking at her again with a sort of friendly defiance; and then his eyes softened with that in which he felt himself superior to any royal duke or potentate; the something which was worthy of Lady Jane, let all the noble fathers in the world do their worst against him. He was not alarmed by all that Lady Germaine had said. Most likely he did not realise it. His mind went away even while she was speaking. She had heart enough to approve of this, and to perceive that Winton felt as a true lover ought to feel, but she was half provoked all the same, and anxious how it was all to turn out.

"Do be a little practical," she said; "try for a moment to leave her out of the question. What are you going to say to the Duke? That is what I want to know."

"How can I tell you?" said Winton; "how can I speak at all on such a subject? If I am to be so happy as to have anything at all to say to the Duke:—why, then—the occasion will inspire me," he added, after a pause. "I cannot even think now what in such circumstances I should say."

Lady Germaine gave up with a sigh all attempt to guide him. "Then I must just wash my hands of you," she said, with a sort of despair; "indeed, in any case I don't know what I could have done for you. I shall be blamed, of course. The Duke will turn upon me, I know; but, thank heaven, I have nothing to fear from the Duke, and I don't see what I can be said to have to do with the busi-

ness. You met only in the ordinary way at my house. I never planned meetings for you, nor schemed to bring you together. Indeed I never thought of such a thing at all. Lady Jane, who has refused the first matches in the kingdom, what could have led me to suppose that she would turn her eyes upon *you?*"

Now, though Winton said truly that he thought the Duke quite right in expecting the very best and highest of all things for his child, yet it was not in the nature of man not to be somewhat piqued when he heard himself spoken of in this tone of slight, and almost contempt. True, he would have desired for her sake to have more and finer gifts to lay at her feet, but still such as he was, was not, after all, so contemptible as Lady Germaine seemed to imply. He could not help a little movement of self-vindication.

"I am not aware on what ground you

can be blamed," he said, coldly, "since you are good enough to admit me to your society at all. Perhaps that was a mistake; and yet I don't know that I have done anything to shut the doors of my friends against me."

"This is admirable," said Lady Germaine; "you first, and the Duke afterwards. Never mind; you will probably come to yourself in half an hour or so, and beg my pardon. I give it you beforehand. But at the same time, let me advise you for your own good, to think a little what you are going to say to the Duke when you ask him for his daughter. It will not be so easy a matter as you seem to think. Oh yes, of course you are sorry for being rude to me—I was aware of that. Yes, yes, I forgive you. But pay attention to what I say."

Winton thought over this conversation several times in the course of the next

twenty-four hours, but his mind was very much occupied with another and much more important matter. He thought so much of Lady Jane that he had little time to spare for any consideration of her father. True, he himself was only a commoner of an undistinguished family; but he had the sustaining consciousness of being very well off—and dukes' daughters had been known to marry commoners before now without any special commotion on the subject. He was a great deal more occupied with the first steps in the matter than with any subsequent ones. He had to find out where Lady Jane was going, and to contrive to get invitations to the same places, for it was the height of the season, and they were all in London. The Duchess did not throw herself into the vortex. She went only to the best houses; she gave only stately entertainments, which the Duke made a point of;

therefore it was more difficult to go where Lady Jane was going than is usually the case with the ordinary Lady Janes of society. It took her lover most of his time to arrange these opportunities of seeing her, and at each successive one he made up his mind to determine his fate. But it is astonishing how many accidents intervene when such a decision has been come to. Sometimes it was an impertinent spectator who would obtrude himself or herself upon them. Sometimes it was the impossibility of finding a nook where any such serious conversation could be carried on. Sometimes the frivolity of the surrounding circumstances kept him silent; for who would, if he could help it, associate that wonderful moment of his existence with nothing better than the chatter of the ball-room? And once when every circumstance favoured him, his heart failed and he did not dare to put his fortune to the

touch. How could he think of the father while in all the agitation of uncertainty as to how his suit would be looked upon by the daughter? During this moment of hesitation the Duchess herself once asked him to dinner, and when he found himself set down in the centre of the table, far from the magnates who glittered at either end, and far from Lady Jane who was the star of the whole entertainment, Winton felt his humility and insignificance as he had never felt them before, and was conscious of such a chill of doubt and alarm as made his heart sink within him. But the Duchess was markedly kind, and a glance from Lady Jane's soft eyes, suffused with a sort of liquid light, sent him up again into a heaven of hope. Next morning they met by chance in the Park, very early, before the world of fashion was out of doors. She was taking a walk attended by her maid, and explained, with a great

deal of unnecessary embarrassment, that she missed her country exercise and had longed for a little fresh air. The consequence was, that the maid was sent away to do some small commissions, and, with a good deal of alarm but some guilty happiness, Lady Jane found herself alone with her lover. It did not require a very long time or many words to make matters clear between them. Did she not know already all that he had wanted so long to say? One word made them both aware of what they had been communicating to each other for months past. But though this explanation was so soon arrived at, the details took a long time to disentangle—and there was a terrible amount of repetition and comparison of feelings and circumstances. It was nearly the hour for luncheon when he accompanied her home, with a heart so full of exultation and delight and pride, that it had still no room for any thought of the

Duke or fear of what he might say. Even after he had parted from his love, Winton could not withdraw his mind from its much more agreeable occupation to think of the Duke. Jane had begged that she might tell her mother first, and that he should wait to hear from them before taking any further step. But he was to meet them that evening at one of the parties to which he had schemed to be invited on her account. And with every vein thrilling with his morning's happy work, and the anticipation of seeing her who was now his, in the evening, how could any young lover be expected to turn from his happiness to the thought of anything less blessed? The day passed like a dream; everything in it tended towards the moment in which he should see her again. It would be like a new world to see her again. When they met in the morning she was almost terrible to him, a

queen who could send him into everlasting banishment. When he met her now, he would see in her his wife, wonderful thought, his own! The place of meeting was in one of the crowds of London society, where all the world is; but Winton saw nothing except those soft eyes which were looking for him. How their hands met, in what seemed only the ordinary greeting to other people, clasping each other as if they never could part again! They did not say much, and she did not even venture, except by momentary glance now and then, to meet his eye. There was scarcely even opportunity for a whisper on his part to ask what he was to do; for as he stooped for this purpose to Lady Jane's ear, the Duchess, who was looking very serious, but who had not refused to shake hands with him, laid a finger upon his arm.

"Mr Winton," she said, "I should like

to see you to-morrow about twelve. I have something to say to you." She had looked very grave, but at the end brightened into a smile, yet shook her head. "I don't know what to say to you," she added hurriedly; "there will be dreadful difficulties in the way."

To-morrow at twelve! He seemed to tread upon difficulties and crush them under his feet as he went home that evening; but with the morning a little thrill of apprehension came.

CHAPTER IV.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

THAT morning, Winton went with his heart beating to Grosvenor Square. He was not overawed by the stately stillness of the place, the imposing dim vacancy of the suite of rooms through which he was led to the Duchess's boudoir. He had a fine house himself, and everything handsome about him, and he did not feel that Lady Jane would make any marked descent either in comfort or luxury should she abandon these gilded halls for his. To tell the truth, he thought the gilding was overdone, not to say a little tarnished and

in questionable taste; but that was the fault of the time in which it was executed. He was so little alarmed that he could notice all this. He had seen those rooms before only in the evening, when they were full of company, and looked very different from now, when they lay, in the freshness of the morning, all empty and silent, the windows open, and the sun-blinds down, and nobody visible. Naturally the lover looked, as he passed through the apartment in which his lady lived, for some trace of her habitual occupation. Was that hers, that little chair by the window, the table with work on it, and some books, and a single rose in a glass? He would have taken the rose on the chance, if that solemn personage in front of him had not kept within arm's length. There was a portrait of her on the wall; but it did not, of course, do her justice, indeed was an unworthy daub, as anybody could see. Thus he stepped

through one room after another, treading on air, his heart beating, not with apprehension, but with soft excitement and happiness. She should have a better lodging than this, rooms decorated expressly for her, pictures of a very different kind; her home should be worthy of her, if any mortal habitation could ever be worthy of such a beautiful soul. In his progress across the ante-room and the two great drawing-rooms, all this went through his mind. Thoughts go so quickly. He even arranged the pictures, selected with lightning-speed what would suit her best, decided that a Raphael—it must be a Raphael—should hang upon the walls of the shrine in which his saint was to be specially set: while he walked on, glancing with a half-smile of contempt at the Duke of Billingsgate, K.G., in his peer's robes, on one side, and a Duchess-Dowager in a turban, on the other. Good heavens! to

think of such hideous daubs surrounding Jane! But in the new home all should be altered. His heart had palpitated with anxiety yesterday before he knew how she would receive his suit — but to-day! To-day he had no anxiety at all, only an eager desire to get the preliminaries over, and to see her, and make her decide when It was to be. There was no reason why they should wait. He was not a young barrister (as he might have been but for that uncle—bless him!—whose goodness he had never duly appreciated till now) waiting for an income. He was rich, and ready to sign the settlements to-morrow. At the end of the season, just long enough to be clear of St George's, and make sure of a pretty quiet country church to be married in, time enough by turning half the best workmen in London into it, and devoting himself to *bric-a-brac* with all his energies, to turn his little house at Winton

into a lady's bower. What more was wanted? He had everything arranged in his mind before the groom of the chambers, entering on noiseless feet, and with a voice like velvet, informed her Grace that "Mr Winton" was about to enter. The Duchess received him with benignity just terminated with stateliness. She had never, he thought, been so beautiful as Jane. Perhaps in the majority of cases it is difficult to believe that a woman of fifty has been as beautiful as her daughter of twenty-eight. And it was true enough in this case. But nobody could deny that she had a face full of fine sense and feeling. It looked somewhat troubled as well as very serious to-day. Winton, however, was ready to allow that his gain would be this lady's loss, and that perhaps the Duchess was not so anxious to get rid of her only daughter as parents generally are understood to be.

"Sit down, Mr Winton," she said. She had not risen from her own chair, but sat behind her writing-table, which was laden with papers, and across this barrier held out her hand to him, and gave him a benign but somewhat distant smile. "I ought to apologise," she added after a moment, "for giving you the trouble of coming to me."

"The trouble! but it is my business. I should have asked to see the Duke if you had not so kindly given me this opportunity—first. I hope I may speak to the Duke afterwards if I have the happiness to satisfy you. You may be sure I can think of nothing else till this is all settled."

"All settled?" she said, with a little shake of her head. "You are young and confident, Mr Winton; you think things settle themselves so easily as this. But I fear the preliminaries will be more lengthened than you suppose. Do you know, I

wish very much you had consulted me before speaking to Jane."

"Why?" he asked, fixing his eyes upon her with an astonished gaze. Then he added, "I know Lady Jane is a great lady, a princess royal. She is like that. I am a little democratic myself, but I acknowledge in her everything that is beautiful in rank. She should be approached like a crowned head."

"Not quite that perhaps," said the Duchess, smiling.

"With every observance, every ceremony; but then," he added, "that is not the English fashion, you know, to ask others first. One thinks of her, herself as the only judge."

The Duchess continued to shake her head. "That is all very well with ordinary girls, but Jane's position is so exceptional. Mr Winton, I hope you will not be disappointed or annoyed by what I tell you.

Had you asked me, I should have said to you, No."

"No!" he repeated vaguely, looking into her face. He could not even realise what her meaning was.

"I should have said, Don't do it, Mr Winton, for your own sake."

Winton rose up in the excitement of the moment and stood before her like a man petrified. "Don't do it! Do you mean —— Pardon me if I am slow of understanding."

"I mean, seeing it had unfortunately come about that, without being able to help it, you had fallen in love with Jane——"

"Unfortunately!"

"You do nothing but repeat my words," the Duchess cried in a plaintive tone. "It *is* unfortunately—but hear me out first. If you had spoken to me I should have said, Try and get over it, Mr

Winton; don't disturb her, poor girl, by telling her. Try if a little trip to America, or tiger-shooting, or to be a 'Times' correspondent, or some other of those exciting things which you young men do nowadays, will not cure you. I should have said, You have not known her very long, it cannot have gone very deep. I tell you this to show you what my advice would have been had you asked me before speaking to Jane."

"But it is of no use speculating upon what we should have done in an imaginary case," said Winton. He had awoke from his first bewilderment, and began to understand vaguely that everything was not going to be easy for him as he had once thought. "You see I *have* spoken to her," he said. "You frighten me horribly; but then it is of no use considering what you would have done in a totally different case."

The Duchess sighed and shook her head. "That is what I should have thought it my duty to say, in view of all the pain and confusion that are sure to follow. Do you know, Mr Winton, that her father will never listen to you — never!" she said, with a sudden change of tone.

Winton dropped upon his chair again and stared at her with an anxious countenance. "I knew—I was told—that the Duke would not be easy to please. And quite right! I agree with his Grace. I am not half good enough for her; but then," he added after a pause, "nobody is. If there is one man in the world as worthy as she is, neither the Duke nor any one knows where to find him; and then," he continued, in tones more insinuating still, "it would not matter now. If that hero were found to-morrow, she would not have him, for—she has chosen me! I allow

that it is the most wonderful thing in the world!" said the lover, in a rapture which became him; "but you will find it is true. She has chosen me!"

"It may be very true," said the Duchess, shaking her head more and more, "but the Duke will not pay much attention to that. I am afraid it is not moral excellence he is thinking of. It would be hard, I allow, to find anybody as good as Jane. Probably if we did, he would turn out to be some poor old missionary or quite impossible person. I am afraid that is not at all what her father is thinking of."

"Then tell me what it is. I am not Prince Charming—but the Wintons have been settled at Winton since the Conquest, and I am very well off. The settlements should be—whatever you wish."

"Don't promise too much," said the Duchess, with a smile, "for no doubt you

have got a family lawyer who will be of a very different opinion; indeed I hope you have, if that is your way of doing business. But, alas! the Duke will not be satisfied, I fear, even with that."

"Then what, in the name of heaven!—I beg you a thousand pardons, Duchess. I don't know what I am saying. I have no title, to be sure. Is it a title that is necessary?"

"I can't tell you what is necessary," said the Duchess, with a tone of impatience. "The Duke is — well, the Duke is her father; that is all that is to be said. He will never listen to your proposal—never! That is why I should have said to you, Don't make it. Leave her in her tranquillity, poor girl."

"But——" Winton cried. He did not know what more to say—a protest of all his being, that was the only thing of which he was capable.

"But ——" the Duchess repeated. "Yes, Mr Winton, there is always a but. To tell the truth, I am not so very sorry that you did not ask me after all. I should have been obliged to tell you what I have now told you. But since you have taken it into your own hands, I am rather glad. If her father had his way, Jane would never be married at all. Oh, don't be so enthusiastic; don't thank me so warmly! I have done nothing for you, and I don't know what I can do for you."

"Everything!" said Winton. "With you to back us, it is impossible that anything can prevail against us. The Duke's heart will melt; he will hear reason."

A faintly satirical smile came upon the mouth of the Duke's wife, who knew better than anybody how much was practicable in the way of making him hear reason. But she did not say anything.

She let the lover talk. He went on with the conviction natural to his generation—that all these medieval prejudices were fictitious, and paternal tyranny a thing of the past.

