QUITS;

A NOVEL.

BY

THE BARONESS TAUTPHOEUS,

AUTHOR OF "THE INITIALS."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1858.

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QUITS!

VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

In the midst of Life we are in Death.

The bell of the steamer tolled. A hissing sound of escaping vapour, and the gradual cessation of even the slight motion of a Rhine boat, informed the passengers that they had reached their destination for the night, and induced those who had taken refuge in the cabins from the heat of a July afternoon to commence a tumultuous rush on deck. Stretched on one of the sofas in what is called the pavilion, and perfectly unmoved by the bustle around him, lay a young Englishman, apparently in a precarious state of health, and in such very deep mourning that some inquisitive tourists took the trouble to make inquiries about him, and, without much difficulty, discovered that he was a nobleman returning home to take possession of his estates on the death of his father. Yet great as had been the attention lavished on him during the day by most of the English travellers who had become acquainted with his name and rank, they now all hurried past him without word or look, so wholly intent were they on securing their luggage, and obtaining apartments at the usually crowded hotels. Two persons who had entered the steam-boat but a couple of hours

previously, stopped, however, at the door, looked back and spoke to each other, but in tones so low, that no sound reached the invalid's ear, though, from the direction of their eyes, he had little doubt that he was himself the subject of discussion. Father and daughter they seemed to be, and had attracted his attention directly on their entrance, from the evident desire of both to remain unobserved. The gentleman had the remains of considerable beauty of face and person, disfigured by an unusual degree of corpulence, which, however, he seemed in no way disposed to lessen, for during his short sojourn in the steam-boat he had left the pavilion no less than three times to strengthen and refresh himself with soup, beefsteak, and coffee, each time inviting his daughter to join him, and receiving for answer a quick shake of the head, followed, after he had left her, by a still closer drawing into the corner of the sofa, from which she never moved, and a pressing nearer to the adjacent window, while she raised towards it, to catch the waning light, a volume of Tauchnitz's edition of "British Authors." Perhaps this last circumstance, as much as the mysterious whispering of the travellers, had excited his lordship's curiosity, for he concluded that if she were not English, she at least understood the language, and perfectly too, as her quick reading and expressive changes of countenance proved beyond a doubt. Certain it is that his eyes had seldom wandered from the face of the young girl from the moment of her entrance; and a charming youthful face it was, with its small undefined nose, lustrous black eyes, well-formed mouth, and high intellectual forehead partially covered by braids of raven hair. But it was the smile that had most of all attracted, for it was the

brightest he had ever seen, and the more remarkable as the general expression of the countenance was pensive. She stood now leaning against the cabin door, while her father satisfactorily proclaimed his country, by offering, in very good English, to secure rooms for the invalid, in case he should reach the hotel before him.

"Thank you—you are very kind," he replied, slowly rising, "but as I have discovered that this boat goes on with us to-morrow, I have made arrangements for remaining in it. Landing, or rather getting myself under way so early in the morning, fatigues me too much."

He advanced towards them while speaking, and then followed them up the stairs to the deck, where their perfect composure during the scene of confusion that ensued, proved them to be experienced travellers. They exhibited none of the anxiety about their luggage, that put the whole ship's company into commotion when the tarpaulin was removed, which had during the day-time covered the innumerable trunks, boxes, bags, and portmanteaux that had lain heaped together, not a few, as is usual on such occasions, without an address, or even the name of the proprietor. It seemed as if each individual expected at once to have his property, and the murmuring, growling voices of the men mixed strangely with the sharp, impatient tones of the women. Many, though surrounded by packages of all kinds and dimensions, neither trusting their eyes nor memories, imagined that something must still be failing, and eagerly watched each piece of luggage as it was drawn forward, while the different emissaries from the hotels thrust cards into their hands, and vociferated recommendations into their bewildered ears. Some oddly-shaped cases, that seemed to have once belonged to a carriage,

were pointed out with a silent gesture by the Englishman, and then instantly seized by the nearest porters, while he turned to the invalid, and, taking off his hat, politely hoped to have the pleasure of seeing him the next day. A few minutes afterwards, he and his daughter disappeared in the long procession of travellers, emissaries, porters, and truck-drivers, who hurried towards the different hotels.

An unusually brilliant sunset had left a bright orange-coloured sky that served to render the chief buildings of the town still conspicuous, and which, reflected in the broad tranquil river, gave the warmth of colouring and distinctness of outline to the numerous boats and their picturesque rigging that is supposed to be peculiar to warmer climes. That recollections of similar places crowded on the memory of the traveller, as he stood alone near the rudder of the steam-boat, is possible, but not very probable, for Englishmen are not prone to meditations on past scenes or scenery; it is more likely that he was thinking of home, and what awaited him there, while his eyes followed slowly the golden ripple on the water, or rested in reverie on the lounging figures of the surrounding boatmen. The colours of evening changed imperceptibly from violet to blue, from blue to grey; but it was not until the landscape had faded in the twilight, and lights from the suburbs of the town began to glimmer redly through the intervening mist, that he turned away and descended to the pavilion.

It is unnecessary to follow him. We have but to record that he was reminded of his dark-eyed countrywoman by finding the book she had been reading where she had probably placed it when putting on her bonnet.

The name written on the yellow cover was "Nixon," and, though neither euphonious nor remarkable, it seemed to attract his attention in no common degree, for he repeated it several times, and then murmured, "Surely a relation of ours married a man of the name of Nixon — yes — certainly, that was the name — and it was Harry Darwin's mother — the man a merchant, or something of that sort, who became a bankrupt, or — no — squandered his fortune and was obliged to live abroad — that was it. Harry never liked speaking of his mother's second marriage or his stepfather; however, I am rather surprised he did not mention this half-sister of his, whom he must have seen repeatedly, for before he began to live in his yacht, he was continually making excursions abroad, and especially to Germany. I wonder is this the man I mean? My mother said he was a vulgar parvenu — parvenu he may be — vulgar he is not — and as to his daughter — one of whose grandmothers I strongly suspect to have been the black-eyed Susan of nautical celebrity — she is the nicest creature I have seen for an age, and may turn out to be a relation of ours. . Let me see; her maternal and my paternal grandfather having been brothers, we should be second cousins — or first cousins once removed — or third cousins — or — At all events the name is a sufficient pretext for commencing an acquaintance with both of them to-morrow, and that I shall certainly do."

At a very early hour the next morning most of the passengers of the preceding day, reinforced by many others, began to crowd noisily into the steam-boat; not one, however, descended to the cabin until long after the boat had left her moorings, and our traveller

was given more than time to finish his breakfast in undisturbed solitude. Tapping rather impatiently on Mr. or Miss Nixon's book, which he had placed beside him on the table, he awaited the entrance of a group of English who seemed to have chosen the stairs as the place for discussing the events of the previous night; and the words that he overheard proved them to have been of no common-place description: — "Dreadful — awfully sudden — enormously stout man — looked apoplectic — must have taken place just after he went to bed — the body was quite cold when they broke open the door this morning — the poor girl fainted — I saw her being carried across the passage to her room." With a degree of anxiety and interest that surprised himself, he approached the speakers, and learned from them that Mr. Nixon, their fellow passenger of the previous day, had been found dead in his bed about half an hour before they had left the hotel.

"And is his poor daughter quite alone?" he asked compassionately.

"It seems so, but really I had no time to make inquiries," answered a gentleman, endeavouring to pass into the cabin.

"Oh I dare say the people at the hotel will do everything that is necessary," observed a lady, apparently of a more inquisitive and communicative disposition; "and, at all events, the young lady seemed to me extremely well able to take care of herself under all circumstances. We joined the table d'hôte yesterday, when we found that we could not procure a sitting-room, for you know it is only Germans or French who can drink tea in a bed-room! She and her father were not far distant from us, and my attention was attracted towards them by

the variety and quantity of meat and sauces devoured by him in the course of half an hour. Poor man! I did not know it would be his last dinner or supper, whichever he called it — nor he either, of course. But I must say, at a public table I should be sorry to see *my* daughters so perfectly at their ease as she seemed to be. The manner in which her father made acquaintance with all the people about him was quite extraordinary, and the young lady joined in the conversation with a fluency scarcely becoming her years, and not at all English!"

"I wish," said the invalid traveller, languidly, "I wish I had gone on shore yesterday evening. I might, perhaps, have been of use. Going back to the aw — aw — town, what's its name? is aw — out of the question now, as my return home has already been provokingly protracted one way or another."

"Very kind of your lordship to feel so much interest about a stranger," rejoined the lady, "but you may be assured the people at the hotel will pay the greatest attention to this Miss Nixon: *my* daughters were actually refused a room they particularly wished to have, in order to let her be near her papa, and the whole household was so occupied with her this morning that we came away without breakfast."

This seemed to have been the case with many other passengers also, and a clattering of cups and saucers, and a hurrying to and fro of waiters ensued, which apparently disturbed his lordship's meditations, for he went on deck and watched the swift motion of the steamer, as, aided alike by art and nature, it hurried forward with the stream: the water widening, the banks

sinking, and windmills serving as landmarks from the time they entered the territories of Holland.

Flow on, river, as you have done for ages! press forward, steam-boat, to complete your daily task — forward as quickly as your impatient passengers can desire — there is but one among them who in the course of the day bestows a passing thought on the orphan girl whose sudden bereavement had that morning so unpleasantly reminded them that "In the midst of life we are in death."

CHAPTER II.

A Short Pedigree.

THOUGH few people could be induced by the sudden death of a stranger at an hotel to protract their journey in order to be of service to the survivor — even supposing that person a young and helpless girl — a return to the town on the Rhine, and a short delay there with the daughter of Mr. Nixon, will scarcely be objected to by any humane novel reader. After the body of the deceased had been examined, and the cause of death ascertained, the civil authorities requested an interview with Miss Nixon, and questioned her respecting her parents, her age, her past life, and future prospects, exhibiting very evident satisfaction on learning that she had two uncles in London, was related to the Earl of Medway, and had a step-brother who she described as being of no profession but a gentleman and a baronet. On being advised to write to this brother without delay she was obliged to confess that she did not know his address — her mother had always sent her letters to him under cover to Lord Medway, who had been his

guardian, and who had also managed all their English affairs for them. She had never corresponded with her uncles, but had written to inform Lord Medway of her mother's death, which had taken place some months previously, and she had received a very kind answer; her brother also had written, but had not come to see them — he and her father had never been on good terms.

These few particulars had been in a manner extorted from the poor girl, as, scarcely recovered from the shock she had so recently received, she leaned her head weeping on the table beside her; but when, on being asked if she had money to defray her expenses to London, she silently produced a purse full of English sovereigns, they recommended her, without further hesitation, to the care of the landlady of the hotel, who was present; and after a whispered proposal to the latter to give her, in some more convenient place, the necessary directions about the interment of the Englishman, they all withdrew, and Leonora Nixon found herself, for the first time since she had known her bereavement, alone.

She instantly sat upright, pushed her dark hair from her pale face, seemed to listen intently to the sound of the retreating footsteps; and, when silence was restored to the corridor, she rose, and murmuring the words, "Once more — I must see him once more," left the room, and ran quickly towards a door at the opposite side of the passage, which she opened with a precipitancy that proved the violence of feelings she had thought it necessary to control in the presence of strangers during the preceding hour. In the doorway, however, she stood amazed, at first incapable of uttering an articulate sound. No trace of her father was there; the bed in which he

had died was deprived of all its furniture, and a woman with water and a brush stood scouring the interior, as if death had infected the very boards. Strips of carpet hung pendant at the wide-open windows, from which the curtains had been removed, and a housemaid was deluging the painted floor with fresh water, after having placed the chairs and tables in an adjoining room. Somewhat startled by Leonora's sudden appearance, the girl stopped her work, and leaned on her long-handled brush, while Leonora advanced, stammering, "Where is — is — my — father?"

"The room must be got ready for the steam-boat passengers this evening, miss," answered the girl evasively.

"Where have they laid him?" she asked, with assumed calmness.

"Surely, miss, you don't want to see the corpse again after being so frightened this morning?"

"I do wish to see it," said Leonora, "and you must take me to the room directly."

"But I have got orders not to let any one into it until the coffin comes."

"Such orders cannot concern me. Give me the key, and I promise to bring it back to you in half an hour."

"I must first ask the landlady," said the girl, evidently impressed with involuntary respect by Leonora's decided manner; and passing her quickly, she was soon after heard speaking to her mistress at the other end of the passage. They then both advanced towards Leonora; and after a few words of remonstrance on the part of the landlady, which of course made no sort of impression, the latter proposed herself accompanying the orphan to take leave of the remains of her parent.

They descended the stairs, traversed a broad cor-

ridor, and, to Leonora's infinite surprise, entered the ball-room. She looked round her with a bewildered air, while her companion slowly and reluctantly unlocked the door of an adjoining refreshment-room, and then silently pointed to a long table, where, stretched on a mattress, and covered with a linen cloth, the outline of a human figure could be distinguished.

The windows were open, but the green jalousies so arranged that little light fell on the features, uncovered with eager haste by Leonora's trembling hand. If the landlady had dreaded being witness to a violent ebullition of grief, she was soon convinced that her apprehensions had been unnecessary. Large tears gathered slowly in the eyes of the youthful mourner, and fell heavily on the face of the dead: — alas! that we should have to record they were the only tears likely to be shed for Frederick Nixon! No bad criterion of our worth and usefulness in this world would be these tears, could they but be collected; and not without deep meaning was the Roman lachrimatory and many funeral customs of other nations of antiquity. In the present civilised states of the world it has become a sort of maxim that of the dead we should only speak advantageously. The Egyptians thought otherwise; and their *post mortem* trials, where every one was at liberty to accuse the deceased, and the defence alone depended on the good will and affection of surviving friends and relations, may often have found a place in the thoughts of the living, and prevented many a sin of omission as well as commission.

Not few would, in such a case, have been Frederick Nixon's accusers, his sole defender the orphan girl, who, with the prospect of dependence on unknown relations before her, and uncertainty as to her reception among

them, nevertheless sincerely mourned the parent who had squandered her inheritance and left her homeless. We regret the necessity of recording the story of his life, which, in its dismal details, is too common either to create interest or serve as warning.

His paternal pedigree had been of a more respectable than brilliant description, until his father became a man of importance in the commercial world. This father had commenced his career in the manner hereditary in the family, that is, as shop-boy in *his* father's old established house in the city, and had wisely preserved through life a vivid recollection of having carried parcels to their destination, and considered it an honour when permitted, in his turn, to stand behind the counter and weigh sugar and spice for the numerous customers; or, on receiving an "order," to make up with dexterous hand the various packages and consign them to the care of his successor in office, the attendant boy, who had been especially commanded to say "Sir" to him. Being without brothers or sisters, he found himself, on the death of his parents, in possession, not only of an extensive business, but also a considerable sum of money: the latter he increased by a judicious marriage, and, being of an enterprising disposition, engaged in successful speculations during the war, which raised him to a state of opulence quite beyond his powers of enjoyment; so that the accumulated money amounted, by means of interest and compound interest, to sums of such magnitude that the shop was at length closed, and an emigration commenced beyond the precincts of the city. He had now an office and warehouses, and when death deprived him of his wife, he found no difficulty in obtaining the hand of one of the very handsome daughters of an Irish gentleman of

wonderfully ancient family and distinguished poverty, whose name, preceded by the euphonious particle O, satisfactorily proved that he belonged to one of the illustrious races said to be of royal lineage.

In the course of time, Mr. Nixon was made fully to comprehend that a name is by no means so insignificant a thing as Juliet Capulet supposed it to be; for his wife, ardently desiring to regain what she considered her proper position in the world, made many and desperate efforts to rise in the social scale, and, as a first step thereto, unceasingly endeavoured to induce her husband to remove to the "West End." From the house in Russell-square, purchased and furnished at the time of their marriage, he could never be induced to move; neither would he give up old friends or habits, and to the last day of his life continued proud of having been Lord Mayor, and gloried *bonâ fide* in the title of alderman.

The two sons of his first wife, born and educated while he was still a hard-working man, acquired his tastes and habits, and in process of time became his partners; but the only son of his second wife, when rendered unmanageable at home by indulgence, had been consigned to the care of, —

"A clergyman, married, of much experience, with extensive premises at the WEST END," who would "receive into his family EIGHT YOUNG GENTLEMEN. The course of Instruction securing a solid preparation for the universities, &c. &c. &c. The treatment of the pupils truly parental."

Parental it was in one sense certainly, for parents are almost always careless instructors; but while lazily construing Virgil and Homer, Master Frederick grew

healthy and handsame, and acquired tastes, habits, and manners that his mother pronounced exquisite, and which raised expectations of future triumphs in life, the disappointment of which was spared her by an early death.

With half a dozen of the "*eight young gentlemen*" Frederick Nixon afterwards went to Oxford, where he proved notoriously idle and indolent. Good-humoured and lavishly profuse in his expenditure, he was, however, universally called and considered a "capital fellow," and in this opinion his father probably concurred, for he paid his debts without expressing much astonishment at their amount, was easily convinced that his son's talents were more of a military than civil description, got a commission for him in the Guards, and dying soon afterwards used his plebeian privilege of dividing his fortune with perfect equality among his sons, thereby leaving them all well provided with what is but too generally considered the greatest blessing in life.

The step-brothers, unlike in disposition, temper, education, and habits, dissolved partnership, and in the world of London seldom met again. Frederick, freed from all restraint, possessed of a large fortune and handsome person, fell at once into the disorderly, if not actually profligate, mode of life of his companions and nominal friends, and, without being worse than others, contrived to give himself an unpleasant kind of notoriety by the numerous foolish things he said, and did, to obtain tolerance, if not a position in society where a total want of connexion nevertheless ever caused him to feel himself isolated. His efforts to remedy this latter evil were unremitting, and at length partially successful, when he persuaded Lady Darwin, the widow of a baronet

of good family and daughter of an Honourable Augustus Thorpe, to become his wife. It is true, her cousin, the Earl of Medway, did not receive his new relative with any demonstration of satisfaction; it was even said that he had openly pronounced him to be a weak-headed spendthrift, and given Lady Darwin to understand that, in consequence of her marriage, he should consider it necessary to send her only son (his ward) to school without further delay. She resigned the youthful Harry to the care of his guardian, and perceived not at all the boy's gradual but total estrangement, as year after year he spent less of his holidays with her, and began completely to identify himself with the Medway family.

Lady Darwin was still young and handsome, and for some years her career was as brilliant as apparently inexhaustible wealth could make it; but Frederick Nixon had, even before his marriage, considerably encroached upon his capital, which, placed in the Funds, was completely at his disposal; and, totally averse to business of any kind, he continued to supply all deficiencies of income in the same manner. His wife, purposely kept in ignorance of the state of his affairs, thought not of making retrenchments; and, in the course of time, was eager to plunge deeper into the dissipations of the world to escape from the society of her husband, who, after having frittered away a noble fortune in the vain pursuit of selfish pleasure and ostentation, began altogether to lose the good temper for which he had once been so remarkable. He became irritable and restless, continually changing his place of residence, and relieving immediate want of money by the sale of one house, while incurring debt, at the same time, by the purchase of another; and thus he struggled on until the crash, long foreseen by

every one, took place; when the sale of his effects, and his wife's resignation of thirty thousand pounds, his wedding gift to her, having satisfied his creditors, he was at liberty to retire to the continent, there to live on her jointure from her first marriage.

They had lost many children while in England, but Leonora, born at a quiet town in Germany, during the time of their first fresh grief, lived; and the change produced in their small household, and cares imposed on them by her birth, turned their thoughts into a new channel, and greatly alleviated their useless regrets. While, however, Lady Darwin quickly resigned herself to her loss of fortune, and continued to devote herself exclusively to her child, her husband, suffering intolerably from ennui, began, by degrees, to indulge in the roving propensities common to his countrymen when they have left England in search of a foreign home. As far as was possible, too, he fell into his former habits, and squandered, and wandered when and where he could during his wife's life-time. Her death, just as his daughter had attained her fifteenth year, left him and his child in a state of painful destitution, and to the two brothers he had so openly despised in the days of his prosperity, Frederick Nixon was at length obliged to apply for assistance. It was not refused; each brother consented to give an annual sum of money for his support; and in order to be near England in case of pecuniary difficulties, he had commenced a Rhine pilgrimage, uncertain where he should finally establish himself with his daughter, and contrive to live on an income, of the smallness of which he complained as only those do who have spent but never earned.

His faults and follies were alike forgotten by his

mourning daughter, as she bent over the well-known face, and drew towards her the cold stiff hand, that, but a few hours before, had, warm with life, pressed hers. The landlady's various movements of impatience — jingling of keys, opening of windows, and displacing of furniture in the adjacent room — were unheeded by Leonora until she became conscious of the approach of two men, who, talking loudly, and walking heavily, carried between them a coffin of large dimensions. As they deposited it on the end of the table, they took off their caps and looked towards the landlady for orders. Leonora shuddered, and allowed herself to be led from the room without remonstrance, receiving a chilling sort of consolation from the assurance given her that her father should be interred with all the consideration due to his rank.

That this promise had been fulfilled she had no doubt, when, a few days afterwards, the bills were laid before her by the hostess. In fact, the purse of sovereigns which had afforded such general satisfaction a few days previously, became so greatly reduced in its contents, that she felt it was time to decide on her future plans, and, having bolted her door, she drew towards her, and unlocked, her father's writing-desk. It contained even less money than she expected, and some letters which shocked and grieved her beyond measure, for, from their perusal, she ascertained that her father had already considerably overdrawn the allowance made him by his brothers. His bills had been honoured, but the letter informing him of the fact contained, from his eldest brother, not only a reprimand of extreme severity but a threat of retaining payment by instalments on any future similar occasion. An angry correspondence had ensued,

followed by a quarrel, and Leonora at length discovered that she had been during the last two days unconsciously on her way to England, where her father had hoped, by his presence, to appease the ire of his justly-incensed step-brothers.

Leonora perceived clearly, and at once, that her father had been in the wrong, nevertheless, her dislike to her City uncles (for so her mother had invariably denominated them) increased tenfold. She remembered all she had ever heard of their purse-proud vulgarity; called to mind the various anecdotes of ludicrous economy and ignorance of fashionable life on their parts, so often related, most probably with exaggeration, by her father; saw all, and more than all, she had ever heard, confirmed by the packet of well-written, business-like letters before her, and resolved never to apply to such men for assistance. Her thoughts naturally turned next to her step-brother, Sir Harry Darwin, although her acquaintance with him was but slight, and her father had done everything in his power to prejudice her against him, never naming him, when her mother was absent, otherwise than "that self-sufficient egotist," or "that good-for-nothing puppy Darwin." She had seen him but twice during her life. Once, when she was a mere child, at Heidelberg he had joined them, intending to enter the university there and remain for a couple of years: he had, however, for reasons at that time unknown to her, resided with them but as many months. The second time was several years later, at Vienna, but he had then come to their house as a stranger might have done, and never without having received a note from his mother to let him know at what hour her husband would be absent from home. He had associated with people un-

known to them, and lived altogether with Lord Medway's second son, the Honourable Charles Thorpe, who had just then commenced his diplomatic career as *attaché*.

This last meeting had occurred so recently that Leonora had been old enough to perceive the mutual antipathy of her father and step-brother. She had been disposed to like the latter though he had taken but little notice of her, and had one day, when she was present, observed to his mother, in a slighting manner, that "her daugther was a thoroughbred Nixon, without apparently a drop of Thorpe blood in her veins: he feared he never should be able to consider her as in any way belonging to *their* family." When taking leave of them he had given his mother a considerable sum of money, telling her, without an attempt at reserve, that on his becoming of age, his guardian, Lord Medway, had pointed out to him the folly of increasing her jointure, as it would only benefit her husband, or rather encourage him in his extravagance; that he had therefore resolved to assist her privately, and trusted she would wisely keep secret his having done and intending to do so. With a deep sigh Lady Darwin had acknowledged the justness of Lord Medway's remark, and fully determined to follow her son's advice; but a few days after his departure, when goaded by her husband's ironical observations about "the extraordinary generosity of her son Sir Harry," while he pointed to and pretended to admire some trifling gold trinkets that had been his ostensible present, she had confessed all, and produced, with short-lived exultation, the money, which was incontinently taken possession of by Frederick Nixon. He, however, in the excess of his surprise and satisfaction, had overseen a purse of sovereigns, and she had not thought it necessary

to point it out to his notice, but dropping it into her pocket with much of the trepidation of a criminal dreading detection, it had been from that time forward carefully concealed, not again seing the light of day, until, on her death-bed, she had privately consigned it to the care of her daughter, with the injunction to reserve it for some occasion of imminent distress, and when all other resources should fail. Often, when her father was subsequently in embarrassments, had Leonora considered if the designated time were not come for her to produce her treasure, as often had the last clause of her mother's speech deterred her. Other resources had been found, silver, furniture, books, had been sold, until, as her thoughtless parent observed with a light laugh, "They were a last travelling in the pleasantest manner possible, with nothing but their respective wardrobes to care for."

The time had suddenly arrived when Leonora had had no doubt as to the necessity of using the contents of this purse. She held it now, much diminished in worth, in her hand, and having counted the remaining sovereigns and some Prussian dollars, perceived that she should just be able to await the answer to the letter which she prepared to write to Lord Medway to tell him of her desolate position, and request him to forward an enclosed letter to her step-brother, of whose address she was in utter ignorance.

From Sir Harry she expected but little sympathy or brotherly love, and her whole trust was in Lord Medway, of whose kindness and excellence she had heard so much from her mother that she scarcely knew whether she most loved or revered him. She carried the letter herself to the post office, and before parting

with it breathed a short prayer that God would raise up friends to her in her time of need and not long leave her homeless.

CHAPTER III.

Down the Rhine and up the Thames.

THE return of the post brought Leonora the anxiously expected answer to her letter. Her eagerness at first impeded her powers of comprehension, and she was obliged to read it twice over before she understood that she was without delay to repair to Lord Medway's house in London, where her affairs would be considered and discussed with the necessary attention, and her plans for the future arranged as advantageously as possible. Energetic on all occasions, she sprang from her seat, tied on her bonnet while rapidly descending the stairs of the hotel, and went, without a moment's delay, to the office where places were to be procured in the steam-boat that was to leave the next morning for Rotterdam.

It was not until after her return to the hotel, and the first excitement of acting for herself had partially subsided, that she again carefully and calmly perused the letter. She had previously not observed that it was written on paper with the very broadest of black edges, a mourning which it now occurred to her was deeper than that likely to have been considered necessary by Lord Medway for her mother, and for her father she never expected him or any of his family to mourn outwardly or inwardly. Again she examined the letter, imagined the handwriting changed — firmer, and at the same time more careless; but as she knew he had been ill, she supposed it not unlikely that he had employed

an amanuensis. The signature appeared quite the same as usual, and she put it aside, packed up her clothes, and went to bed, resolved to sleep off the cares and anxieties which crowded on her mind at the near prospect of undertaking, for the first time in her life, a journey alone. Such, however, was the buoyancy of her mind, that all her perplexities were chased by vivid surmises as to the personal appearance of Lord and Lady Medway, their sons and daughters; and her last thought, in falling asleep, was af the Charles Thorpe of whom her step-brother had spoken incessantly, and who seemed from his account to be idolized, not only by his own family, but by all the world besides.

The next morning Leonora and her antiquated carriage cases were carefully committed to the charge of the captain of the steam-boat by the hotel-keeper and his wife, who had shewn her much kindness and attention during her ten days' sojourn with them. They remained as long as they could with her, and when parting shoved into her hands a basket full of grapes and cakes, hurrying away afterwards without listening to her thanks, and from the shore bowing and waving their hands and handkerchiefs as long as she remained in sight.

"These strangers have been kind to me," thought Leonora, "why should I fear that those on whom I have some natural claims will prove otherwise?"

Of the kindness of strangers she had no further proofs worthy of notice for a couple of days. The route by Rotterdam is that of home-returning families burthened with luggage, or commercial travellers: the latter scarcely observed her presence, the former did not approve of the appearance of a girl so young being quite alone: and prudent parents frowned down the incipient attempts

of sons willing to offer civilities to eyes so dark and face so fair.

It was well for Leonora that she was in mind less youthful than in appearance, and that her knowledge of various languages helped her through the little difficulties which invariably fall to the lot of a solitary female traveller at the much dreaded foreign *douane*, and the infinitely more disagreeable English Custom-house.