"Cruel fathers," said Winton, "are things of the middle ages. I am not afraid of them any more than I am of the Castle Spectre. The Duke will rightly think that I am a poor sort of a fellow to ask his daughter from him. I ought to have been something very different—better, handsomer, cleverer."

"You are not at all amiss, Mr Winton," said the Duchess, with a gracious smile.

He made her a bow of acknowledgment, and his gratification was great—for who does not like to be told that he is considered a fine fellow? But he went on. "All this I feel quite as much as his Grace can do. The thing in my favour is that Jane——" the colour flew over his

face as he called her so, and her mother, though she started slightly, acknowledged his rights by a little bow of assent, somewhat solemnly made,—"that Jane——" he went on repeating the sweet monosyllable, "does not mind my inferiority—is satisfied, the darling——" Here his happiness got into his voice as if it had been tears, and choked him. The Duchess bent her head again,

"To me that is everything," she said.

"How could it be otherwise?" cried the young man; "it *is* everything. I have no standing-ground, of course, of my own; but Jane—loves me! It is far too good to be true, and yet it is true. The Duke will not like it, let us allow; but when he sees that, and that she will not give up, but be faithful—faithful to the end of our lives—— Dear Duchess, I have the greatest veneration for your Grace's judgment, but in this point one

must go by reason. Life is not a melodrama. So long as the daughter is firm the father must yield."

He gave forth this dogma with a little excitement, almost with a peremptory tone, smiling a little in spite of himself at the tradition in which even this most sensible of duchesses believed. Perhaps a great lady of that elevated description is more liable than others to believe that the current of events and the progress of opinion have little or no effect upon the race, and that dukes and fathers are still what they were in the fifteenth century. He, this fine production of the nineteenth, was so certain of his opinion, that he could not feel anything but a smiling indulgence for hers. On the other side, the Duchess was more tolerant even than Winton. His certainty gave her a faint amusement —his gentle disdain of her a lively sense of ridicule; but this was softened by her

sympathy for him, and profound and tender interest in the man whom Jane loved. She was a little astonished, indeed—as what parent is not?—that Jane should have loved this man precisely, and no other; but as the event called forth all her affection for her woman-child, it threw also a beautifying reflection upon Jane's lover. On the whole, she was satisfied with his demeanour personally. It is not every man who will show his sentiments in a way which satisfies an anxious mother. The Duchess, however, was pleased with Winton. His look and tone when he spoke of her daughter satisfied her. He was fond enough, adoring enough, reverential enough to content her; and how much this was to say!

"Well," she said, "we will hope you may be right, Mr Winton. You know men and human nature, no doubt, better

than I do, who am only about twice your age," she added, with a soft little laugh. "Anyhow, I wish with my whole heart that you may prove to be right. The only thing is, that it will be prudent not to speak to the Duke now. Don't cry out—I know I am right in this. In town he is never quite happy; there are many things that rub him the wrong way. He sees men advanced whom he thinks unworthy of it, and others left out. And he thinks society is out of joint, and cannot quite divest himself of the idea that he, or rather we, were born to set it right." All this the Duchess said with a little half-sigh between the sentences, and yet a faint sense of humour, which gave a light to her countenance. "But in the country things go better. If he is ever to be moved, as you say, by love and faithfulness, and such beautiful things, it will be in his own kingdom, where

nobody thwarts him and he has everything his own way."

Winton's countenance fell at every word. What! he who had come hither with the intention of persuading Jane to decide when it should be, was he to go away without a word—to be hung up indefinitely, to be no farther advanced than yesterday? His whole heart cried out against it, and his pride and all that was in him. He grew faint, he grew sick with anger, and disappointment, and dismay. "That means," he said, "complete postponement; that means endless suspense. I think you want me to give up altogether; you want to crush the life out of us altogether!"

"Of course you will be unjust," said the Duchess—"I was prepared for that; and ungrateful. I am advising what is best for you. The Duke, I believe, is in the library. He is the pink of polite-

ness; he will see you at once, I feel sure, if you ask for an interview; but in that case you will never darken these doors again. You will be shut out from all intercourse with Jane. The whole matter will be ended as abruptly and conclusively as possible. I know my husband; you will not have time to say a word for yourself. You can take what course you think best, Mr Winton. What I say to you is for your good; and in the meantime, if you do as I wish, everything that I can do for you I will do."

The young man sat and listened to these words in mingled exasperation and dismay. As she spoke of the Duke in his library, Winton's heart jumped up and began to thump against his side. Oh yes, it might be decided fast enough. Evidently he could have an answer without fail or suspense on the spot. He sat and gazed at her blankly in such a dilemma as he had never known before. What

would Jane think of him if he submitted? What would she say if he insisted, and got only failure and prohibition for his pains? The Duchess, it was evident, was not speaking lightly. She knew what she was talking about. She wished him well—too well to let him go on to his destruction. But, on the other hand, there was the postponement of all his hopes, a sickening pause and uncertainty, a blank quenching of expectation. He could do nothing but stare at the Duchess while she spoke, and for some time after. What was he to answer her? How calmly these old people sit on their height of experience, and look down half smiling upon the frets and agitation of the young ones! What was it to her that he—even that Jane, who naturally was of far more importance—should suffer all these pangs of suspense? Probably she would smile, and say that life was long, and what did it

matter for a month or two? A month or two! It would be like a century or two to them. Sometimes Winton resolved that he would not be silenced; that he would go and have it out with the Duke, who, after all, was Jane's father, and could not wish his child to be unhappy. And then again, as she went on laying the alternative before him, his heart would fail him. He changed his mind a hundred times while she was speaking, and after she had ended, still gazed on her, with his heart in his mouth.

"I don't wish," he said at last, "to do anything rash. I will submit to anything rather than run any risks. But how are we to bear the delay? How am I to bear it? and it will be deception as well! I don't see how I am to do it. Do you mean me to give her up all the time—go tiger-shooting, as you were good enough to suggest?"

"Well — there would be no harm in that," said the Duchess, with a smile; "but I did not suggest it in the present circumstances. I said, if you had spoken to me first—I ask you to wait a month —perhaps two" (this addition, made as it seemed in *gaieté de cœur*, with rather a pleasant sense of the exasperation it would produce in him, called forth a muttered exclamation, a groan from the victim) — "or perhaps two at the most," the Duchess repeated; "whereas tiger-shooting would take six at least. But, Mr Winton, I repeat, I force you to nothing. There is the bell, and the Duke is in the library. Ring it if you will, and ask him to see you; he will not refuse."

Winton rose slowly and went towards the bell. But he had not the courage to take this extreme step. "I suppose I may see her sometimes?" he said; "but it will be a kind of treachery."

"Her mother does not object; the case is an extreme one," said the Duchess, though she blushed a little at her own sophistry. "What he does not know will not do him any harm."

"It will be deception," said Winton, shaking his head, and he made another step towards the bell. Then he turned back again. "How often may I see her? If we take your way, you will not be hard upon us?" he said.

"But it will be deception," said the Duchess, solemnly.

"I know that; that is what revolts me. Still, as you say, what he does not know will not do him any harm."

The Duchess laughed, and then she grew grave suddenly. "Mr Winton, I feel as if I were betraying my husband; but at the present moment my child has the first claim upon me. It is her hap-

piness that is at stake. I will not prevent you from meeting — you are both old enough to know your own minds. I will do nothing to put off Jane from a woman's natural career. It is doing evil, perhaps, that good may come; but we must risk it. Come here, but not too often: I will take the responsibility; and when we go to Billings, Lady Germaine will invite you, and you can try your fortune then. I will prepare the way as much as I can. I don't give you great hopes when all is done," she said, shaking her head.

"And after?" said Winton, turning once more with a kind of desperation towards the bell.

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," said the Duchess, piously.

But oh, the difference when he walked out crestfallen through all the big drawing-

rooms! Not a word about when It was to be. No sort of arrangement, consultation, possible. Everything had seemed so near when he came—so near that he could almost touch it. Now everything had been pushed far off into the vague. He had seen Jane indeed, but in her mother's presence, which made her happy enough, but him only partly happy. Was this how it was to be? The Duchess indeed was writing at her table, taking no notice of them. But still it was very different from what he had hoped. He did not perceive the bad pictures or the over-gilding as he went away. The place looked like a prison to him, and was dark and stifling. Lady Jane indeed accompanied him through the rooms. She gave him the rose which he had thought of stealing as he came, and told him all their engagements for a week in advance.

"You will be sure to go wherever we are going," she said, and called him Reginald with a blush and a tone of sweetness that went straight to his heart. But nevertheless his disappointment, he thought, was almost more than he could bear.

CHAPTER V.

THE ANTICIPATIONS OF LADY JANE.

Lady Jane, it will easily be understood, did not look upon the matter at all from the same point of view. A girl, however much she may be in love, is seldom anxious for a peremptory marriage such as—when there is no great sacrifice involved—suits the bolder sex. She loves to play with her happiness, to prolong the sweet time when, without any violent breach of other habits, even any change of name, she can enjoy the added glory of this crown of life. She accompanied Winton through the great silent rooms,

with a sense of perfect, quiet happiness which was exactly in accordance with the summer morning—the fresh soft air in which there was no sunshine, but a flood of subdued light, and in which every sound had a tone of enchantment, though not music. It suited her gentle nature to dwell in such an atmosphere of delicate delight, which had no fact to vulgarise it, but only an ecstasy of feeling. She was disappointed to find that he was less satisfied, less happy. And he would have been angry to see that she was so happy. Such are the differences between those most near to each other. He kissed the rosebud and her hands as, with a sense of daring beyond words, she put it into his coat; but he wanted something more. Yes, he could have been angry with her; he felt a desire to say something brutal. "How can you be satisfied to deceive your father?" he asked. "It will be

clandestine——" He had the cruelty to say this, though next moment he was horrified, and begged her pardon, metaphorically on his knees.

"Clandestine!" she said, with a little surprise—she made allowance for a man's rough way of speaking — "oh no; my father has never entered into all the circumstances. So long as my mother approves——"

"But," Winton cried, in his ferocity, "suppose he refuses his consent at last, as the Duchess thinks, will you venture to oppose him then, or will you send me away?"

"Ah, never that!" said Lady Jane, looking at him with her soft eyes. They were not brilliant eyes, but when she looked at him there came over them a certain liquid light, a melting radiance such as no words could describe. The light was love, and may be seen glorify-

ing many an unremarkable orb. It made hers so exquisite that they dazzled the beholder, especially the happy beholder who knew this was for him. But he was not satisfied even with that.

"Suppose," he went on, "that the Duke were to open that door and walk in now —as he has a good right to do, into his own drawing-room — what would come of it? Would you take your hand out of mine, and bid me good-bye like a stranger?"

Her hand indeed slid out of his at the suggestion, and a little tremor ran through her frame; but the next moment she raised her head and put her hand lightly within his arm. "If you think I am without courage!" she said—then added with a smile, "when it is necessary; but at present it is not necessary."

"Then you will not, whatever happens, give me up?—not even if the founda-

tions of the earth are shaken, not even if the Duke says 'No'?" he cried, partly furious, partly satirical, catching at the hand which was on his arm.

His violence gave her a little shock, and the savage satire of the tone in which he named her father distressed Lady Jane. "You must not speak so," she said, with her soft dignity: "the Duke is my father. But you do not know me if you think that anything will change me." Then indeed Winton felt a little ashamed of himself, and began to realise that he did not yet know all of this gentle creature who was going to be his wife. She parted with him at the door of the ante-room, and went back through her mother's boudoir to her own retirement. Next to being with the *objet aimé*, being alone is the purest happiness at this stage. She kissed her mother, who was busy at her writing-table, in passing. The Duchess was deep in cal-

culation, not how she should make her ends meet, which was impossible, but how near she could draw them together, so that the gap might be small. It is a sad and harassing business. She paused only a moment to pat her child on her soft cheek, and reflect within herself how beautifying was this love which in youth is full of enchantment and illusion, and then returned to her figures. When the ends will meet, what pleasure there is even in the pain of drawing them together! but when no miracle will do this, when there must always remain a horrible chasm between! Fifty remained thus at work in the finance department, while Twenty-eight went lightly away to think over her happiness. It must be allowed that Lady Jane was not quite young enough—she ought to have been but twenty, by rights; but her maturity only added to the exceeding fulness of her enjoyment. There

is something sweet in being awakened late; it prolongs the morning, it keeps the "vision splendid" a little longer in one's eyes. The unfulfilled even has a glory of its own, which people who are bigoted in belief of the ordinary canons of romance are slow to perceive. This preserved to Lady Jane, at an age when girlhood is over, its most perfect fragrance and charm.

Presently, however, the sweet vagueness of her anticipations began to open into other thoughts. She had been so preserved by her stately upbringing and the traditions which she had felt to centre in her, from knowledge of fact and the world, that she knew little at all about money, or the power it has to bridge over social differences. When she allowed her heart to go out to Reginald Winton, she did so with the most absolute conviction that it involved a great descent

in rank and abandonment of luxury. She would have to put off the coronet from her head, she believed, the princess royal's myrtle crown. She would have to learn a great many things, both to do and to do without. She had heard of Winton House, which was a small place; and probably she had heard of the house in town. But the latter had altogether dropped out of her mind, and she knew very well that a squire's little manor would be very different from Billings, and would require from its mistress an existence of a kind unknown to all her previous experiences. She would have to superintend her own household; if not to make her maids spin, according to the usage of old times, at least to direct the housemaids, and know how things ought to be done. Though her father was in reality much less rich than the man whom she had chosen for her hus-

band, she was entirely in the dark on this point, and her mind awoke to a sense of a hundred requirements of which she knew nothing. She had been like a star, and dwelt apart (if it is not profane to apply such words to a young lady of the nineteenth century) as much as any poet. But now love and duty bade her come down from these heights, and learn how people walk along the common ways. She addressed herself to this task without a grudge, with glad alacrity and readiness; but she was a little puzzled, it must be admitted, to know how to begin. The first person to whom she addressed herself (for naturally Lady Jane was shy of betraying her motive, or letting it be known that the inquiries she made were for her own benefit) was her maid, who was as superior a young person and as much like a waiting gentlewoman as it was possible

to find. Lady Jane was aware, of course, that Arabella's family (for this was the distinguished name she bore) were not in the same position as Mr Winton. But in that sad deficiency of perspective which we have already noted as one of the drawbacks of rank, she felt it possible that Arabella's knowledge of how life was conducted at her end of the social circle would be more useful than her own to Reginald Winton's wife. She opened the subject in, it must be avowed, a very uncompromising and artless way one evening, while Arabella stood behind her, partially visible in the large mirror before which she sat, brushing out her long and abundant hair. It was very fine and silky, and made very little appearance when smoothly wound round the back of her head; but when it was being brushed out it was like a veil, soft and dreamy and illimitable, spreading out

almost as far as the operator chose in a cloud of soft darkness — "like twilight, too, her dusky hair." A lady's-maid is very much wanting in the spirit of her profession if she is indifferent to the fact that her mistress has fine hair. Generally it is the thing of which she is most proud. And Arabella held this sentiment in the warmest way. Her scorn of chignons and of frizzing was indescribable. "You should just see my lady's hair when it is down," she would say, almost crying over the fact which she could not ignore, that the hair of many other ladies, when it was up, greatly exceeded in appearance and volume the soft locks of Lady Jane. It was while Arabella was employed in this way that her mistress, looking at her in the glass, said suddenly, "If you were going to be married, Arabella, what should you do to prepare for it? I want very much to know."

"My lady!" cried the girl, with a violent start. She let the brush fall from her hand with the fright it gave her, and then without any warning she began to cry. "Indeed, indeed, I never could make up my mind to leave your ladyship —not in a hurry like he wants me to— never! never! at least till you were suited," Arabella said.

"Oh!" cried Lady Jane, turning round, "then you really were thinking! I did not know of that, I assure you; I never thought of it. Are you really going to be married, Arabella?"

"It is none of my doing," the girl said; "indeed I told him I couldn't make up my mind to leave; but he says — you know, my lady, men find always a deal to say——"

"Do they?" said Lady Jane, with a soft laugh of sympathy. Yes, it was true—they had a deal to say: and then sometimes

when they were silent, that said still more. She paused upon this recollection, with a soft wave of pleasure going over her; and then—perhaps not so anxious to understand Arabella as to follow out her own thoughts—"Tell me," she said, "when you go away from me, Arabella—out of Billings and out of Grosvenor Square—into a little small house, how does it feel to you? Do you dislike it very much? Is it very wretched? I should like to know how you feel about it. One day here in these large rooms—and the next in a tiny little place, without servants, without any conveniences. It is only lately that I have thought about this, but I want to know. Nobody can tell me so well as you."

"Oh, my lady," cried Arabella, "don't you know without telling? Why, it's home! That makes all the difference; though it's a little place, yet it's your own."

Lady Jane's eyes still remained unsatisfied, though she said "To be sure" vaguely. "To be sure," she repeated; "but then here you have everything done for you, and everything is nice. You cannot have the same at home."

"No, my lady; but it's so nice and fresh there: no carpets or things to catch the dust—except in the parlour, but that is only for Sundays. The floors all so white and fresh; the plates and the dishes shining; the fire so cheerful. I can't deny," said Arabella, her tone of delight sinking to one of candid avowal, "that the parlour is—well, my lady, it is a dreadful little place; and poor mother is so proud of it!—it is not so nice as the room the under-housemaids have their tea in. I feel just as if I were one of the inferior servants when I sit there. But the kitchen: if your ladyship took a fancy to playing at being poor—like the

French queen did, you know, my lady—it would be quite nice enough even for you."

"You should not say 'like the French queen did'; that is bad grammar," said Lady Jane, softly. "I shan't play at being poor, Arabella, but perhaps some day—— All this you have been saying is about your home, but that was not what I asked. If you were going to be married, what would you do? You could not keep any servants; you would have to do all sorts of things yourself. Do you think it will be a dreadful sacrifice to make?"

Arabella gave her lady's hair a few tugs, perhaps unconsciously to hide a little emotion, perhaps with a little gentle indignation at her mistress's humble estimate of her prospects. "It is not so low as you think, my lady," she said. "He is a careful young man that has saved a little, and can give me a nice home and

keep me a servant. I'll have no dirty work to do nor need to soil my fingers. He thinks, like your ladyship, that it will be a great sacrifice; but what can a girl have better, mother says, than a good steady husband and a nice home? and I think so too."

Lady Jane smiled with gentle sympathy. "And so do I, Arabella. Still that is not the question I was asking. It will be a small house, I suppose, and one little maid? And I suppose you will have many things to do, and to live with——" Here she paused, blushing for her own want of perception. "You are accustomed to things very much the same as mine," she continued softly, "and it must be different. How will you put up with it—or shall you not mind? Only a few little rooms, perhaps, to live in."

"Oh, my lady," said Arabella, "a few! We shall have a little parlour, where I

can sit in the afternoons. What could any one wish for more? Your ladyship yourself, or even the Duchess, though you have all the castle to choose from, you can't sit in more than one room at a time. And it has often surprised me, my lady, to see how, with all those beautiful drawing-rooms and all their grand furniture, your ladyship and the Duchess will prefer quite a little bit of a place to sit in. Look at the morning-room at the castle!—and her Grace's boudoir here is quite small in comparison. I can't see that it will make much difference to me."

"That is a very just observation, Arabella," said Lady Jane; "I wonder I never thought of it before. Nobody can sit in more than one room at a time, it is quite true; that is all one really needs. I am very much obliged to you for putting it so clearly."

"Yes, my lady," said Arabella, with a little curtsey of acknowledgment. She was pleased, but not so much surprised as might have been expected. She was fond of her mistress, and had a great reverence for her in her way, but she was aware that in practical matters she herself was far more likely to be right than Lady Jane. And then she proceeded on her own account to give many particulars which were very satisfactory to herself, and inspired her mistress with great interest, but threw no further light upon the point which occupied her mind. She smiled to herself afterwards, with a mixture of sympathy and amusement, to think that Arabella was going to be married *too*. But in the meantime this new view as to the number of rooms which were indispensable, did her a great deal of good, and threw much light upon the chief subject of her thoughts.

Her next inquiries were addressed to a very different kind of counsellor. It was well for Lady Jane that she was not on womanly confidential terms with her sister-in-law, or it would have been very difficult to keep the secret of her love from that acute observer; as it was, the curiosity of Susan was much awakened by some of her questions. She asked her, "What do girls in the other classes do when they are preparing for their marriage?" Lady Jane would not say the lower classes, partly lest she might offend Lady Hungerford, partly because of a delicate sense she had that deficiency of any kind should not be made a mark for those who suffered under it. Lady Jane's politeness was such that among blind people she would have thought it right to assume that blindness was the common rule of life, and to suppress in her talk any invidious distinction of herself as a person who saw.

"What do they do when they are preparing for their marriage? Why, dear, they generally spend most of their time, and far too much of their thoughts, in buying their wedding clothes."

"That is so in all classes," said Lady Jane; "but still that cannot be everything. Some must be bent upon doing their best in their new life. Those, for instance, who have not much money."

"I am afraid I cannot tell you," said Susan, "for I never was in that predicament. My people, you know, were vulgar, and it was a great rise in the world for me, of course, to marry Hungerford."

"I do not think you have ever thought it that," said Lady Jane.

"Haven't I? I ought to have, then. It *was* a great rise; but my people were never poor. A good girl who is going to marry a clerk, or that sort of thing, buys a cookery-book, I believe, and has

her husband's slippers warmed for him when he comes home. She finds out all the cheap shops, and puts down her expenses every day in a book. That is all I know."

"I was not thinking of a clerk's wife. I was thinking rather of a gentleman—in the country, for instance — not great people, but perfectly *nice*, and as — as good as ourselves, you know. If a girl wanted very much to do her duty, I wonder what she would do?"

"It would depend very much upon her husband's requirements, I should say. If he was a fox-hunter, she would probably ride a great deal, and find out all about horses and dogs; if he was studious, she would pay a little attention to books. All that wears off after a little time," said Lady Hungerford. "But at the beginning, when a girl is not used to it, and is making experi-

ments, she takes up all her husband's fads, and attempts to humour him. By-and-by, of course, everything finds its level, and she lets him alone and follows her own way."

"You think, then, that it does not make much difference what one does," said Lady Jane.

"What one does! You do not mean yourself, I suppose? Crown princesses are above all that sort of thing; they are too magnificent for human nature's daily food. You will be married by proxy, no doubt, when the time comes, in Westminster Abbey."

"Which means I shall never be married at all," said Lady Jane, with subdued pleasure and a delightful sense of her own superior knowledge. She smiled with such a tender softness that her lively sister-in-law, who, if not formed in a very delicate mould, was yet capable of kind

impulse, and clever enough to understand the superiority of the spotless creature beside her, had a moment of shame and self-reproach.

"If you are not, it will be all the worse for somebody," she said. "When I was married I used to watch Hungerford to find out what he wanted me to do; but I soon tired of that, for he never wanted me to do anything. Most men like you to strike out your own line, and never mind them. That is why I say everything finds its level. The most dreadful thing in the world is a woman who is always studying to do her duty, and watching her husband to anticipate his wishes. They don't like to have their wishes anticipated. They like to state them honestly, and have the satisfaction of getting what they want. They are strange creatures, men. The best thing is to strike out your own line, and never interfere with theirs.

It is always most satisfactory in the end."

Lady Jane made no answer to this, except by a little sigh, in which Lady Hungerford, to her great astonishment, noticed an impatient sound. "What is it you want to know?" she said. "Why are you asking me such questions?" But Lady Jane made no reply. She had got a little enlightenment from Arabella, but none from this woman of the world. How to manage her husband was not a question which disturbed her. The clerk's wife studying the cookery-book pleased her more than the lady who first tried to humour her husband's fads, and then struck out her own line. In such a person the sweet and true but not too lively intelligence of Lady Jane had little interest. She dwelt on the other with a tender sympathy. After all, it was not entirely in the light of the husband that

she regarded this new life. She wanted to put herself in tone with it, to understand its requirements for herself as well as for him. She retired into her own chamber and thought it out in the quiet which, even in London, is possible in a great house. It would not be possible, perhaps, to have every room cushioned and every noise stopped before it reached her, as here. Lady Jane imagined herself stepping down into a world of noise and bustle, and duties quite unknown to her. It would be her business to bring harmony out of that; not to confront the guillotine, as she once thought, but perhaps to do something even harder, to overcome the petty and small, even the sordid perhaps, and show what her order was capable of, and what a thing it was to be a woman. A soft enthusiasm filled her for those unknown, humble duties. As for giving up, what was there to give

up? Arabella's philosophy gave her a shield against every suggestion of loss. You can't sit in more than one room at a time, if you have a hundred to choose from. To think that a girl like that should find the true solution of the parable without knowing anything about it, which the wisest shook their heads over! Lady Jane, with that enlightenment, did not feel the least fear. Next time she was out without supervision, she drove to a bookseller's and bought all the books she could find upon household economy. 'How to Live on Three Hundred a-Year' was one of these volumes. With this she did not quite sympathise, feeling it too fine and elaborate. Her instinct told her that domestic economy, to be beautiful, must be more spontaneous and not so laboured, and that some things were tawdry, and some sordid, in the arrangements laid down. She

thought over the problems in these books with great conscientiousness. She thought a French cook would be much the best to start with, for they were so economical. She thought plate would be the cheapest thing to use, since it never breaks. But with a few mistakes of this kind, which were inevitable, and which experience would set right in three months, Lady Jane made herself out a beautiful programme for her behaviour as a poor man's wife. It gave her a sense of elation to feel that at the least she could do something, and qualify herself for fulfilling a heroic destiny. She was quite unconscious of either downfall or humiliation.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ART OF STRATEGY.

BUT the Duchess's thoughts were of a more serious kind, and it was she who through all had the most difficult part to play.

Perhaps five or six years before, when Lady Jane was in the first bloom of womanhood, her mother would have thought but little of Reginald Winton as a husband for her child. She would have preferred, need it be said, another set of strawberry-leaves; or even an earl with a good estate would have seemed to her a more suitable match. But as the years

went on, and it became apparent to her that what with Lady Jane's own visionary stateliness, and the known folly of her father, it was quite possible that there might be no match for her daughter at all, her ideas were sensibly modified. It did not seem to her at all desirable that Lady Jane should remain Lady Jane for ever. The Duchess had experienced no absolute blessedness in life. Her husband had given her infinite trouble, her son had by no means realised her ideal, and her daughter had gone beyond it, and sometimes vexed her as much by very excellence as Hungerford did by his commonplace nature. But still she thought it better to be thwarted and disappointed at the head of a family, than to sicken of solitude and pine out of it. She thought the same for her daughter; though indeed Lady Jane's character would have lent itself much better to the

maiden state than that of her more practical and active-minded mother. She had, too, a still more stringent reason, not of an abstract character at all. She knew that some time or other a crash must come. The Duke had never denied himself in his life, and he was not likely, of his own free will, to begin now. But as everything has to be paid for sooner or later, one way or another, she knew very well the time was coming when their fictitious fortunes would collapse, and it would be known to all the world that their income was not enough to support them, and that they were burdened with debts which they could not pay. And indeed it often seemed to her that she would be glad when the crash came—except for Jane. Notwithstanding her desire that it should come and be done with, she was ready to fight with all her strength to keep it off till Jane should

be out of its reach. And Winton, she felt, had stepped in in the very nick of time. She was under no delusion such as filled the mind of her daughter about Winton's poverty. She knew exactly what his standing was, and that though he was not a brilliant match, he was good enough for any girl, however exalted, who had no fortune to speak of, of her own. He was more satisfactory in appearance, and manners, and character, than three-fourths of the eligible men in England, and in fact he was himself eminently eligible, a man whom no parent (in full possession of his senses) could possibly despise. The Duke was not in full possession of his senses on this point, but his wife could not see the justice of allowing her daughter's future to be spoiled by this partial insanity on the part of her husband. It is a fine thing for a wife to obey her husband, but the Duchess

was perhaps a little impatient of the yoke. She had never gone against him, save for his good. She had submitted sorrowfully to the consequences of his follies when she found herself powerless to restrain them. But she said to herself almost sternly that she would not allow Jane to be ruined. Let him say what he would, this excellent husband, this good, nice, well-off man should not be repulsed. If she could persuade the Duke to hear reason, so much the better; but if not—— But she did not like domestic dissension and a breach of the decorums of life more than another, and the thought that she might be compelled to place herself in active opposition to her husband distressed her beyond measure.

The Duchess laid her plans with great and anxious care. She invited Winton to the few stately gatherings which were still to be held in Grosvenor Square, and

she threw him in the Duke's way, prompting him beforehand with subjects such as would please that arbiter of fate. It was no small trial of endurance for both Winton and Lady Jane, but the success of the attempt so far seemed great. The Duke noticed the genial commoner who was so ready to interest himself in his Grace's favourite subjects. He even asked, "Who is this Mr Winton?" with an interest which made the Duchess's heart beat. She gave a sketch of her *protégé* offhand, laying great stress upon the antiquity of his lineage. "Ah, oh," the Duke said indifferently. He was not impressed, nor did it make any difference to him that this gentleman, whose family had been settled for so many hundred years in their manor, had recently had a great accession of wealth. He asked no further questions about him, and yawned when the Duchess said

that she had thought of inviting him to form one of the usual autumn party at Billings. "Oh no, I have no objections," his Grace said; "there must always, I suppose, be a few nobodies to fill up the corners." This, after his transitory show of interest, was like a cold douche to the Duchess. But she did not allow herself to be dismayed. She managed, as a great lady can always manage, to get Winton a great number of invitations to her own magnificent circle, and threw him perpetually in her husband's way. Some of her friends and contemporaries more than suspected the Duchess's game. But she kept a brave and cheerful front to them all, and never allowed herself to be found out; and not only had she to contrive all this and baffle all beholders, but she had likewise a struggle to maintain even with the man whose cause she was up-

holding. He wanted, forsooth, to make quicker progress. He wanted to see more of his betrothed. He wanted to have it announced to all the world. He was more impracticable, more unreasonable than ever man was, although she was wearing herself out in efforts to help him. Lady Jane did not say a word, but she looked at her mother's proceedings with a gentle surprise, and high, silent wonder, keeping herself aloof from all the plottings, avoiding the subject altogether. It was all done for Jane, but Jane disapproved, and blamed her mother in her heart. This was the unkindest cut of all. Notwithstanding, the Duchess held by her point; there was no other way to do it. When she gave Winton her invitation to Billings, he received it in the most uncomfortable way. He coloured high; he rose up and paced about the room. "If I

am to come as an impostor, I would rather not come at all," he said; "if I may come as Jane's affianced——"

"How can that be, Mr Winton, unless her father gives his consent?"