Her ideas of the vastness and commercial importance of London were certainly not decreased by her passage up the Thames. All foreigners should choose that approach to the metropolis if they wish to receive new impressions; even those from maritime countries cannot fail to be struck with the endless rows of ships that form a floating world around them. The word foreigner, as applied to herself, would have been most offensive to Leonora, whose pride in being an Englishwoman, and admiration and reverence for everything English, were as unbounded as her ignorance of the manners and customs of the country which she pertinaciously called her "native land." Unwilling that even her fellow passengers should suspect this to be her first passage up the Thames, she sat on the still damp, green benches in the stern of the Dutch steam-boat, a perfectly silent observer of all that was new to her. Through a rather dense, yellow fog she first saw the great ships of war; then more clearly the merchantmen in apparently interminable lines; large steamers rushing past, containing perchance persons and papers of incalculable importance; smaller ones darting in all directions, filled with people and things of less note; and many crowded with gaily-dressed pleasure-seeking parties. Innumerable boats

of various dimensions and forms plyed across the river from ship to ship, or supplied the latter with fresh provisions: each and all afforded her endless interest, while from the colliers alone she turned away as children are wont to do from chimney-sweepers. It was Sunday, and she saw both ships and crews in their best attire. There was none of the usual hurry and bustle, and as the sailors leaned lazily over the gunwale of their ships, or descended smartly dressed into attendant boats in order to go ashore, she found more resemblance to other places and people than she perhaps desired; while the dark looking wharfs, stores, and warehouses not a little disappointed expectations of the banks of the Thames, that partiality had unconsciouly raised to a par with the beautiful quays of southern cities of less note.

All comparisons with other lands were soon, however, lost in wonder at the apparently endless number of ships, which, as they proceeded, seemed to increase, and at last close around them; so that when the noisy escape of steam convinced her that they had reached their mooring-place, she still saw beyond her an interminable extent of masts and rigging, with a dark background of massive buildings becoming gradually clearer in the rays of red sunshine that struggled through the slowly dispersing fog.

In the year 1840 there was no St. Katharine's Wharf to facilitate the landing of travellers, and Leonora's contemplations were interrupted by the arrival of the Custom-house officers. Her luggage was detained, her carpet bag, after a severe examination, returned to her, and having dragged it to the side of the ship, she waited patiently for an opportunity of descending into one of the numerous boats surrounding them. There was a

great deal of shouting, and swearing, and pushing, and pulling, and loud dialogues carried on in a language unintelligible to her, though an occasional word made her aware that it was intended for English. An elderly French gentleman, who had been invisible during the voyage, having been drawn forward by the crowd, began slowly and carefully to descend the side of the ship, and when about half way attempted, in very broken English, to make a bargain for the transporting of himself and *sac de nuit* to the hospitable shores of old England. He was, however, immediately somewhat rudely shoved forward by two sailors who stood at either side of the ladder, and who then looked up with grinning faces to see who would come next. There was a pause, no one seemed disposed to follow, and Leonora, taking advantage of the open space, directly advanced. She was politely requested "not to be afeard," then fairly lifted into the boat very much in the manner of a package marked "Glass — keep this side up" — deposited beside the Frenchman, and though the boatmen evidently expected and wished for more passengers, they were, in spite of their vociferations, pushed aside and forced to pull towards the landing-place. It was at a short distance further up the river, and they reached it in about ten minutes; but as the French gentleman prepared to step on shore he was desired first to pay his fare, and the evidently much valued *sac de nuit* drawn from his reluctant hands as a pledge for the same. He gave two shillings — four shillings — six shillings — and then looked with an expression of astonishment at the impudent laughing faces of the boatmen. When, however, he closed his purse, and endeavoured to gain possession of his property, they waved him off, and explained by

words and the extension of so many fingers, that for less than eight shillings he should not enjoy the privilege of landing on British ground.

"Dat is four *pour* mademoiselle and four pour moi?"

They explained, with imperturbable insolence, that *poor* or rich ma'mselle must pay eight shillings as well as mounshier, and they seized her property, also, to explain alike their determination to persist in their claims, and fully to explain their meaning, which they doubted her understanding, as they had only heard her speak French to her fellow-traveller. Leonora instantly paid the eight shillings, without attempt at remonstrance; and then, in better English than was perhaps quite agreeable to them, hoped at least that one of them would carry her bag and place it in a carriage for her. After a few words of advice to her travelling companion to follow her example, she ran up the landing-place, and was soon after rolling rapidly towards B—— Square.

CHAPTER IV.

Leonora Nixon lands, — and forthwith finds a Guardian.

ONLY those who have travelled, and not unfrequently themselves remained stationary for some time at various places on the continent of Europe, can form an idea of the numbers of British subjects who, from necessity, or for economy, or pleasure, reside there. The wanderers, scarcely deserving the name of residents, are perhaps still more numerous, and to both classes children are born, who, educated and not unfrequently married without having ever been in England, nevertheless persist in calling it their *native* land, denominate themselves

English, and think it incumbent on them to be peculiarly and even sometimes ostentatiously patriotic.

One of these pseudo-English was Leonora Nixon. England was to her the land of promise, the home of her imagination. Her father had ever taken a sort of pride and pleasure in abusing foreign habits and manners, even while himself unconsciously acquiring them. He had impressed on her mind so exalted an idea of England, both as country and nation, that she supposed ignorance alone enabled her still to value what she saw elsewhere; and his brilliant and somewhat boasting reminiscences of his life in London, received too much confirmation from her mother's fond recollections of the same scenes, not to be listened to with profound and eager credulity. During the long private conversations between the mother and daughter, it was especially the glory and excellence of the Medway family that had formed the topic of discussion — the worth and dignity of Lord Medway, the beauty and grace of Lady Medway, her enviable position in the world of fashion, her charming children, the magnificence of Thorpe Manor, and even the humbler beauties of a villa on the Thames called The Willows. Of her paternal relations, the Nixons, Leonora had, as has been observed, heard nothing that had tended to raise them in her estimation — vulgar, purse-proud, city people. She wished to forget their very existence, and pretty nearly contrived to do so as she drove along the silent, empty streets of London, internally applauding the evident keeping holy of the sabbath day, and doing no manner of work, which the still unopened shutters of the windows so satisfactorily demonstrated.

Her predetermination to admire everything English

was, during this early Sunday morning drive, put hardly to the proof: there were no open warehouses, with their marvellous display of costly goods to attract her attention; no bustling crowd to amaze her with its endless swarms; no palace-like buildings, such as had been familiar to her eyes from childhood; and as she glanced curiously up at the interminable rows of dingy brick houses, with their unornamented façades of three and four windows, she was obliged to recal to her mind all her mother had told her of the luxury and domestic comfort which could only be obtained when each family, as in England, possessed a house alone.

The prospect brightened as she advanced westward. The squares were succeeded by long, wide streets; buildings of some extent became visible in the distance; there were occasional glimpses of the parks; more rows of shopless houses, trees, grass, iron railings, and at length the cab stopped. A knock, and instantaneous opening of a large handsome door followed; but although two servants became visible, neither moved beyond the threshold, and the cabman returned to Leonora for orders.

"Ask if I can see Lady Medway."

The man came back directly with the answer, "Her l'ship has left town for the Willys."

"Perhaps Lord Medway is still here," suggested Leonora, getting rather nervous.

She saw the servants look at each other, and then at her, and half smile as one of them answered, "His lordship is in town, but not up; he always breakfasts late, and it would be better if the young lady were to call again."

"Oh! if he be but at home, that is all I want,"

cried Leonora, joyously springing up the steps to the door; "I can wait until his usual breakfast hour, and do not wish him to be disturbed on my account."

One of the footmen now whispered a few words to a servant out of livery, just then about to ascend the stairs: he turned round, looked deliberately, almost inquisitively, at Leonora, and then asked her name.

Not apparently much enlightened by hearing it, he nevertheless opened the door of the breakfast-room, and requested her to wait while he informed Lord Medway of her wish to see him.

Leonora was too anxious to take much notice of the room or its furniture; she stood with her eyes fixed on the closed door, listening for the sound of returning footsteps, which the well-carpeted stairs rendered inaudible; but so intense was her attention that she soon after heard a low voice say distinctly, "All right, Williams, take in the travelling bag and dismiss the cabman." A moment afterwards the door was opened, and she was respectfully informed, "That his lordship was up, and would come down as soon as possible; he hoped Miss Nixon had had a good passage from Rotterdam: had he known when she was likely to arrive he would have sent a carriage: — begged she would breakfast without waiting for him."

All this was very satisfactory; and with a sigh of relief Leonora took off her bonnet, and for some time calmly watched the quick yet noiseless preparations for breakfast. They were, however, no sooner completed, and she was once more alone, than her uneasiness and anxiety returned; and after walking for some time up and down the room, she threw herself into a chair, and awaited the coming interview with a sort of desperate

resolution that enabled her effectually to overcome the faintness that befell her as the door at last opened; and advancing towards her she saw — not the benevolent-looking, venerable friend she had expected, but the invalid traveller of the Rhine steamer!

"Miss Nixon," he said, in a low and rather weak voice, "I know you did not expect to find in me your late correspondent. Let me assure you that nothing but the fear of filling your mind with doubts, and creating useless difficulties, prevented me from informing you of my father's death when I answered your letter."

Leonora, who had risen for a moment, again sat down, struggled with her feelings of regret, disappointed hopes, and personal annoyance for a few seconds, and then burst into tears.

"I — I did not know that you had been personally acquainted with my father," said Lord Medway: "from some letters found among his papers I was led to suppose that he had corresponded with your mother, and chiefly as guardian to her son. In fact, I imagined you in want of an adviser and friend, both of which my father would have been to you most undoubtedly had he lived. I hope I have not erred in proposing to take his place, or supposing that my services would be as acceptable to you as his."

"He was my only friend," said Leonora, in a voice nearly choked by emotion, "the only one of our family who ever remembered my name, or seemed conscious of my existence."

"And when did you last see him?" asked Lord Medway, leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, and watching, with an air of mixed surprise and commisera-

tion, the uncontrolled expression of her almost passionate grief: "When did you last see him?"

"I never saw him," she answered, looking up, and at the moment the utter selfishness of her sorrow struck her so forcibly that she compelled herself to overcome it; and removing the traces of tears from her face, she stood up, and in a tolerably composed voice informed him of his father's kind letter to her after the death of her mother, and offers of friendly services should she ever be in want of them. "I mention this," she added, "that you may not think I applied to him without a right to do so: his loss to me is just now irreparable, as it obliges me to apply to my step-brother, who, I fear, will have little inclination to assist a person he could scarcely learn to tolerate even for his mother's sake."

"You don't mean that Harry does not like you!" said Lord Medway.

"I once heard him say," answered Leonora, "that the name of Nixon would stifle any feelings of regard he might ever be disposed to feel for me. You have, I hope, had the kindness to forward my letter to him, and if you will now only let me know where he is to be found —"

"You could scarcely ask me a more puzzling question," answered Lord Medway, smiling; "I forwarded your letter to my brother Charles, who is at Vienna: he keeps up a desultory correspondence with Harry, and generally knows something of his whereabouts — he believes him to be now at some place on the coast of Syria, in his yacht; but when your letter will reach him is very uncertain."

"What is to become of me!" cried Leonora, covering her face with her hands, while visions of her city uncles

and their plebeian families floated distractingly before her haughty imagination.

"You will of course remain with us — with my mother, until you hear from Harry," suggested Lord Medway.

Leonora instantly caught at this idea. "Can I go to Lady Medway to-day?" she asked quickly.

"My mother is at present from home on a visit to some relations," he answered, "and only my youngest sister is at The Willows. I shall, however, have great pleasure in taking you there to-morrow."

"And why not to-day?" she asked a little anxiously.

"I'm sure I don't know. I aw — suppose — there is nothing to prevent us from driving there after we have breakfasted, and aw — been to church?"

He rang the bell, and afterwards, during a *tête-à-tête* of more than an hour, they strode towards intimacy with seven leagued boots, Leonora being perfectly communicative on every subject excepting her uncles; and Lord Medway informing her that he had been a sad, idle, worthless fellow; but now intended to reform, and, if his health allowed him to winter in England, proposed becoming a pattern country gentleman. He evidently considered a regular attendance at church, as a first and very important step towards the meditated change, and nothing could equal the gravity and decorum of his manner, as he accompanied Leonora to church, and his attention to the service when there. She did not at all believe that he had ever been idle or worthless, and when he rose from his knees at the end of the Litany, apparently exhausted, tears of genuine compassion dimmed her eyes to think that so excellent a young man seemed doomed to an early grave! This feeling must have been

in some degree participated by a large proportion of the congregation, if one might judge by the looks of interest which reached them from the remotest corners. The carpeted and well-cushioned pews of the Chapel of Ease, as it was called, were occupied by a congregation who were all either sufficiently acquainted to speak or who at least knew each other by sight. Lord Medway's appearance with a young and remarkable pretty stranger, in as deep mourning as his own sister could have worn, created quite a sensation; more eagerly than usual was he surrounded as he left the church, more numerous than ever were the inquiries concerning his health, and plans for the summer; the querists deliberately examining his companion while listening to his languid negligent answers. To not one did he name her, to not one did he mention his intention of leaving town that afternoon; but drawing her arm within his, increased their curiosity by murmuring a few words of German, and then sauntering slowly homewards.

"I fear," said Leonora, after having seen him throw himself at full length on a *chaise longue*, and resolutely close his eyes; "I fear you will not be able to drive to The Willows to-day."

"Oh, yes; I shall be quite well again after I have slept a little and dined. You won't mind dining with me at two o'clock, will you? I am obliged to keep invalid hours at present."

"I am accustomed to dine early," answered Leonora. "What people call dinner here would be supper to me."

"Ah, true — I had forgotten that you are scarcely an English woman."

With considerable warmth she explained that "she did not think her having by chance been born in a

foreign country, in any way lessened her right to consider herself one."

"I referred to your habits and education," said Lord Medway, amused at her eagerness.

"Papa's habits were very English, and mamma directed my education herself, I — I only," she added with some reluctance, "only went occasionally for a few months to a foreign school, when, on removing to a new country, it was necessary to acquire the language quickly"

"What immense advantages you have had," he observed thoughtfully; "I dare say, now, you speak three or four languages quite as well as English."

Leonora was silent. She could not contradict the assertion; but would have greatly preferred his saying, that she spoke the last named as if she had never been out of England.

"The only way to learn these languages properly," he continued, "is to live abroad. And with what ease can they be acquired in early youth — with what labour at a later period!"

Leonora just then, felt too English to value in the least her linguistic acquirements, and when he again spoke and remarked, that travelling about, as she had done, imperceptibly formed both mind and manners, almost without instruction, and added that she was "charmingly *dégagée*, and not at all prudish, or like an Englishwoman," she rose, and with a formality which seemed to contradict his last words, "feared she was preventing him from sleeping, and would not further intrude upon him."

"Stay, Miss Nixon — stay; I can't go to sleep this half hour," he cried, starting up; "and as to intruding,

I never heard anything so absurd! Why we're relations, aren't we? Come back, and let us find out in what degree."

These last words were not without effect: Leonora was at the door — she stopped a moment, looked back with a bright smile, and seemed to hesitate; but then saying: "We can talk of that some other time, you must go to sleep now," she resolutely closed the door.

For the first time in her life she had now an opportunity of inspecting a really well-furnished house. She had not unfrequently been the inmate of suites of rooms approached by marble staircases; of airy Italian villas; of apartments with fresco-painted walls, and statue-filled anti-chambers; but cold and comfortless came the recollection of such domiciles, when compared with the perfectly elegant luxury of the furniture of this English home. All that art, and taste, and wealth, could command, or fancy suggest of useful or beautiful was there, and all so judiciously in keeping that the most careless observer must have been charmed. She had not examined half the china, bronze, and or-molu ornaments, the tables, carpets, and book-cases; and was de lightedly turning over the leaves of a volume of magnificent prints, when the announcement of dinner obliged her to join Lord Medway.

It was still early when they were seated in the carriage, on their way to the Willows. Once fairly out of the immediate precincts of London, Leonora became eager in her praise of the various crescents, squares, and rows of neat houses which long made the suburb appear a continuation of the metropolis. These houses gradually assuming a country air, diminished in height as their possessors increased their extent of landed property; be-

ginning with the little garden in front, progressing to the small shrubbery, followed by more or less ambitious attempts at avenues; then some trees to shut out the road, and finally the walled domain!

Much as Leonora was bent on finding every thing in England supereminently excellent and admirable, she was somewhat puzzled to find any object worthy of commendation, when their road lay between high walls topped by iron spikes, or hideous fragments of broken glass bottles. The dust seemed forced to hover around them, while the overhanging trees, giving an idea of green woods beyond, became at last so tantalizing, that, after a long silence, she could not help drawing a comparison between the road scenery of other countries and England, which was not exactly advantageous to the latter.

Lord Medway seemed roused to unusual attention, and replied quickly, "It is quite natural that you should merely glance at things with the eye of a foreigner, and, like them, form hasty conclusions. I can easily understand your disapproving of these walls; but there are two sides to every question. You have as yet no idea of the extent and population of London, and were you for some time an inmate of one of these places, you would, for more reasons than I can now explain to you, be very glad to have a barrier between you and a high road such as this!"

Leonora thought this might be true, but was surprised at the warmth of her companion's defence of the ugly broken-bottle-topped walls, as he had not only abused every thing English during dinner, but had unreservedly laughed at her, perhaps, indiscriminate praises of all she had since seen. She was not yet aware that

an Englishman's abuse of his country is about as sincere as his abuse of himself. He may call the laws confused and intricate, the climate atrocious and so forth; but he does so much as he would call himself a dolt or a donkey, great being alike his surprise and indignation at finding anyone inclined even for a moment to agree with him.

Leonora begged him playfully not to remind her so very often of her foreign education, and assured him she was quite disposed, in fact, rather expected (with the exception of the walled-in roads), to find everything faultless in England.

"Then you will be bitterly disappointed," said Lord Medway.

"I do not quite agree with you," she rejoined. "There, for instance, is a village, and here are trees and meadows answering all my expectations."

"That village is not far from The Willows," said Lord Medway, "and at the next turn we shall see the river and soon after the house."

The Willows was what is called a jointure-house; it was there that all Countesses of Medway took up their abode, inspected schools, were good to the poor, and died respected and lamented by all who had the happiness of knowing them. But it was not there that they were buried — their remains were conveyed to the family vault at Thorpe Manor, there to be solemnly interred in the presence of the surviving family. On former melancholy occasions of this kind, many days had been necessary to convey the coffin and coach full of mourning servants to their destination; on the last as many hours had sufficed for the same purpose per rail-

road, thereby proving that railroads are curtailers of grief as well as distance

The Willows had been long uninhabited, excepting occasionally for a few days, when there were races or archery meetings in the neighbourhood; and the present possessor having three young and unmarried daughters, was not likely to be as constant a resident as her predecessor. She had already left it, accompanied by her two elder daughters, to spend a few weeks with relations, at whose house a select party of friends had assembled to offer her all the consolation in their power. It had been said The Willows required repair, and some tiles had been put on the roof, the doors and windows painted, and the chintz curtains washed. Further orders had not been given, and, perhaps, they were not necessary, for the house was comfortably, though not luxuriously furnished. As Leonora drove up the short avenue, so short that it scarcely deserved the name, and gazed up at the long low red brick house, with its ground floor, first story, and high weather-beaten tiled roof, a look of disappointment passed over her expressive face, which was instantly observed by her companion, who seemed to study her countenance as earnestly as Lavater himself could have done.

"Leonora," he said, smiling, and laying particular emphasis on her name (they had discovered that they were cousins in some way or other, and had become very good friends during the day), "Leonora, this is not one of the disappointments I foretold. Wait until you have seen the other side of the house before you pass judgment on The Willows."

They entered the hall, which was large, and had an old-fashioned fire-place, not far distant from the com-

mencement of a broad oak staircase, rendered almost black by oil and age; they then passed into an anti-room redolent of fresh flowers in vases and pots, concealed by green wicker-work stands, and thence into a long drawing-room, with windowed recesses that seemed to belong to octagonal turrets, each forming a sort of separate apartment, while between them glass doors led into a garden terminating in shrubberies with groups of forest trees.

The undoubtedly antiquated furniture of the room was covered with a gay coloured chintz; its want of elegance of form being, however, amply compensated by its variety and comfort. This chintz, perhaps, concealed more costly material, for each succeeding dowager had added some favourite pieces of furniture, so that the covers now served but to give them all the necessary uniformity. The setting sun shone brightly into the room and lighted the figure of a fair-haired girl of about fifteen, who, after uttering a slight exclamation of surprise, sprang forward and embraced Lord Medway with an emotion that wavered strangely between joy and sorrow.

"My dear Severton — a — a — I mean Med —."

"Never mind, that, Jane. — Let me introduce our cousin Leonora Nixon to you."

Lady Jane looked round hastily, gazed half inquiringly, half amazedly, at Leonora, saw nothing repelling, perhaps something the contrary, in her appearance, and held out her hand, murmuring something about having so many cousins that she scarcely knew all their names.

It was hardly to be expected that she should know Leonora's, never in all her life having heard it, but,

without waiting for an answer, she turned to her brother, and said, "How kind of you to come to see me — I gave up all hopes from the time mamma went to you!"

"If you promise to be very attentive to me, perhaps I may stay here for a few days," he answered, smiling.

"Oh, so attentive!" she exclaimed, pushing a large chair towards him, and seating herself on a footstool beside him, while Leonora walked to one of the glass doors, "so attentive and obedient! you may send me twenty messages in an hour and I shall not grumble or pout my lips, as you used to say I did."

"Twenty messages in an hour! surely I never was so unconscionable!"

"Indeed you were; but I was often disobliging enough too — however, that was all a hundred years ago. Tell me something about yourself now. Mamma and Grace wrote to me after they had seen you, and said you had grown rather thinner, but that you were getting much better, and they hoped you would be induced to remain in England this winter."

"If not," answered Lord Medway, "I intend to propose your all spending the winter with me at Nice."

"Oh how delightful! nothing I should like so much as going abroad. I really at times feel quite ashamed of never having left England."

"And there is your cousin Leonora, who is quite ashamed of never having been here."

"Never been in England?"

"No. She was born and has spent all her life, hitherto, on the continent."

"Do tell me how she is our cousin," whispered Lady Jane.

"She is step-sister to Harry Darwin — her mother and our father were cousins, you know."

"Oh!"

"So you see — she is second cousin or a — aw — first cousin once removed, or a — something of that sort — a cousin at all events."

When Leonora perceived the gradual lowering of the voices to a confidential whisper, she stepped into the garden, and having walked a short distance, turned round to take a view of the house. It might have been originally at this side also a long low red brick building, but changes had been effected, and additions made, until it had assumed the appearance styled Elizabethan; and as Leonora's wondering eyes wandered along the puzzlingly irregular façade, seeking symmetry and finding none, she was fully impressed with the idea intended to be given to all beholders unlearned in such matters, that the mansion was of great antiquity.

She was soon after joined by Lord Medway and his sister, and commenced a walk through gardens and shrubberies kept with a neatness perfectly new to her. The grounds, running along the banks of the Thames, were tastefully and advantageously laid out, and contained fine specimens of forest and other trees, single and in groups, and among them sufficiently conspicuous, and near the house, some splendid weeping willows — which had probably given the place its name. Under these trees were seats, and there they sat down to watch the approach of night.

It was a calm warm evening, and a pleasing glow spread over the whole scene as the sun disappeared, and left the sky covered with fantastic-looking bright red and yellow clouds, that were distinctly reflected on the clear

surface of the river. Occasionally a heavily-laden barge glided slowly past, or a light wherry darted across to the landing-place of some other villa, but it was not until a succession of boats filled with a gay party returning from a pic-nic came close beneath the willows that they moved. Lord Medway had accosted some friends, and great was their surprise, as they said, to see him there, looking so well, and able to sit out so late on the damp banks of the river. On this hint a hasty retreat was made to the house, Lady Jane openly expressing her anxiety, and hoping and trusting he had not caught cold, to prevent which she ordered a fire in an odd-shaped little room, where they drank tea and spent the evening together very gaily.

CHAPTER V.

The Willows.

One week, and then a second, and then a third passed over calmly and pleasantly at "The Willows." For some undoubtedly good reason, which Lord Medway did not think it necessary to communicate to his companions, he had from day to day deferred writing to his mother, and Leonora, after being desired somewhat authoritatively to "leave everything to him," concerned herself no further about the matter. Lady Jane was too young, and had a much too exalted idea of her brother's wisdom to offer either advice or remonstrance, and having yielded at once to the boundless admiration for Leonora with which she had suddenly been inspired, informed every one who chose to hear it, that she liked her better than all her other cousins — that she was the most dear, darling, clever creature she had ever seen,

the only one who suited her exactly for a companion, and could make her quite contented to stay at home until Grace or Louisa were married.

To all this Lord Medway listened approvingly, agreed with his sister in thinking it would never answer to let Harry Darwin take charge of Leonora, even if he proposed doing so on his return to England, and when they were alone together, "hoped" his mother would allow her to remain with them until — until —

"Until Harry is married," suggested Lady Jane. "Oh, I am sure mamma will have no objection when I promise to speak French constantly, and to learn German from her; do you know, I think German does not sound at all disagreeably when she speaks it; and then she sings such lots of pretty little songs — but she says they sound better to a guitar — I wish you would send to town for one."

"Of course I shall," he answered, "and in the mean time she must sing to me with a pianoforte accompaniment. I dare say she plays famously!"

"Not exactly — it is rather in an odd sort of way, for her father did not like to hear her practise, so she learned altogether differently from other people."

"How so? I heard her playing some sacred music very nicely."

"That's it!" cried Lady Jane, "she has learned theoretically, and can go on playing chords and composing for herself whole hours together."

"A much pleasanter kind of accomplishment for a private performer than rattling eternally at those dreadful fantasies and variations like Grace and Louisa," observed Lord Medway. "Tell her to come here, Jane;

say, I want her to write letters for me, as I am too much fatigued to sit up any longer."

He stretched himself on a sofa as he spoke, and when Leonora appeared, pointed to a table beside him on which were writing materials. He dictated, and she wrote, sealed, and addressed as he directed her; the last letter was an order for a guitar with case, strings, &c., and then she looked up inquiringly.

"For you — to serenade me with," he said, nodding his head, and Leonora smiled and folded the letter, with a slight increase of colour, that he thought became her exceedingly.

The guitar arrived the next evening and was carried into the garden, where, to Lady Jane's infinite delight, Leonora hid herself behind a clump of trees, and by a few chords or a verse of a song, attracted the attention of all the passers by on the river. At a later hour she played at serenading too, sitting outside the drawing-room window, and recalling distant scenes and persons to Lord Medway's mind by a succession of light French, sweet Italian, and melodious German airs. When she re-entered the room he seemed to be indulging in a deep reverie, while Leonora, drawing a chair close to Lady Jane's, and unconscious of being watched or listened to, yielded without reserve to the gaiety inspired by her own music, and sang, laughed, talked, and related some travelling adventures with such humour, that Lord Medway, irresistibly attracted by her amusing gaiety, moved unperceived his chair behind hers, and she was first made aware of his vicinity by a hearty fit of laughter on his part that startled himself by its mirthful boyish sound.

This had taken place very shortly after her arrival,

and a slight sketch which she afterwards gave of her short but not unadventurous life, seemed at once to remove all barriers to intimacy, and their intercourse thenceforward lost every trace of new acquaintanceship.

Lady Medway's letter announcing her intended return home, gave pleasure to Lady Jane alone — "She so much wished Leonora to know dear mamma, and darling Grace and Louisa, and then they could have some nice little pic-nics in the neighbourhood, and —" but here she was stopped by Leonora asking anxiously if there were no mentiou made of her in the letter.

Lady Jane had not observed the omission; she glanced once more at it, and then her look of inquiry, though less intense than Leonora's, was turned towards her brother.

His pale face became unusually flushed, and there was a good deal of nervous irritation in the manner in which he suddenly rose from the breakfast-table and said, "I have not yet written about you, Leonora, but I suppose I must do so to-day; there is, however, time enough — and I feel better now than for some time past — more equal to the exertion."