To this Winton made no reply, except a peevish, "I cannot go on false pretences any more."

"You have met the Duke six times, without rushing at him with a request for his daughter! Is that what you call false pretences? Jacob served for Rachel seven years."

"Ah! and so would I; but he had it out with her father first. He did not hang about and profess to be there only for Laban's agreeable conversation; that makes all the difference."

"I think he could have stood that; he had a robust conscience," said the Duchess, with a smile. And then she added, "I am trying to do what I can

for you. If you will not agree, I cannot help it."

"I suppose I must agree. There does not seem anything else for me to do," he said; which was the most ungracious reply she ever had to that invitation, which was rarely extended to any one of so little importance. At Billings, Lady Germaine's principle of asking people who would amuse her was never resorted to. The people who were asked were very noble and splendid people, but they were not amusing as a rule. It was such a compliment to Winton as the uninitiated could not understand. But there were, of course, a great many people who knew better than the Duchess herself did the intention with which this invitation was given. Lady Hungerford, for instance, sitting quietly with her husband after dinner, having heard of it that morning, suddenly astonished him

by bursting out into a great fit of laughter. As nothing had been said to account for this, and Lord Hungerford's company of itself was not calculated to produce hilarity, he was much surprised, and at once requested to know what she was laughing about.

"Oh, it is nothing," she said. "Your mother is asking young Winton—the man, you know, who has that pretty house in Kensington — to go to Billings, for the shooting."

"Is that so very funny?" said Lord Hungerford.

"Don't you see, you thickhead?" said his wife, who was not, perhaps, so exquisite in her language as became her present rank; "she has taken it into her head that he will do for Jane, and she thinks by taking him down to Billings that she will get your father to consent."

"For Jane!" said Hungerford in dismay.

"That is your mother's little plan. But what amuses me is to see that she thinks she will get your father to consent."

But it did not appear that Hungerford found the same amusement in the thought. He was slow of intelligence, and took some time to master it. "For Jane!" he said at least half-a-dozen times over during the course of the evening: and when he next met his mother he proceeded at once to investigate the matter.

"What is this I hear about Regy Winton?" he said. "Susan tells me you are thinking of him for Jane."

"Susan is so well informed——" said the Duchess, with a little redness of indignation. "But I think you know Jane well enough to be aware that thinking of any one for her would not do much good."

"That is what I thought," Hungerford said, falling readily into the snare. "But

it wouldn't be at all a bad thing," he added, "if it could be brought about. He has plenty of money, and nothing against him; and Jane isn't quite so young as she was, don't you know?"

This was true enough; but that such a question should be discussed between her son and his wife made the Duchess's blood boil. "I am not so clever as Susan and you, Hungerford," she said, with fine satire. "You will manage your daughter's marriage, I don't doubt, a thousand times better than I shall ever manage mine."

"What has that to do with it?" Hungerford said, surprised, for he was not quick in his intellects. But he added, as he went away, "I should think Regy Winton would be a very good man for Jane."

The Duchess was very angry, and declined altogether to take her son into her confidence. But yet she was sustained

in her mind by this volunteered opinion, and went on with more boldness. They were all very glad to get out of London, as soon as the Duke thought it right to withdraw that support which he felt himself bound to give to the empire and the constitution by going to town every year. His countenance expanded as they left that limited world in which a duke is almost as a common man, and has to submit to see a simple commoner considered much more important than himself. He preferred the country, if for nothing else, on that score. There was space to move about in, and the whole district bowed down before him. He smoothed out even during the journey, though it was by railway, which is a levelling and impertinent way of travelling. The Duke's carriage had large labels of "engaged" plastered upon it. But still such a thing had been as that

a lawless traveller, a being without veneration or feeling, had seized upon the door-handle and attempted to make an entrance. Nevertheless, even with these drawbacks, the Duke already began to show the genial influence of going out of town. And to think that the wife of his bosom should have taken advantage of this in the disingenuous way she did! It was not absolutely on the journey, but on that first evening at home, when the noble pair took, as had been their habit since before any one could remember, a little stroll together after dinner in the cool of the evening under the ancestral shades; and just when his Grace had looked round him with a sigh of satisfaction, and announced that woods were better than bricks and mortar, which was a remark he made habitually in about the same spot, on about the same day of every year—

"That is very true," the Duchess said (as she always said on similar occasions), "and there are no trees like our own trees. I hope her native air," added the crafty woman, "will do something for Jane."

"For Jane! Is there anything the matter with Jane?" said her august papa.

"I felt sure you must have observed it; you are always so keen-sighted where Jane is concerned. I have thought she looked pale; and she has a little air of—what shall I call it?—preoccupation."

"I do not see," said the Duke, half indignantly, "what she can have to be preoccupied about."

"She has always been so tenderly cared for, that is true. But we must remember that she is no longer a girl, and there are thoughts which come into one's mind which it is difficult to avoid."

"What thoughts? A young lady in

Jane's position need have no thoughts that can give her any trouble. I hope that even in these revolutionary times, when everything is going to pieces, the house of Billings is still sufficiently secure for that."

"Yes, yes; there is no doubt on that question. Jane has no doubt," the Duchess said, correcting herself. "But there are problems, you know, which occupy the mind. It is a revolutionary age, as you say, and even young women are not exempt. Besides, if you will let me say so, by the time a girl has come to be eight-and-twenty, she often begins to feel, you know—that to be only her father's daughter is not quite enough for her—that she wants some sort of standing of her own."

"Do you mean to tell me that such thoughts as these have ever entered the mind of Jane?" said the Duke, severely.

"My love, I put great faith in you in matters quite within your sphere—— But Jane, my daughter!——"

"I hope you will allow that she is my daughter as well," the Duchess said, with the half laugh, half rage natural to a woman long accustomed to deal with an impracticable man. She was obliged to laugh at his serious contempt of her, lest she should do worse.

The Duke waved his hand. "Yes, yes," he said, in the tone of a man yielding to an unreasonable child. "To be sure, in a way, we do not dispute that. But I am certain," he added, "that you know better than to resist the claims of race. Jane is not so much your daughter, or even mine, as she is the daughter of the race of Altamonts; and in that capacity you may allow, my love, great as are your claims to respect as her mother, that I may be supposed to understand her best."

The exasperation with which the Duchess listened to this speech may be understood; but it was not the first by a great many, and she made no revelation of her feelings. On the contrary, she made use of his solemn vanity with a craft which the exigencies of her position had developed in her.

"You must give me the benefit of your superior insight," she said quite calmly, without any indication of satire in her tone. "Now that you have leisure to give your consideration to family matters, as you could not be expected to do in town: — tell me what you think. My impression is, that she has begun to think of the future. I was her mother when I was her age. She has been very much admired and sought after."

"Naturally," the Duke said, with a wave of his hand.

"And I have a feeling that there is a—

preference, if I may call it so—an inclination, perhaps—dawning in her mind. To lose her would be a terrible deprivation: still," the Duchess said, "I do not suppose it is in your mind to prevent her from marrying."

"To prevent her from—— You surely have the most curious way of putting things. There is nothing I desire more truly — when a suitable match can be found."

"But don't you think," cried the Duchess, "that we are, perhaps, letting the time slip a little? Of course, I would naturally keep my child by me as long as possible, but in her own interests—— Women on the whole are happier to marry, I think," she said doubtfully.

"Marry! of course they are happier to marry. Can there be any doubt upon that subject? A woman unmarried cannot be said to have any life at all!"

"Yes, I should say there was a doubt," said his wife, with again that half laugh; "and as I am one of them, I may be allowed an opinion on the subject. But still, in respect to Jane, I could wish my daughter to marry. In her position, to remain unmarried would really be to remain apart from life."

"It is not to be thought of for a moment; an old maid!" the Duke said, with a quaver of pain in his voice; and he thought of that slight indentation—not a hollow, scarcely more than a dimple, which, however, was not a dimple, on Jane's cheek. "The truth is," he said, "that in respect to one's children one deceives one's self. I have no feeling that I am myself any older than I was twenty years ago, and therefore I do not notice the difference in her."

"Hungerford is very old," said the Duchess. "He is older in many things than either you or I."

"Ah, Hungerford; what can you expect with that wife?" the Duke said, with a little shudder; and then he added, with inward alarm but outward jauntiness (so far as dukes can be jaunty), as if her opinion was an excellent joke, "By the way, I suppose that she will have something to say on the subject. She generally has something to say."

"Susan does not conceal her opinion that Jane's chances are all over," said the Duchess. "She thinks her *passée*. She believes, I understand, that a clergyman—to whom we could give the living of Billings—would be the likely thing for Jane now."

"A clergyman!" said the Duke, with rage and horror. His wife laughed a little, but there was anger below her laugh. How it was that Susan's impertinent speeches always came to the ears of her parents-in-law it was difficult

to know, but they did so, and they generally had the effect of warming most wholesomely the Duke's too noble blood.

"It is very well known how difficult you are," said the Duchess. "I don't think myself that the clergyman is likely to present himself; but if Jane had a preference, as I suppose, I should, for my part, be very unwilling to thwart her."

"Jane will have no preference that is not justified by the merit of the object," cried Jane's father. "She is too much my child for that. She will never permit her mind to stray out of her own rank. Indeed, it is with difficulty I realise," he added, with dignity, "the possibility that she can have conceived what you call a preference at all. To me she has always been so completely superior, so serene, so——"

"But not cold," the Duchess said.

"I don't know what you mean by cold; yes, cold, certainly, in my sense of the word, as every woman ought to be. I believe that unless I put it before her—or you as my representative—she is far too pure-minded and elevated ever to think of marriage at all."

"If she were shut up in a tower," said the Duchess; "but unfortunately there are so many things in this world to force the idea upon her, and if you really wish her to marry——"

"Of course I wish her to marry," said the Duke, almost angrily; and then he added, "in her own rank in life."

The Duchess asked herself afterwards whether this had been a wise way of directing her husband's attention to the subject. She had meant it to be very wise, but conversation is one of those strange things that will manage itself.

However closely we may have laid down the lines of what we shall say, it is pretty certain to balk us and direct us in other ways. This had been the case on the present occasion. Instead of directing the Duke's mind to the possibility of receiving a suitor who should be indispensable to Jane's happiness, though not of her rank, she had only elicited from him a repetition of his determination that nobody out of her own rank should marry Lady Jane. She thought with a shiver of Winton coming down full of hope with the intention of unfolding his rent-roll, and his statement of the settlements he was able to make, for the Duke's satisfaction. The Duke was one of the few men remaining in the nineteenth century who was invulnerable to money. Susan Hungerford was enough to give any one a disgust at that manner of filling the household coffers. Perhaps it would have

been better to say nothing, to let Winton work upon the Duke by that respectful admiration for his opinions which he had already shown. She walked back to the castle with a sense of failure in her mind. For her part, she would not have been at all disinclined towards a clergyman (had he been *nice*) who would have established her child in the beautiful rectory not a quarter of a mile from the lodge-gates, and kept her constantly, as it were, at home. But there was no clergyman available, and no question of that. Lady Jane gave her a half-timid glance when she went into the drawing-room with the fresh air of the evening about her. She would not inquire whether there had been any talk of herself between her parents; but she could not keep that question out of her eyes. All the Duchess's reply was to give her a kiss, and ask whether she

had not been out this delicious evening. "This is better than town," her Grace said. Was it better than town? For the first time, with a soft sigh Lady Jane remained silent and did not echo the sentiment. The country is sweet, and the woods, and fields, and one's native air, and the silence of nature—but there are other things which perhaps even in smoky London, among the bricks and mortar which his Grace made so little of, were still more sweet. Of all people in the world, Lady Jane was the last to prefer a ball-room, or the jaded and heated crowds at the end of the season. But for the first time in her life she thought of these assemblies with a sigh.

CHAPTER VII.

SUSPENSE.

WINTON stayed in London until September, with a certain sense of satisfaction in this self-martyrdom. It was totally unnecessary and could advantage nobody —but the thought of going into the country and pretending to enjoy himself while everything was so doubtful as to his future prospects, was disagreeable to him. He neglected his friends, he declined his invitations, he took pleasure in making himself miserable, and in pouring out his loneliness and wretchedness on sheet after sheet of note-paper, and addressing the budget to Billings Court;

from whence, very soon indeed after this practice began, the Duchess, alarmed, sent him an energetic protestation. "Such a hot correspondence will soon awaken suspicions," she wrote; "for Jane's sake I implore you to be a little more patient." "Patient! much she knows about it!" Winton said, when, pouncing upon this letter with the hope of finding, perhaps—who could tell?—the Duke's consent in it and final sanction, he encountered this disappointing check. What could she know about it indeed, with Jane by her side, and all that she cared for? Perhaps in other circumstances the young man might have had a glimmering perception that the Duchess was well acquainted with the exercise of patience, even though Jane was her daughter; but at present his own affairs entirely occupied his mind. He spent a good deal of his time in

Wardour Street and other cognate regions, and attended a great many sales, in which there was some degree of soothing to be obtained; for to "pick up" something which might hereafter grace her sitting-room, gave a glory to *bric-a-brac*, and thus he seemed to be doing something for her, even when most entirely separated from her. Jane herself wrote to him the most soothing of letters. "So long as we know each other as we do, and trust each other, what does a little delay matter?" she said. Poor Winton cried out, "Much she knows about it!" again, as he kissed yet almost tore, in loving fury, her tender little epistle. This was very unreasonable, for of course she knew quite as much about it as he did. When a pair of lovers are parted, it is not the lady that is supposed to feel it the least.

And yet he was more or less justified

in that despairing exclamation, for Jane's perfect faith was such as is rarely possible to a man who has been in the world. He did not feel at all sure that she might not be capable out of pure sweetness and self-sacrifice—that pernicious doctrine in which, he said to himself angrily, women are nourished—of giving him up. Even the Duchess sometimes thought so, deceived by the serene aspect of her child, who did not pine or sigh, but pursued her gentle career with a more than ordinary sweetness and pleasure in it. Lady Jane had the advantage over both these doubting souls. Doubt was not in her; and she was aware, as they were not, of the persistency of her own steadfast nature, which, in the absence of all experience to the contrary, she held to be a universal characteristic. It did not occur to her as possible that having made up his mind on an important subject—

far less given his heart, to use the sentimental language which she blushed yet was pleased in the depths of her seclusion to employ—any man—or woman either—could be persuaded or forced to change it. Many things were possible—but not that. She had no excitement on the subject, because it was outside of all her consciousness, a thing impossible. Change! give up! The only result of such a suggestion upon Lady Jane was a faintly humorous and perfectly serene smile. But Winton had not this admirable serenity. Perhaps he was not himself so absolutely true as the stainless creature whom he loved. He worked himself up into little fits of passion sometimes, asking himself how could he tell what agencies might be brought to bear upon her, what necessities might be urged upon her? It was very well known that the Duke was poor; and if it so

happened that in the depths of his embarrassment somebody stepped forward with one of those fabulous fortunes which are occasionally to be met with, ready to free the father at the cost of the daughter, as occurs sometimes even out of novels, would Jane be able to resist all the inducements that would be brought to bear upon her? Winton sprang from his feet more than once with a wild intention of rushing to his lawyers and instructing them to stop his Grace's mouth with a bundle of bank-notes, lest he might lend an ear to that imaginary millionaire. And on coming to his senses, it must be said that the Duke's overweening pride, which was working his own harm, was the point of consolation to which the lover clung, and not any conviction of the firmness of Lady Jane in such circumstances. It *was* a comfort that his Grace was far too haughty in his duke-

dom to suffer the approach of mere millionaires.

In September, Lady Germaine returning from that six weeks at Homburg with which it was the fashion in those days for worn-out fine ladies to recruit themselves after the labours of the season, and pausing in London two days in a furious *accès* of shopping before she went to the country, saw Winton pass the door at which her carriage was standing, and pounced upon him with all the eagerness of an explorer in a savage country. "You here!" she said; "for goodness' sake come and help me with my shopping. I have not spoken two words together for a week —not even on the journey! There was nobody: I can't think where the people have gone to: one used to be sure of picking up some one on the way, but there was nobody. Well! and how are

things going?" she added, making a distinct pause after her first little personal outburst was over.

"Very badly," Winton said, with a sigh.

"Papa will not pay any attention?" said Lady Germaine. "I warned you of that: don't say you were taken unawares. I told you he was the most impracticable of men, and you, in your holy innocence——"

"Don't," said Winton. "I remember all you said; you called me names: you confessed that you felt guilty——"

"Be just. I did not say I felt guilty, but only that his Grace would think me so, which are very different things. And so he will not have you? poor boy! but I knew that from the beginning. There is one fine thing in him, that he has no eye to his own advantage. Most people would think you a very good match for Jane."

"Don't speak blasphemy," said Winton. "I agree with the Duke, he is as right as a man can be. There is nobody good enough for her——"

"Except——"

"Except no one that I am acquainted with. I don't deserve that she should let me tie her shoes. Oh, don't suppose I have changed my opinion about that."

"I am glad to find you are in such a proper frame of mind — then there will be no trouble at all, none of the expedients adopted in such cases? Poor Lady Jane! but since that is the case, there is nothing more to be said. And what, may I ask, you good humble-minded young man, are you doing in town in September? You ought to be shooting somewhere, or making yourself agreeable."

"I am knocking about at all the sales," said Winton, "trying to pick up a little

thing here and there for her rooms at Winton. What are the expedients you were thinking of, dear Lady Germaine? It is always good to know."

Lady Germaine laughed. "Then you have not given in?" she said. "I did not suppose you were the sort of person to give in. What did he say? was it final? did he show you to the door? You will think it hard-hearted of me to laugh, but I should like to have been in hiding somewhere to have seen his Grace's face when you ventured to tell him."

"He has not received that shock yet," said Winton, not very well pleased.

"He has not——! Do you mean you have never asked the Duke? Are things just as they were, then, and no advance made?" said Lady Germaine, in a tone of wonder that was not quite free of contempt.

"They will not let me speak," said Winton, in a voice from which he could not keep a certain querulous accent. "It is not my way of managing affairs; but what can I do? Her mother says——"

"Then you have got the Duchess on your side?"

"I suppose so," said the young man. "I sometimes doubt whether it is for good or evil. She will not let me speak. She says she will let me know the right moment. In the meantime life is insupportable, you know. I shall take my courage *à deux mains*, and when I go down there——"

"You are going down there—to Billings?" cried Lady Germaine with a gasp of astonishment.

"On the 10th," said Winton with a sigh, "but whether anything will come of it or not——"

"When the Duchess is taking the business into her own hands! Reginald Winton, I have told you before you were a goose," said Lady Germaine, solemnly. "And what is the use of mooning about here and asking me what are the expedients? Of course she has thought of all the expedients. Whatever *he* may be, the Duchess is a woman of sense. Are you furnishing Winton? Have you all your arrangements made? I should have everything ready—down to the footstools and door-mats—and servants engaged, and your carriages seen to. You can't marry a duke's daughter without taking a little trouble about the place you are going to put her in."

"Trouble—there shall be no sparing of trouble!" he cried; but then shook his head. "We are a long way off that," he added, in a dolorous tone.

"This is the confident lover," said Lady

Germaine, "who scoffed at dukes and thought himself good enough for anybody's daughter. Don't you see that if it comes to nothing, something must come of it directly? Things of this sort can't hang on—they go quicker than the legitimate drama. If I were you, I would have the steeds saddled in their stalls, and the knights in their armour, like Walter Scott, you know."

"Do you think so?" said Winton, his eyes lighting up. "If I could imagine that anything so good as this was on the cards——"

"On the cards! Oh, the obtuseness of man! Do you think the Duchess will let herself be beaten? Oh yes, her husband has been too many for her again and again. I know she has had to give in and let him take his own way: but now that Jane is concerned, and she has pledged herself to you——"

"She has been very kind. I had not the least right to expect such kindness as she has shown me: but she has given no pledge," said Winton with a recurrence of his despondency.

Lady Germaine, who had stopped herself in the full career of her shopping to hold this conversation with him in a luxurious corner of the great shop, where all was still at this dead moment of the year, and only velvet-footed assistants passed now and then noiselessly — gave him at this moment a look of disdain, and rose up from her chair. "I did not think you had been such a noodle," she said, and, before he could answer a word, went forward to the nearest counter, where an elegant youth had been waiting all the time with bales of silks and stuffs half unfolded for her ladyship's inspection —and plunged into business. That elegant youth had not in any way betrayed

his weariness. He had stood by his wares as if it were the most natural thing in the world to wait for half an hour, so to speak, between the cup and the lip: but he had not been without his thoughts, and these thoughts were not very favourable to Lady Germaine. Most likely this was the origin of a paragraph which crept into one of the Society papers in the deadness of the season and puzzled all the tantalised circles in country houses, and even bewildered the clubs. Who could the "Lady G." be who had awakened the echoes of the back shop at Allen and Lewisby's? Here is the advantage of an immaculate reputation. Neither the clubs nor the country houses ever associated Lady Germaine with such a possibility; but this, of course was what that elegant young person did not know.

"Why am I a noodle?" said Winton, going after her, and too much absorbed

in the subject to think of the attendant at all.

"If you can think of a stronger word put that instead," said Lady Germaine. "I can't call names here, don't you see, though I should *so* like to. No pledge! Oh, you—— What should you like in that way? Something on parchment, with seals hanging to it like a Pope's bull? as if every word she said and every suggestion she made was not a pledge, and the strongest of pledges? Go away, and let me choose the children's new frocks in peace. It is easier to do that than to make people understand."

But Winton did not go away. He leaned over her chair, making certainty more certain to the spectator behind the counter. "Look here," he said; "do you really mean what you say—that I ought to have everything ready?"

"Don't you think these two shades go nicely together?" said Lady Germaine, putting the silk and the merino side by side with skilful hands, and with an air of the profoundest deliberation. "The girls have not a thing to wear. I should have the steeds in the stables and the knights in the hall, if I were you, and William of Deloraine ready to ride by night or by day."

Perhaps this advice was not the clearest in the world, but, such as it was, it was all the lady would give; and it sent Winton along the half-lighted half-empty streets, in the twilight of the soft September evening, with an alert pace and a heart beating as it had not beat since London had suddenly become empty to him by the departure of one family from it. He went over every room of his house that evening, calculating and considering. It was a charming house, and

he had regarded it with no small satisfaction when, only a year or two before, its decorations had been completed. But now, with the idea in his mind that at any moment (was not that what she said?) he might have to be ready for the princess, the wife—that his happiness might come upon him suddenly, and his life be transformed, and his house turned into *her* house—in this view it was astonishing how many things he found that were incomplete. Nay, everything was incomplete. It was dingy—it was small; it was commonplace. The drawing-rooms had become old-fashioned, though yesterday he had been under the impression that there was an antique grace about them—a flavour of the old world which gave them character. The dining-room was heavy and elaborate; the library too dark; the morning-room—good heavens! there was no morning-room in which a

lady could establish herself, but only a half-furnished place uninhabited, cold, with no character at all. It brought a cold dew all over him when he opened the door of that empty chamber. He could scarcely sleep for thinking of it. What if she might be ready before her house was! The idea was intolerable: and everything was petty, mean, without beauty, unworthy of her. He had not thought so when he walked through those over-gilded drawing-rooms in Grosvenor Square, and said to himself that not amid such tawdry fineries as these should his wife be housed. Everything had changed since that brief moment of confidence. He was dissatisfied with everything. Next morning he had no sooner awoke from a sleep troubled by dreams of chaotic upholstery, than he went to work. Perhaps, after all, things were not so bad. With the aid of a few

experts, and a great deal of money, much, if not everything, can be done in a very short space of time. He ran down into the country as soon as he had set things going in Kensington, and arrived at his old manor-house without warning, to the great consternation of the housekeeper. Winton had still more need of the experts and the *bric-a-brac.* It wanted many things besides, which were not to be had in a moment, and his life for the next week was as laborious as that of the busiest workman. The excitement among the servants and hangers-on at both places was indescribable. He said nothing of his approaching marriage, and yet nothing but an approaching marriage could account for it; or else that he was going clean out of his senses, which was another hypothesis produced.

This fit of active and hopeful exertion got over these remaining days with the

speed of a dream. The hours galloped along with him as lightly at least, if not as merrily, as though they were indeed carrying him to his wedding-day. But when all was done that he could do, and the moment approached for his visit to Billings, a cold shade fell over him. Lady Germaine's clever little speeches began to look like nonsense as he thought them over; "quicker than the legitimate drama;" what did she mean by that? Could he imagine for a moment to himself that Jane, the princess of her own race as well as of his affections, the serene and perfect lady of his thoughts, would be the heroine of any vulgar romance? That he could have entertained such a thought for a moment horrified him when he paused in his feverish exertion and began to think what it all meant. But this was only on the way to Billings, when every pulse in his body began to

throb high with the thought of being once more in her presence, under the same roof with her, and about to put his fortune to the test to gain everything or—no, not to lose her. He said to himself with a sudden passion that he would not lose Jane. Such a calamity was not possible. Father and mother and all the powers might do what they would or could, but she was his, and give her up he would not. Thus the anxious lover went round the compass and came back to the point from which he started. He found Lady Germaine as wise and clever as he had always thought her, when he came thus far. There were expedients—and the Duchess was pledged to the employment of them as certainly as if he had her word for it engrossed on parchments sealed and signed and delivered. One way or another, his visit to Billings would be decisive. He

went like a soldier to the field of battle, with a thrill of excitement over him, as well as with all the softening enthusiasm of a lover. Happen how it might, he could not leave that unknown fortress, that Castle Dangerous, as he came.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT.

It was not, however, at all like a conquering hero that Winton made his appearance at Billings. A number of other people arrived by the same train, and were conveyed in various carriages both before and after him to the great house. It was a long drive, and he had time to think about it and to go over the approaching meeting, rehearsing it again and again. Winton knew as well as any one what it is to arrive at a country house,—the confusion of the arrival, the little pause when no one knows what to do, the

hesitation of the people who have never been there before, the well-bred attempts of the people who have, not to seem too much at home, the anxiety of the hosts to distribute their attentions equally and leave no one out—were all familiar to him. But somehow his special position now gave him much of the feeling of surprise and disappointment and involuntary half-offence which a new-comer, unused to society, and expecting perhaps to be received with all the warm individual welcome of more intimate hospitality, feels when he finds himself only one of the least considerable of a large party. All the other members of the group were of greater consequence than Winton, and almost all were *habitués* of the place, accustomed to come year after year — persons whom the Duke could receive as sufficiently near his own level to be worthy the honour of his friendship.

Such a party is always diversified by some one or two people who are altogether nobodies, and afford either a sort of background like supernumeraries in a play, or are elevated to the most important position by dint of dexterity and adulation. Winton felt himself to belong to the background as he stood about in the hall when all the greetings were going on, waiting for his. It had been like a sudden downfall from heaven to earth to perceive, as he cast his first rapid glance round on entering, that Jane was not there. Afterwards he said to himself that he could not have endured her to be there, but for the moment her absence struck him like a blow. And what could the Duchess do more than shake hands with him as she did with all her other guests? He thought she gave him a glance of warning, a little smile —but no doubt every man there supposed

that for himself individually her Grace had a kind regard. He stood talking for a short time after the ladies had been swept away to their rooms. He knew several of the more important of the guests, and he knew one of the nobodies who was a very prominent figure. But it was with an indignant sense that his reception ought to have been a very different one that he found himself following a servant up the grand staircase into those distant regions allotted to bachelors, where his non-importance was to be still more forcibly brought home to him. He who ought to have been received as the son of the house—he to whom its brightest member had linked her fate—that he should come in on the same footing as Mr Rosencrantz the German librarian, or that stale hanger-on of the clubs who made a sort of trade of country houses, was very

bitter to Winton. He was not accustomed to be a *super*, and he did not like the post. To tell the truth, in the first half-hour in Billings Castle Winton felt his own hopes and dreams come back upon him with a bitterness and sense of ridicule which drove him almost out of himself. Had he not been a fool to entertain any hopes at all? Was not Lady Germaine ludicrously mistaken when she talked of the Duchess's pledge? The Duchess, was she not far too great a lady to care what happened to a simple gentleman? He began to think he had been a fool to come, a fool ever to permit himself to shipwreck his heart and life in this way, and doubly a fool, a ridiculous idiot, to go drivelling into decorations and pieces of furniture, as if his little manor-house could ever vie with—— All these thoughts were put to flight in

a moment by the sudden opening of a closed door which flooded a dark passage to his right with the glory of the sunset sweeping through it. Some one came out and stood for a moment in the midst of that glory: then Winton heard himself called. The servant disappeared by magic, and he suddenly found himself in a small sitting-room with a broad window flooded by the evening light. The Duchess held out both her hands to him, but he scarcely saw them, for behind her, coming in through another door, a little flush upon her soft cheeks, and that liquid golden illumination in her eyes——it was as if some one had said to him out of the glowing west, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

This meeting, however, was of the briefest—for the house was very full and the dinner-hour approaching. "You

must go away directly," the Duchess said; "but I could not trust you to meet for the first time down-stairs before so many eyes."

"So it was policy?" Winton cried.

"Entirely policy—is not every step I take more or less of that description?—but Jane could not have borne it," she said, "and neither could you, I think. I did not bring you here to ruin you. We must all be on our p's and q's."

"P's and q's!" cried Winton, "become insupportable. Dear Duchess, you will not be too hard upon me. Now at least I must have it out, and know my fate. How can I bear to hang on—to have everything pushed off in indefinite space?"

Lady Jane touched his arm lightly with her hand, stroking it, with a pretty movement of mingled soothing and sympathy. "*Pazienza*!" she said softly; but

she liked the impatience. It pleased her delicate sense of what was best.