He had ever found his health so impenetrable a shield against reproaches implied or expressed, that he never failed to use it; and Leonora was not only silenced, but even felt great compassion a couple of hours afterwards, when she saw that he had written an unusually long letter, and appeared extremely fatigued.

Lady Medway arrived the ensuing week. She was what is generally termed "a fine woman" — that is, she was tall, handsome, and distinguished-looking, and inclined just so much to *embonpoint* that, with the partial loss of symmetry of figure, she had preserved a good

portion of the freshness and beauty for which she had long been remarkable. Lady Grace and Lady Louisa resembled their mother a good deal in appearance; they were lady-like, and had already enjoyed several seasons in London, which had given them considerable knowledge of the world, and what is called *à plomb*.

They all received Leonora kindly, putting her at once at her ease by seeming to consider her being at "The Willows" the most natural thing possible. She was very much pleased, and very grateful, and thought Lady Medway the most charming person she had ever seen, the most amusing person she had ever heard talk — especially when, seated beside her son's sofa, her feet stretched out before her on a footstool, she related all that had occurred in their family during his absence abroad. She touched but once, and then lightly, on his not having been able to return home for some time after his father's death, ending by assuring him, with a warmth that made no small impression on Leonora, that dearest Charley had supplied his place to them all, and that nothing could equal his attention to her, or energy in business of every description.

"Charley was always a capital fellow," murmured Lord Medway in reply.

"We thought him greatly improved in appearance, too," she continued.

"I think him much the same as ever," he rejoined; "very like you in face, very like my father in figure, and his manners all his own."

Lady Grace and Lady Louisa joined their mother in pronouncing Charley's manners perfect.

"Well, I believe he is pretty generally considered a gentlemanlike sort of fellow," he observed. indolently;

"people even admire and applaud his eccentricities, perhaps because they are essentially English. For my part I sincerely rejoice in all his faults and foibles, as I should consider a paragon younger brother a decided bore."

"Has he done or said anything to offend you?" asked Lady Medway, quickly.

"Quite the contrary; he has saved me such an infinity of trouble that I have forgiven him for having called me a lazy hypochondriac, and recommending a course of his own rough exercise to a man in my state of health!"

"Perhaps," began Lady Medway, hesitatingly, "perhaps, my dear love — a little exertion on your part occasionally might be beneficial to your —"

"Do you, too, begin to consider me a *malade imaginaire?*" he asked, peevishly. "Do you think the life I lead at preseut is agreeable? I tell you it is not; and if," he added, rising and walking towards the door leading into the garden, "if I could with half my fortune purchase health and a constitution such as Charley's, I would do it to-day, without waiting for to-morrow."

As he stepped out of the room his mother sighed, and turning to her eldest daughters, observed, "Is it not melancholy to see such terrible want of energy? His desire to be considered an invalid has become a positive mania."

Leonora did not hear the answer, she followed Lord Medway and Lady Jane into the garden, and began to collect flowers to make a bouquet for the former, such as she knew he liked. His mother had since his arrival so completely monopolized him that for several days she

had scarcely had an opportunity of speaking to him. When he now sat down under one of the willow-trees, she placed herself beside him, and while arranging her bright-coloured verbenas and pelargoniums, hoped he could bestow a few minutes of his precious time upon her — just enough to tell her if his mother would permit her to remain at "The Willows" until she received an answer from her brother Harry — she had not courage to ask Lady Medway herself.

"It will be long before Harry gets your letter," he replied, evasively, "still longer before you can have an answer to it. Suppose you should be obliged to pass the winter here?"

"I should be but too happy," said Leonora, looking up with a smile.

"And do you not find it dull in this place, after the gay, wandering life you have hitherto led?"

"Dull in such society? Oh, no! — I wish I could spend the rest of my life here."

"Indeed! and how much of that wish may I place to my own account?"

"A large fifth portion," she answered, twisting some bast round her bouquet, — "a large fifth portion. I like Jane best — you next — then Grace — then Louisa — and then Lady Medway — I am a little, a very little, afraid of her still, because — because I don't think she quite likes me."

"You are mistaken, Leonora; she likes you very much, but —"

Leonora looked up anxiously.

"She thinks you ought to have been more candid with me in the first instance, and not concealed the fact of your having two uncles living in London, able, and

probably willing, to be of use to you, but who may now reasonably be displeased at your avoidance of them. She even fears they are in ignorance of your present place of abode. Is this the case?"

"It is," answered Leonora, her eyes filling with tears; "but, oh! if you knew how I fear and dislike these uncles —"

"Are you personally acquainted with them?" he asked, surprised.

"No; but I have heard of them all my life from mamma and papa: they are purse-proud, vulgar men; and in papa's writing-desk I found such severe letters from my uncle Stephen to him that I quite dread a meeting. It is true papa had overdrawn his allowance, and was rather in the wrong; but under the circumstances the threats were so ungenerous, so ungentlemanlike, that —"

"Let me see these letters," he said, interrupting her, and Leonora throwing her half finished bouquet and remaining flowers over his crossed arms, ran into the house.

She soon returned, and then with heads bent together they pored over uncle Stephen's epistle; Leonora reluctantly admitting her father's error but eloquently commenting on the harshness of the manner in which he had been reproved.

"It is the letter of an angry man of business," said Lord Medway, folding it up and returning it to her. "I believe, Leonora, the less we say about this matter the better. What sort of a man," he added, after a pause, "what sort of a man is your other uncle? Gilbert I believe is the name."

"Rather less disagreeable but infinitely more vulgar,

according to papa's account," she answered, "but you see the letter is a joint concern — he says, 'my brother Gilbert and I,' throughout."

"True," said Lord Medway, musingly, "I must explain all this to my mother — it would never do — careless as Harry is, he would scarcely approve of his sister's being sent to people among whom we should completely lose sight of her."

"My uncle Stephen's house is in Russell Square," began Leonora, despondingly, "so except when you happen to be in town I should be very far away from you and Jane."

"And even then you would be very far away from us," he observed, smiling, "so far, that I refuse my consent to any arrangement beyond letting your uncles know where you are now living. Perhaps, however, in the excess of your patriotism you would prefer any residence in England to one on the continent just at present?"

"You think," said Leonora, "I shall have no answer from Harry before you go abroad."

"I am sure you will have none," he replied, with emphasis. "Now listen to me, Leonora, you have very exalted ideas of England and the English, and I have no desire to lower either in your estimation; for this reason, and perhaps some others also, I do not wish you to go to Russell Square. On the contrary, I hope to be able to induce you for my sake to leave England again for some time. My mother and sisters spend the winter with me at Nice — promise me to go there with us?"

"If Lady Medway have no objection —" began Leonora.

"She will be *my* guest," he interposed quickly, "and you, Leonora, will be the same — for — some — time." While speaking he took her hand, and drawing her towards him looked earnestly into her face while he added, "But you must tell me that you will leave England without regret, that you can do so willingly, because you know that you will add to my happiness —"

"And Jane's," said Leonora, smiling.

"No Janes," cried Lord Medway, impatiently, "you must think of me and me alone!"

At this moment a low soft voice immediately behind them said gently, "Is it prudent your remaining out here when it is so late and so very damp?"

He turned round, evidently not pleased at the interruption. It was his mother, who stood close to them. She might have heard the latter part of their conversation, but there was nothing in her manner to lead any one to suppose so. Her eyes were fixed on the dusky fog that now seemed to be slowly drifting along the river towards them, while she added, "One feels that it is September, and that winter is approaching. Let us go in and sit round the fire, the pleasantest place by far on such an evening as this!"

"It is damp, but not cold," said Lord Medway, rising. "Come, Leonora, you shall read the papers to me. I want you to acquire a taste for politics."

"Let me or Grace read to you," said his mother, "we shall ourselves be interested while so employed, while to Leonora it will be an unnecessary trial of patience. She and Jane can take a walk in the shrubbery — the evening fog will do them no harm."

Leonora had no particular fancy for reading newspapers, nor did she fear the fog, so she turned back to

Lady Jane, who was springing along a gravel walk with a small spaniel barking at her heels, and followed her slowly with thoughts full of having to leave England before she had seen almost anything of it — of returning to Nice, where she had already spent two winters with her dying mother — of Lord Medway's unusually earnest manner, until her companion suddenly ceased playing, and, snatching up her dog in her arms, breathlessly exclaimed, "Oh, Leonora, only think! After all you may see Charley before we leave England!"

"How so?" asked Leonora, with an eagerness and interest only to be accounted for by the fact, that, added to what she had already heard of him from her step-brother, he had been latterly the subject of constant conversation between her and her friend Jane.

"Because, you see, mamma wrote to Charley the day after she came here, and an answer arrived this morning."

"Well?" said Leonora.

"Well, I heard mamma say to Grace and Louisa, that she would write again and request him to come to England, if only for a fortnight, as she required not only advice but assistance."

"About what?" asked Leonora.

"I 'm sure I don't know — something concerning Medway, I should think, as they talked of the necessity of getting him off to Italy without delay."

"He has asked me to go with you," said Leonora.

"And you will go — Oh say yes!"

"Of course I shall, if Lady Medway have no objection."

"What objection can she have?"

"I don't know."

"Nor I either. Do you, Azor?" she cried, appealing to the struggling little animal in her arms, bending down her face and speaking with closed teeth. "Can you think of any possible reason why Leonora should not go with us to Italy? No! you see he is quite delighted at the idea," she added, when, having let him spring to the ground, he began to caper round them, barking with all his might, as if inviting them to join in his gambols. Repeated gestures of pretended anger, various grimaces and shakings of the head having failed to silence him, a chase began, and soon after the sound of youthful laughter, intermixed with Azor's sharp barks, reached the drawing-room through the still unclosed windows. Lord Medway became singularly inattentive to his mother's reading — begged she would not give herself so much trouble — the papers were really not worth reading just now — scarcely anything going on at home, and nothing at all elsewhere — he believed he wished for tea — and — would it not be better to send to Jane and Leonora, and desire them to come in?

CHAPTER VI.

An "Enemy" procures Leonora an English Home.

Lady Medway's attention to her son became from day to day more assiduous: she was ably assisted by her two elder daughters, and Lord Medway, constitutionally indolent, and sincerely attached to his mother and sisters, was exceedingly gratified, and only occasionally a very little bored. Some weeks elapsed without his having found a convenient opportunity for renewing his interrupted conversation with Leonora, though he had not

unfrequently, in an impatient pettish manner, said, that "He chose to have Leonora to sit beside him," or, "He wanted to speak to Leonora." On such occasions, a place in his immediate vicinity was instantly ceded to her; but the attention then bestowed on the youthful guest, completely overpowered her. Even Medway himself felt a sort of reserve creep over him, in the presence of so many apparently eager listeners. Lady Medway invariably laid down book or work, and whether near or distant, turned her face towards them with a benignant smile. Lady Grace pushed forward her embroidery frame, and Lady Louisa, with a playfulness for which she was remarkable, never failed to seat herself on a favourite foot-stool at her brother's feet, and kindly request Leonora to relate her life and adventures;

> "Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
> But not intentively."

Leonora would *not* consent, however, and the conversation was in the end carried on between Louisa and her brother, or Lady Medway advanced to the rescue, and allowed Leonora to slip away to her friend Jane or the garden, the first covenient opportunity.

Letters of importance began to arrive from London for Lord Medway, and it became evident that he would be obliged to spent some days in town. He prepared to do so most unwillingly, tried to persuade his mother that it was necessary they should all accompany him, and received for answer, that she must remain at The Willows until various unavoidable arrangements, before leaving England for so long a time, were completed; if the arrangements could be made in the course of the ensuing week, she would follow him to town without

delay, or to Paris, should he think it advisable to precede them. For her part, she thought it very desirable that he should reach a warmer climate before the weather became wintry.

Lord Medway said, he would "think about it," and did so, perhaps, occasionally, for some days; at the end of which time a messenger was sent late one evening from London, to inform him that his brother Charles had just arrived from Vienna, had but one week to spend in England, and hoped that he would leave The Willows and join him in B— square, without delay.

Lady Medway expressed more surprise at her son Charles' arrival than Leonora expected, after having heard from Jane that her brother would probably come to England, in consequence of a pressing request from his mother. Her look of inquiry was answered by Jane in a whisper: "I suppose Charles first said he could not come, and after all has managed it; some way or other he always contrives to do whatever he likes."

"I suppose I *must* go to town to-morrow," said Lord Medway; "but, with Charley's energetic assistance, we may manage to start for the Continent in a week or ten days! I dare say," he continued, glancing towards Leonora, "he can tell us something about brother Harry; but at all events," he added, turning to his mother, "nothing shall now interfere with the arrangement for Leonora, about which I spoke to you yesterday."

"Of course not," she replied, dryly; and rising abruptly, she walked towards a writing table at the other end of the room, and there found occupation until it was time to separate for the night.

When leaving the next morning, Lord Medway begged his mother to follow him as soon as possible,

told Jane she might take Azor to Italy with her, and then, turning to Leonora, hoped she had not forgotten her promise about going to Nice, and assured her that being at some place on the coast of the Mediterranean, was her best, if not only, chance of seeing her brother for years.

When she looked towards Lady Medway, hoping for a word or look of at least acquiescence, her ladyship seemed altogether engrossed by some directions which she was giving to a servant about a letter that he was to deliver without delay to her son Mr. Thorpe.

Some few words Lord Medway then added in a whisper to Leonora; "He feared he should find the time pass very dismally without her, even for one solitary week — he was convinced he should be bored to death — most probably he would return in a few days, and bring Charley with him — entreated her not to forget him — and made her promise to try and like him better even than she liked Jane!"

Leonora promised, and hoped he would bring Charley to The Willows. And she did hope this with all her heart, for if the truth must be told, she had taken a singular fancy to the boy portrait of him that hung beside that of her brother Harry, in the breakfast-room. Often, when she was supposed to be looking at the latter, had her eyes been fixed on the miniature of the proud, manly-looking boy with his whip, and his dog, and his great grey eyes! and then, when Jane told her of his wild pranks, and his courage, and extraordinary strength, Leonora feared — yes, feared — she should prove ungrateful, and like him better — far better — than her kind and gentle friend Medway!

Lady Medway's silence respecting the projected

journey during the ensuing week, surprised Leonora much, as the intercourse of letters was apparently incessant. Lady Jane told her, in confidence, they were almost all from Charley, adding mysteriously, that he did not appear quite to approve of the plan of their going to Nice for the winter. Leonora attached infinitely less importance to this remark than it deserved, and forgot it completely a few evenings afterwards, when, at tea time, a packet of notes arrived, with one for herself, from Lord Medway. He informed her very briefly, that all his arrangements were completed, and that, urged by his brother, he had consented to leave England in the course of a few days — that he should not, however, go further than Paris, without them all, and, therefore, hoped she would forthwith have her "coffers," as she called them, packed up, as he found it impossible any longer to exist without the society and services of his charming little secretary.

Lady Medway's eyes were fixed on Leonora's smiling face, as she stood by the fire-place and read these hurried lines. Explanation of some kind respecting the journey to Nice was now inevitable, and to promote it Leonora silently handed the note to her ladyship, who was sitting unusually upright on an adjacent sofa.

"It is a fortunate circumstance, my dear girl," began Lady Medway, after a pause, "a most fortunate circumstance, that you so greatly prefer England to the Continent; were it otherwise I really should be extremely embarrassed at this moment."

Leonora's face said more plainly than her words, "I do not understand —"

"It is a curious coincidence," her ladyship continued, in her softest voice, "that I, this very morning,

received a letter written by your uncle Stephen, to say that he would send a — a person here to-morrow to take charge of you and convey you safely to his house in Russell-square."

"My uncle! but I — I did not ask him to send for me — I have not written to him since I have been in England!"

"So I perceive from his letter, and I must say, Leonora, it was very injudicious your so openly neglecting such a rich relation."

"But his riches can in no way concern me," suggested Leonora, hurriedly.

"It seems, however, he offers you a highly respectable, and a — a — comfortable home — one which may lead, in all probability, to the possession of future affluence," observed Lady Medway.

Leonora felt greatly inclined to say that she would not go to her uncle, that she should greatly prefer spending the winter at Nice — when it suddenly occurred to her that the announcement had been made without a word of regret, and that perhaps Lady Medway was unwilling to add another member to her family. Bending forward she therefore said in a low voice, "*You* do not wish to take me to Nice?"

"Most willingly, my dear Leonora, would I take you with me, if I should not, by doing so, deprive you not only of the protection of your nearest relations, but also of the chance of hereafter inheriting from them."

Leonora made an impatient gesture.

"Why not?" continued her ladyship. "This uncle of yours is, by all accounts, so rich, that he could provide for you without injuring his own family in any perceptible manner — and let me tell you, dear Leonora,

that I cannot do so. We all like you, for Jane you are a charming companion, but after having made you sacrifice your relations, and, probably, considerable pecuniary advantages, what have I to offer you? Literally nothing. With two already grown-up daughters, and a third, who, in a couple of years, will also expect to be introduced to the world, myself a widow, and consequently reduced in circumstances, what could I do with a young person such as you are?"

She paused, but Leonora made no attempt to answer her question, and after a moment's hesitation, her ladyship, gently compelling her to sit down beside her, enlarged with eloquence on the same theme, ending by an appeal to her good sense, and an assurance of unalterable regard on her part.

A good deal softened by this speech, Leonora sat for some moments silent and motionless, her eyes fixed intently on the floor. The necessity of resignation to her fate, and the certainty that Lady Medway would *not* take her to Nice, had become so evident to her, that Lord Medway now reigned paramount in her thoughts. She feared he might suppose that she had joined in deceiving him in order to remain in England, and she continued this train of ideas when, taking his note from Lady Medway's hand, she murmured, "What will *he* think of me? what will *he* say?"

"Very little, Leonora," answered her ladyship, quietly; "I am sorry to be obliged to undeceive you respecting Medway, but — a — his wish to have you with him is a most reprehensible instance of selfishness — he merely wants something to interest him — some one to amuse him — and thinks you may answer both

purposes for the next six months. I regret to say, this is not the first time he has acted in a similar manner!"

Leonora did not quite comprehend what the "similar manner" meant. She believed Lord Medway to be her only sincere friend, and was not disposed to resign him without a struggle. She could not understand why he should not be made acquainted with her removal to her uncle's if the plan were so very desirable for all parties. A wish for further information made her ask to see her uncle's letter, and Lady Medway, evidently prepared for the request, drew it from her pocket, placed it in Leonora's hands, and walked towards the tea-table where her daughters were seated, the two eldest speaking to each other in a low, indistinct manner, the youngest listening anxiously and following with her eyes all her mother's movements.

"There is some mistake," said Leonora, hastily, advancing a few steps, "this letter begins 'Sir,'"

"It is addressed to Charles," answered her ladyship, without turning round, "it was he who undertook and carried on the correspondence."

"So," thought Leonora, "there has been a correspondence, and my uncle was perhaps unwilling to receive me!"

Yet there was nothing in the letter to confirm this idea. It informed Mr. Thorpe, in the very fewest words possible, that a trustworthy person would be sent to The Willows for Miss Nixon, who would not so long have been left there to cause embarrassment, had either of her uncles been earlier made acquainted with her address.

"I think," said Leonora, after a long and painful pause, "I think as this 'trustworthy person' will be here

so early to-morrow, I had better go to my room now and commence packing my clothes."

"Oh, no — dear Leonora, no — wait until after tea," exclaimed the ladies Thorpe together. "Jennings will pack everything for you in an hour or two to-morrow morning."

"No, thank you," said Leonora, in a scarcely audible voice, but walking with an appearance of unusual calmness to the door. A strong effort of the mind will enable most people to control the outward signs of emotion as far as they are expressed by the movements of the body; to retain the colour of the cheek — to restrain the flashing of the eye and quivering lip — is however not so easy, and Leonora's deadly paleness greatly alarmed Lady Medway. She first advanced a few steps with outstretched hand as if to detain her, and then, as the door closed between them, hastily motioned to Jane to follow.

Breathless the two young girls stood together at the top of the staircase.

"Jane — I — wish to be alone — I cannot — speak — even to you — just now," gasped Leonora.

Jane's answer was a tearful embrace, from which Leonora released herself somewhat impetuously, and then ran into her room. Her thoughts, as she afterwards impatiently paced up and down the apartment, were for some time quite chaotic: anger, mortification, and disappointment predominated by turns. One moment she resolved to write to Lord Medway, the next blushed at the mere idea — wished she had expostulated with Lady Medway, then rejoiced she had not done so. Suddenly an undefined terror of the meeting with her uncle took possession of her mind. Had he sent to inquire about her? or had her place of residence been notified to him

with the request that he would relieve the Medway family of an — incumbrance? She feared the latter; and what a reception was likely to be given to her under such circumstances! The thought was dreadful. Overwhelmed by the consideration of her perfect helplessness, she yielded for a few minutes to a violent burst of grief, from which she had not quite recovered when Jane stood at her door praying for admittance. Leonora for a minute or two appeared inclined to be inexorable; she employed the time, however, in opening her wardrobe, drawing forth various articles of apparel, and throwing them on the sofa and chairs in a manner to give the room all the uncomfortable appearance that generally accompanies the preparations for packing. Even after the entrance of her friend she continued her occupation with averted head and an expenditure of energy that someway began to impress her companion with a feeling of awe and dismay.

Lady Jane's voice was very tremulous as she observed, "I hope I shall see Charles, and have an opportunity of telling him how very unkindly he has acted."

"I rather think he has only done what Lady Medway desired him," answered Leonora, continuing her occupation without intermission, "and I do not blame her, on reflection, for wishing to get rid of me; but she ought to have consulted me and let me make the application to my uncle myself."

"That is exactly what Grace said just now; but Charley, it seems, disapproved from the beginning of your being spoken to. He said nothing but your extreme youth could excuse your having come here with Medway, and that nothing but the strongest and most energetic measures would now insure your going to your uncle;

and if given time even to write to Medway, the consequences would inevitably be most disagreeable to us all."

"I do not see how," said Leonora, turning round with a look of astonishment, and standing upright before her companion; "for if Lady Medway declined to take me with her, there must have been an end of the matter. I could not," she added, petulantly, "I could not have gone alone to Italy with your brother, could I?"

"I suppose not," said Lady Jane.

"Well, then, had I been able to consult him there is no manner of doubt that he would have mediated between me and my uncle more kindly than Charles seems to have done."

"That is true," said Lady Jane; "but Charles does not choose Medway to mediate, or to know anything about the matter, for he has written to say that he hopes to get him off to Paris to-morrow, and then mamma must write to him and pacify him with promises and plans for next summer."

"What promises and plans?" asked Leonora.

"They said something about proposing to ask you to return to The Willows when we come back to England, but —" here she hesitated.

"But what?"

"Charley says that Medway's fancy for you will be long over by that time."

Leonora could not or would not believe this. She clung to the idea of Lord Medway's regard as the drowning mariner to the floating wreck, thoughtless of the force of the surrounding waves, and hoping against reason.

Lady Jane continued sorrowfully: "From the day that I heard of Charles's disapproval of our winter plans I was

sure that another arrangement would be made. In his letter to mamma this evening he says that from some conversations he has had with Medway he expects to find him troublesome at Paris, but by dint of ridicule and judicious procrastination he has no doubt that all will be right in a few weeks."

"I cannot understand what all this means," said Leonora, with a puzzled air; "Lady Medway's reasons for not wishing me to reside with her are quite within my comprehension; but why Charles, who has not yet seen me, should so dislike me is what I never shall be able to make out."

"Or I either," said Jane; but he says expressly in his last letter that mamma must be firm, and rather spend the winter in England than consent to take you with her to Nice."

At that moment a feeling of strong resentment sprang up in Leonora's mind against Charles Thorpe. A positive personal dislike to him for what she considered his officious and unkind interference in her affairs. She pictured him to herself as stern arbiter of her fate, an intriguing, calculating man of the world; in short, her secret, powerful, and implacable enemy; and though she wished him no actual evil, the wild desire presented itself that she might in the course of her life have an opportunity of making him feel, if only for a short time, as acute mortification as she had suffered that evening. It was a vague wish prompted by anger, and without a thought of intervening obstacles; yet she remembered it years afterwards, when experience had taught her to understand the motives of his conduct, and knowledge of the world and its ways made her judge him rather more leniently.

"Jane," she said, slowly, "all this manœuvring and writing was most unnecessary. A few rational words from Lady Medway, such as she spoke this evening, would at any time have been sufficient to have induced me to apply to my uncle and leave The Willows voluntarily."

"Charles did not choose to have it so," murmured Jane.

Leonora shrugged her shoulders, and began, in an absent manner, to collect her books. "I believe, Jane," she said, at length, looking round her with some dismay at the disorder she had created in the room, "I believe, after all, it will be better to let Jennings pack up all these things for me to-morrow morning."

"Oh, much better! and now, dear, you will come down to tea, won't you? Mamma is so sorry, you can't think!"

"I must hope, and not think, for the next twenty-four hours," said Leonora, making an effort to appear cheerful. "As to going down stairs, and talking on indifferent subjects, after all that has occurred this evening — that is beyond my power; so you must say good night for me: I wish you could say good-bye, also, and that I were now far, far away from The Willows!"

"Oh! Leonora," cried Jane, vainly endeavouring to restrain her tears, "I cannot bear to think of your leaving us! but we shall continue friends for ever, promise me that at least."

Leonora warmly gave the assurance required.

"And when we go to town," continued Jane, "I shall be sure to see you and spend hours with you — and I shall write to you — oh, that puts me in mind —

mamma desired me to find out if you intended to write to Medway."

"No," said Leonora, "I leave it to you to explain this affair to him, and then — perhaps — he may write to me. I wish, with all my heart, I had never come here — but there is no use in thinking of that now. Good night."

The door closed, and Leonora was once more alone, and how confused and unhappy only those can know who have been in their youth homeless, and unceremoniously forwarded from one house to another. For some time a feeling of utter desolation, a sensation of even more complete loneliness befel her than when first, an orphan and among strangers, she had written the short formal letters to her uncles, and the long explanatory one to Lord Medway, on whom all her hopes then centered. What would he have been to her had he lived? Would Charles have dared to — but why complain — his successor had proved as willing to befriend her as she could have desired; it was the unexpected opposition on the part of his brother and mother that now made him unable to do so. And then hope began to whisper that he would not desert her completely, that he would write to her; perhaps even return to England, if only for the purpose of securing her a pleasanter position in her uncle's house. Had he not said repeatedly that he liked her better than any of his sisters? — told her never to doubt his interest in all that concerned her? and assured her that his father's offer of protection should be carried into action by him in the most surprising and satisfactory manner? Some doubts of his power to do this just now, were reluctantly admitted; but with all the careless confidence of youth and inexperience, she

dwelt long on the chance of being invited, kindly and willingly invited, to spend the ensuing summer at The Willows. That Lord Medway would still desire it she felt sure, and she took it for granted that by that time she should have sufficiently conciliated both her uncles to satisfy even Lady Medway's scruples. In short, were the dreaded interviews with her relations once over, she believed she should, after all, have no very great objection to spend, on any terms, the winter in London — it would be something so novel, so interesting to her! Opening a guide-book that lay on the table, she spread out the map of London before her and studied it attentively, until she had her finger on Russell-square. It seemed to her just the central sort of place for seeing and hearing everything. Yes; she should see Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's, the Docks, the Tunnel, the Zoological Gardens, the Tower, and the Museum! It was so odd that her mother had lived so long in London and had never been to see the Museum! She could not expect her uncle to go everywhere with her — he was too old, past sixty she believed — but his son Arthur — here Leonora sighed, and wished she were going to her uncle Gilbert, who had a daughter or daughters about her own age — vulgar most probably — but she believed she could like any one now who would receive and treat her kindly. Yet even while this humble thought passed through her mind, appalling visions of corpulent, red-faced, loud-voiced uncles, with shopmen-looking sons, rose vividly before her imagination, which, it has been already observed, was of the most fertile description; and the forms, when they had acquired gigantic proportions, were in their turn chased, phantasmagoria-like, by painfully contrasting groups of tall,

graceful, gentle-mannered Thorpes. Among these, however, Charles at length stood so prominent, that anger effectually put to flight all the intruding phantoms; her pride was roused, and, starting from her chair, she resolved, whatever her fears for the future might be, to conceal them; not even to Jane would she breathe a word of complaint, or show a particle of the deep regret with which she left a family whose habits and manners were so congenial to her own; and her thoughts centered, during the greater part of a sleepless night, in the consideration of how she could now leave The Willows with at least a semblance of dignity.