"Would you prefer, Mr Winton, to know the worst? — would you rather have a definite No than an indefinite suspense?"

"Don't call him Mr Winton," said Lady Jane in her under tone.

Winton looked from one lady to another keenly, with an inquiry which the Duchess met without flinching, and Lady Jane without being at all aware what it meant. Her Grace gave him an almost imperceptible nod, always looking him full in the face. Her eyes seemed to promise everything. "In that case," he said—"in that case—better the refusal: then we shall see what there remains to do."

The Duchess sighed. "I believe it is the wisest way," she said, "after all: but you cannot suppose it is very pleasant

to me. Now, go; you must go, and leave us to dress. You may come here to-morrow after breakfast, or when we come in, in the afternoon—but you must not be always coming. And in the meantime prudence, prudence! you cannot be too prudent. If you betray yourself I cannot answer for the consequences. You must remember that for Jane's sake."

Then they put him out of the room, out of the shining of the sunset in which he thought she stood transfigured, the soft glory caressing her, the level golden radiance getting into her eyes and flooding them—and closed the door upon him, leaving him in the darkness of the passage, which looked all black to his dazzled eyes. Fortunately his guide appeared a moment afterwards and he was led up to his chamber, in the wilds so to speak of the great house, where he came back to himself as well

as he could. Winton was only a man like the rest of his kind. He wondered if the women enjoyed, with a native feminine malice such as everybody has commented upon from the beginning of time, the position in which they had placed him. Ah, not *they;* not Jane, who was a world above all jesting—but perhaps the Duchess, who, he could imagine, did not mind making him pay a little in his dignity, in his self-regard, for the promotion he had got through her daughter's love. She would do anything for him because Jane loved him, but perhaps she had a mischievous satisfaction in the little drama which she was arranging round him — the external slights, the sudden bliss, the dismissal back again to humility and the second floor. Was this so? He concluded it was, with a half-amused irritation, a sense of being played with.

She was kind: but was it in mortal to suffer without a pang, without an attempt at reprisals, the loss of Jane? And then, perhaps the Duchess too had a little feeling that he was not one of her own caste, her daughter's equal—not enough to make her resist that daughter's choice, but yet enough to prompt in passing a little prick as with a needle at the too fortunate. As a matter of fact, had Winton been cool enough to notice it, the Duchess had meant him no prick at all. He had been received in the usual way, lodged according to the general rule. She had thought it wisest not to do anything to distinguish him beyond his neighbours, but that was all.

The evening was full of tantalised and suppressed expectation, yet of a moment's pleasure now and then. Except the German librarian and the man from the clubs, and a young author who had been

the fashion and was the *protégé* of one of the great families visiting at Billings, the company was all much more splendid than Winton. Names that were known to history buzzed about him as he sat down to dinner, with Lady Adela Grandmaison beside him, who was exceedingly relieved to fall to his lot and not to one of the elderly noblemen who illustrated the table. Lady Adela wore a *sacque* like a dainty lady of the eighteenth century, but was apt to throw herself into attitudes which were suggestive of the fourteenth. She did not feel at all disposed to be disdainful of Winton. Instead of this she took him into her confidence. "Did you ever see such a party of swells?" she said, notwithstanding her medieval attitudes. "Don't they frighten you to death, Mr Winton? I am so glad to have somebody I dare talk to. The Duke is too

funny for anything, don't you think so? like an old monarch in the pantomime. It is all exactly like the theatre. He says 'My lord'—listen! exactly as they do on the stage."

"I suppose they did that sort of thing when his Grace was young," said Winton, looking up the great table to where that majestic presence showed beyond the ranks of his guests. A little tremor ran over him when he realised the splendour of the personage to whom he was going so soon to carry his suit. "Perhaps we are a little too free-and-easy nowadays," he said.

"Don't desert your generation," cried Lady Adela; and then she added significantly, "there is Jane looking our way. Jane is so sweet—don't you think so, Mr Winton?"

Winton met the soft eyes of his love and the keen ones of this young observer

at the same moment; and this, though he was a man of the world, brought a sudden flush to his face. All the fine company, and the gorgeous table, heavy with plate and brilliant with flowers, grew like a mist to him, and nothing seemed real except that softly tinted, tender-shining countenance, turning upon him the light of her eyes. They were so placed that though they never spoke they could see each other across the table, through a little thicket of feathery ferns and flowers. Lady Jane was too courteous, too self-forgetting to neglect her special companion or to abandon the duty of entertaining her parent's guests. But now and then she would lift her eyes and empty out her heart in one look across the table through that flowery veil. He was not nearly so entertaining in consequence as Lady Adela had hoped.

Next morning there were some moments

that were full of excitement and happiness in the midst of a day which was just like other days. Lady Jane agreed fully with Winton, that to be there under her father's roof without informing him of the object of his visit was a thing unworthy of her lover; and she was, like him, entirely convinced that, whatever might come of it, the explanation must be made. The Duchess did not contest this high decision of principle — but she shook her head. "I have nothing to say against you. I suppose you are right. It must be done sooner or later," she said. "There is only one thing — put it off till the last day of your visit; for this I am sure of, that you will not be able to spend another night at Billings."

"Mamma!" Lady Jane cried, with a fervour which brought the tears to her eyes, "my father will say nothing that one gentleman may not say to another."

The Duchess once more shook her head. "When one gentleman asks another for his daughter and is refused—though the one should be the most courteous in the world, and the other the most patient, yet it is generally considered most convenient that they should not continue in the same house."

"I will take your mother's advice, my dearest," said Winton; but it was hardly possible for mortal man to have it put before him so plainly without a little feeling of offence. It had been settled that he was to stay a week, and notwithstanding the happiness which the Duchess had secured to him by giving him the entry to this sacred little sitting-room into which no stranger ever intruded, and by affording him as many opportunities as were possible of seeing Lady Jane, he spent the rest of the time with a certain feeling of hostility in

his mind towards her, which was thoroughly unreasonable. He began to doubt whether she wished him to succeed, whether she was indeed so truly his friend as she represented herself to be. A man must be magnanimous indeed who can entirely free his mind from the prevalent notions about the love of women for "managing," and their inclination towards intrigue and mystery. A conviction that his own manly statement of his case would tell more effectually with the Duke, who was a gentleman though he might be pompous and haughty, than any semi-deceitful feminine process, began to grow in his mind. And this conviction, in which there was a partially indignant revulsion of feeling—rank ingratitude and unkindness, but of that he was not conscious—from his allegiance to the Duchess, gave him a natural inclination to propitiate the head of the house and see him in his

best light, which was not without a certain influence even on the Duke himself, who more and more felt this modest young commoner, though he was nobody in particular, to be a person of discrimination, and one who was capable of appreciating himself and understanding his views.

Thus with new hopefulness on one side, and mistrust on the other, Winton counted the days as they went by towards the moment which was to decide his fate. He impressed his own hopefulness upon Lady Jane, who was indeed very willing to believe that nothing but what was noble and honourable could come from her father. They discussed the subject anxiously, yet with less and less alarm. To her it seemed, as she heard all the wise and modest speeches her lover intended to make as to his own lesser importance, but great love — it seemed to her that no heart could hold out against

him. That tenderest humility, which was the natural characteristic of her mind underneath the instincts of rank which were so strong in her, and the sense of lofty position which was part of her religion — was touched with the most exquisite wonder and happiness at the thought that all this noble and pure passion was hers, and hers only. "It is impossible," she said, "if you speak to him as you do to me, Reginald—oh, it is impossible that he can resist. "It is impossible, my darling," said the young man, "when he hears that you love me." Thus they encouraged each other, and on the eve of the great day wrought themselves to an enthusiasm of faith and certainty. The Duchess's limitation of his visits had of course come to very little purpose, and every moment that Winton could manage to escape from the bonds of society below stairs he spent with Lady

Jane above, discoursing upon their hopes, and the manner in which best to get them wrought into fulfilment. They talked of everything, in those stolen hours of sweetness: of what was to happen in the future, of all they were to be to each other, coming back again and again to the moment which was to decide all, always with a stronger and stronger sense that the Duke's consent must come, and that to be balked by this initial difficulty was impossible. But it cannot be denied that Winton had certain difficulties even about that future in his communings with his bride. He could not get her to understand that very little self-sacrifice would be necessary on her part, and that the house to which he proposed to transplant her was little less luxurious than her own. Lady Jane smiled upon him when he said this with one of those little heavenly stupidities which belong to such

women. She did not wish it be so, and so far as this went put no faith in him. It was a settled question in her own mind. Arabella's famous elucidation had fortified her on that point beyond all assault. It pleased her to look forward to the little manor-house, and the changed world which would surround the Squire's wife. If he had carried her direct to a palace more splendid than Billings, she would have felt a visionary but active disappointment. She drew him gently to other subjects when he entered upon this, especially to the one unfailing subject, the Duke, and what he might say. They both grew very confident as they talked it over: and yet when Winton came to tell her, on the evening preceding that momentous day, that he had asked for an interview and it had been granted to him, Lady Jane lost her pretty colour, which was always so evanescent, and her

breath, and almost her self-possession. "No," she said, "oh, not afraid! if you say *that* to him, Reginald, he cannot resist — but only a little nervous; one is always nervous when there is any doubt. And then to think that this is the last evening!"

"If things go right it will not be the last evening," he cried. "The Duchess said a man could not stay who had been refused; but even she would allow that a man who has *not* been refused may remain and be happy. Ah, Jane! imagine the happiness of being allowed to belong to each other! no more secret meetings, no further alarms or discovery."

She gave a sigh of happiness and relief, yet blushed almost painfully. The idea of doing anything which she did not wish to be found out hurt her still, notwithstanding that in the stress of the crisis she had yielded to do it. Winton's con-

science was not so delicate, and his excitement made him wildly confident. It is a woman's part to fear in such a case as it is her part to encourage in the midst of doubt. "Provided," she said, with a little sigh of suspense, "provided it all goes as we wish."

He took her hands in his and held them fast and stood bending over her looking into her eyes. "Supposing," he said slowly, "supposing,"—he was so excited and sure of what was going to happen that he could afford to be theatrical, —"supposing all should not go as we wish, Jane — what then?"

Lady Jane did not make any reply. She returned his look, with her hands clasping his, standing steadfast without a shadow of wavering. She felt as she had done in her youth when she had imagined herself facing the guillotine. She was ready to suffer whatever might

be inflicted upon her, but to yield, she would not. It would have been easier by far to die.

All this time the Duchess let them have their way. They were ungrateful, they were even unkind, but she endured it with a patience and toleration to which long experience had trained her. If it was with a little pang that she kissed her daughter, wondering at that universal law which makes a woman, still more than a man, forsake father and mother, and cleave to her husband, she said nothing about it: she left them to themselves and their hopes. She said to herself that they would find out too soon what a broken reed they were trusting to, and her heart ached for the failure of those anticipations which gave Lady Jane so beautiful a colour, and an air of such serene happiness. Better that she should have a happy evening, that she

should sleep softly and wake hopefully once more.

The morning of the great day dawned in a weeping mist, the heavens leaden, the earth sodden, and streams of blinding rain falling by intervals. Lady Jane, as she opened her eyes upon the misty daylight, and thought, as soon as her faculties were awake, of what was going to be done, clasped her soft hands, and said a prayer for *him*, and for herself, and still more warmly for her father, who was, so to speak, on his trial. He had never been less than a noble father in Lady Jane's eyes. She had not found him out, being scarcely of her generation in this respect, and accepting unaffectedly what was presented to her as the real state of things; but she could not help feeling that the Duke was on his trial. He might deny her lover's suit and break her own heart, and yet keep his child's respect.

But a vague fear lest he should not do this had got into her soul she did not know how. She waited with a tremor which she could not subdue for the moment. How fortunate it was that it rained, and that it was impossible to go out! For once in her life Lady Jane failed in her duty. She escaped from little Lady Adela, who was so anxious to be taken into her confidence, and from the other guests, who, seeing the hopelessness of the weather, were yawning together in the great bow-window of the morning-room, gazing out upon the sodden grass and dreary avenue, dripping from every tree, and wondering how they were to kill the time till luncheon. Lady Jane, instead of helping to solve that problem, as she ought to have done, fled from them and escaped to the seclusion of her mother's drawing-room, where she sat with the door ajar, listening for every footstep. The

Duchess, though she had felt her desertion, and knew that the foolish pair of lovers were in a sort of secession from her, following their own way, yet was very magnanimous to their wrong-headedness. She said no word and looked no look of reproach, but gave up her writing and her business, and went down herself among the unoccupied ladies, and did her best to amuse them. This was perhaps of all the sacrifices she made for them the one that cost her most.

It was about eleven o'clock when Winton presented himself at the door of the Duke's room; which was a handsome room, full of books, with a large window looking out upon the park, and some of the finest of the family pictures upon the walls. Over the mantelpiece hung a full-length portrait, looking gigantic, of the Duchess, with Lady Jane, a little girl of eight or nine, holding her hand. It

seemed to Winton, as his eye caught this on entering, that there was a reproachful look in the eyes, and that Jane's little face, serene and sweet as it had always been, had a startled air of curiosity, and watched him from behind her mother. The large window was full of blank and colourless daylight, and an atmosphere of damp and rain. The Duke rose as he came in with much graciousness, and pointed to a chair. He came from his writing-table, which was at some distance, and placed himself in front of the fireplace, as an Englishman loves to do, even when there is no fire. "I hope," the Duke said, "that you are going to tell me of something in which I can serve you, Mr Winton." There arose in Winton's mind a momentary thrill of indignation and derision. Serve him! as if he were not better off and more fit to serve himself than half-a-dozen bankrupt dukes! But

Winton remembered that this was Jane's father, and restrained himself: and indeed the excitement and suspense in his breast left him at no leisure for more than a momentary rebellion. He replied—"It is true, I do appear before your Grace as a suitor——" but here his voice failed him and his courage.

"You must not hesitate to speak plainly," said the Duke, always more and more graciously. "Alas! I am in opposition, and my influence does not tell for much. Still, if there is any way in which I can be of use to you—there is no one for whom I should more willingly stretch a point."

"You are very kind," said Winton. "It is not in that way that I should trouble you. I am not in want of patronage—in that way. I may say that I am rich—not," he hastened to add, "as you are, but, for my position in life, very well off—almost more than well off."

"I am delighted to hear it, Mr Winton; but that is all the more reason why you should serve your country. We want men who are indifferent to pecuniary advantage. I shall be most happy to mention your name to Lord Coningsby or to——"

"If you will permit me," said Winton, "it is your Grace only whose favour I desire to gain."

Here the Duke began to laugh in a somewhat imbecile way, shaking his head with an air of complacency which would have been too ludicrous for mortal powers of gravity, had not Winton's mind been so much otherwise occupied. "Ah," he said, "I see! you are thinking of that old story about the Foreign Office. You must know that was mere talk. I do not expect that anything could come of it. But if, "his Grace added with another little run of laughter, "when we return to

power—be assured, Mr Winton, that nothing could giveme greater pleasure——"

What was he to say? Winton knew very well that he himself was as likely, if not more so—for he was a young man, with the world before him—to be Foreign Minister than the Duke: and what with the confusion of the mistake and the ludicrous character of the patronage offered, he was more embarrassed than tongue could tell. "You are very kind," he faltered, scarcely knowing what he said; then, taking his courage with both hands, "Duke," he said, boldly, "it was on a much more presumptuous errand I ventured to intrude upon you. What you will say to me I dare not venture to think. I come not to ask for patronage or place, but for something a great deal more precious. I come——" Here he paused, so bewildered by the dignified unconsciousness and serene superiority of the

potentate in whose presence he stood that words failed him, and he stood and gazed at that immovable countenance with a sort of appalled wonder to think that anything should be so great yet so small, so capable of making himself ridiculous, and yet with power to spoil two lives at his pleasure. The Duke shifted his position a little, put his right hand within his waistcoat in an attitude in which he had once stood for his portrait, and regarded his suppliant with benignity. "Go on," he said, waving his other hand, "go on."

Ah, how right the Duchess was! Oh, what a miserable mistake the lover had made! But there was no drawing back now. "I am not worthy, no one is worthy of her," he said with agitation. "I am only a commoner, which I know is a disadvantage in your eyes. The only thing, and that is nothing, is, that at least I could make ample provi-

sion and secure every comfort for my wife."

"Your wife!" said the Duke, with a surprise which was ineffable. If any gleam of suspicion came over him he quenched it in the sublime patronage of a superior. "This is very interesting," he said, "and shows a great faith in my friendship to take me into your confidence on such a delicate subject. I am happy to hear you are in such favourable circumstances; but really," he added with a laugh, "when you think how very unlikely it is that I can have any knowledge of the future Mrs Winton——"

The young man grew red and hot with a mixture of embarrassment and resentful excitement, stung by the look and the tone. "It is your daughter," he said, "who has given me permission to come to you. It is of Lady Jane I want to speak. You cannot think me

less worthy of her than I think myself."

"Lady Jane!" The Duke grew pale; he took his hand out of his waistcoat, and stared at the audacious suitor with dismay. Then he recovered himself with an effort, and snatched at a smile as if it had been something that hung on the wall, and put it on tremulously. "Ah! ah! I see," he added. "You think she might render you assistance. Speak a good word for you? — eh?" The attempt to be jocular, which was entirely out of his habits, convulsed his countenance. "Yes, yes, I see! that is what you mean," he said.

There was a pause, and the two men looked each other in the face. A monarch confronted by the whole embodied force of revolution — scorning it, hating it — yet with an insidious suggestion of alarm underneath all — on one hand; and on

the other the revolution embodied—pale with lofty anger and a sense of its own rights, yet not without a regret, a sympathetic pang for the old king about to be discrowned. The mutual contemplation lasted not more than a few moments, though it seemed so long. Then the Duke turned on his heel with a grimace which in his agitation he intended for a laugh. "I prefer," he said, "on the whole, that Lady Jane should not be appealed to. My disposition to serve you was personal. The ladies of my family are not less amicably inclined, I am sure; but I do not wish them to be mixed up—in short you will understand that, wishing you well in every way, I must advise you to trust to your own attractions in a matrimonial point of view. I cannot permit my daughter to interfere."

He had moved about while he was

speaking, but at the end returned to his place and fixed Winton with the commanding look, straight in the eyes, of a man determined to intimidate an applicant. It was the least successful way in which he could have attempted to influence the present suitor. Winton's excitement rose to such a pitch that he recovered his calm and self-possession as if by magic.

"I feel that I have explained myself badly," he said, "and this is not a matter on which there can be any misunderstanding between us. I must ask you to listen to me calmly for a moment."

"Calmly, my good sir! your matrimonial affairs, however important to you, can scarcely be expected to excite me," cried his Grace sharply, with irritation in every tone.

"There can be nothing in the world so exciting—to both of us," said Winton.

"My Lord Duke, I come from your daughter, from Jane."

"SIR!" cried the Duke. But no capitals are capable of expressing the force, the fury, of this outburst, which struck Winton like a projectile, full in the face so to speak. He made a step backward in momentary dismay.

"I must finish," he said, somewhat wildly. "Jane sends me to your Grace. I love her and she me. She has promised to be my wife. It is no intercession, it is herself I ask. Jane — Duke! on her account I have a right to be heard—a right—to have an answer at least."

The Duke was beyond the power of speech. He was purple with rage and astonishment, and at the same time moved by a kind of furious panic. He caught at his shirt-collar like a man stifled. He had no voice to reply, but waved his hand imperiously towards the door. And

Winton, too, was in a degree panic-struck. He had never seen such a blind and helpless fit of passion before. Such things had been heard of as that a man should die of rage. That indeed would be a separation from Jane beyond any power to amend. He drew back a little with an anxiety he could not conceal.

"I have taken you by surprise," he said. "I ask your pardon. Whatever I can do to soften the shock — to meet your wishes — I will do."

"Go, sir!—go, sir!" the Duke stormed in his fury. "That is all you can do—go! there is the door." He waved his hand towards it with a threatening gesture. He was transported out of himself. He followed Winton step by step with a sort of moral compulsion, forcing him to retire. The young man's blood, it is needless to say, was in an uproar; his heart thumping against his breast, every

pulse going like a hammer. But he made a stand again midway to that door which seemed the only reply he was to have. "You will remember," he said, "that I have no answer—you give me no answer; I will leave the room and the house as your Grace bids, but that is not a reply——"

"Go, sir!" the Duke cried. He stamped his foot like an enraged fishwife. He had the sense to hold himself in, not to allow the torrent of abuse which was on his lips to pour forth; but how long he would have been able to endure, to keep in this vigorous and fiery tide, could not have been predicted. He flung open the door with a force which made the walls quiver, and the action seemed more or less to bring him to himself. He recovered his voice at last. "I ought," he panted, with a snarl, "to thank you for the honour you have done my poor house;" and thus with

an explosion of labouring breath drove the astonished suitor out, as if by a blast of wind. Winton found himself in the corridor, while the crash of the great door swung behind him echoed through the house, with an amazement which words cannot describe. It had all passed like a scene in a dream. He paused a moment to recover himself. He, too, was breathless, his whole physical being agitated, his head hot and throbbing, his heart choking him. He could not speak to the Duchess, whom he met a moment after coming along the corridor with a packet of papers in her hand. "It is all over," he said incoherently, waving his hand as he passed her. The only idea in his mind for the moment was of indignity and wrong.

CHAPTER IX.

ACTING FOR HERSELF.

THE Duchess's little sitting-room had not for years enclosed so melancholy a group. She herself, in old days when she first began to realise all the circumstances of the life which she had come into, had wept many an unnoticed tear in it; but in after-years she had acquired the philosophy of maturity, and had too much to do holding her own amid all the adverse circumstances about her, to be able to indulge in personal lamentations. But Lady Jane had never known any of those burdens which had made

her mother's career so full of care. When Winton rushed in, in all the excitement of the scene which he had just gone through in the Duke's library, too much disturbed even to tell her what had passed, it was almost her first experience of the darker side of existence. For the first moment he had not been able to keep some resentment and sense of the indignity to which he had been exposed from getting to light. He told her with a pale smile and fiery eyes that he had scarcely time to speak to her, that he must go instantly, that her father had turned him out. But as Winton came to himself, and began to perceive the pain which he was inflicting upon her, he did his best to smooth away the first unguarded outburst. Lady Jane's pallor, the tears which she could not restrain, the serenity of her countenance turned into anguish, all made apparent

to him the fact which he had forgotten, that there were to her two sides to the question. He tried to draw in his words, to smooth away what he had said in the first outburst of his resentment. "After all, we must remember it was a great shock to him. I am nobody, only a simple gentleman, not fit to place myself on a level with the Duke's daughter," he said, though still with that smile of wounded pride and bitterness about his lips. Lady Jane was too heart-broken to say much; she listened like a martyr at the stake, standing silent while spears and arrows were thrust into her. Her father! he had been tried and he had not borne the trial. What she understood by rank was the highest courtesy, the noblest humbleness. A man who would turn another to the door, who would suffer his guest to perceive, under any circumstances, that he was not as a prince

in his host's eyes—Lady Jane did not understand such a being. It hurt her so deeply that she did not even at first realise the fact that it was her lover who was turned away. She tried to ask a few faltering questions, to make out the circumstances to be less terrible; but failing in this, fell into silence, into such shame and consternation and deep humiliated pain as even Winton scarcely comprehended. No other hand, no other proceeding could have struck such a blow at all the traditions of her life. She sat with her hand indeed in her lover's, but in a kind of miserable separation even from him, feeling her life fall away from her, unable to think or realise what was to happen now; until Winton, recovering from his excitement only to fall into a deeper panic, took renewed fright from her silence. "Jane," he said, "Jane! you don't mean to give me up because your

father has turned me away?" Lady Jane turned her head towards him, gave him a miserable smile, and pressed his hand faintly, then fell, as perhaps had never happened in her life before, into a passion of tears. He drew her into his arms, as was natural, and she wept on his shoulder, as one refusing to be comforted. It was but vaguely that Winton could even guess the entire upheaval of all her foundations, the ruin into which her earth had fallen. He thought it was the tragedy of his own love that was the cause, and that with this heart-breaking convulsion she was making up her mind to see it come to an end.

This was the attitude in which the Duchess found them. She, too, was pale, her eyes bright, her nostrils dilated, as if she had been in the wars. She found her daughter in this speechless passion of weeping, with Winton's pale coun-

tenance very despairing and tragical, yet touched with a livelier alarm, a frightened incomprehension, bending over her. He gave her a look of appeal as she came in; was it true that all was over, as he had said? The Duchess went to her child's side and took the hand that lay on her lap and caressed it. "My darling," she said, "this is not a moment to give in: and you are not one to fail in a great crisis, Jane. We have only a very little time to decide what we are to do before Reginald goes away."

She had not called him Reginald before, and there was a faint smile in her eyes as they met his—a smile of forgiveness and motherly kindness, though he had asked no pardon. The sound of her mother's voice broke the spell of Lady Jane's self-abandonment, and it went to Winton's heart with a forlorn sense of happiness in the midst of all

the misery, that even her mother exercised a constraint upon her which when alone with him she did not feel. Was it not that he was herself, and that with him nature had free course unabashed? But the scene grew brighter and more hopeful when the Duchess came into it. She was not surprised nor overthrown by what had happened. She put back the soft hair from her child's forehead, and gave her a kiss of consolation. "My dearest," she said, "the crisis has come which I knew would come. Reginald must go as soon as it is possible for him to go. It is for you now to say what is to be done. You are of age; you have a right to judge for yourself. When you told me first, I warned you what was before you. You have never taken the burden of your life upon you hitherto. Now the moment has come. I will not interfere. I will say nothing;

neither will Reginald, if I understand him rightly. You must judge for yourself what you will do."

Winton obeyed her Grace's lead, though with reluctance and a troubled mind. He only partially comprehended what she meant. He would have liked for his own part, to hold his love fast—to cry out to her once more, "You will not give me up because your father sends me away?" But he yielded to the Duchess's look, though with a grudge, feeling that this was moral compulsion almost as absolute as that with which her husband had turned him out. He rose from the sofa on which he had been sitting with Jane, and stood before her, feeling in his hand still the mould of hers which had lain there so long, and which left his, he thought, with reluctance. This proceeding brought her altogether to herself. She looked around her with

an almost pitiful surprise. "Am I to be left alone," she said, with a quiver in her lip, "when I need support most?" and then there was a pause. To Jane and to Winton it seemed as if the very wheels of existence were arrested and the world stood still. No one spoke. He was not capable of it; the Duchess would not. Lady Jane between, with wet eyelashes, and cheeks still pale with tears, and mouth quivering, her hands clasped in her lap as if clinging to each other since there was nothing else to hold by, sat perfectly still for a moment which seemed an hour. When she spoke at last there was a catch in her voice, and the words came with difficulty, and with little pauses between.

"What is it I am to decide?" she said. "All was decided—when we found out—in town—— We cannot separate, he and I—— That—can never come into

question now. Is it not so?—— I may read it wrong—— It appears—I have already read something wrong——" And then a spasm came over her face once more: but she got it under control. "What you mean is—about details?" said Lady Jane.

Winton, who had been in so extreme a state of excitement and suspense that he could bear no more, dropped down upon his knees at the side of the sofa on which she sat, and, clasping them, put down his face upon her hands. Lady Jane freed one to put it lightly upon his bowed head, with something of that soft maternal smile of indulgence of which love has the privilege. "Did he think I was a child?" she said to her mother, with a gentle wonder in her eyes. "Or not honest?" She herself was calm again; steadfast, while the others still trembled, seeing the complications so

much less clearly than the fair and open way. She was a little surprised by Winton's broken ecstasies, by her mother's tremulous kiss of approval. "Is there anything left for me to decide?" she said.

Nobody knew very well what was said or done in the agitated half-hour that remained. It was agreed between them that "the details," of which Lady Jane had spoken with a blush, should be arranged afterwards, when all were more cool and masters of themselves—a state to which no one of the little group attained until Winton was hurrying along the country roads towards the station, and Lady Jane and her mother were seated in forlorn quiet alone in that little room which for the last week had been the scene of so many excitements. The Duchess rose with a start when the little French clock on the mantel-

piece chimed one. "My dearest," she said, "we have many things to do which look like falsehood, we women. You and I must appear at luncheon as if nothing had happened. There must be no red eyes, my love, no abstraction. It will be all over the world in no time, if we do not take care. For myself, alas! I am used to it; but you, Jane——"

Lady Jane did not immediately reply. She said, "There is one thing, mamma, to which I have made up my mind——"

The Duchess was examining herself in the glass to see if she was pale or red, or anything different from her ordinary aspect. She turned round to hear what this new determination was.

"I will speak to my father myself," Lady Jane said.

If a cannon had been discharged into the peaceful little boudoir the effect could

scarcely have been greater. "You will speak to your father, Jane? There are some things I know better than you. It will wound you, my darling—for no good."

"But I think it is right. There should be no means neglected to make him give his consent. With his consent all would be better. I think I ought to do it. It will be no shock to him now—he knows. To think of him like *that* is the thing that gave me most pain."

"But if you should see him like *that*" —the Duchess said; then added hastily, "I know you are right. But you must set your face like a flint; you must not allow yourself to be made unhappy. Jane, your father does not think as I think in many ways. I have tried to keep you from all opposition; but he is old and you are young; you judge differently. You must not think because his point

of view is different that he is wrong, even in this case—altogether.

Lady Jane lifted her mild eyes, which which were almost stern in their unwavering sense of right. "I sometimes feel that you think nothing is wrong — altogether," she said.

"Perhaps not," the Duchess replied, with a smile and a sigh.

"It seems noble to me that you should think so, but I cannot. My father will not be like *that* to me," she added, with a little sadness. "Do not be afraid, and I will take a little time—not to-day, unless he speaks to me."

"He will not speak to you," said the Duchess, eagerly. She thought that she had at least secured that.