CHAPTER VII.

A City Uncle.

LEONORA'S composure the next morning surprised Lady Medway not a little. The arrangement of her clothes, and the hasty finishing of some trifling fancy-work which she had undertaken for Jane and her sisters, seemed to occupy her so completely, that she appeared quite unconscious of the grave faces around her, or even Jane's tearful eyes, as she followed her from place to place with Azor in her arms; bestowing on the dog the caresses she no longer ventured to offer Leonora, who seemed to have changed in some strange manner during the night. Yet once more their eyes met with the wonted look of intelligence, and a mutual sympathetic paleness overspread their features as the carriage was announced which was to separate them for a time — nominally indefinite, but which both, with anxious forebodings, feared for that reason might prove long.

Lady Medway desired to see the "person" who was to take charge of Miss Nixon; and as Leonora left the room, to prepare for her journey, she stopped for a few minutes in the hall to look at the monstrous yellow carriage sent by her uncle, and the strange figure that descended from it. She had been closely followed by Jane; and, under almost any other circumstances, laughter would have been irrepressible on their parts; but all inclination to gaiety was subdued by grief, and merely an expression of wonder pervaded the countenances of the young girls, as their eyes followed the thin form of the elderly woman, who tripped rather than walked across the hall. A glimpse of her face had shown them a pair of prominent, restless, dark eyes, a nose of large yet sharp proportions, slightly inclining to the left, and partaking amply of the dappled colours that flushed her cheeks, and all surrounded by a cap of innumerable lace frills, pressed down upon her forehead by a bonnet of amazing proportions, and in form resembling a coal-scuttle — the date of fabrication was beyond the recollection of either Leonora or Jane; and the extreme freshness of the materials for a moment staggered their judgment, and made them fear it was some terrible importation from beyond the Channel, which they and every one must, in the course of time, copy and adopt. It was a relief to their minds when the removal of a muffling cloak disclosed a black silk dress, fresh as the bonnet, but which, even to their youthful eyes, betrayed its age in those unmistakeable cyphers — the sleeves. Old as was that gown, the folds from the shop might still be distinctly traced in its thick rustling plaits: it was a curious fact, the cause of which was made but too evident to Leonora at a later period.

While her bags and boxes were being placed in and outside the carriage, she put on her bonnet; and on returning to the hall was met by Lady Medway, who, with a slightly-flushed face, turned to her and said, "I hoped you would have been able to remain until after luncheon, but this — a — person — says that she has received directions to avoid all delay here, and is to stop at the Toy in Hampton Court to rest the horses. I suppose your uncle's orders must be obeyed, dear girl."

"Oh, of course!" answered Leonora, breathing quickly, as they all advanced to take leave of her.

Jane, in an agony of grief, laid Azor in her arms, and with difficulty articulated, "Keep him for my sake."

The gift was already accepted with eager gratitude, when the "person" interfered, observing that "Mr. Nixon could not abide dogs, wich certainly were 'orrid hanimals in a town 'ouse."

Leonora reluctantly resigned the proffered treasure, and Azor displayed considerable enjoyment at recovering the liberty of which he had been deprived for so long a time in order to be ready when required for the meditated sacrifice to friendship.

Turning hastily away, Leonora entered the carriage; and then, leaning back in a corner, remained silent and motionless, until, on arriving at Hampton Court, her companion proposed having luncheon and walking in the palace garden. Leonora declined both, and was left unceremoniously enough to sit alone with her luggage, her feet on the opposite seat, her head bent on her clasped hands.

How long she thus remained she had not the least

idea; for, in complete oblivion of all around her, she had lived over again in thought the last two months of her life, recalling, with an accuracy sharpened by regret, all she had seen, and heard, and felt during that time. Pleasant were the recollections of the various afternoon tea-parties beneath the willows with Jane and her brother; interesting the drives with Lady Medway in the neighbourhood, where people and scenery were equally strange and new to her. A certain small dog cemetery at one place they had visited rose distinctly before her; for among the graves of pet pugs and poodles she and Lord Medway had spoken of the contrast between German and English churchyards — the pious remembrance of lost friends displayed in the carefully-cultivated graves of one country, the apparent forgetfulness, in the neglect of them, so common in the other. Her description of a foreign village churchyard he had called poetical prose, while she had obstinately refused to believe his perhaps exaggerated account of some London burial-places. Then there had been quiet boating-parties to neighbouring villas, whence friends of the Medways came for them in their own wherries: expert and handsome boatmen, who had all been, as Leonora ingenuously expressed it, "extremely kind to her." She was in the midst of an excursion to Claremont, then untenanted by royalty, was in imagination standing before the picture of the Princess Charlotte in the dining-room, the white satin, well-fitting shoes again provokingly attracting her attention, when — the horses were led out to be put to, the carriage-door was opened, and her travelling companion entered, apparently greatly refreshed by her luncheon. She carried in her hand a paper bag, filled with tempting-looking biscuits, which Leonora, who had breakfasted very

slightly, found it impossible to refuse, and they formed the commencement of a conversation, that gradually, from a description of the excellent mutton-chops to be had at Hampton Court, led to an enumeration of the things most suitable for luncheons; dinners followed, and market prices, until Leonora had no longer a shadow of doubt that she was enjoying the society of her uncle's housekeeper, or cook, or both united in the person of Mrs. Ducker, which she now learned was the name of her companion.

Indeed, Mrs. Ducker, who probably saw no reason for either concealment or silence on the present occasion, informed her soon afterwards, at some length, that she had risen to her present high position in Mr. Nixon's family from having been nurse to his only son, Arthur (so named after the Duke of Wellington, who, however, she believed, was not his real godfather). Arthur she loved as if he were her own child; she might say, indeed, that she had been a mother to him since Mrs. Nixon's death; and he never forgot her — never came home from foreign parts without bringing her a handsome silk dress. The bonnet she then wore was from Paris, given to her by him, and was so well made that it was quite as good as new after years' and years' wearing: but then, to be sure, she took remarkably great care of her clothes. Here an admonitory glance was darted at the unconscious Leonora, who, while crunching her biscuits, was carelessly lounging in the corner, and allowing her crape bonnet and its light decorations to rub against the side of the carriage.

"I wonder my uncle did not marry again," observed Leonora, on whom the history of the bonnet had made but little impression.

"Why should he?" asked Mrs. Ducker, rather tartly. "I was there to take charge of the 'ousekeeping. Our Arthur had gone to school, the little girl died of the measles, and Missus was after all but a poor thing, always unealthy, and the doctor never out of the 'ouse as long as she lived. Master had no fancy to take another wife — never thought of such a thing, *I'm* sure!"

"He is very old now, is he not?" asked Leonora.

"Between sixty and seventy," answered her companion, thoughtfully; "they said he was past thirty when Arthur was born."

"So Arthur is also quite old!" exclaimed Leonora, with a look of disappointment.

"A *man* is young at thirty, Miss Leonora, and your cousin is young and 'andsome too, though he 'as red 'air like his mother."

"Red hair! oh, now I am sure I shall never be able even to tolerate him," cried Leonora, with a light laugh.

"You're not likely to see much of him, I suspect," rejoined Mrs. Ducker, with flashing eyes; "he can have his choice of company, I can tell you, and will not be in any hurry to leave Rome, or his friends Viscount Torpid and the Marquis of Witherington!"

This was said almost triumphantly, and in the manner of a person who plays down a well reserved trump at cards. Leonora, however, had known too many viscounts and marquises, and was still too little English in her ideas, to attach the expected importance to such titles. Indeed, the chances and changes of foreign life enabled her to number some dukes and princes among her acquaintance; she was, therefore, neither astonished

as her companion intended, nor at all interested in the given information — it merely sent her thoughts, with the swiftness of lightning, to Italy; and, as answer to the pompous announcement, she observed with a smile, "I liked every thing at Rome excepting — the fleas."

"So! you have been there too!" cried Mrs. Ducker, with a look of surprise; and then piqued, and, provoked perhaps, by Leonora's silent nod and mouth full of biscuit, she added, "It *will* be a change for you, going to school this Michaelmas Term!"

"To school!" repeated Leonora, amazed, and instantly sitting up as erect as her companion could have desired.

"Yes; to the same where Miss Georgina 'as been so well heducated. Oh, you may think yourself very well hoff, for there's a carriage for the young ladies to go a hairing in and to the riding-school, and a French *fem de sham*, and they learn to make curtseys, and receive visitors, and are only a limited number, and the daughters of people of fortune and family!"

"Georgina is my uncle Gilbert's daughter?" said Leonora, half interrogatively.

"Who else could I mean?" asked Mrs. Ducker, "but she's Miss Nixon, by right, since our little girl died; and most uncommon haccomplished she is they say — plays long variations on the pianer, and sings hopera songs, and draws 'eads in chalk; but of course you can do all this too!"

"No," answered Leonora, "I am not at all accomplished;" and, to say the truth, she had no particular wish to become so at that moment, if, for the purpose, she must again go to school. Had Mrs. Ducker expressed

herself properly, and said that, "A lady would receive her into her circle," or that, "A vacancy having occurred in a select ladies' establishment, &c.," the plan might have appeared less revolting; but to be sent to school when she considered her education finished, was a stroke of fate for which she was not prepared; and though her companion began, in consequence of her confession, loudly to applaud Mr. Nixon's intention, she paid no sort of attention, merely ejaculating during the first pause, as if in continuation of her thoughts, "Why could he not let me live with him?"

"And what," demanded Mrs. Ducker, "what could a gentleman, at his advanced time of life, do with a young person such as you are?"

"Do with a young person, such as I am? —" repeated Leonora, thoughtfully, "just what Lady Medway said — no one knows what to do with me."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Ducker, her face flushing vividly; "Why you couldn't make yourself useful — and fill my place, and undertake the 'ouse-keeping, could you?"

Leonora's natural powers of observation had been strengthened by practice. She instantly perceived that Mrs. Ducker dreaded finding in her a rival, and was ill-disposed towards her in consequence. She hastened, therefore, to remove all such suspicions from her mind, by some very truthful confessions of both uselessness and inexperience on her part, which were received with amusing satisfaction; a very perceptible softening of manner taking place after she had murmured, "Oh, I thought, perhaps, as you wasn't accomplished —"

"I ought to be useful —" interposed Leonora, with a smile. "I have led too wandering a life, and my ac-

quirements are merely in foreign languages and literature, not, I much fear, in any way likely to recommend me to my uncle."

"Well, I don't think he has any partikler hobjections to forring heducation; but Mr. Gilbert 'as, and couldn't at all be persuaded to let you be sent to him, wich master would of course have preferred."

"So," said Leonora, "my uncle Gilbert refused to have me; everyone rejects or tries to get rid of me."

"Perhaps, however," said Mrs. Ducker, softening as Leonora's insignificance became more and more apparent to her, "perhaps, after all, you may not be sent to school. Master didn't seem quite decided, and only desired me to send to Mr. Gilbert for the Prospects of Mrs. Howard St. Vincent's establishment. If he doesn't find you troublesome, he'll not mind you at all after the first week or two."

This was poor consolation, and Leonora thought long before she again spoke; when she did so, it was with the wish to conciliate her companion, who, she began to suspect, was a person of importance in her uncle's house. "I dare say," she began, with some hesitation, "or rather I am sure, that having lived so many years with my uncle, you have great influence with him—"

"No one has the least, excepting Arthur," interposed Mrs. Ducker. "I could't venture to offer an opinion even about a salad, or lobster-sauce! He orders everything from market himself, and excepting at the greengrocer's, and the fruit shop, I never buy any thing for the 'ouse."

This, and some other remarks about her uncle's habits, gave Leonora so much subject for thought, that they were driving through the streets of London long

before she again began to look around her. The endless rows of shops, the crowds of busy pedestrians, the carriages, carts, and omnibuses, seemed to multiply as they advanced, and became at last so confusing, that she felt a sort of relief as they turned at length into a succession of quieter streets, and she was informed that they were drawing near home. She looked out eagerly, and saw soon afterwards a space of ground neatly enclosed by iron railings; within which were a few dark-looking trees and shrubs, some dried-up dusty grass, and a weedless gravel-walk, whereon several nurses and children were sauntering sorrowfully, like prisoners taking exercise. The high surrounding houses appeared to Leonora perfectly alike; and so they were, in fact, the only difference being in the number of windows in front. They stopped, and while a loud knock announced their arrival, Leonora looked upwards, perfectly unconscious what sort of rooms were lighted by the rows of bright-paned carefully-blinded windows above her. Not so the English reader, for so great is the uniformity of British town architecture, that it will suffice to say, the house of Mr. Nixon was one of the largest sized, three-windowed, long-balconied, description; and immediately the edifice stands erected with its discoloured bricks, and plate-glass windows outside, — its dining-room, drawing-rooms, bed-rooms, and attics, within.

Mrs. Ducker commenced gathering together the stray parcels, and then said, "Miss Nixon — please — will you step out —"

Leonora did as she was desired, — ascended the stone steps to the door, and entered the hall. It was large and lofty, and at the end of the first flight of stairs she perceived a stained glass window of a brilliant

kaleidoscope pattern, calculated effectually to shut out the view of stables and the backs of other houses, and perfectly harmonising with the yellow and red striped stair-carpet. A remarkably portly butler, with a white waistcoat and red face, was at first so occupied with Mrs. Ducker, and giving directions to a youthful footman about the proper places for Leonora's luggage, that she herself appeared to be completely forgotten after having received from him a stiff obeisance on entering; but when she opened a door near the foot of the staircase, and looked into a perfectly dark room, he advanced, saying, "That is the dining-room, Miss Nixon — will you not walk into Mr. Nixon's study, where there is a fire?"

He preceded her, while speaking, into the large, handsomely furnished front parlour, drew up the window blinds, moved a chair towards the fireplace, and informing her that Mr. Nixon would be home in about an hour, left her to examine at her leisure the furniture of a room which was so different from what she had expected, that she found it necessary to call upon her imagination for a new portrait of her uncle. Handsomely bound books in glass cases completely covered the walls, a round table was heaped with new works, pamphlets, magazines, reviews, and news-papers. There was a writing-table of large dimensions, and near one of the windows, globes and a telescope on pedestals. About a dozen luxuriously comfortable arm-chairs and a chaise longue were covered with green morocco leather to match the colour of the curtains and carpet; the chimney-piece was loaded with handsome ornaments, and, in the midst of them, a clock of singularly beautiful workmanship. Leonora had ample time for obser-

vation, and used it while there was light sufficient to discern the objects around her. As the evening drew to a close, she walked towards one of the windows and looked at the square and the surrounding houses, and watched the various groups of people who resided in the neighbourhood returning to their homes. Candles glimmered red and rayless in the opposite houses, lamplighters began to hurry to and fro, and when, at length, a broad gleam of light fell on the window where she stood, and the stone steps immediately before her, she saw a man slowly ascend the latter, while deliberately drawing from his pocket a key, which he applied to the hall-door. A moment after she knew that only a few steps separated her from her much-dreaded uncle.

During the hour she had just spent alone, the silence in the house had been unbroken, but now the opening and shutting of doors not far distant from her became audible, and soon afterwards the study-door was opened, and she turned round, with a beating heart, to meet — Mrs. Ducker, who came to inform her that Mr. Nixon having gone to dress for dinner, she supposed it was time for Miss Nixon to do the same, and she had come to show her to her room. Leonora followed her into the gas-lit hall, and up four long flights of stairs, in silence; then Mrs. Ducker pointed to the door of the back bedroom, and whispered "Master's room," whereupon Leonora turned to the other doors, but finding them locked, perceived that she was to follow her guide up a narrow, uncarpeted continuation of the staircase, which led to the attics, where she was put in possession of a large, wild-looking room, called the nursery.

Her toilet was quickly made, and without giving herself time to become frightened again, she rapidly

descended the stairs, fervently hoping to reach the study before her uncle. She was disappointed, he was already there, his elbow leaning on the chimney-piece, and his tall stiff figure turned towards the door, on which his eyes here fixed with piercing keenness.

Leonora's previous life had been of a description that was calculated to early form her manners and give her unusual self-possession for her age; but the gentlemanly appearance of the erect old man before her, with his well-formed expressive features, full lips, high forehead, prolonged by baldness, and snow-white curling hair, was so unlike the "City" uncle of her dread and dreams, that she stopped blushing and uncertain how to approach him. After a long and painfully scrutinizing glance, he slowly extended his hand towards her, and, as she had expected, his first words were a reproach.

"It would have been better," — he began, coldly and severely, — "it would have been better, and infinitely more decorous, had you applied to me or your uncle Gilbert for advice and assistance after your father's death, instead of forcing yourself upon the notice, and seeking the protection, of a young and unmarried man like Lord Medway."

Leonora was so shocked at this view of her conduct, that it was with great difficulty she explained the true state of the case, and assured him, she had supposed Lord Medway's father still alive when she came to England, and that he having been in constant correspondence with her mother, had, by letter, offered to protect and assist her should she ever be in want of a friend.

"When you found out the mistake," said her uncle, calmly, "there was still time to remedy it; but I have

reason to know that you purposely kept Lord Medway in ignorance of our being in existence."

"So," thought Leonora, "Charles Thorpe's correspondence has been of a nature to create a strong prejudice against me — that was unnecessary cruelty on his part." Mr. Nixon pausing, with provoking patience, for an answer, she stammered a few words about the letters in her father's writing-desk having made her unwilling to apply to either of her uncles.

"A plausible defence," said Mr. Nixon, his features relaxing a little; "but," he added, slowly, "the letters in question related altogether to pecuniary affairs, and in no way concerned you."

"I could not be sure that you would not visit the failings of the father on the child," answered Leonora, beginning to recover from her embarrassment, "and besides, after all, the Thorpes are also relations of mine, and —"

"They are very distant ones," interposed Mr. Nixon, "but you would, no doubt, have preferred a residence with them, had they been disposed to keep you."

"They told me I was a second cousin," began Leonora, her eyes filling with tears, "and I was very happy at the Willows, for they were very kind to me, and I found a companion of my own age."

"You would have found the same in your uncle Gilbert's family," rejoined her uncle, drily; "however," he added, while ringing the bell twice in an expressive sort of way, that probably conveyed some order to the regions below stairs, "however, on this disagreeable subject I shall, in consideration of your youth, now only observe that you have acted foolishly, perhaps I should say childishly, did not the Thorpes view the matter in

another and more serious light: of that, and of them, we need speak no more, for you will scarcely seek or desire further intercourse with a family who, in order to get rid of you, have shown so little consideration for either your feelings or wishes."

Leonora blushed deeply, and he continued —

"I have been considering how best to dispose of you; my first idea was to send you to a Mrs. Howard St. Vincent, with whom your cousin Georgina will probably remain another year for the completion of her education; it has since occurred to me, that the advantages you have probably had abroad will make this unnecessary. You are old enough to judge for yourself; the establishment, as they call it, is very expensive, so if you prefer remaining here with me —"

"Oh I should greatly prefer it," cried Leonora hastily.

"Then you may do so. I require and expect nothing from you, excepting that you will be punctual in your hours, and not interfere with habits of regularity which have become necessary to my health and comfort."

Leonora was about to answer, when dinner was announced, and her uncle, with polite formality, offered his arm, and conducted her into the adjoining room. It was an enormously large apartment, containing massively carved mahogany sideboards, tables that might be drawn out to an astonishing length, carpet and curtains of a rich crimson colour, chairs to match, and even the walls were covered with paper of the same warm tint, on which the gorgeously gilt frames of some family pictures shone resplendent. Over the fire-place hung the portrait of Mr. Nixon's father, a handsome, healthy-looking man, in a buff waistcoat, with a bunch of ponderous seals

pending over his portly paunch. On the long wall opposite were hung Mr. Nixon's own portrait, taken some thirty or forty years previously, when he had, evidently, dressed very carefully for the occasion; that of his wife, a sickly-looking woman, with short frizzled curls of red hair; and also that of his son, likewise red-haired and not handsome — yet so full of life, and so eminently well painted, was *this* picture, that Leonora was instantly attracted by it, and her uncle, with a wave of his hand, and the words, "Your cousin Arthur," introduced her to it, much as if it had been a living person.

"Painted at Rome, by a very eminent German artist," he added, seating himself at the dinner-table; after which words the most profound silence reigned, rendering audible the eager snorting sound that accompanied Mr. Nixon's hasty devouring of the viands before him, and which proved to Leonora that her uncle's gastronomic propensities greatly resembled those of her late father. Either the previous conversation, or the bag of biscuits, had so effectually deprived her of all appetite, that she had time to examine and study the appearance of her now perfectly unobservant relation. She saw, with more dissatisfaction than surprise, the pale face flush with avidity, the veins near the temples swell, and at length, as he bent over a plate full of curry, large drops of perspiration trickling down his white intellectual forehead! While seeking his handkerchief to remove them, he perceived Leonora's eyes fixed gravely on him, with an expression that he mistook for astonishment, and probably intended to reply to her thoughts, when he said, "if you had worked hard as I have done since ten o'clock this morning, and had had no luncheon, you would, perhaps, be quite as hungry as I am."

Leonora turned away, and pretended to eat.

"You don't like curry," said her uncle, after having, in his turn, observed her for a short time.

"It burns my mouth," she answered, "worse, even, than English mustard."

"You will soon learn to like it," said Mr. Nixon, amused at her wry faces and glistening eyes, "very soon — it is a taste that must be acquired, but like all such, when acquired, is frequently stronger than what we feel for simple natural food."

Leonora shook her head incredulously.

"You do not understand me," he continued, helping himself again copiously, and eating quickly while speaking slowly. "What I mean is, one never hears — of habitual excess — in the gratification, of — of the inclinations towards — bread, milk, water — or even wholesomely cooked meat, but often, very often, in the acquired taste for brandy, tobacco, wine, opium, and so forth —"

"But I should think all these tastes better avoided than acquired," observed Leonora.

"That I shall not attempt to deny," he answered, glancing quickly from his plate towards her, with a look of keen intelligence; "but my pleasures in this world are very limited, and their variety consists almost exclusively in a change of dishes on this table, and of books on the one in the next room. Both acquired tastes, for which my relish is, I confess, at times more intense than it ought to be."

Leonora attempted no answer, but watched with some interest the, to her, novel operation of removing the table-cloth, admired the highly polished wood beneath; and when the desert was arranged, following a sign from her

uncle, she rose and took the chair placed for her at the side of the fire-place, opposite him.

When they were alone, he asked her a few questions about her former mode of life and places of residence; told her, in a parenthesis, not to put more powdered sugar on her plate than she could eat with her orange; sipped unremittingly glass after glass of the wine placed close beside him by his attentive butler; and when the contents of the crystal jug began to wax low, he stretched out his feet to the adjacent fender, sought and found a comfortable resting-place for his head on the well-stuffed back of his large arm chair, and from a doze imperceptibly fell into a profound sleep.

Leonora's position was so new to her, that she did not know whether to leave the room or remain in it; but having at length decided on the latter, she leaned her head on her hand, gazed pensively at the glowing coal-fire, and recalled the events of the previous evening at The Willows with painful minuteness. Stealthily she drew from her pocket the letter she had then received from Lord Medway, and having read it carefully over, tried to convince herself that she should hear from him again and soon. Yet, while she mused, it seemed as if all around began to assume an appearance of home: already she felt that she was not, as at The Willows, a mere passing visitor in her uncle's house; he had offered, and she had tacitly accepted his protection. She looked along the walls of the room, and the portraits, warmed by the light of lamp and fire, appeared to return her glance with the freedom of long acquaintance, her cousin Arthur's fiery brown eyes seeming to ask her opinion of the vase on which his hand rested, the form

of which was far more familiar than that of any of the fruit dishes on the table beside her.

At the end of about an hour, her uncle awoke, expressed some surprise at finding her still in the room, rang the bell, and opened the folding door into the study. There they found the preparations for tea, which Mr. Nixon made and poured out himself, retiring with his cup to a seat near the fire-place, and taking up a book, in which he read without intermission until bed-time. Leonora had silently followed his example, which seemed to please him, for as they separated for the night, he observed, that he was glad to perceive she liked reading, and, after a pause, added, "You will find the key of the bookcases on my writing-table, and near the window there is a collection of foreign works, which belong to my son. Though *I* cannot read them you of course can. They are well chosen I am sure — in fact, the names of all the authors are familiar to me, and I have read translations of most of them. We breakfast at nine o'clock, *pre — cisely.* Good night."

"Good night," said Leonora, turning into the hall while he remained to extinguish the lamp and rake up the embers still glowing in the grate.

CHAPTER VIII.

How Leonora's name came to be shortened.

ACCUSTOMED to early rising, Leonora was dressed the next morning before seven o'clock, and was considerably puzzled how to employ her time for the ensuing two hours before breakfast. Half that time sufficed for the unpacking and arrangement of her wardrobe, and then,

having placed her little writing-desk on a table ready for use should she hear from the Medway family during the day, she went to the window, counted the houses of the square and their windows, speculated dreamily on the families in the neighbourhood with whom she was likely to become acquainted, and at length sauntered towards the staircase, intending to inspect the drawing-rooms, which, from the appearance of the lobby, and the lofty doors, she concluded, must be unusually splendid. She found the doors locked, and while deliberating about the propriety or necessity of returning to her own room, she continued to descend the stairs, her lingering irresolute steps bringing her at last to the door of the study. She entered and advanced to the glass cases, to examine the books that had so strongly attracted her attention the day before. The door into the dining-room was ajar, and she started slightly on perceiving her uncle already seated at the breakfast table reading a newspaper, his spectacles poised on the end of his nose, and his chin slightly raised as if to keep them there: glancing over them he made some guttural sound as answer to Leonora's morning greeting, and then continued his occupation until the clock struck nine. As he deposited "The Times" on the table the door opened, and every requisite for a substantial breakfast was noiselessly placed within his reach — a large tea caddy, as on the previous evening, being rolled towards him, out of which he not only took the necessary quantity of tea, but also a massive silver sugar basin. He did not himself invite Leonora to join him, but made some sign to the servant to do so; and when she seated herself at the table, after having pushed towards her a cup of tea, he helped himself to each thing before forwarding it to her, as if at once and for

all to show that he had no intention of playing politeness with so young a person and so near a relation. Leonora made a few attempts at conversation, which seemed to surprise him amazingly, but they proved completely abortive, his answers — with a mouth full of egg and buttered toast, or voice half smothered in a tea cup of immense proportions — being perfectly unintelligible.

At length he rose, received from the servant, who was waiting in the hall, his paletot, gloves, hat, and walking-stick, while looming in the distance stood Mrs. Ducker to receive his orders for dinner. His conference with her lasted some time, and seemed to interest him deeply; the moment it was ended he left the house, and Leonora did not see him again until he was dressed for dinner.

These particulars are not interesting, and would not have been forced upon the notice of the reader, had it not been necessary to give an idea of the tenor of Leonora's life for a longer — much longer — period than she had expected. So completely did one day resemble the other in Mr. Nixon's house, that it merely remains to name Sunday as an exception, scarcely however worth mentioning. On that day Mr. Nixon did *not* go to his office, and *did* go to church accompanied by Leonora, having procured for her a place next his own in a part of the building where the light was not too strong for his eyes, or, as Leonora soon shrewdly suspected, where he could occasionally close them unremarked by other members of the congregation. When the service was over, she was consigned to the care of Mrs. Ducker, while he went to take a walk at the "West End," from which, however, he returned home at precisely the usual

hour — dining, sleeping, reading, and going to bed without the slightest further deviation from his wonted habits.

Leonora did not willingly or even patiently resign herself to this unsociable life, — the change was too great from the freedom and incessant variety to which she had been accustomed. That she had been perfectly happy for a couple of months in the dignified seclusion of The Willows, with a companion of her own age and a young man such as Lord Medway, was quite natural, the more so as, to add a charm to her intercourse with the latter, there had been a sort of consciousness that his friendship had been mixed with a large proportion of personal admiration. Her hopes of hearing from him or his family sustained her for some time, but when weeks passed over without a line even from Jane, an uncontrollable impatience began to prey upon her mind. Like a newly caged bird, she moved about restlessly in her prison, wandered from one window to the other, rushed up and down the stairs, wondered if ever her uncle would have time to take her out to walk, or if she should ever have courage to ask him to show her something of London! So great was at length her want of a companion, that she even made desperate efforts to obtain the friendship of Anne Ducker, descending to the housekeeper's room and offering, nay entreating to be allowed to hem rubbers or mend stockings as an excuse for remaining there. Mrs. Ducker's jealous fears, however, had returned directly she found that the school plan had been set aside, and she repulsed Leonora's offers of usefulness so ungraciously that the poor girl retreated, mortified and offended, to the lonely study, and after yielding for some time to a despondency that

deprived her cheek of every trace of colour, and caused an unconquerable lassitude to pervade every movement of her drooping form, she at last sought and found in the library, placed by her uncle at her disposal, occupation for her time, and solace for her solitude.

At first she read slowly, almost listlessly, but the works were all of the best kind, and there were critical journals of every description to guide her choice. She began to discover that she was extremely ignorant, to rejoice in having so much leisure for reading, to like the quiet room with its comfortable ponderous furniture, to be surprised at the quick flight of time, and even wonder if her uncle had not come home too soon when the turning of his now well known Chubb key in the hall door interrupted her studies. It is astonishing what a variety of literary inclinations the careful perusal of reviews and magazines gave her, and what knowledge of the world — that is the English world — she acquired by reading not only the works of fiction already in her uncle's possession, but each new novel as it appeared. As regularly as the newspapers these works were laid on Mr. Nixon's table, for, like thousands of men in his position in England, he felt the necessity of relaxation for his mind, and perhaps also a natural longing for some intercourse (though but in fiction) with a world from which, either from choice or necessity, he lived so wholly apart. Leonora was needlessly surprised at the interest which he took in the fate of the various heroes and heroines of these works, for it is not unfrequently those who concern themselves the least about the life struggles of the persons immediately around them, who sympathize most unreservedly in the joys and sorrows of fictitious personages. At all events, novel reading

was the usual evening occupation of both uncle and niece, and served effectually to banish the sleepiness which the nocturnal silence in the room and house might have produced.

Leonora at last succeeded in completely gaining Mrs. Ducker's heart by submitting to a regimen of slops to cure a cold caught during the winter on one of the very few occasions that presented themselves for going out: she also discovered why that worthy woman's bonnets and silk dresses retained the lustre of newness, while their forms denoted an unusual age for such articles — they were used but once a week, and then only when the weather was propitious. A walk for pleasure or health was a thing scarcely understood by the members of Mr. Nixon's family, but, indeed, had it been otherwise, Mrs. Ducker would not easily have found leisure for what she unhesitatingly pronounced waste of time. Her activity at home was unceasing, amounting almost to restlessness; she was domineering, addicted to scolding, yet a kind and even warmhearted woman, perfectly illiterate, yet possessed of both good sense and intelligence. Her jealousy of Leonora once overcome, she scolded and petted her alternately — her ire being generally provoked by Leonora's carelessness about the rents in her clothes, her affection continually increased by the gentleness, growing cheerfulness, and, it must be added, beauty of the young girl, whom she began to consider in some degree dependent on her for bodily comforts. Her visits to Leonora in the study, at first "short and far between," were in the course of time frequently prolonged by a forcible retention on a chair while the whole story of a new play or poem was related. It is even on record that a strong piece of cord was once used for that pur-

pose, the knots laughingly tied being afterwards found of a Gordian description, and the operation of cutting them still uncompleted, when Mr. Nixon's step was heard in the hall: Mrs. Ducker, or, as she was then called, "Duckey," was obliged to make her escape into the dining-room with the chair still fastened to her person.

Leonora's efforts to understand her uncle's character were at first not quite successful. The unbroken regularity and seclusion of his life astonished her, and his want of all inclination for society, or anything approaching to amusement, was incomprehensible to one accustomed to the sociability and gaiety of foreign life. Winter, spring, and summer passed over without his ever even mentioning to her the familiar words concert or theatre, and from the papers alone she knew that such entertainments were not uncommon in London. His taciturnity yielded, however, by degrees to her winning ways; she had a good deal of feminine tact, and never put herself in competition with "The Times" during breakfast, or the *entremets* at dinner; but after having breakfasted he sometimes voluntarily entered into a short political discussion, or he delayed his slumber after dinner to criticise a new book; occasionally, too, he lingered over his tea in the evening for the same purpose, and as time wore on, and intimacy increased, he spoke of foreign countries, and manners; and though in both giving the preference to England, his opinions were those of a man who had read and thought, his prejudices the natural consequences of want of personal experience. His ruling passion was ambition, — he himself would have said love for his only son, of whose long and frequent absences he nevertheless evidently approved. He told

Leonora that Arthur was a man of unusual artistical and æsthetical tastes, which were more easily satisfied on the continent than at home; but he refrained from adding that he could there also make acquaintances, English and foreign, quite out of his domestic sphere, and that they both concurred in an ardent desire to rise in the social scale, and hoped to secure this desirable end through the wealth perseveringly increased by the one, and the judicious marriage of the other.

The first interruption to the quiet monotony of Leonora's life, was a grand dinner given on Christmas-day by Mr. Nixon to his brother Gilbert and his family on their return from the country. He invited to meet them his commercial partner, William Plumpton, his wife, sons, and daughters; and again to meet them, and render the party complete, several young men in their mutual employment. The preparations for this dinner were of the most extensive description; the furniture of the drawing-rooms was uncovered, and Leonora examined and admired the carefully preserved chairs, sofas and tables, carpets, lustres, and alabaster vases, as much as she perceived Mrs. Ducker expected. The glasses over the chimney-pieces were of enormous dimensions, fixtures, as Leonora was informed, and bought with the house, some earl or marquess having had them built into the wall when Russell-square had been one of the most fashionable parts of London!

Leonora felt a good deal of curiosity to see her uncle Gilbert and his family, about whom she had, by degrees, obtained some information from Mrs. Ducker, — her utter ignorance of the names and ages of her cousins appearing to the latter perfectly incomprehensible. Not without surprise had she learned that there were Gilbert

Nixons in both the East and West Indies and Australia, all well-to-do in the world and likely to be as rich as their grandfather in the course of time. Of the fourth son, Mr. Sam, who had received the "heducation of a lord, had been to Hoxford, and was a barrister with chambers," Mrs. Ducker spoke with respect and reserve, but she dwelt long and feelingly on the restlessness and ill-conduct of Master John when "at 'ome for the 'ollidays." Miss Georgina was considered very helligunt; but by far the best of the fambly, in her opinion, had been Miss Leonora, who had died of a heart complaint a few months previously.

Leonora, ashamed to confess that she had never heard either of the existence or death of this cousin, considered it a sort of expiation to make the most minute inquiries respecting her name-sake, and learned that she had been about her own age, but from childhood so delicate that she had constantly resided at her father's country-house, Beechfield, which was at a convenient railroad distance from London; that even in winter she had been seldom long separated from her family, her father especially regularly passing part of each Saturday and all Sunday with her. Though greatly inferior to her sister Georgina in talents and acquirements she had avowedly been his favourite child, and he had by no means recovered from the grief occasioned by her death when he first saw his niece on Christmas-day. Similarity of age and name, perhaps also some personal resemblance between the two Leonoras, seemed to strike him forcibly and painfully; tears started to his eyes, and, unable to control his emotion, of which, like a true Englishman, he was heartily ashamed, he abruptly left the room, and did not return until just before dinner was announced.

"Papa cannot yet bear to hear the name Leonora," observed Georgina, who had swept into the room and seated herself on one of the sofas with astounding gracefulness, "but I dare say in time he will learn not to mind it."

"It may require longer than you suppose," said Stephen Nixon, gravely. "I have not yet been able to pronounce my niece's name without an effort."

"Ah! true — my aunt's name was Leonora," said Georgina; "I had forgotten that she was godmother to our poor dear Leonora."

"I had also a daughter of that name," observed Mr. Nixon.

"But," rejoined Georgina, "she was such a mere child when you lost her!"

"She lived long enough," he answered, slowly, "to make the name doubly dear and familiar to me."

Leonora now recollected that during the three months she had resided with her uncle he had scarcely ever addressed her by her name, that he had even used some ingenuity to avoid doing so, and had peremptorily desired the servants to call her "Miss Nixon," when, with the nice perception of rank peculiar to the English, they had shown their knowledge, that the daughter of the youngest son of Samuel Nixon was in fact only Miss *Leonora*, until after the marriage or death of her cousin Georgina.

"Why do you not call me Nora?" she now said, turning suddenly to her uncle; "I never was called otherwise until I came to England."

"And you never shall be called by any other name in future," he answered; "we shall drink your health

after dinner to day, and give you again the name I have no doubt you like better than any other."

Nora, as she was henceforward called, had not time to become much acquainted with her relations during the evening. Her uncle Gilbert appeared to her more goodnatured, but less gentlemanlike, than her uncle Stephen. In fact, good living had made him stout, and prosperity cheerful — at times almost jovial — though ever with a certain pomposity of demeanour, which he imagined equally English and dignified. He had suited himself with a wife early in life, and had often facetiously declared that she had been one of his best speculations. They had lived very happily together, and, after having attained an immense size, she had died from the effects of good living and want of exercise. Time had enabled Gilbert Nixon to get reconciled to this loss, but there was another which he never ceased to regret, and unceasingly and loudly to deplore — the want of a classical education. While his brother, however, had endeavoured to supply this loss by an extensive study of every branch of English literature, Gilbert had never even attempted to read anything but a newspaper, in which, strange to say, the fashionable intelligence was apparently of nearly as much importance to him as the state of the funds. Fortunately this intelligence was not scanty in detail, so that he had frequent opportunities of rejoicing in balls and dinners, given by and for the entertainment of people, with whose *names* at least he was familiar. The queen and princes seldom rode or walked out without his being in the same way made acquainted with the minutest particulars; and, feeling deeply interested in such communications, he invariably spoke of them with a mixture

of pride and exultation, the cause of which might perhaps by a circuitous route be traced to the fact that the balls and dinners were given and frequented by *his* countrymen, the queen was *his* queen, the princes were *his* princes!

Gilbert Nixon was, according to the English fashion, essentially patriotic, being not only deeply impressed with the invincible power and boundless wealth of England, but perfectly convinced that there never had been, and never would be, a nation in any respect capable of bearing a comparison with her. Personally he was strongly prejudiced against all foreigners, calling the French dirty and the Germans dull, without ever in the course of his life having become acquainted with an individual of either nation. Nora's continental education he considered a great disadvantage, but was more than half reconciled when a nearer acquaintance made him aware of her still unbounded admiration for everything English.

Nora found the Christmas dinner tedious and tiresome, and the plumpudding by no means so excellent as she had expected. She was somewhat perplexed, too, how to find amusement for her guests in the drawing-room, and much regretted her cousin Arthur's having removed the pianoforte to the attics, and let it fall to pieces there, merely because the form was old-fashioned, and the more so as Mrs. Plumpton informed her more than once, that both her daughters "played with extraordinary execution," and that the Plumpton family were all remarkably musical! Nora's efforts to please were, however, too sincere to be unsuccessful, and before her uncle came upstairs she and Mrs. Plumpton had made great strides towards a better acquaintance, the latter

having already hoped to see her soon at *her* house, and promised to give her an excellent receipt for mock-turtle soup.

The Misses Plumptons were slim, quiet girls, no longer very young, and Nora had thought them sensible unaffected women until she observed their efforts to attract the attention and flirt with the half-dozen young men who, flushed with wine, hovered round the tea-table at a later hour. Not so Georgina; *she* seemed to consider Nora alone worthy of notice, disdained the female Plumptons altogether, and leaning back in an arm-chair repulsed even the advances of that very fine gentleman Mr. Percival Plumpton, so that he withdrew in disgust from the contemplation of her little saucy turned-up nose, and bestowed his condescending attention on Nora for the remainder of the evening.

In due time an invitation to dine with the Plumptons reached Mr. Nixon, in which Nora was included. The party was of a gayer description than that given by her uncle, for, as Mrs. Plumpton observed, "Where there are young girls in a house music and dancing are a matter of course." Many people came to tea, and the Misses Plumpton commenced an impromptu concert with what they called "pieces" of Thalberg and Herz. They were succeeded by some timid young ladies, who trembled forth the newest and most popular ballads, and then a stout gentleman shouted out the bass of a duet from a well-known opera, but with such utter contempt of all the rules of music that when people whispered "Lablache to the life," Nora innocently supposed his performance a parody, and laughed and nodded her head with the others. During the waltz on the carpet that followed, she came to the hasty conclusion that Englishmen con-

sidered it beneath their dignity to learn to dance, and then unwillingly admitted to herself, that as specimens of the first nation in the world, they were wonderfully awkward in their manners.

Yet this evening often recurred to Nora's memory, as week after week and month after month passed over without another invitation. Her uncle Gilbert spent all his spare time at Beechfield, Georgina had returned to Mrs. Horace St. Vincent's Establishment, Mr. Sam Nixon lived at his chambers, and John had gone back to school. The Plumptons called one day, and said they were going to Margate, which was a delightful place, and from that time forward, excepting to church on Sunday, or to take a solitary saunter in the square, Nora never left the house.

CHAPTER IX.

A Practical Lesson on the Force of Habit.

Soon after the commencement of the second year of Nora's residence with her uncle, a transaction took place that seemed likely to change her prospects in a very unexpected manner. Stephen and Gilbert Nixon had joined in some railway speculation that had proved fortunate beyond their most sanguine expectations. Gilbert, who had been manager on the occasion, called by appointment late one afternoon, and brought with him his daughter Georgina, now returned home "for good," as he expressed it.

The two girls retired to one of the windows, where Georgina, putting her hand on Nora's shoulder, hoped they were soon likely to be much together, and become very good friends.

"If you can manage to come here occasionally," began Nora.

"No, dear, you must come to us," said Georgina, interrupting her hastily, "Russell-square is quite out of the question — Ultima Thule, as one of my friends called it the other day!"

"But my uncle has strictly forbidden my going out, excepting to walk in the square," said Nora, "or with Anne Ducker, who has so seldom time — scarcely ever in fact!"

"Oh, we don't want old Ducker at all," rejoined Georgina, laughing, "we only want you — that is, *I* want you, and hope to be of use to you. Papa has been so lucky with his railway shares, that he has at length yielded to my entreaties, and bought a house in Eaton-place, and given me *carte blanche* for the furniture! I have chosen amber-coloured silk for the drawing-rooms, green and gold for the dining-room, and Mrs. Savage Wayward says, if papa will only give dinners, she can introduce us to all the first people in town, and that her friend, Lady Robert Botherton will present us — that is you and me, — at the next Drawing-room; but you, I suppose, will prefer Lady Medway, as she is a relation."

"Who? I? — Lady Medway!" repeated Nora, "I — I do not even know where she is at present!"

"Surely," cried Georgina, much astonished, "surely you must be aware that they are all returned from Italy."

"How should I know?" asked Nora, with a faint smile.

"Because it was in the papers a week ago," answered Georgina. "Do you never read the fashionable intelligence?"

"Very seldom."

"What an odd girl you are! But you will soon think and feel differently about all these things. Wait only until our establishment in Eaton-place is in order! I intend to begin very quietly, to prevent people from talking too much about us, or forming a league to laugh at us, also to give papa time to get rid of all his tiresome old-fashioned habits. My brother Sam is a provoking plodder and John still a mere child — both of no sort of use to me, and I have not courage to brave the difficulties of working my way in the world of fashion quite alone. With you, however, for a companion, and plenty of money, it will be very odd if I cannot contrive, not only to brave, but even to overcome them. You see I am candid, and tell you that I want you. It would undoubtedly have been more worldly wise, had I pretended perfectly disinterested motives for this offer of a home — such as a wish to save you from a continuance of your present dull life, and a desire to promote your marrying advantageously; but I take it for granted that though a couple of years younger than I am, you have seen enough of the world to understand me and like me all the better for being plain-spoken."

Nora smiled with a look of such perfect intelligence that Georgina continued,

"There is but one thing likely to interfere with our plans; I fear — I greatly fear — that my uncle Stephen may take it into his head to object to your leaving him."

Nora almost laughed at the idea, and assured her cousin that her uncle Stephen would scarcely observe her absence.

"I am glad to hear it," said Georgina; "papa will speak to him directly about you. I suppose," she added,

abruptly, "I suppose you will be glad to see the Medways again, and can introduce us to them? You must know them well after having resided in their house so long!"

"I *knew* them tolerably well," said Nora with a slight blush, "but they have never come to see me — never even written to me since I have been here."

"Of course not," said Georgina, lightly, "how could you expect such a thing?"

"I thought Jane at least too young to have any absurd prejudices."

"She must do as her mother desires," rejoined Georgina; "but you will soon see her, as she is to be presented this year, when Lady Grace marries Mr. Cardwell."

"Why, you know all about them!" said Nora surprised.

"I saw them yesterday evening at the Opera, where I went with the Savage Waywards. Lord Medway was there too, looking so indolent and ill; people say it is quite unpardonable his requiring such a length of time to die!"

"Oh, Georgina, how can you speak with such levity!"

"Mr. Wayward's words, not mine," she answered; "but hush," she added, turning towards her father and uncle, "they are talking about us now, and I suppose we may listen."

A look of intelligence passed between her and Gilbert Nixon as in an off-hand kind of manner, and without any circumlocution, he proposed to relieve his brother of the charge of their niece, Nora, assuring him with evident sincerity "that he and Georgina had taken a fancy to her; that she should never want for anything, and that without offence he might say they had a gayer

and more eligible residence to offer her than the old house in Russell-square!"

Mr. Nixon did not listen to this speech unmoved; the colour forsook his lips, and, perhaps to conceal some feeling so unexpected on his part that he hardly understood it himself, he turned towards the fire-place, bent his head on his hand, and seemed to consider long before he answered slowly, "With you Nora will undoubtedly be happier than here, and I have no right to retain her if she choose to leave me."

This answer was pretty much what Nora had expected, but Georgina seemed equally surprised and pleased at an acquiescence so unconditional, when she had prepared herself for downright steady opposition. She thanked him warmly, and asked when Nora might remove to Eaton-place?

"When she pleases," answered Mr. Nixon, stiffly.

"Let us take her with us at once," suggested Georgina, eagerly.

To this, however, he objected with strangely flashing eyes, and Gilbert interfering, proposed the following day, to which no objection being made, he added, while shaking his brother's hand, "To-morrow thet let it be. I'm glad to find you so ready to part with the girl, Stephen; Georgy was afraid you might wish to keep her, and," he added, turning round at the door, "and I myself enjoy so much having young people about me, that I thought it very likely you might some way or other have got fond of her, and used to her company and all that sort of thing. Of course, I should not have pressed the matter had this been the case, but Georgy would have been terribly disappointed, I can tell you. Good-

bye, Stephen; God bless you. So you won't join me in the shares I intend to purchase to-morrow?"

Mr. Nixon shook his head, the door closed, and Nora stood in the middle of the room, stupified at the sudden and perfectly unexpected change in her prospects. "Youthful companions — a gay house — balls — operas — concerts — a presentation at Court — perhaps she should meet the Medways, and Lady Medway might *now* be kind to her, as she no longer wanted to live with her! She believed she could pardon Lord Medway's having forgotten her — but Charles Thorpe, if in England, should be made to feel the whole weight of her displeasure. She would not dance with him, or look at him; and if he asked her to forgive him, she would say, "*Never!*" or — no; she would laugh, and refuse to listen to his excuses; or, still better, she would — but there was time enough to think of all that. How different her life would be in Eaton-place to what it had been in Russell-square; and yet the quiet study and the well-known books had to a certain degree become dear to her, and even her uncle —" Here she raised her eyes, and found his fixed on her with an inquiring, penetrating glance. He was standing precisely on the same spot where she had first seen him, somewhat more than a year before: again he stretched out his hand towards her; but this time no words of reproach followed.

"Nora," he said, calmly, "my brother was right when he supposed I should 'get fond of you and used to your company:' you do not know with what reluctance I resign you."

"You are very kind to say so," answered Nora, with a slight flush of pleasure; "but I cannot flatter myself that you will miss me in the least."

"You are mistaken," said Mr. Nixon; "I shall miss you greatly, and wish I had a right to insist on your remaining with me."

"That right you have," rejoined Nora. "When I was homeless you received me into your house, and I feel bound in gratitude —"

"I received you into my family as a duty," said Mr. Nixon, interrupting her; "and I resign you now for the same reason."

He rang the bell in the deliberate manner that Nora now knew denoted an order for dinner, and she was but too glad to consider his doing so a sign on his part that he wished to end a conversation that was likely to embarrass her extremely.

Of the charms of change Nora had perhaps an exaggerated idea — of the force of habit a very faint notion. With the docility that generally accompanies a fair proportion of intellect, she had accommodated herself to the customs of her uncle's house; but as she stood occasionally at one of the study windows, or sat alone there after dinner by fire-light, her thoughts had wandered far and wide, and not once had it occurred to her that happiness, or even contentment, could be felt by any one who was immured within the walls of one house. From the day of her arrival in Russell-square, she had never for one moment lost the feeling of imprisonment that had then taken possession of her; but it was ever so mixed with a hope of release at some time indefinite, that she had seldom, even to herself, mourned over a captivity of such uncertain length, and, taken all in all, so endurable in its details. The eve of this long-expected time of freedom had arrived; and, to continue the contrast with the day of her arrival, she

and her uncle seemed to have, in a manner, changed places. While she dined, he watched her intently; so much so, that he scarcely ate anything himself, causing thereby some consternation on the part of Biggs, the butler, who lingered unusually long in the room, to satisfy himself that the claret would not be disdained, as the various viands had been.

That evening, too, Nora waited in vain for her uncle's accustomed sleep, during which she was in the habit of retiring to the study: though he stretched out his feet, and leaned back his head in the usual manner, his eyes askance were still fixed on her, until, at length, murmuring something about not disturbing him, she thought it better to leave the room. He followed her almost immediately, sat down to read near the fire; but a few minutes afterwards, starting up, he dashed the book on the table, and returned to the dining-room. A good deal surprised at conduct so unusual, Nora sat musing on the probable cause, until she heard the bell ring for tea, when he again entered the room, and, without speaking, commenced walking up and down in an uneasy, impatient manner.

"Nora," he said at length, abruptly stopping before her, "the nomaden-like life that you have led, until very lately, will, I fear, prevent you from understanding me if I speak of the — force of habit."

"Perhaps so," she answered; "my life has been, as you say, nomaden-like. I do believe I have never yet been long enough stationary in any place to know the true meaning of either the word home or habit."

"Pre-cisely," said Mr. Nixon; "I thought so. It would be absurd," he added, with ill-concealed embarrassment, "absurd my expecting you to have found any-

thing congenial to your disposition in my house: you naturally rejoice in the prospect of leaving it — and me."

"Not you," answered Nora, quickly; "for though our daily intercourse has been very limited, and you have seldom found me worthy of any kind of rational companionship, I have by no means remained so indifferent towards you."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Nixon, with a look of extreme satisfaction, as he seated himself at the table beside her. "Now see, Nora, my taciturn habits alone have prevented me from enjoying your society as I ought to have done; but I have been by no means insensible to the pleasure of having a young and cheerful girl to greet me in the morning and to meet me on my return home in the evening. Surely you must have observed that I come home from my office a whole hour earlier than formerly."

"Certainly, I remarked it," answered Nora, smiling; "your return has been the only daily event of importance to me — my life has been positively regulated by it!"

"Can you not imagine," said Mr. Nixon, gravely, "that coming home to silence and loneliness will now be very disagreeable, if not painful to me?"

"I think," she answered, beginning with some anxiety to suspect the drift of his discourse, "I think that your old habits will soon resume their preponderance, and that you will forget an interruption which certainly, at first, was anything but pleasing to you."

"Very well reasoned, indeed," said Mr. Nixon; "it seems you know more of the force of habit than I supposed. Let me, however, tell you that your presence has been no interruption to my habits, and a very great

embellishment to my home — that, in short, you have become necessary to my comfort and happiness, and — and — I wish you would consent to remain with me."

Nora's countenance fell so instantaneously and perceptibly that her uncle hastened to add, "I shall, of course, undertake to provide for you respectably, and promise to make a codicil to my will for that purpose to-morrow."

What did Nora know about codicils? what did she, with youth, health, and beauty, care for a respectable provision? She sat beside her uncle in a painful state of embarrassment, a vague feeling of gratitude alone preventing her from refusing at once a proposition so unwelcome and perplexing. All things considered, her gratitude was without much foundation; Mr. Nixon had but tolerated her presence in the first instance, as the least expensive mode of disposing of her; and if he had felt otherwise, at a later period, she had in no way been made aware of the change. This he knew and understood better than Nora, who only remembered that she had been received without demur, and permitted to live without molestation. He made a very slight impression when he assured her that the happiness she expected to enjoy in his brother's house might prove of a very mixed, if not uncertain description; that Gilbert and his family were about to labour up the hill of fashion, and would, undoubtedly, meet with stumbling-blocks in the form of rebuffs and annoyances, the mere description of which in books alone, had effectually deterred him from ever even attempting to increase or *improve* his small circle of acquaintances! It was the concluding sentence of his tolerably long oration that at length had the effect he desired; it was when he earnestly, yet gently, en-

treated her to stay with him, and not force an old man back into a loneliness that had become distasteful to him, that she consented to remain in Russell-square, and of her own accord, before she went to bed, wrote an explanatory note to her cousin Georgina, which he took particularly good care should reach its destination at a very early hour the next morning.

CHAPTER X.

Arrival of, an Addition? or, an Acquisition?

Mr. Nixon in no way concealed the satisfaction he felt at having secured Nora's society "for the remainder of his life," as he unhesitatingly said to his brother a few days afterwards; adding confidentially, "The fact is, Gilbert, I am growing old, and were I to become infirm, Anne Ducker is not the person I should like to have about me. The wife likely to be chosen by my son Arthur will never consent to live in Russell-square; and, in fact, I make no pretention to acquiring a daughter when he marries — on the contrary, rather expect to lose him altogether."

"You have very nearly done that already," observed Gilbert, bluntly.

"By no means," said Mr. Nixon, quickly; "I expect him home very soon to spend some time with me."

"Perhaps he will condescend to visit us now that we have moved westwards," observed Gilbert, with some pique. "He was formerly much too fine a gentleman to notice or know me in the Park or at Kensington when he happened to be surrounded by his grand acquaintances."

"I have passed him in the same places without a nod of recognition," said Mr. Nixon, smiling; "a look of intelligence is all I expect on such occasions."

"Oh, if he cuts his own father, I have no right to be offended," rejoined Gilbert, laughing; "only one of *my* sons had better not attempt anything of the kind with me."

"Arthur and I have come to the most perfect understanding on these subjects," observed Mr. Nixon, calmly; "he must endeavour to rise in the world, and he can do so much more easily when not hampered by an old father, whose very existence is unknown to many of his acquaintances."

"I have no notion of being put aside in any such way," said Gilbert, flushing a good deal. "I should think there was nothing to prevent me from rising in the world as well as my son. Money's the main point, and that I have, and intend to keep too as long as I live."

"It won't do what you want," said his brother, in the same calm, thoughtful manner; "the rise in the social scale is only perfected in the third generation. We are a decided improvement on our father in manners and appearance, and in both, as well as in education, our sons are an improvement on us."

"Ah, I knew you would say something about our want of a classical education! *That* indeed is a loss never to be repaired; but do you know, Stephen, Georgy tells me that people of rank do not quote Greek or Latin excepting in parliament, and she thinks even if they did, I might pull out my handkerchief, like the people on the stage, and pretend to understand, and—"

"And look like a fool!" said his brother, interrupting him.

"That's it," said Gilbert, laughing good-humouredly; "after all it's better to 'tell the truth and shame the devil,' eh?"

"It is better to keep quiet and make no pretension of any kind," answered Stephen. "Let your sons and daughters work their way in the world; your wealth will help them on, but you yourself will be a dead-weight on their hands, and with all their affection for you, they will find your presence in society a nuisance."

"No, I cannot believe that," exclaimed Gilbert, walking up and down the room a good deal chafed; "though not as good looking as you, I may at least say that I have the manners and appearance of a — gentleman."