And then they went to luncheon. A little look of exhaustion about Lady Jane's face, a clear shining in her eyes like the sky after rain, betrayed to some

keen-sighted spectators that there had been agitation in the atmosphere. But for a novice unaccustomed to trouble, she bore herself very well. And as for the Duchess, she was perfect. Her unruffled mind, her easy grace of greatness, were visible in every movement. What could so great a lady have to trouble her? She was gracious to everybody, and full of suggestions as to what should be done, as the afternoon promised to clear up, proposing expeditions to one place and another. "Mr Winton would have been an addition to your riding-party, but unfortunately he left us this morning," she said in a voice of the most perfect composure. "So that there was nothing in it, after all," little Lady Adela whispered to her mother. But Lady Grandmaison, who was a woman of experience, shook her head.

And next morning Lady Jane, pale, but courageous, with a heart that fluttered, but a purpose as steadfast as her nature, went softly down-stairs in her turn and knocked at the Duke's door.

CHAPTER X.

A MOMENTOUS INTERVIEW.

THE Duke, like his wife, was too high-bred to allow any sign of disturbance to be seen in him; but nevertheless he was very greatly disturbed. Such a thing had never happened to him in all his life before. He had come in contact indeed with many men of lower social pretensions than Winton. But a person who is absolutely nobody is always easier to deal with than one who, without reaching at all to the level on which you can regard him as an equal, is still, by the unfortunate and levelling privileges of English

society, supposed to be as good even as a duke; whereas nobody but a duke can be, in reality, as good as a duke, though a peer of old creation may approach him near enough for most social purposes. But a Mr Winton! His was precisely the kind of position which is most perplexing and disagreeable to the great man who is nevertheless obliged to allow, in deference to the folly of society, that there can be nothing higher than an English gentleman, and that princes themselves must consider their right to that title as their highest qualification. There are commoners, indeed, with whom even a duke might make an alliance and find himself no loser. We have already pointed out that Mr Roundell, of Bishop's Roundell, had been seriously thought of as a suitor for Lady Jane. But a little squire with a little manor-house somewhere in the Midland counties—a man

whom only a chance inheritance had raised above the necessity of working for his living, whose ancestors had been no better than little squires before him, who was nobody, of a race unheard of out of their parish, that he should take it upon him to walk quietly up to the Duke on his own hearth and ask from him the hand of Lady Jane! He did not venture to permit himself to dwell upon the thought. When it came back to his mind it set his blood boiling as at first—his head grew hot, his veins too full, his respiration difficult. To allow himself to be driven into a fit by such *canaille* would be unworthy of him; and therefore the Duke put force upon himself, and when the recollection came back took the wise step of flying from it. He would not risk himself on such an ignoble occasion. To allow a Mr Winton to bring on an illness would be almost as bad as accepting him for

Lady Jane. Therefore he sent for his steward, or had an interview with his head groom, or seized upon some other external aid to save himself from the thought. He was unusually stately during the evening and snubbed the man of the clubs, who had gained some favour before by his adroitness and the interest he took in the house of Billings. The Duke turned his back upon this candidate for favour in the midst of an account he was giving of some discoveries he had made—discoveries for which the entire race of the Altamonts ought, he believed, to have been his debtors—as if the House of Altamont could have been advantaged by any discovery made by a man who was nobody, or indeed wanted any new glorification. The Duke turned round in the very midst of the tale, turned his shoulder to the discoverer and began to talk to the next of his noble visitors.

This snub direct made everybody stare, and quenched the victim for the evening. It gave his Grace a little satisfaction to mortify somebody; but after all it did not do much for his own wounds. And after a disturbed night, when malicious recollection presented him with the souvenir of Winton almost before he was free of his disturbed dreams, it may be supposed that the Duke's uprising was not a pleasant one. Heaven and earth! a little squire! a nobody! He got up precipitately—if the Duke could be supposed to do anything precipitately—and hurried his dressing, and plunged himself into business. To allow himself to be drawn even into a bilious attack by an assailant so contemptible would have been beneath him. His Grace was very busy checking the steward's accounts, and just had started what he thought was an error in the balance-sheet, and was about with

much enjoyment to hunt it back to its origin—for he loved to think that he was cheated, and to find out the managers of the estate in an inaccurate sixpence was a great gratification to him—when there suddenly came a low and somewhat tremulous knock at his door. He knew in a moment that it was some new annoyance and connected with the Winton affair, though it did not occur to him who the applicant could be who made this gentle demand for admittance. His first thought was so little wise that it prompted him to make as though he had not heard. But he heard very well, and through every fibre of him. Then as he waited, keeping very quiet, with perhaps a hope that the interruption might thus be diverted, the knock was repeated a little louder. The Duke rose in great impatience. He knew as well as if he had been in all their counsels what it was,

but he did not know who it was. When it was repeated for the third time he made a stride across the room, and with his own hand flung the door open. "WELL!" he said in a voice of thunder, then fell back appalled. For there, in her white morning dress, and whiter than her dress, save when she was crimson, her soft countenance inspired with something which her father had never seen there before, her eyes meeting his steadfastly, a slight tremor in her, which rather added to than detracted from her firmness—stood Lady Jane.

The Duke was so much excited that for one moment he failed in politeness towards the princess royal. "YOU!" he cried, with something of that intonation of supreme surprise and horror, with which he had said SIR to her lover. But he paused, and a better inspiration returned to him. A spasmodic sort of

smile came over his face. "Ah, Jane!" he said, and put out his hand. "You want to speak to me? This is an unusual visit—and perhaps it is rather an unfortunate moment, if you have much to say."

"Not very much, papa," Jane answered, with an agitated smile. She took his hand, though he had not meant this, and held it, as she closed the door behind her. He would not have allowed her to do as much as this herself, had he noted what she meant, but he was agitated too in spite of himself. He recovered, however, and shut the door, then led his daughter to a chair and placed her in it. It was — but he noticed that only after it was beyond mending—the very chair in which her presumptuous suitor had placed himself yesterday. The Duke stood up before her in front of the fireplace exactly as he had done with Win-

ton. The coincidence alarmed him, but now he could not help it. "Well, my love?" he said. He put on an air which was jaunty and light-hearted, the false gaiety with which a frightened man faces unknown danger. "Well, my love! I have just found Whitaker out in some serious miscalculations. I am robbed on all hands by my servants. It is one of the penalties of our position. But I warn you I have my head full of this and will be a poor listener. Whitaker, you see——"

"What I have to say will not take much time, papa. But it is very important to me."

"Ah, ah!" said the Duke, with a laugh. "*Chiffons*, eh? Money wanted? You must talk that over with your mother. I am not rich, but whatever my Jane may require, were it to the half of my kingdom——"

He made her a bow full of that deference and almost reverential respect with which it was one of the Duke's best points to have surrounded his only daughter—with a smile in which there was more tenderness than his Grace was capable of showing to any other creature. He loved his daughter, and he venerated her as a sort of flower of humanity and of the Altamonts, who were the best that humanity could produce.

"I will not ask so much as that," said Lady Jane, tremulous, yet firm; "and yet I have come to ask you for something, father. I am older than girls are usually when they—marry."

"Older, nonsense! Who has told you that?" cried the Duke, his veins beginning to swell, and his heart to thump with rising excitement. "You are in the bloom of your youth. I have never seen a girl look sweeter, or fairer, or younger, for

that matter, than my child has been looking. Who has put such folly into your head?"

"It is not folly, it is true; and no matter — that is nothing; but only to show you that I am serious. I am no longer a girl, papa. Ah! do not interrupt; I shall always be a girl to you. I am a woman. I have had a great many thoughts before I came to speak — for myself. That is the last thing one wishes to do. To have others do it is so much the easier. But one must at last. I have come to speak to you for myself."

"Jane, you had better pause and think," said the Duke, with threatening looks. "What can you have to say about yourself? Don't bring down my respect for my daughter, We are driven out of our respect for women in most cases early in our career; but most men have a prejudice in favour of their daughters. Don't force

me to think that you are just like all the rest."

She looked at him wondering, but with eyes that did not falter. "My mother, I am sure, can have forfeited no one's respect," she said softly; "neither shall I, I hope; but perhaps more than she. I must speak to you, father, about my own life. Oh!" she cried, clasping her hands, with a vivid colour coming to her pale cheeks, "speak you for me! do not let me have to do it. There are things that can only be said when the case is desperate, and surely—surely it cannot be desperate between you and me. Speak for me, father, to your own heart."

"So far as I can see, this is melodrama," said the Duke, with a feeble smile of agitation that looked like a sneer, for his lips were dry. "What am I to say? Come, must we be brutal? That Lady

Jane Altamont, like any poor milliner, is beginning to be afraid——"

Her eyes opened a little wider with a scared look, but she said nothing, only gazed more fixedly on her father, her whole soul bent on what he was next to say.

"Afraid," he said, with a little forced giggle of a laugh, "because she is twenty-eight, and her cheek is hollow—afraid that she is growing an old maid, and will never get a husband? There is nothing more natural than that," he cried, bursting out into a mocking laugh.

Lady Jane rose from her chair. She coloured high, then became white as a ghost. Astonishment, consternation, pain —pain indescribable, a kind of horror and dismay were in her eyes. She opened her lips, but only to give forth a gasp of sound which was inarticulate. She did not take her eyes from him; but gradually

there grew in them, besides the pitiful suffering of a creature outraged and insulted, a gleam of indignation, a flash of contempt. When a man, even a duke, has taken that fatal step between resentment and fury, between what is permissible and what is unpermissible, the other steps are easy enough. Her father forgot that she was Lady Jane, and the first of womankind. He let his passion go. The more he had loved and elevated her, the more did he trample all her superiority under his feet.

"Ah! you thought I should say something prettier, something more pleasant," he cried. "Poetical! but I am not poetical, and that is the short and long of it. Afraid to lose your chance altogether, and determined to have a husband, that is the meaning of it! I know now why the man was brought here. I never could make out what we wanted with him at Billings,

A last chance for Jane! Ah, I see it all now!"

Lady Jane stood and received all this as if the words had been stones. She put her hands upon her breast to ward them off. She shrank backwards now and then with a faint moan, as one after another was discharged at her. Her eyes grew larger, and more and more pitiful, wet, appealing as if to earth and heaven; but she never withdrew them from her father's face. And now that he had let himself loose, he raved on, expending upon her all his wrath, putting himself more and more fatally in the wrong with every word, showing, alas! that nothing, not a coal-heaver, could be more vulgar than a duke when he is put to it. Lady Jane stood still before him and never said a word. This was worse than the guillotine. She had dreamt of facing the insults of the mob, but never the insults of her fa-

ther. As she stood there, to all appearance so full and painfully occupied in sustaining the storm of words thus poured upon her, a hundred reflections were passing through her mind. She almost smiled to herself to think how small had been the terrible scenes presented to her by her imagination, in face of the reality. The Constitution might have gone to pieces, the guillotine might have been raised without shaking her confidence in her class, or disturbing her lofty unconscious superiority to all the rabble could do,—but her father—this was what she had not thought of. Ah! it is not any rabble that can shake the foundations of the earth: but when your father, when those who are most dear to you, lay hands upon the pillars of the house—she stood so still, and looked at him with such a steadfast gaze, that the Duke was driven out of himself. He said—who can doubt?

—a thousand things he never meant to say. He turned himself outside in before her, displaying weaknesses which even his wife did not know. But at last his wrath exhausted itself. He began to stammer and hesitate, then stopped short suddenly, with all the consciousness of his self-betrayal on him. There was a moment's silence, during which they looked at each other without a word said—and then he made a step forward closer to her, and asked, "What have you got to say?"

"Nothing," said Lady Jane. Her eyes were wet, and shining all the more for the moisture in them, but she had not cried nor felt any impulse to cry. "Oh, nothing —nothing now."

"You are convinced then?" he said hurriedly, trying to assume his usual aspect. "Come, come, that is well. And perhaps I have been hasty. But you

know what is the point upon which I feel most strongly. There must be no descent out of your rank. I have trained you in the sentiment of your rank, above all things. What have we else?" cried the Duke, "everything fails us—the masses pour in everywhere—they have ruined the kingdom, they are ruining the Church: but," he said slowly, "they shall never ruin the House of Altamont: that shall be kept sacred whatever goes. Pardon me, my love, if I have failed in respect to the last daughter of the house. I know my Jane will not fail."

But still Lady Jane did not make any reply. She stood as if she had been struck dumb, regarding him with a kind of serious wonder which confused him more than he could say. The desire to explain herself, to ask him for his consent, to get his sympathy, seemed to have died in her. Was she stunned only, or con-

vinced, or what was it he had done? The Duke grew alarmed at last. He waited a moment longer, and then he added, "I have been hasty. After all, my dear, whatever it is, it would be better that you should say what you meant to say."

She shook her head, still looking at him. "No—no—there would be no advantage in it now."

"What do you mean by *now?*—perhaps I might have been mistaken. Come, let me hear what it was," the Duke cried, with an air of sudden amiability, ignoring all that had gone before.

"Father," said Lady Jane with a certain solemnity, "there was a great deal to say—but not now. Certain things were uppermost in my mind. I thought my father would listen, and perhaps feel for me, though he might not approve. But I do not wish it now. There is nothing —it is over——"

She put her hand upon her heart, pressing it as if to keep down a sigh. Her eyes so wet, but not weeping, were strangely pathetic, with a resignation in them which it was not wonderful perhaps that he should interpret in his own way. He put out his hand and laid it caressingly upon her arm.

"My good child! if that is so, you may be sure it is for the best. I knew there was that in my Jane that would respond to what I said. And I thank you, my love, not only for myself, but in the name of the race."

She looked at him again with a penetrating gaze. "The race is everything to you then," she said.

"Everything, my love! everything. I have no other thought."

"To keep it honourable and true — above all unworthy thoughts, above dishonesty and untruth," she said slowly, telling over the words like beads.

"That is what I desire," said the Duke. Then he added his gloss. "To retain our old nobility unbroken, to sully the the name with no *mésalliances*. Your brother has disregarded my wishes; but though I would never have sanctioned it, he has secured another kind of advantage, and perhaps I have no right to complain. But you, my Jane, nothing must touch you: you must remain the pride of your family. And," he added soothingly, "do not lose heart, my love. Lady Jane Altamont will not want for opportunities. Do not think from what I said that you are considered *passée* by any one, or that a good marriage is less likely than before. We are not come the length of putting up with an inferior, trust me, my dear."

Lady Jane's pallor changed into an overwhelming blush. She turned away from him, almost shaking his hand from her shoulder. "In that case," she said,

with a muffled voice full of some emotion which he did not quite understand, nor yet feel comfortable about—"in that case there is certainly no more to say."

And without any little civility, such as, though not indispensable, it is pretty to keep up between the nearest relations, no little bow or smile, or glance of pleasant understanding, she turned from him and went out of the room, suddenly and noiselessly. The Duke did not like it: he felt there was something in it which he had not fathomed. He stood in the place where she had left him, his hand still stretched out where she had shaken it off, his mouth and his eyes open, a bewildered alarm in his mind. What did she mean? Was there more meaning than one in those simple-seeming words? Was this real submission as he hoped, or a something else? He could not tell. But a cold chill got into his veins; he did not know

what to make of it. After a while, however, he reasoned with himself, and recovered his comfort. Jane, who had always been so docile, so ready to accept his views, why should she turn against him and all his traditions now?

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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