Stephen Nixon neither assented nor dissented to this observation; he seemed relieved by the entrance of Nora, to whom his brother instantly turned, exclaiming, "So, Miss Nora, you prefer Russell-square to Eaton-place after all, it seems!"

"My uncle Stephen prefers my society to being alone," she answered, with a smile.

"Now, I wonder," he continued, with some asperity — "I wonder if you would give the same answer to Lady Medway, supposing her ladyship took it into her head to wish for your company!"

The possibility of an invitation to spend the summer at "The Willows" had again partially taken possession of Nora's mind, from the time her cousin Georgina had informed her of the return of the Medways to England. She looked eagerly and inquiringly towards her uncle Stephen, who apparently understood her thoughts, when he answered, "Gilbert is jesting, Nora; no letter or

message has been sent by the Medways, nor is there the slightest chance of your hearing anything of them until your brother returns from the Mediterranean; *he*, I suppose, will take some notice of you, but I have no fears of his ever proposing to take you from me altogether as your uncle Gilbert would have done."

"For which I shall ever feel grateful," said Nora, extending both her hands to the latter.

"Well, well," cried Gilbert, looking exceedingly pleased, "it's a good thing to have 'two strings to one's bow,' Nora; so when you are tired of Russell-square you can come to Eaton-place, and *vicy vercy*. In an establishment such as mine, one more or less is of no importance, as Georgy said, when she engaged the fellow who is to wear powder, and indeed everything would be right if I could only get used to the new fashions and the late dinner-hour. Georgy chooses to keep the cloth on the table, too, and won't let us afterwards sit round the fire to crack our nuts comfortably, as I have been used to do ever since I have had a house of my own — but I suppose it's all right, for Mrs. Horace St. Vincent told her that such customs were now considered quite antidelerium."

Mr. Nixon rubbed his upper lip to conceal a smile, and said, "You are a younger man than I am, Gilbert, and can perhaps change all your habits to please your children. Nora has fortunately been able to accommodate herself to the old-fashioned usages of my house, though, I have no doubt, many of them are diametrically opposite to what she has been accustomed to. Take care that Georgina does not learn to dictate more than you may find agreeable hereafter."

"Oh, she's so clever," responded Gilbert, with evident

pride, "such a manager, that she would turn even you round her finger in no time if she were here. It was her plan our inviting Nora as we did last week; she said, if we took you by surprise, and spoke in Nora's presence, you would be ashamed to refuse your consent, it would appear so egotistical on your part; and, egad, she was right, but she did not reckon on your flinching when our backs were turned."

A flush passed over Mr. Nixon's face while his brother continued — "She was exceedingly provoked at Nora's note of refusal, and would not come here with me to-day, as she said, she could not possibly refrain from telling you that it was uncommon selfish your burying poor Nora during the best years of her life in your front parlour here, and depriving her of all chance of settling advantageously in the world."

Gilbert, in his eagerness to prove the cleverness of his daughter, evidently forgot the presence of his niece; not so, Stephen, who, with difficulty, repressed his anger, as he answered, "Georgina seems a person of extraordinary penetration, and I am happy to be able to relieve her anxiety by giving her the information that she need give herself no further concern respecting her cousin's settlement in the world. I shall so provide for Nora, that aw — in short, Georgina may bestow all her thoughts and care upon herself and her own affairs in future."

"That I shall certainly tell her, Stephen, you may depend upon it; for she desired me to sound you on that very subject, and point out to you the necessity of doing something handsome for Nora, after her having consented to remain with you in this dismal old house!"

"Have the goodness also to tell Georgina from me," said Mr. Nixon, his face flushing and eyes flashing, "that I consider her advice on this occasion extremely impertinent, that I forbid all future interference on her part between Nora and me, and to prevent the possibility of anything of the kind, that I shall feel greatly obliged by her absenting herself altogether from my dismal old house."

"Now, don't be offended," said Gilbert, half apologetically; "that the idea was not bad is proved by your having already done of your own accord what she desired me to suggest. You don't yet know what a clever girl Georgy is; if you only heard her talk you would be astonished!"

"At her flippancy? I dare say I should."

"Come, come, Stephen, you must not be angry with my girl for knowing a little of the world and its ways. Mrs. St. Vincent assured me, when I left Georgy with her the additional year, that she would make her capable of presiding over any establishment in England, and I must say she has kept her word. Georgy might be a duchess!"

"I hope she may be," said Stephen, with a grim smile.

"It won't be her fault if she's not," said Gilbert, "she has ambition enough for us all. But now I must go — won't you take a look at my new carriage? It's a very nice turn-out, I can assure you; Georgy says, quite complete and in very good style."

"Chosen by her, of course?" half asked Mr. Nixon.

"Certainly. Nothing would have induced her to enter our old coach since her return from Mrs. St. Vincent."

"Oh — indeed!"

"I can afford it, Stephen, afford it well," cried Gilbert, provoked at last by his brother's manner; "and I don't see why my daughter should not have her own carriage as well as your son his cab and riding-horses, to say nothing of all the expensive fooleries on which he spends so many thousands every year!"

"Your ignorance, alone, excuses the word fooleries," said Mr. Nixon, with a smile of contempt.

"I know I am ignorant, Stephen," cried Gilbert, too angry to understand the less offensive meaning of his brother's word, "but there is no necessity for your telling me so continually. All the Greek and Latin ever learned at Oxford or Cambridge would not have taught us to make money like the writing and arithmetic that you pretend to despise."

"You misunderstand me —" began Stephen.

"No, I don't. You sneer at me and my family because we are about to make at home the same efforts that your son has been for years making abroad."

"By no means," said Mr. Nixon. "Don't suppose I blame the young people for endeavouring to rise, or even for making desperate efforts to push themselves forward in the world; they may succeed, but you will only be ridiculed for your pains."

"And why so?" asked Gilbert. "Did not Nora's father —"

"You have chosen a bad example," said Stephen, interrupting him; "Nora's father sacrificed his fortune to fashion, and died — a pauper."

"Take care that Arthur does not do the same," said Gilbert.

"I have no anxiety on that subject," answered

Stephen, nodding his head. "Few fathers are on more confidential terms with their sons than I am with mine. Arthur has seldom exceeded his allowance, and when he does so, it is only for objects of *virtù*."

"Virtue, indeed!" exclaimed Gilbert, laughing ironically. "You know very little about him or his virtue, during the last twelve years, I suspect! My sons Sam and Jack shall remain at home, and never wear a moustache on pain of being disinherited!"

"Oh, it's the moustache that has given offence!" said Stephen, smiling.

"No offence at all," rejoined Gilbert; "but I have heard enough of your son's doings to make me resolve to keep my sons at home as long as I can; and if going abroad be so necessary as people seem to think now-a-days, why I shall go with them, and follow them about too, wherever they go."

"I advise you to set about learning French, with all convenient expedition," said Stephen, with a sneer.

"I shall have a *courier*," retorted his brother.

"And a tea-kettle —" suggested Stephen.

Gilbert took up his hat, with evident signs of extreme irritation.

Stephen rose and laid his hand on his brother's arm. "Come, Gilbert," he said, "let us understand each other, and not part in anger. You are a clever, clear-headed man, as I have reason to know, having often enough profited by your advice."

The other, with a look of returning satisfaction, attempted to disclaim.

"I say, you are an unusually clever man of business," persisted Stephen; "but you are no man of the world, and never will be — or I either, though I know more of

it from books than you do. Try it for a few years, and painful experience will convince you that I am right. As to our children — it is evident you feel no great regard for my son, and to tell you the truth, I do not desire the society of your daughter, either for myself, or Nora. Let us, therefore, as heretofore, meet daily in the city, and but rarely at our respective homes. Our roads are no longer parallel, and Georgina will explain to you before long, that your servants need not be made acquainted with the fact, of your having a brother who lives so much nearer the city than the West End."

Gilbert looked conscious, as if he had already heard something to that purport, and endeavoured to conceal his embarrassment by asking when Arthur was expected home.

"In a week or two," answered Stephen, "he and Lord Torpid are travelling together, and have reached Paris by this time."

"Ah — indeed — I read this morning in the paper, that it was generally supposed his lordship would shortly lead the beautiful and accomplished Lady Louisa Thorpe, to the — the — hymn — hym — him-alay-an altar!"

Nora thought her uncle meant to be facetious, and laughed. Such was not his intention; he had some slight misgiving that he had blundered a little in the pronunciation of a hard word; but, otherwise, considered his speech as very correct, and probably classical.

"That may be true," observed Stephen, suppressing a smile, "Lord Torpid was at Nice, for some weeks, when the Medways were there. Arthur can tell you all about the Thorpes, Nora, if they still continue to interest you."

"I believe I had better try to forget them, as they seem to have forgotten me," answered Nora, blushing.

"The Medways are a very distinguished family," said Gilbert, as he walked towards the door, "very distinguished, indeed! Yesterday evening, her ladyship entertained a select party, at her house in Grosvenor-place, at which were present the Earl and Countess of Witherington, the Ladies Martingale, Lord Augustus Jockley, and other members of the aristocracy. It is not improbable that I may become acquainted with the Medways during the season, Nora; and you may depend upon my speaking of you the first opportunity that occurs."

He left the room with a pompous wave of the hand, and an oddly contrasting good-humoured smile.

This conversation made a deep impression on Nora, from having given her more insight into the characters of her two uncles than all the previous months of careful observation. Mr. Nixon never referred to it; but the knowledge that Nora was not altogether in his power, that others were as desirous as he was of having her to reside with them, unconsciously raised her in his estimation, and made him anxious to relieve the tedium of his house. That same evening, he requested her to preside in future at the tea-table, proposed her writing once a-week a list of the books she wished to read, promising to procure them for her with his own, and, in a fit of kind thoughtfulness, actually surprised her with a present of a pianoforte, which with difficulty found a place in the study. She saw his efforts to make her feel herself at home, and, unostentatiously met them half way; so that by the time her cousin Arthur arrived, she had pretty nearly obtained the position of a daughter in his father's house. It was his arrival that first made her

painfully conscious of the very reduced state of her wardrobe; her mourning was completely worn out, she had outgrown all her other clothes, had no money to replace them, and could not overcome the repugnance she felt to an explanation with her uncle on this subject. From week to week she had hoped he would observe her wants, and say something when on the way to church, during the cold, damp, autumn Sundays; but he had no idea that her crape bonnet that had borne the dust of two summers, could not also sustain the sleet and rain of the succeeding winters.

Nora's embarrassment was greatly increased by the unusual preparations made for the reception of her cousin. The drawing-room windows were opened, the furniture uncovered, and fires lighted; Anna Ducker informing her, that their dear Arthur could not endure a house looking only half inhabited. The treasures of the front bed-room, and adjoining dressing-room, which were his, were then too, for the first time, completely disclosed to her admiring eyes, and she was permitted, at her leisure, to examine the choice pictures that covered the walls, the inlaid cabinets and tables, bronze statuettes, vases, and other objects of art, with which they were crowded. The day of his arrival, light once more fell on the splendid service of plate, and the silver vessels of various form, that had decorated the sideboard on the occasion of the Christmas party; but when Nora at last perceived that new and handsome carpets were being laid on the stairs, she thought it time to inspect her wardrobe, and endeavour to discover some dress appropriate for the reception of a person of such evident importance. She possessed a black velvet gown that had belonged to her mother, and though a foreign prejudice

had hitherto made her unwilling to wear what she had learned to consider a matron's dress, she was now glad to have it, with its valuable old lace appendages, unconscious, when her toilet was completed, and she reluctantly left her room, that she had never in her life looked so picturesque and pretty, so graceful and dignified, as while leaning for a moment over the banisters of the staircase, to ascertain whether or not her cousin had arrived.

He had arrived. Ostentatious as had been the preparations for his reception, nothing could be more simple and quiet than his entrance. Having joined his father at his office in the city, they had returned home together, and he had then expressed so much more desire to see Mrs. Ducker than his cousin Nora, that he had retired first to the apartment of that much-flattered woman, and then to his own, making hastily the slight alterations in his dress which he considered sufficient for his father and the young relation whose acquaintance he was about to make. He seemed, however, rather to waver in the latter opinion, as, immediately after leaving his room, his eyes rested on the charming figure in black velvet, that he saw preceding him down stairs, and he would, perhaps, have retreated to effect some advantageous change, had not Nora looked up and — smiled, smiled as if she already knew him.

In a moment he was beside her, and they entered the drawing-room together, where they found Mr. Nixon enacting *grand seigneur* with all his might for the laudable purpose of gratifying his only son.

The dinner, as far as conversation was concerned, proved almost a *tête-à-tête* between Nora and her cousin; but she left the father and son together directly after-

wards, and sitting down beside the fire in the drawing-room (where she felt rather as if in a strange house) she came very quickly to the conclusion that Arthur was very decidedly gentlemanlike. She thought his hair, too, rather auburn than red; and if the colour of his beard admitted of no doubt whatever, it did not prevent him from being good-looking: he was agreeable, too, and would be a pleasant addition to their small party, an acquisition to her as well as to her uncle.

A very short time elapsed before he joined her, and, drawing a chair close to hers, said, "My father is sleeping, and, I suppose, will continue to do so for half-an-hour longer. Let us have coffee, and tell me all you know about Lady Louisa Thorpe: she is going to be married to a friend of mine — one of the quietest, best-natured fellows in the world, and I hope you can tell me that he has not drawn a blank in Hymen's lottery."

"I know very little of Louisa," answered Nora; "but I should think Lord Torpid had not made a bad choice."

"So you know all about it!" said Arthur; "very natural — to be sure — of course."

"Do not misunderstand me," rejoined Nora, quickly. "A paragraph in one of the papers, repeated by my uncle Gilbert, gave me all the information I possess. That Lord Torpid and the Marquis of Witherington are *your* intimate friends, Anne Ducker has impressed upon my mind by dint of eternal repetition of the words."

Arthur half laughed as he exclaimed, "Dear old Ducker! I hope you like her, Nora? In fact, you must, for she loves you beyond measure, and has already assured me that you are a 'hangel:' I, too, feel rather inclined to think this must be the case now that my father has told me you refused to go to Mr. Gilbert

Nixon's in order to vegetate here with him. It was an immense sacrifice on your part; and what this house must have appeared to you, coming from the Medways, I can well imagine."

Nora played with her fire-screen, and made no attempt to disclaim.

"You expected," he added, with some hesitation, "to return to — them?"

"I confess I had some foolish hopes of the kind for a month or so," answered Nora, with a freedom from embarrassment that encouraged her companion to go on; yet he looked at the fire, and not at her, as he observed —

"You did not know Lord Medway's wavering character, and expected him to carry through his plans concerning you with firmness."

"I hardly knew what I expected," she answered, leaning back in her chair, and gazing thoughtfully at the ceiling; "I did not expect to be so completely forgotten, certainly; but, after all, the plan was impracticable, you know, without his mother's consent."

"I know no such thing," said Arthur; "her ladyship's consent was, undoubtedly, desirable, but by no means necessary to a man in his position. Our cousin Georgina would, in your place, have played her cards differently, and gone to Nice as — head nurse — hired by his lordship himself — as Lady Medway, in short!"

"I do not understand —" began Nora.

"Is it possible you did not know that he intended to marry you? that his brother had the greatest difficulty in keeping him in Paris; that he refused for a long time to see his mother, who was obliged to propitiate him by making all sorts of promises about you for the ensuing

summer, the fulfilment of which her son Charles assisted her in evading?"

"Are you quite sure of all this?" asked Nora, earnestly.

"Perfectly certain."

"And," continued Nora, "and they returned to England last year?"

"Oh, no! I don't think anything but the marriage of her two eldest daughters would even now have induced Lady Medway to return. In her present position as a widow she finds Paris, Naples, or Rome pleasanter places of residence than London; besides which, she wished to have the Channel for some time longer between you and Medway, being much more afraid of the effect of your *beaux yeux* than even her son Charles, who told a friend of mine, in confidence, that a very short separation would be sufficient for their purpose, as you were merely a — a —"

"What?" asked Nora, smiling.

"Something so very different from what you are, that for his sake I am glad he gave the name of his informant."

"And who may that have been?" asked Nora.

"Your step-brother, Harry Darwin, who most probably has not seen you since you were a child."

"Harry never liked me," said Nora, with some emotion; "but that is of little importance to me *now*. As to Charles Thorpe, I dislike him intensely."

"You would not if you knew him," said Arthur; "he is a fine resolute fellow, and knows perfectly what he is about. As to his not particularly wishing his brother to marry, why — aw — a — hum —"

"Oh! as to that," said Nora, "my studies in English

novels and tales of fashionable life since I have been here have given me such an insight into the present state of society that I can perfectly understand his motives."

"And partly excuse them, perhaps," said Arthur, "when you consider his brother's state of health, and that he did not know you personally."

The entrance of a servant with coffee prevented her from answering: and Mr. Nixon joining them almost immediately afterwards, the Thorpes were not again mentioned.

CHAPTER XI.

Battledore and Shuttlecock.

It was not long before Nora began to discover that her internal rejoicings at the agreeable addition to their family had been somewhat premature. Arthur Nixon left home every morning directly after breakfast with his father, sometimes accompanying him to the City, more frequently directing his steps westward to the Club, where he not only received his notes and letters, but also his friends; and in the course of time the numerous invitations he expected for dinners, soirées, and balls. The evening after his arrival he went to the opera; and from that time forward, for several weeks, seldom dined at home, excepting on Sundays. He informed his father daily at breakfast of his evening engagements, spoke of every person and everything he saw without the slightest reserve; and on such occasions exhibited a degree of satire eminently calculated to lead the uninitiated to suppose that in his heart he had

learned to despise the rank and fashion, in the pursuit of which he was squandering the best years of his life.

Nora and her uncle returned to their old habits, and the study, and Arthur became to them merely an occasional, but always acceptable and agreeable guest. As the spring advanced, his engagements multiplied; and though he complained frequently of being bored and fatigued, he seldom made arrangements for a day of rest; gravely assuring Nora, when she jested on the subject, that if he remained at home for even one week, he should run a great chance of being "clean forgotten, like a dead man, out of mind."

One rainy afternoon, towards the end of May, he returned home at an unusually early hour, and instead of going directly to his room, as was his custom, turned into the study. That he expected to find Nora there is certain, but so little did her absence concern him, that he took up a book, without even inquiring whether or not she were in the house; and, throwing himself into a chair, rather rejoiced in the feeling of being alone. Scarcely, however, had the slight noise produced by his movement of books and chairs ceased, than he heard the sound of irregular, eager, almost breathless counting in the adjoining dining-room — 98 — 99 — 300! — 301 — 302 — 3 — 4 — 5 and so on.

Cautiously opening the door of communication between the rooms, he perceived that Nora, adroitly avoiding the tables and chairs, was amusing herself with a solitary game of battledore and shuttlecock, her anxiety lest the latter should fall to the ground being so great that his intruding head remained long unperceived. It happened that one of her greatest personal advantages was a perfectly-formed figure, and nothing could be more graceful

or fascinating than the unstudied and various positions into which her game compelled her to place it, while her upturned face, with sparkling eyes, lips slightly parted, and cheeks into which exercise had forced the clearest and brightest colour, made her, for the time being, the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld. He watched with intense interest every movement, followed with a sort of nervous anxiety the wavering flight of the shuttlecock as it sometimes approached, sometimes receded from his vicinity, and started when at length it alighted on his head and Nora stood before him.

"Oh, why did you open the door!" she exclaimed, in a tone of jesting reproach; "if your tiresome head had not been there, I could have completed my fourth or even fifth hundred without interruption. Surely you must have returned home a full hour too soon to-day!"

"An hour earlier — but I hope not too soon," he answered, with heightened colour.

"Oh, I have said something you don't like to hear, or you would not correct my English," observed Nora, smiling archly as she continued to play with her shuttlecock. But it now began to fall continually, and after Arthur had raised it from the floor at least a dozen times, he said he supposed she must be tired.

"Not at all," she answered, quickly, "it is dividing my attention between you and the shuttlecock that makes me so *maladroite:* I am never tired until after my fifth hundred."

"What on earth do you mean by your fourth and fifth hundred?" asked Arthur.

"Why you see," said Nora, tossing the shuttlecock towards the ceiling and pursuing it afterwards with a look of sportive eagerness — "you see I am not ac-

customed to be so completely confined to the house (bump, bump), as if I had been born and bred in London (bump). — So when I first came here I used to run up and down the stairs a good deal (bump, bump, bump); but without any object in view, it was all too tiresome (bump). Then I made a ball for myself (bump) — broke the windows (bump, bump) — and had no money to pay the glazier!" Here the shuttlecock fell to the ground, and she raised it herself, as Arthur repeated —

"Pay the glazier!"

"Yes, for I did not wish my uncle to know that I was so childish as to play at ball, so Duckey paid for me (bump, bump), and did not write it in the account-book. She also (bump) gave me this battledore and shuttlecock last Christmas (bump, bump, bump.) —

"Ducker!" exclaimed Arthur.

"Yes, Ducker," said Nora, coming towards him, and with light touches of her hands keeping the shuttlecock constantly in the air just before her face, after the manner of the most expert juggler, "You have no idea how kind she has been to me."

"Or how generous you have been to her," said Arthur; "yet she has shown me a brooch and earrings given her by you, which were certainly intended to deck a fairer person than good old Ducker's."

"Earrings are a barbarous ornament," replied Nora, smiling, "and I never wear them. Other trinkets I value in exact proportion to my affection for the donors. The brooch that so delighted Ducker was worthless to me, given carelessly and accepted unwillingly. I can only rejoice in its having at last found a possessor who will value it, both intrinsically and fictitiously."

"You have raised my curiosity concerning this brooch," said Arthur. "Have you any objection to tell me the name of the donor?"

"None whatever — it was my step-brother, Harry Darwin."

"Do you feel so very indifferent towards him?" asked Arthur.

"I have reason to do so," answered Nora. "He never cared for me, and the letter I wrote to inform him of my father's death and my unpleasant position was not answered for six months!"

"It may not have reached him so soon as you supposed," suggested Arthur.

"It was forwarded to him immediately by Charles Thorpe, who must have given him some information concerning me at a later period, as in his answer, though he passed over my father's death as an event of no importance, he expressed very great satisfaction at my being so well provided for; and recommended me to conciliate my uncle Stephen in every possible way, and to make myself generally useful in his house."

"When you again write," said Arthur, "you can tell him that you have made yourself indispensable to my father."

"Our correspondence is at an end," said Nora, as she entered the study. "I could read between the lines of his letter, his anxiety to avoid all further communication with me, his fear that I might become a burden to him."

"For a young unmarried man, like Darwin," began Arthur, "an orphan sister is rather a — a —"

"An incumbrance?" suggested Nora. "Harry shall never find me one."

"I should not exactly have used that word," said Arthur, laughing, "and only wished to point out to you, that Darwin only acted as a — most other young men in his place would have done. He disliked your father, I believe — knew very little of you, and therefore —"

"You need not go on," cried Nora, interrupting him, indignantly. "After having attempted a justification of Charles Thorpe's conduct the very first evening of our acquaintance, I can hardly be surprised at your now excusing Harry's neglect of me! In a worldly point of view they are both patterns of prudence, no doubt, but I can never like them — or you either," she added, petulantly, "if you can speak and think in this manner."

"Forgive me, Nora," said Arthur, gravely, "for not being able to find fault with men whose conduct, whether reprehensible or not, has been the means of bringing you under our roof." He sat down at the writing-table, and hastily wrote a few lines, while Nora, half vexed, half flattered, retired to her room to dress for dinner.

Great was Mr. Nixon's surprise, and (must it be confessed?) not inconsiderable his annoyance, when his son entered the study a few minutes before dinner-time, and carelessly saying that he had written an excuse to the Savage Waywards, and intended to dine at home, sat down beside Nora, and peered over her shoulder, while she examined a book of engravings containing views of various mountainous parts of Germany, but chiefly the Tyrol.

"If you had mentioned your intention of remaining with us a little earlier," said Mr. Nixon, "we could have

had a fire in the drawing-room; in fact," he added, hastily turning round, "it is not too late, and the —"

"Let me entreat that no change may be made for me," cried Arthur, springing towards him. "I am really not such a bulky fellow that you cannot find room for me in your snuggery here."

"But," said his father, "I know you dislike this room, and when we have drawing-rooms, why not use them?"

"Why not, indeed!" exclaimed Arthur, laughing, "but, on the present occasion, I do not choose in any way to interfere with your or Nora's habits, nor do I choose to be treated as a visitor any longer."

"I assure you, however," said Mr. Nixon, "that when the weather begins to get warm I have no sort of objection to going up stairs in the evening. I only turned in here when I was quite alone, you know."

"Yes, but you have continued here with Nora, and she likes this room better than the others, I am quite sure;" he turned to Nora, while speaking, but without waiting to hear her answer, Mr. Nixon left the room to give some orders about Rhine wine and ice, while Arthur, resuming his place beside his cousin, bent over the engravings and murmured, "I wish I were at any of these places."

"So do I," said Nora, vainly endeavouring to suppress a sigh.

"You are, probably, well acquainted with them all?" he asked.

"I have spent several summers among these mountains," she answered, "and know the banks of the Inn, and Innsbruck, far, far better than the Thames and London!"

"I suspect you have as yet seen scarcely anything of London," he observed.

"Rather say nothing at all," she replied; "I have not even had a glimpse of St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey."

"You shall see both to-morrow," he said, smiling.

"Oh thank you — I should like so much to see the Tower, also, if — if —" here she stopped, for it suddenly flashed across her mind that she had no dress in which she could appear in public with her cousin. To hide her embarrassment she turned over a leaf and forgot it altogether as her eyes rested on a view of Meran, with its beautiful suburb of Obermais. "There, there we lived," she said, her colour rising as she extended her hand to the print, "just beside that church — I do believe these are the windows of our little drawing-room — we could see the Zenoburg and the road to the Castle of Tyrol from them. You have been to see the remains of the old castle?"

"Yes," said Arthur, "the view from that long room which, by-the-by, is not at all ancient looking, is the most beautiful imaginable — without water."

"But there is the Adige," cried Nora, eagerly, "one can follow the course of the river for miles."

"True, but it looks like a silver thread; and to satisfy me half the valley ought to have been under water in the form of a lake — I dare say it was, once upon a time."

"If you were not enchanted with that view, just as you found it," said Nora, "we must never travel, nor even look at prints together," and she prepared to close the book.

"Surely you will allow me to differ from you in

opinion occasionally," he said, preventing her from doing so; "if we always thought alike there would be an end to all conversation."

"But," said Nora, "I am afraid you are like most travelled Englishmen, and will contrive to find something to criticise everywhere."

"Try me," said Arthur.

"This is Rametz," she said, pointing to a castellated building. "You know Rametz."

Arthur nodded.

"And the very fat Italian doctor to whom it belongs?"

"No."

"The son of a peasant of Meran, who studied in Italy, became a celebrated physician, saved money, returned home to purchase the ruins among which he had played as a boy, and restored, and rebuilt, and added —"

Arthur laughed. Nora stopped, and looked at him inquiringly.

"I had not time to find out all this," he said; "but it accounts most satisfactorily for the confusion of architecture, which you must allow to be rather evident in the edifice."

"What do I care for the architecture!" said Nora. "I did not go to Rametz to see a Gothic church or Grecian temple; I went with gay friends to sup under the vines, and to stand on the balcony, after sunset, and watch the shadows of evening spreading over the valley — I have stood there until the mountain tops were lighted by the moon, and —" here she stopped again.

"Go on," said Arthur.

"No," answered Nora, "you are laughing at me. You do not understand me, and cannot comprehend the distinctness with which I can recall those scenes, and remember every word I there heard spoken."

"I can — I do —" cried Arthur, eagerly; "the terrible monotony of your present existence makes you return to and live in the past. Nora," he added, lowering his voice, though they were alone in the room, "are you very unhappy here?"

"No — oh no — by no means — only a little lonely sometimes; but that is the fault of my education, I suppose. Had I been born and brought up in London, I dare say I should have quite enjoyed being shut up — that is a — rather confined to the house as I now am."

"Do you go out so very seldom?" asked Arthur.

"Not at all, excepting to church, and occasionally to walk in the square," she answered, and then fearing a renewal of his proposal to take her out the ensuing day, she again bent over the prints, and pointing to Schoena, asked, "if he had been there too?"

"No, I had not time; in two days one cannot go to all these places."

"I am sorry you did not go to Schoena, for the architecture is quite correct there, I believe. A stronghold of the middle ages, with massive walls, small windows, vaulted corridors, armoury hall, and so forth. I don't understand much about these things, and confess that the history of one of its last possessors, before it was purchased by the Archduke John, interested me more than the place itself."

"And what was his story?" asked Arthur.

"*Her* story, you must say," answered Nora. "She married a peasant, and retired with him to a small house, which she built lower down on the hill."

"Some handsome fellow, no doubt," observed Arthur.

"I did not ask," said Nora, thoughtfully; "they said she was not happy —"

"I dare say not," interposed Arthur. "A descent, or, rather, a fall in rank, is always a dangerous experiment for a woman, and a *dame châtelaine*, who becomes a peasant's wife, has a very difficult lesson to learn; the sort of love, too, which induces her to take such a step, is not of a description to last long, or enable her to bear her unavoidable trials with patience."

"The peasant, who spoke to us about her, seemed to be of your opinion also, and evidently disapproved of the match; he would have told us more, perhaps, had papa been disposed to listen. Almost all the old castles about Meran, have not only ancient, but also modern histories, some of them quite romantic; at Fragsburg, for instance, one of the most isolated of them all, where we went in the hope of seeing a curious collection of family portraits described in Sewald's 'Tyrol,' we found a widow, with a son and daughter, obliged, by circumstances, to reside there constantly, hardly able to keep the great pile of building in repair, yet clinging, with affection, to the very stones. The ancestor's pictures had been disposed of in the Charles Surface manner, and no rich uncle having made his appearance as purchaser, they —"

Here dinner was announced; but Arthur only waited until his father slept, afterwards to return to Nora, professedly to hear the remainder of the story, but, in fact, to talk of other things, and find out as much as he could

of the mind and attainments of a relative, who, in the very heart of London, was nearly as much alone as the young shy girl she so graphically described standing beneath the old fig-tree in the dilapidated court at Fragsburg.

Arthur had an evening engagement, but seemed in no hurry to leave home: the announcement of his cab was received with an impatient wave of his hand, nor did he again think of it, or the Countess of Allcourt's ball, until his father had gone to bed, and Nora parted from him in the hall. Even, afterwards, he stood watching her ascent of the stairs, compelling her frequently to look over the banisters, and answer his reiterated "good-night."

It was remarked, that Arthur paid very little attention to the countess's daughter, Lady Emmeline, that evening; the young lady herself seemed to consider an officer in the Blues a very good substitute, but her mother thought otherwise, as she was by no means unwilling to bestow one of her numerous progeny on Nixon the millionnaire, a man of such undoubted talent that it was generally supposed he could become anything he pleased. Arthur was not ignorant of the favourable opinion entertained of his fortune and intellect, and in no way endeavoured to lower it; he called himself a "marrying man," spoke of purchasing landed property, and hinted an intention of entering Parliament the first convenient opportunity. Once only that night did he address Lady Emmeline, and when she was afterwards questioned by her mother on the subject of his apparently interesting, though short conversation, she assured her he had spoken of nothing but the charms of — battledore and shuttlecock, which he pronounced to

be the most perfectly graceful game ever invented, and one that rendered a handsome woman, when playing, irresistibly captivating.

The fact was, Nora's face and figure had that day taken Arthur's heart by storm, and he could only wonder at his previous insensibility; while thenceforward, without the slightest consideration of the consequences, or the faintest attempt to overcome the headstrong passion that he felt taking possession of him, he yielded to every impulse, and before many days had elapsed, made Nora perfectly aware that his heart was hers, and that he wished her to know it.

There are few things that ought to be less gratifying to a woman than becoming the object of a sudden and violent passion of this kind, yet there are not many who remember that the feeling has its source in an exaggerated estimation of mere personal beauty, and remain unflattered by it. Nora attempted no analysis; she received Arthur's homage as willingly as it was offered; and found that his earnest devotion contrasted pleasantly with her recollection of Lord Medway's languid regard. He soon began to remain much at home, at first ostensibly to direct her studies in English literature, of which she fancied herself unusually ignorant, afterwards to improve himself in German, which she undoubtedly understood better than English, though nothing annoyed her more than being told so. Both occupations were dangerous, for they led to mutual discoveries of talent, that, in the common intercourse of life, might long have remained concealed; and when Arthur in time learned to appreciate her mind even more than her person, and began to meditate a sacrifice in her favour of his long-cherished matrimonial plans, the very idea of which

would have appeared incipient madness to him a few months previously, Nora, not for a moment doubting his intentions, gave herself an infinity of trouble to return his affection, as she thought it deserved, and laboured not unsuccessfully to become reconciled to what her foreign education made her contemplate without much aversion, a *mariage de convenance et raison.*

The weather had become sultry, windows and doors were opened, the large drawing-rooms in use by common consent, and either Nora remained longer in the dining-room, or her uncle's drowsiness was increased by heat, for she was seldom more than a few minutes alone after dinner before Arthur was again at her side. She had learned to expect this, and many other little attentions of so unobtrusive a nature, that though perfectly understood by her, they were completely unobserved by her uncle.

One day, before and during dinner, Arthur had used all his eloquence to induce his father to go abroad, if only for a few weeks, during the summer, promising to show him scenery, of which he had not yet even an idea; pictures and statues of which he had but read descriptions; and ending with the assurance that none of his habits should be interfered with, none of his usual comforts forgotten; he and Nora would undertake to make him enjoy himself perfectly, and travelling was now so easy!

"Rather too easy, Arthur," replied Mr. Nixon, drily. "As to *my* ever leaving home, that is out of the question; but that you want to take flight again is evident enough. Now, without intending to dictate, let me tell you that I should be glad to hear you had at last begun to think

seriously of establishing yourself in your own country; half my fortune is yours whenever you choose to do so."

"I cannot — say — that I feel — any great inclination just now to — accept your — really very — liberal offer," said Arthur, with some hesitation and evident embarrassment.

Mr. Nixon, who had already begun to stretch and compose himself for a doze, suddenly raised himself upright in his chair, and, fixing his eyes on his son, observed, "You have remained at home a good deal lately, Arthur; I hope that no quarrel with Lady Emmeline has been the cause, or that any difficulty on the part of her family is likely to interfere with our plans. You did not seem to apprehend anything of that kind when we last spoke on this subject."

"Nor do I now," answered Arthur, with all the confidence usually manifested by his sex on such occasions; and he glanced toward Nora as he added, "any delays or difficulties that may henceforward occur are likely to be on my side."

Now this was the first time that Lady Emmeline had been so mentioned in Nora's presence; and though not by any means as yet deeply attached to her cousin, she had so completely made up her mind to become his wife, that she could not hear unmoved so plain an intimation that he was engaged, or nearly so, to another woman. She looked alternately at her companions in a bewildered, inquiring manner, felt herself blush intensely, and then rising, with as much calmness as she could command, murmured something about leaving them alone to discuss affairs of such importance, and walked towards the door, to which her cousin sprang before her, and where he bent forward as she passed him,

in the vain hope that she would look at or speak to him.

Before Nora had reached the drawing-room, her consternation at what she had just heard began to abate. No one but herself knew what she had expected and intended, and no one ever should know the efforts she had made to return the affection of a man who, it was now evident, had only been amusing himself with her. Was it right or honourable that he had done so? It is true he had never uttered the *word* love, or spoken of marriage, but — but — no matter — men were undoubtedly at liberty to act in this manner if women allowed them. With her, at least, no one should ever trifle again; she had received a painful and mortifying lesson, but had reason to be thankful that she had not been wounded in a manner to destroy her happiness irretrievably. It was, after all, a disappointment in marriage, and not in love — a disappointment unknown to all the world, easily concealed, not *very* hard to bear, and she believed she should in future distrust all mankind, and despise and dislike that portion of it to which Arthur Nixon belonged.

Having come to this conclusion, she walked into the back drawing-room, opened wide one of the windows, and gasped for breath in a manner that strongly resembled a succession of deep sighs. The evening was oppressively warm; and being dressed, for a reason already mentioned, in the indestructible black velvet, she naturally concluded that the sensation of suffocation proceeded altogether from her unseasonable attire. This led her to long reflections on poverty and dependence, that were by no means exhilarating; so that as she stood half on the balcony, half in the room, now growing

dusky in the twilight, her anger subsided slowly into a despondency, that better suited the scene around her. A strong current of air made her aware of the opening of the door of the front room; it ceased immediately, and she was provoked to find her heart beating violently, her hands cold and trembling, as she pressed them together in the agitation and dread of a meeting, and, perhaps, explanation, with Arthur. She wished to get out of the room; but could not do so without passing the open folding-door and being seen. Suddenly she remembered having heard her mother say, that to prevent an untimely exhibition of agitation, there was no better remedy than a severe pinch administered to the back of the neck, which pinch was to be repeated until it took effect. She raised her hand, and — was it the pain, or hearing her uncle's voice, that so effectually tranquillised her? She knew not, nor had she time to consider, for, unfortunately perceiving the room unoccupied, the first words that Mr. Nixon uttered were of a nature to compel her to remain where she was, in order not to embarrass him, and place herself in an intolerably mortifying position. She therefore endeavoured to put herself out of sight and hearing by standing on the balcony, while her uncle continued — "No one can be more sincerely attached to Nora than I now am; she is a good and a clever girl — yes, a very clever girl, and pretty, and interesting, and all that you have said, but such a connexion for you would destroy all our plans and hopes of rising in the world. I am sorry to perceive that your opinions on this subject have begun to waver: be yourself again, Arthur, and follow the course that will enable you to found a family and *obtain* a name! This first step is of the greatest importance, and any

attempt to evade it will place you in my position, and force you to realise your ambition in the person of your son. Want of fortune may easily be overlooked on our side, but want of rank — never!"

"I thought," began Arthur, hesitatingly, "that perhaps my own numerous personal friends, and her relationship with the Medways —"

"They all but deny the relationship," said his father, interrupting him: "Lord Medway, indeed, attracted probably by her youth and good looks, wished his mother to retain her in the family, but her ladyship was, in consequence, rendered even more anxious to get rid of her on any terms. She even sent for her son Charles, who was at Vienna, to manage the affair. You shall see his letters to me; they will show you in what light the Thorpe family view the relationship! Nothing could be more downright than his statement of facts; and it was not flattering to Nora, I can tell you: but I neither blamed him nor his mother for acting precisely as I should do myself in a similar case."

"Were I to be the object acted upon," said Arthur, "such plans would most certainly fail; but Nora was young and inexperienced, and Lord Medway an indolent, wavering fellow, who always has been, and always will be, completely governed by those about him. I have yet to discover the man who can rule me openly or covertly."

"You prefer being ruled by women," observed his father, sarcastically. "But come: the most perfect confidence has hitherto existed between us, and will, I trust, continue as long as we live; believe me, this foolish fancy for your black-eyed cousin will pass over, as others have done. I know that your ambition fully equals

mine: marry this Lady Emmeline, get into Parliament, and let me see you a man of consequence, if not of rank, before I die."

"Had you so spoken a few weeks ago," said Arthur, gloomily, "your words would have found an echo, if not in my heart, certainly in my head; but now —"

"You surely do not mean to say that you have deliberately been making a fool of yourself for that length of time, Arthur?"

"I mean to say that I then admired, but now love Nora — sincerely, deeply, passionately — as I have never loved before, and never shall again. I fear — I — cannot forget her."

"Time will enable you to do so," said Mr. Nixon, quietly. "Time must do you this good service, Arthur, for I will never give my consent to your marriage with her. To all your other follies I have been more than indulgent, and am now prepared to make any sacrifice to give you a position in the world; it seems to me, also, that you have already paid this Lady Emmeline too much attention to be able to draw back with honour —"

"Oh, no!" cried Arthur, with a slight sneer: "in this world of fashion that we value so highly, one is not so easily caught and bound as elsewhere. I consider myself still quite at liberty."

"Oh, indeed!" said his father. "Then, perhaps, you prefer one of the daughters of Lord Witherington? Having never seen any of these young ladies, I do not venture to give an opinion; in the latter case, you will, of course, go abroad again, and — Nora can then remain with me."

"That she can do at all events," said Arthur. "After what you have just said, I cannot speak to her, and everything remains as it was, before this foolish confession of mine."

"Not quite," said Mr. Nixon, "for if you do not decide on either marrying Lady Emmeline, or joining the Witheringtons at Baden, where you told me they now are, I shall consider it necessary to send Nora, for some time at least, to your uncle Gilbert's. He and Georgina will I know be quite pleased to have her."

"I dare say they will," replied Arthur; "but I am much mistaken if they ever let her return to you."

"Gilbert will scarcely interfere with me, after my having told him of my intention to give her two thousand pounds," said Mr. Nixon.

"Have you done so?" asked Arthur, quickly.

"Certainly. The very day after she consented to remain with me, I placed the sum in the Bank for her."

"Then," rejoined Arthur, "I think you had better henceforward allow her to receive the interest of this splendid fortune, for this morning, when I was angry with her for persisting in her refusal to go out with me, Ducker told me in confidence, that the poor dear girl had outgrown all her clothes and had no money to replace them."

"Why did she not tell me?" said Mr. Nixon; "the slightest hint would have been sufficient."

"I do not think Nora likely ever to hint a wish of the kind," said Arthur; "but you are bound to supply her wants, and make her existence as endurable as possible, after having refused to resign her to your

brother, or give her to me; — after having, in short, deliberately resolved to bury her alive in this house."

"I really do not understand what you, and Gilbert, and Georgina, mean by eternally harping on the horrors of this house," said Mr. Nixon, testily. "Nora's life is not more solitary than that of thousands of others in London. I cannot perceive why she is such an object of pity — her time is at her own disposal, I give her a home, and —"

"And," said Arthur, sarcastically, "and food, and even raiment, perhaps; but you seem altogether to forget that her previous life has been spent in the enjoyment of bright skies and magnificent scenery, gay society, and all that art can offer to improve and refine the taste. As to comparing her to those who have been born and bred in London, it is absurd. Canaries reared in a cage are happy there, knowing no gayer kind of life; but other and rarer birds mourn their captivity, and find the shelter and food given them a poor exchange for liberty."

"In order to answer you in the same strain, Arthur, let me tell you, that you will compel me to set my rare bird at liberty, if you do not soon begin to think and speak more rationally than you have done for the last hour. I cannot, however, say," added Mr. Nixon, walking towards the fireplace, and from habit leaning on the chimney-piece, and gazing into the grate, "I cannot, however, say that I feel in the least uneasy as to your ultimate decision; the question is rather, now, whether you go abroad or remain at home."

"I shall remain here," answered Arthur, sullenly.

"And," said Mr. Nixon, in the same calm voice, "and propose for Lady Emmeline without further delay?"

"To-night, or — never," he replied vehemently, and then strode across the room and stepped out on the balcony.

His father followed him, and Nora seized the opportunity to glide unseen past the open door, and escape up stairs to her own room.

CHAPTER XII.

To Marry, — or, not to Marry, — that is the Question.

It was with some slight trepidation that Nora descended to breakfast the next morning. Before her return to the drawing room the previous evening, Arthur had left it, and probably the house also, and while afterwards awaiting the striking of ten o'clock, with an open book in her hand, her thoughts had been completely occupied by surmises as to how he and his father had parted. All her doubts on the subject were at once removed when she saw them standing together at one of the windows of the dining-room amicably engaged in the discussion of money matters. The words "purchase" and settlement were frequently repeated as she employed herself making tea at the breakfast table, and while she was still considering whether or not Arthur's manner was that of a man who had taken the important step that had been so peremptorily enjoined him, her uncle advanced towards and informed her, that having, according to promise, placed two thousand pounds in her name in the bank, she could draw the interest of that sum as she pleased, and when she pleased in future.

Prepared for this announcement, Nora thanked him warmly and appropriately; but when, sitting down beside

her, he thrust a bank note of large amount into her hand, saying that was for immediate use, she felt distressed, and stammered and coloured as a feeling that he was paying her for her disappointment flashed across her mind. Her uneasiness was, however, almost immediately relieved, when he turned towards Arthur, who stood with his back to them looking into the little garden, and observed, with a jocularity of manner very unusual to him, but denoting a satisfaction too great for concealment, "Who would think now, Nora, that that man there was a bridegroom elect, the accepted lover of one of the prettiest girls in London!"

Nora perceived that her uncle had not thought at all of her on this occasion, so she looked up and observed quietly, "Lady Emmeline, I suppose."

Now this was said with a composure that gave infinite satisfaction to herself, but struck Arthur as something so unexpected that he turned his flushed face round, and stared at her in astonishment.

"I don't know what is the custom in England, Arthur," she continued, bending slightly over the table as she poured out the tea, "but abroad you know people expect to be congratulated by all their friends, and therefore —"

"For heaven's sake, spare me all such heartless formalities!" he cried, interrupting her vehemently, while he seated himself further from her than had of late been his custom, and snatched up the nearest newspaper.

There are few women, even at the age of seventeen or eighteen, who have not the power of concealing annoyance, disappointment, and mortification, if a strong motive make them desirous to do so: some hours' reflection had enabled Nora so effectually to overcome the

portions of all these feelings that had fallen to her lot, that she not only looked but felt calm, and she experienced a strange sort of satisfaction in showing her cousin that the commiseration he had perhaps intended to bestow on her would be quite thrown away.

Now Arthur really loved Nora; but such is the selfishness of man's heart, that he was disagreeably surprised and beyond measure indignant to find that he had not made her as unhappy as himself.

"Let me show you the advertisement of the sale of the house I spoke of just now," said Mr. Nixon, supposing his son to be in search of it, when he saw his eyes wandering up and down the columns of the paper with impatient uncertainty. "It is there, just at the end of the page before you."

"I know the house well," said Arthur, after a pause, "it belongs to Lord Trebleton's young widow. I suppose her jointure is not sufficiently splendid to enable her to keep it, and that she intends to return to her family."

"Do you know her?" asked Mr. Nixon.

"Of course I do — she is a daughter of Lord Witherington, and by many degrees the handsomest of the family. She is somewhat extravagant in her tastes, fond to excess of all kinds of gaiety, but altogether one of the most charming women of my acquaintance. We very nearly fell in love with each other, just before she was engaged to Lord Trebleton."

"Would the house suit you?" asked Mr. Nixon, but little interested in the history of its possessor.

"I should think so," answered Arthur, "for undoubtedly no expense has been spared to make it perfect."

"Then let us see about it this very day, before I

go to the city," said Mr. Nixon, beginning his breakfast without further delay.

Nora attended little to the conversation that followed. She was considering if the very great change in Arthur's manner were necessary — if instead of the murmured good morning, and scarcely perceptible bow when she had entered the room, he might not have given her his hand as usual, and looked at her and spoken to her. Perhaps he had some idea that he had not acted honourably — but no — he had observed the evening before, that in the world in which he lived, men were not bound as elsewhere, and he had certainly not in any way committed himself — had said, in fact, even less than Lord Medway: there was some similarity in the two cases, and Arthur, she now remembered, had not blamed him in the least, had rather approved of the interference of Charles Thorpe, and had undertaken his defence the very first time he had ever spoken to her alone. Perhaps he was glad that his father now compelled him to be prudent! One thing was certain and evident to her, that however much she might be admired or even loved, there was that in her position in the world which precluded all chance of marriage; this fact she resolved should not again escape her memory.

A few days afterwards Arthur received as a gift from his father the spacious and completely furnished mansion of Lady Trebleton: all the treasures of his rooms in Russell-square were conveyed to it, and various new and costly purchases added, so that between his house and visits to Lady Emmeline, he had little time to spare for home. When there, he was rather low spirited, and failed not whenever an opportunity offered, and he chanced to be alone with Nora, to assure her that he

was the most wretched of human beings, a martyr to the prejudices of the world and parental authority.

Yet he hurried forward the preparations for his marriage with an energy that gave great satisfaction to the heads of both families, his father merely smiling ironically when he persisted in assuring him, he only wanted to have it over. Nora, in the mean while, apparently forgotten, had full leisure to renovate and improve her wardrobe. This she accomplished with judgment and taste; her decision when purchasing and giving orders astonishing Mrs. Ducker, who conducted her to some of the large warehouses in the city, and to the Soho Bazaar, at her leisure hours, viz. between seven and nine o'clock in the morning.

It is not alone simple Bob Acres who has discovered that "dress does make a difference." The first day that Nora laid aside her mourning, and when dressing for dinner put on white muslin and rose-coloured ribbons, her glass told her something to the same effect, and it must be confessed she herself was more than satisfied with her appearance, as she looked at the reflection of her fair young face and graceful figure. She thought it probable her uncle would say something on the occasion, and prepared a little speech of thanks, but on entering the drawing-room all thoughts of herself or her dress were lost in surprise and anxiety, when she saw Mr. Nixon walking up and down the room, with pallid face and purple lips, and Arthur astride upon a chair, his head bent down on his hands, which seemed to clutch the back of it as if cramped, while he muttered "Infernal affair altogether!"

As Nora closed the door, he looked up, started from

his seat, and added, "Hang me if I care much after all, were it not for my legion of friends and acquaintances!"

"Cross the channel until the affair has blown over," suggested his father, following towards the door.

"No!" he answered fiercely, "I will face and brave them all; not one shall dare to pity me!"

The door closed, and Nora was left alone until dinner was announced. At table her uncle and cousin talked of politics and public affairs; but she suspected they did so on account of the servants, and was confirmed in this idea when profound silence followed their absence. For her own part she was so convinced that something very unpleasant had occurred, and so perfectly at a loss as to its nature, that she scarcely uttered a word, and left the dining-room almost immediately after dinner. Arthur and his father joined her at tea-time; the former went out as usual, the latter read, or seemed to read, until ten o'clock, when Nora went to bed, feeling herself forcibly reminded that she was still a stranger in her uncle's family.

Too proud to show a particle of curiosity, she scarcely observed the next morning that both father and son were poring over a paragraph in one of the papers as they stood together at the window; but she could not help remarking afterwards that they were endeavouring to outstay each other and that a serious kind of manœuvring was going on, which ended by Mr. Nixon asking his son abruptly, "If he intended to tell Nora?"

"Certainly," he replied; "it is no secret, and I am very anxious to know what she will say."

Mr. Nixon fixed his eyes on her, while Arthur, folding the morning paper into a small form, placed it so before her that her eyes instantly fell on a paragraph

headed "Marriage in High Life," in which the engagement of Lady Emmeline Wary to her cousin the Marquis of Torrisford was announced in the usual manner.

It was some moments before Nora could stammer, "How is this? was she not betrothed to you?"

"We have no betrothals in England," replied Arthur. "She was engaged to me publicly enough, and I thought willingly too; but yesterday morning she informed me that she had long been attached to her cousin Torrisford, and entreated me to release her from a promise that had been in a manner extorted from her by her mother. Could I refuse? I felt myself atrociously and notoriously jilted, but any attempt to seek redress after such a confession on her part would only have served to render my position still more ridiculous; so having told her I was sorry her cousin had not known his own mind, and rewarded her constancy a few weeks earlier, I resigned my claims, and prepared myself to face the world's dread laugh as well as I could on such short notice."

Nora's colour mounted to her temples, and she paused for a moment before she observed, "This is a most unexpected — a most undeserved indignity, Arthur. I am sincerely sorry for your disappointment."

"I shall get over that easily enough," he answered with a slight sneer; "my heart was wonderfully little engaged in this affair."

Mr. Nixon walked across the room, and placed himself behind Nora's chair, directly facing his son.

"But the vexatious mortification — the — the publicity" — continued Nora, indignantly.

"Well," he said, with a forced smile, "I suppose I shall get over that too. Emmeline's avowal of an attachment to her cousin is infinitely less distressing to me

now than it would have been after our marriage: she assured me he was in ignorance of her engagement to me when he wrote the letter from Naples, which she offered to show me, but which I declined reading. I suppose, however, that I must believe her; and I have serious thoughts of giving a proof of my good faith and exemplary patience by requesting an invitation to the wedding, which will be celebrated a few weeks hence."

So Arthur spoke to Nora, so also to all his friends and acquaintances, by no means avoiding them or the subject that formed the chief topic of discussion for nearly nine days, after which it was forgotten by all but those personally interested in the affair. But though Arthur jested lightly and laughed good-humouredly at his "disappointment in marriage," as he pointedly called it, he was greatly irritated and deeply mortified, proving it to all thoughtful observers by his continuing to parade his indifference long after the effort had ceased to be necessary. His father wished him — urged him — to go abroad for a few months, in vain; he was determined to stay out the season, and employed himself chiefly in the purchase of pictures and furniture for his house, no wish of his being left ungratified by his father, who secretly blamed himself for having precipitated his son's choice of a wife, and thereby drawing him into his present painful position.

One day when Arthur at dinner was expatiating on the excellence of a picture that was for sale at an artist's in Piccadilly, his father, who had, at his request, been to see it, at first hesitatingly "supposed his son might be right, as he had experience in such things," and then commenced a criticism that was as distinguished for sound sense as want of technical language. Arthur

laughed, while Nora, with a smile, assisted her uncle to express his opinion in proper words, and then playfully sided with him as much as her want of knowledge of the object of discussion would permit.

"Two against one is not quite fair," said Arthur at last, turning to his father; "but as Nora has seen most of the best pictures in Europe, and I really believe knows something about the matter in question, I am ready to make her umpire between us. Shall I drive her down to Piccadilly to-morrow, and will you abide by her decision?"

Mr. Nixon instantly agreed, and Nora had no reason and no wish to excuse herself. Arthur was in waiting exactly at the appointed hour the next day — he examined her dress with a critical eye, bestowed on it some words of approval, on herself a glance of undisguised admiration, and then devoted his attention for some time to the rash movements of his high-stepping horse.

Nora's opiniou of the picture was quickly given; she agreed with Arthur in considering it worthy of much commendation as a work of art, but scarcely adapted for a private collection intended to decorate the walls of a dwelling-house. The subject was hackneyed (nymphs bathing); and the very excellence of the flesh-tints would make it, to her at least, an unpleasant picture to have constantly before her.

"You are a genuine Englishwoman after all, Nora," said Arthur, smiling, "and somewhat prudish too, for the painter, by means of water, rocks, and trunks of trees, has managed to make this picture the least exceptionable of its kind that I have ever seen."

"Perhaps so," she answered, turning away, while he, half-petulantly remonstrating against her "absurd objection," followed her to an unfinished portrait at a little distance. There she stopped, and said, in a low voice, "Those other people, and the presence of the artist, prevented me from saying all I thought of the picture. The richness of colour is an exaggeration of nature; did you not observe how very freely he has used vermilion?"

"N — o — I don't know much about the mixture of oil colours. You do, I suppose?"

"A little — that is, I studied it for some time, until either the smell of the materials or the sedentary occupation disagreed with me. I was a mere copyist, but learned enough to have some idea of the browns of Rembrandt and the flesh-tints of Rubens."

"That's it," cried Arthur; "the colouring in that picture strongly resembles Rubens."

"And are you aware that, to copy a head of his, the colours on your palette must be different from those required for any other master? that the flesh-tints are all mixed with vermilion, which gives a wonderful and almost unnatural freshness?"

"But I like this wonderful freshness," said Arthur.

"Unfortunately, however," observed Nora, "time fades, or perhaps changes, some colours and darkens others, while the vermilion remains bright and glaring."

"You — you don't mean to say that you have the audacity to depreciate Rubens!" cried Arthur, laughing.

She nodded her head, and then said, "The colossal proportions of his women I cannot admire, and the too

great use of vermilion I cannot approve; but remember I don't want to force this opinion on you, it is altogether the result of my own experience and observation, and I may be altogether in error."

"My nymphs have lost the power to charm me at all events," rejoined Arthur, taking advantage of some new arrivals to pass out of the room; and when they reached the street, he said gaily, "Come, Nora, let us take a drive in the Park, and you shall also have a short walk in Kensington Gardens."

Nora made no objection. She was amused and pleased, and giving words to every idea that presented itself to her mind, so delighted her companion that he resolved to enjoy again and frequently the same pleasure. That day at dinner he proposed taking her on the following one to see Westminster Abbey; and though Mr. Nixon was too much pleased with her opinion of the picture to make any objection, Arthur prudently waited afterwards for some days before he observed, with well-assumed indifference, "that he had an hour to spare on Wednesday, if she still wished to see St. Paul's." Unobserved by Nora, the invitations were subsequently given when his father was not present; there was something new to be seen continually, and three or four times every week Arthur's cabriolet whirled her from Russell-square to Hyde Park, Kensington, the Zoological Gardens, or wherever the crowd was greatest and gayest.

Arthur asked her one morning, if she had any inclination to go to the Royal Academy, in Trafalgar-square, and receiving a joyous assent, as she sprang lightly into his cab, they drove there. He had been a

good deal gratified at the sort of sensation which her appearance with him so frequently in the Park had created among his acquaintances, but he had taken care never to allow any of them an opportunity of speaking to him, when she was present, and to the questions afterwards asked him, he gave such short unwilling answers that a very considerable degree of curiosity had been excited. It was so late in the season, that he had not expected to meet any of these inquisitive persons, and his annoyance was, therefore, great, when, after an hour of pleasant loitering and discussion with Nora, he perceived a group of well-known inveterate loungers enter. Scarcely bestowing a glance on the well-furnished walls, they scanned with astonishing rapidity the appearance of every person within sight, occasionally uttering a few indistinct but as it seemed significant monosyllables to each other, as they strutted along, feeling or fancying themselves the "observed of all observers." Arthur's first inclination was to seize Nora's arm, and attempt an escape, but there were two among them of rather enterprising dispositions who had already threatened to force an introduction to his fair incognita the first convenient opportunity, and he therefore whispered to her hurriedly, "I see a lot of men of my acquaintance, to whom I must speak — it wouldn't do to introduce them to you, so go on quietly looking at the pictures, without turning round, and when you have reached the door stand still and I shall join you instantly."

Nora did as she was desired, undisturbed by the English cause of uneasiness, the "being without a gentleman," for her recollection of foreign galleries, where the appearance of a woman alone merely leads to the supposition that she has come to study, prevented her

from feeling either annoyance or embarrassment. But her quiet self-possession, joined to such evident youth, the graceful, fashionably dressed figure, without the appendage of a protector, so necessary in London, soon made her as much an object of impertinent curiosity as admiration, and before long she found herself, to her infinite surprise, surrounded by a number of men, some of whom continued to follow her from place to place, with an assiduity that astonished without in the least alarming her. Those nearest her were well dressed and elderly, and the one who had secured a place at her left elbow, was a particularly stout fatherly-looking sort of personage, with a grave face, and very grey hair. Nora felt quite comfortable in the vicinity of so much respectability, until a low voice which seemed to come from the grey head, slowly pronounced the words "Are you Maria?"

She did not answer — he had mistaken her for some one else, would perceive his error and go away.

But he did not go away, on the contrary, he came still nearer, and again, in a mysterious whisper, repeated the words, "Are — you — Maria?"

"No!" she answered, turning to the querist a face in which amazement was so legible that the bystanders with difficulty suppressed their laughter, and Nora, blushing at the unexpected rudeness of her much-respected countrymen, sought refuge at the place near the door assigned her by Arthur. He joined her immediately, and they were soon on their way to his new house, which he had promised to show her. She related what had just occurred, but Arthur was apparently so occupied with his horse that he answered not a word, and wondering at his taciturnity she added, "Had the old gentle-

man asked me if my name were Brown or Smith, I should not have thought it so odd, but inquiries about one's Christian name is certainly rather uncommon!"

"Very," said Arthur.

"Perhaps the man was mad," suggested Nora.

"By no means impossible," he responded.

"I am beginning to think," she continued, "that some things abroad are better than in England."

"Picture galleries for instance," observed Arthur.

"Yes," she answered thoughtfully, "and the manners and habits of those who frequent them. People there look less at each other, and longer at the pictures; and works of art have a sort of current value which makes them universally respected even by the ignorant — much as jewels of high price and ingots of gold would be here."

"Far be it from me to attempt a defence of either our galleries or their visitors," said Arthur, laughing, "rather let me point out to you the delightful comforts of the interior of our houses — see this is mine and," he added, drawing up his horse, "and strange to say, Nora, the only property I possess in the world; this my father gave me as a reward for implicit obedience a few weeks ago, but for the means of living in it I am still altogether dependent on him."

"The dependence of a son upon a very indulgent father is easily borne, I should think," answered Nora, with a smile, as she walked up the steps to the hall-door.

On the staircase she would have stopped to admire a conservatory, but he hurried her forward to one of the drawing-rooms, not giving her time to look round her until she had reached a window there.

"Oh, how light, how airy, how cheerful!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "London at the West End — is not that what you call it? and London at — at — in the middle, are as different as — day and night."

"Almost," said Arthur, thoughtfully, "I wish I were less conscious of the difference."

"Wish no such thing," said Nora, "you possess this house, and should rather desire to be able to enjoy it to the fullest extent."

"But I must do so alone, or with a companion chosen by my father."

"Not exactly," said Nora, quietly; "for I believe he requires nothing but rank, and you are free to choose among the nobility of England. Not a very hard fate, I should think."

"And yet, Nora," he answered, gloomily, "I have lately begun bitterly to regret not having a profession, or rather not having joined my father in business. I should have been, by this time, in all probability, either quite independent, or a partner in his house, and, in either case, able to marry the only woman I can ever really love."

He paused; but Nora made no attempt to answer, and he continued — "Obtaining my father's consent to *this* marriage is out of the question — to await his death would be odious."

"Very," said Nora, perceiving that he paused more determinately than before.

"Oh, if ever I have a son —" he began, passionately.

"If you have," said Nora, interrupting him, "you will act precisely as your father is now doing. Your son and son's son must seek connexion, until the name

of Nixon has made itself of note, or become but the family name of a noble house; such is the open or covert ambition of all rich rising men like you in this free country of ours. Your father is already in treaty for the purchase of landed property; you acquiesce in his well-devised plans, and are not one bit in earnest when you speak as you have just now done."

"You wrong me, Nora; I am in earnest — *now* — understand me — to-day — *this* day — to-morrow, perhaps — that is, after having given my father a solemn promise never to marry without his consent, I shall be put in actual possession of a noble fortune, but bound in a manner that may — that will blast my future domestic happiness. I have planned this opportunity to speak to you alone without the chance of interruption, in order to ask your advice, while I am still at liberty to mar or make my own fate."

"And why ask the advice of so inexperienced a person as I am?" asked Nora, almost coldly, for the eager, inquiring expression of Arthur's face made her suspect he was putting her feelings towards him to the test.

"Because I place the most implicit reliance on your intellect and good sense."

"And," said Nora, gravely, "supposing me to possess these estimable qualities, do you think it possible that I would venture to give you advice? Should I not prove myself wanting in both by the mere attempt?"

"No — for I see that you perfectly understand my position in the world, my habits, and disposition. From you, educated abroad, I have no fear of hearing English twaddle about a home, and cheerful firesides, contentment, domestic bliss, and so forth."

"Yet I have dreamed of all this," said Nora, "as much, perhaps more, than many an Englishwoman who has never left her home."

"You have!" cried Arthur, eagerly. "Then you think that you — that I — that we — I mean that a man brought up as I have been, and with my expectations, could be happy in poverty with the companion of his choice? You think that luxurious habits can be overcome, visions of ambition pushed aside, the longing to be of importance in the world of fashion altogether subdued — for oh, Nora, I am ashamed to confess, that this last would be to me the hardest task of all!"

"Is then the love of fashion so inveterate?" she asked.

"Almost inextinguishable among the upper classes of the inhabitants of cities," answered Arthur. "No weakness, no folly, is so prevalent as this, which, like a moral pest, infects the soundest understandings, and not unfrequently prostrates even genius itself! But why," he added, impatiently, "why talk to you of what you cannot possibly comprehend? Why force on your notice my own weaknesses or the absurdities of a world still unknown to you?"

"Not so unknown as you suppose," said Nora; "young as I was, the struggles of my father and mother to get into, what is called, the best society abroad, were perfectly evident to me — were made so by the presentations at Court, the introductory letters to the different ministers, residents, or ambassadors, some of whom were civil to us, some not; in the one case we were induced to live beyond our means, in the other, we shortened our stay, exceedingly disgusted at the inhospitality and unkindness of people who were given their places, as my father

continually affirmed, for no other purpose than to assert the rights of British subjects, and be polite to travelling English people! At the best, however, it was a miserably unsatisfactory sort of life. Mamma often complained, that she had not a friend in the world, that she spent her life getting introduced to people who invited her to their balls and routs, but never spoke a word beyond the mere civilities of society, showering visiting cards upon her without asking if she were at home, and sliding past her with a '*Bon soir, madame,*' when they met her elsewhere."

"I suppose she talked over all these things in your presence," observed Arthur.

"Of course," said Nora, "and without the slightest reserve. I remember quite adoring the people whom she rather liked, and intensely hating those who had been rude to her: for my own part, I was, as a child, singularly fortunate, being not unfrequently the playmate of various little royal and serene highnesses, and feeling, I assure you, immensely flattered at the distinction. From all, however, that I have heard from mamma and her visitors, I believe there must be a great deal of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, in this world of fashion that you prize so highly."

"No doubt of it, Nora, no doubt of it. *Mais, que voulez-vous?* I have laboured for years, and not unsuccessfully, to obtain some rank in it; to support rank of any kind and anywhere, money is necessary; married, I require more than single — so you see, dear girl —"

"I see," she observed, with a smile, "that you want no advice from me, or any one else, having already made up your mind on the subject."

"Don't speak so lightly and look so cheerful, Nora," cried Arthur, greatly displeased; "that is, if you would not have me think you totally heartless!"

Nora's short upper lip became still shorter as she shrugged her shoulders and turned away, with a slightly contemptuous smile.

"Nora, what do you mean?" he cried, catching her hand.

But she had so completely understood him from the beginning, and so well managed to avoid betraying consciousness, that she now greatly desired to end the conference.

"Nothing, nothing," she answered hastily. "It is late, Arthur. Let us go home."

As she leaned back silently in the corner of the cab, she thought to herself, "The fear of paining his father, or the thought of having acted dishonourably towards me, has had no weight with him. Is he thoroughly selfish, or — or — is this the way of the world?"

CHAPTER XIII.

All Serene.

This explanation (for such he chose to consider it) afforded Arthur great relief of mind; he was quite unconscious of the insufficiency and selfishness of his excuses; and on his way home planned a continuation of his former pleasant intercourse with his cousin, under the name of friendship.

Nora, however, began quietly, and at first imperceptibly, to avoid him. When he returned home before his father, she retired to the long, low building that extended

nearly the length of the garden wall towards the stables, the greater portion of which was in possession of Mrs. Ducker, under the name of store and housekeeper rooms. The apartment which she occupied was rather gloomy, and not rendered more cheerful by its green paper, representing luxuriant vine-leaves, or its wide, iron barred windows. Here, however, Nora contrived to amuse herself very satisfactorily with a canary-bird, that had been born and bred in the large green cage that rested on the rickety work-table. A cheerful little animal it was, this canary-bird; and Nora having assisted in rearing it, not a particle of fear, or even timidity, was perceptible it its play with her: it hopped on her arm and shoulder, pecked grain from her lips, was desperately jealous when she took notice of the other birds, stretching out impatiently its quivering wings, and twittering in a melancholy, reproachful manner, being afterwards proportionately happy and flattered when she showered kisses and caresses on it, and seizing the first opportunity to perch on the top of the looking-glass, or the handle of a work-basket, there to stretch its little throat almost to bursting while warbling a song of ecstasy.

To Anne Ducker's room, however, Arthur began not unfrequently to follow Nora, feeling himself peculiarly at home and unrestrained there, surrounded by the well-known, old-fashioned furniture of his nursery, a choice collection of his former playthings serving for chimney-piece ornaments, and the high wire-work fender, though freshly-painted, still bearing evident marks of the violent kicks bestowed on it by him in various fits of juvenile rage. The book-shelves, too, brought crowds of old remembrances to his mind; beside the large-print Bible

and Prayer-book, there were still the well-known copies of "The Mysteries of Udolpho," "The Children of the Abbey," and the awful and never-to-be-forgotten "Tales of Wonder." Some of these last had made a terrible impression on his youthful mind, and caused him many sleepless nights; his recollection of them, as read aloud by Anne Ducker in a nasal, melancholy tone, while he sat perched beside her on his high chair, was so vivid that they had become fixtures in his momory for life. He could repeat, with provoking accuracy, "Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogene," remembered the ever-renewed horror with which he had awaited the words, "Behold me, thou false one," addressed by the dead Alonzo to the faithless Imogene, as she sat at her marriage-feast, the bride of another. The story of Rudiger had had something more personally interesting for the anxious-eyed, open-mouthed boy, who breathlessly listened to the recital of the cruel father proposing to give his only son, instead of himself, to Beelzebub. But Anne Ducker's favourite tale was "The Maid of the Inn," beginning —

"Who is the poor maniac, whose wildly fixed eye,' &c. &c.

and relating how the said maid went out by moonlight, and beheld a corpse carried by murderers, one of whom drops his hat, which she picks up, and

— "the 'at of her Richard she knew!"

All this, and much more, had Arthur related to Nora, ending with a dissertation on the cruelty of reading or relating such tales to children, who, almost always endowed with vivid imaginations, recalled them when left alone at night, suffering, in consequence,

frightful paroxysms of shivering fear, and glowing terror. For his part, if ever he had a child likely to visit Mrs. Anne, he should consider it both a duty and a pleasure to consign to the flames volumes so destructive of sleep, and suggestive of painful dreams.

In the vicinity of Anne Ducker, Arthur seemed to return to his boyhood; he sat on the table at the window, swinging his legs, and gazing complacently into the dismal, high-walled, little garden, while making jesting remarks on the rank grass, stunted gooseberry-bushes, and smutty London-pride and pensées, that contended for the honour of forming a border to *the* flower-bed; or he peeped into cupboards, and stole guava jelly, tamarinds, and preserved ginger; or, opportunity and an open drawer favouring him, he dressed himself in the antiquated, carefully-hoarded silk garments and pyramidal-crowned bonnets, mounting afterwards, with Nora's assistance, to the top of some high press, and awaiting, with a look of intense glee, the return of Anne, who invariably threatened vengeance, and scolded loudly, while it was easy to perceive that she was not a little flattered at the liberties taken with her, and was more than willing to have these troublesome children, as she called them, in her room on any terms.

It must be confessed that Nora was sorry, when it occurred to her, that spending an hour with her cousin quietly in the study was far less objectionable, in their relative positions, than the same time passed in the very free-and-easy intercourse of Anne Ducker's room — a freedom which seemed to increase from day to day, for Arthur could be amusing when he chose: he sang scraps of songs, imitated actors, actresses, popular orators, and all his friends and acquaintances — men, women,

and children — sparing, as Nora laughingly observed, neither age nor sex, but making himself so entertaining, that one day, after having carried on for some time a supposititious conversation between his uncle Gilbert and cousin Georgina, Nora asked him if *he* had been able to steer clear of all the absurdities he ridiculed so unmercifully; and desired to know what sort of person he was himself in society.

"Nothing very brilliant," he replied, with perfect sincerity.

"But you are feared, most probably," suggested Nora, "on account of this extraordinary power of imi tation that you possess."

"Why no, for I reserve the talent, if such it may be called, for the amusement of my most intimate friends, being well aware that it is no sign of genius, quite opposed to originality, and usually the resource of mediocre intellects. In society, I believe, I generally affect a mixture of the blasé and cynical, having found it the easiest mode of procuring a sort of respect from fops and fools."

"But you are not really either the one or the other?" she asked.

"No — if I had not become a votary of the phantom, Fashion, and had not been encouraged in my worship by my father, I believe I should have been a respectable hard-working man, with some qualities of head and heart that might have won me what are called 'golden opinions,' and, perhaps, also, a larger portion of your esteem than I have now the faintest hope of ever obtaining."

Nora did not chose to continue the conversation.

She placed her bird in its cage, again played with it for a few minutes, and then left the room.

That day, at dessert, Mr. Nixon informed his son that he had completed the arrangements for the purchase of the estate in Suffolk, and that it should be his on the day of his marriage.

"And not before?" asked Arthur, pretending to jest, but evidently surprised and offended. "I understood that a promise on my part —"

"I have been advised," said Mr. Nixon, interrupting him, — "advised by your uncle Gilbert to trust no man, not even my own son. He said he considered it a foolish thing, under any circumstances, my resigning so much property to you, and making you so completely independent during my lifetime; but with my views it is unavoidable; and, indeed, until very lately, I never doubted that our wishes and intentions on all subjects were perfectly similar."

Arthur's face became crimson, he pushed away his plate, threw himself back in his chair, crossed his legs, and while impatiently moving backwards and forwards the upper one, observed, "Oh then in fact I am precisely in my old position — that is, if my uncle Gilbert permit you to continue the liberal allowance which I have hitherto enjoyed. I had no idea that his advice had such weight with you, or I should have cultivated his acquaintance more assiduously of late, though he *is* such an ignorant, pompous noodle!"

"He is a very shrewd man of business," said Mr. Nixon, frowning, "and this very day realized no less than twenty thousand pounds in railway shares. I greatly regret not having joined him in the speculation, and in-

tend to take his advice without hesitation on such occasions in future."

"Do so, by all means," said Arthur; "but I request he may never again interfere between us."

"I am afraid he knows you better than I do, Arthur; he has seen you more frequently than you suppose."

"And," observed Arthur, sneeringly, "and is offended at my not stopping to speak to him, most probably!"

"Ah," said Nora, "then it *was* my uncle we saw in the Park — that day — you know, Arthur —"

She stopped, instinctively feeling that something was wrong; her uncle looked at her sharply, and said, stiffly, "Young Plumpton, too, saw you every day."

"It seems you have been making inquiries," said Arthur, flushing with anger.

"I heard more than I wished without asking a question," answered his father.

"I don't think I can stand being watched and schooled in this manner," continued Arthur, with increasing irritation; "so, if you have no objection, sir, I shall leave England to-morrow."

"Do so, Arthur," cried his father, quickly, — "do so. The very proposal on your part is reassuring, and dispels at once my doubts and fears. I now feel convinced that you have not deceived me, or — or — betrayed yourself — in short that you have acted honourably and kept your promise."

Arthur shrugged his shoulders, drew his plate towards him, and as he bent over it observed, bitterly, "I am still for sale if that be what you mean. Next time we must manage matters in a more business-like manner, as, were I thrown on your hands again, I should fall

immensely in value. As it is, I think we might now be satisfied with an Honourable Blanche or Beatrix."

"Arthur!" said his father, reproachfully.

And a silence ensued, during which, uneasy and feeling uncomfortably conscious, Nora left the room

Four-and-twenty hours afterwards, Arthur was on his way to Baden Baden, his rooms were closed up, and Nora and her uncle sat in the study, sipping their tea and reading alternately, to all appearance as if nothing had ever occurred to interrupt the even tenor of their lives. Mr. Nixon felt perfectly contented; his son was out of the reach of the dark eyes and bright smile that, even he, as he glanced occasionally over his tea-cup, began to suspect might reasonably put a man's prudence to the test: he and Arthur, too, had parted in perfect amity, and he had little doubt that the wish for independence would induce him, before long, to think again of marriage. Nora's feelings were of a less satisfactory description, when the door had closed that morning on her cousin; her uncle's house had once more assumed, in her eyes, the aspect of a prison, the little liberty she had enjoyed having served but to make her more impatient of her thraldom. She had become perfectly aware of the insurmountable obstacles that separated her from a world of luxurious enjoyment and brilliant gaiety, and if her intellect prevented her from exaggerating the pleasures of which she was deprived, her education had at least taught her to appreciate some of them more highly than they deserved. She made one desperate, energetic effort to induce her uncle to move nearer to his brother, but failing completely, she once more resigned herself to solitude and study, sincerely hoping that nothing would again occur to disturb either.

A few months later, Mr. Nixon informed her that Arthur was engaged to be married to Lady Trebleton, the widowed daughter of the Marquis of Witherington.

"Was it not from her that you bought his house?" she asked, perceiving he expected her to say something.

"Yes. He writes that he supposes she had accepted him in order to get possession of it again; but he informs me also, towards the end of his letter, that she has confessed she would have married him seven years ago had he asked her before Lord Trebleton."

Nora remembered having heard Arthur make some remark to this effect, and also his having said that she was young and handsome.

"Very handsome," said Mr. Nixon, "and as they are to be married immediately, and do not return to England until spring, Arthur has sent me her picture in miniature."

With undisguised interest Nora examined the portrait placed before her by her uncle: it was that of an extremely pretty woman of about five or six-and-twenty, magnificently dressed, and all her personal advantages so judiciously displayed that it was impossible not to suspect her possessed of more than a common portion ot coquetry. Yet it was a pleasant insinuating countenance, and Mr. Nixon was supremely satisfied with it; he talked of his son's choice doing him credit, of the double connexion acquired among the Witheringtons and Trebleton's, doubted not that Arthur's house would become one of the most fashionable in London — Lord Trebleton's had been so, whose fortune had not been so large as Arthur's would be — rank was a good thing, riches better, both together ruled the world — he wondered what Gilbert would say?

Gilbert, who had not unsuccessfully studied the peerage for some years, and knew the family name and arms of every nobleman in the United Kingdom, was a good deal amazed, and expressed infinite satisfaction at the prospect of a marriage which, as he expressed it, would give them all a "lift" in the quarter where they most wanted it. A fortnight afterwards, however, he drew his brother aside, and whispered that he had better limit Arthur's power over the estate in Suffolk, for that he had heard that Lady Trebleton could spend money faster than most men could make it, and Arthur had never been in the habit of denying himself any gratification that wealth could procure.

CHAPTER XIV.

Seven Years Later.

FEW things are more difficult than in the space of six or eight lines to give the idea of the lapse of as many years. Were we to follow the career of Arthur Nixon, some events, though of no particular interest, might be found to mark the passage of time; but his fate, it is to be hoped, can only interest the reader inasmuch as it affected that of Nora, and this was at first very little — apparently. He returned to England with his wife, who immediately repaired to Russell-square, and effectually gained her father-in-law's heart by a freedom from affectation and an ease of manner that delighted him beyond measure. She dined with him on all the great church festivals, and also on his birth-day; invited him to her house with persevering assiduity; and though he almost invariably, and with polite formality,

refused the invitations, he liked to receive them, and to be able to think and say, that the first society in England was accessible to him whenever he chose. Unable to conceal his satisfaction, he pointed out to Nora with triumphant mien, the paragraphs in the papers describing the dinners, balls, and soirées given during each succeeding season by his son and daughter-in-law; but that was all she ever knew about them, for Lady Trebleton's first invitation to her had been refused by her uncle in a manner to prevent a repetition.

Arthur, in the course of time, entered parliament, but proved a less brilliant member than had been expected; he was useful and hardworking; and as such men, though necessary, are seldom valued as they deserve, after having been passed over on various occasions when he hoped for and expected place and power, he became disgusted with, and retired altogether from public life, seeking, unfortunately, occupation in the indulgence of one of the most expensive fancies of the present day — building. Not satisfied with the handsome old house on his recently purchased estate, he commenced erecting an edifice which was to make Morris Court one of the handsomest places in England. Magnificent it was when completed, but — Arthur had become an embarrassed man, he furnished it splendidly, and found himself deeply in debt. Lady Trebleton, who had never for a moment thought of making the slightest retrenchment in her town establishment, and whose inclinations and habits were of the most expensive description, continued, with a levity incomprehensible to prudent minds, to give dinners and balls as long as she could find tradesmen willing to supply her various wants. Many were the plans resorted to by both to procure money;

but their efforts were abruptly terminated by the arrest of Arthur one afternoon for a few hundred pounds, which, serving as a signal to his other creditors, so many detainers were lodged against him, and for such large sums of money, that his father, on hearing it the next day, was struck with palsy and taken home more dead than alive. On regaining consciousness and the partial use of his arms, Mr. Nixon sent for his partner, Plumpton, and made the necessary arrangements for paying his son's debts, and restoring him to freedom. In the immediately subsequent meeting, Arthur was received without a word of reproach, but the sight of his father's shaking head and paralysed limbs so overcame him, that he burst into an uncontrollable passion of tears and was long quite inconsolable. Nora, whose presence had been desired by both, at length found means to tranquillize her cousin's grief and uncle's agitation, and induce them to discuss calmly the state of their affairs. Arthur insisted on selling the house in town as well as Morris Court; and Mr. Nixon heard with surprise and satisfaction his son's declaration, that he intended to reside in Russell-square, and supply his father's place at the office as long as might be necessary.

"But your wife, Arthur — your wife — what will Lady Trebleton say?"

"Very little," he answered, "she proposes remaining in Paris until I join her."

"Do you not think she would like to come here if my uncle wrote to her?" asked Nora.

"No," sighed Arthur; "Alice could not live here, — nothing would induce me to make such a request to her; but if she remain in Paris, I can cross the Channel

occasionally, and, in point of fact, see her quite as often as during these last three years, which you know I have spent almost entirely at Morris Court."

"I supposed her very much attached to you —" began Mr. Nixon, gravely.

"Oh, well, so she is," said Arthur, "and I like her too — amazingly. All things considered, we got on very well together; but aw — she likes living in the world, and being admired, and all that sort of thing — and even if she did consent to come here for a time, she would disturb you and put the house in confusion with her eternal visitors, and, in all probability, go out every night, and return home late — and, in short, it would never answer."

Mr. Nixon was silent, and seldom spoke of her afterwards. He soon recovered sufficiently to be able to get up and be moved down stairs, where the dining-room was converted into a sleeping-apartment, and he could be rolled into the study in a chair; but months passed over without the slightest further change in his state becoming apparent, and he grew captious at last, and impatient, and greatly worried poor Nora, now his constant companion. Eagerly she daily watched the return of Arthur from the city, his presence alone having the power of restoring her uncle's equanimity, and gladly she left them after dinner to discuss their complicated affairs, Mr. Nixon requiring the most accurate information on every subject. Arthur, wholly bent on satisfying his father, devoted himself completely to business, and so successfully, that he already began to rival his uncle Gilbert in fortunate speculations. The exultation of Mr. Nixon on these occasions was unbounded, he shook his son's hand every ten minutes, drank his health in cham-

pagne, and encouraged him to go on while fortune favoured him. And he did go on; but while doing so undermined his health completely. The sedentary work at his office, the constant mental excitement, and the climate of London, proved in the end too much for one who had hitherto led a life so different. He caught cold, neglected it, became hectic, and after having refused to consult the family physician or use any of Anne Ducker's remedies, quietly told Nora one evening as they sat alone together, that he believed he was — dying.

At first she thought him jesting, but when he told her that his mother and all his maternal uncles and aunts had been the victims of consumption before the age of thirty, and that he had already in early youth been threatened with the treacherous disease, she entreated of him to see some eminent physician and not treat so serious a matter lightly.

"I have already been to Dr. X—, wo gives me just *one* winter if I remain here; but promises me a tolerable lease of life in a warmer climate."

"Then, Arthur, you must leave England this year — at once."

"Impossible, Nora; my presence just now is of the greatest importance."

"I have no doubt of that; but if my uncle for a moment suspected that it was attended with danger to your life, he would urge — insist on your leaving him."

"He would be incredulous, Nora — would doubt the danger, and think I was merely tired of work. My proposal that we should close accounts with Plumpton,

and retire altogether, was evidently most offensive to him, and I shall never renew it."

"And for what purpose is he accumulating all this money?" asked Nora, impatiently.

"He says it is for me," answered Arthur; "and had I a family I could, perhaps, understand him. For my own part, my only wish is to replace what I squandered on Morris Court, and that once accomplished, I am ready to — die; for in good truth, Nora, I have little left to make life desirable."

"Arthur, how can you say so!"

"It is a melancholy fact," he continued, drawing his chair close to hers; "and now for once in my life I wish to speak to you without reserve. My life, Nora, has been a failure — a complete failure. I will not blame my father — he meant well; but my education was a mistake from beginning to end; yet, when it was supposed to be completed, I had still time to redeem the past had I been so inclined, instead of which I plunged into a life of folly, idleness, and dissipation, and so frittered away my best years in the pursuit of pleasure and novelty — making acquaintances, valued solely by me for their names, and by whom I was merely tolerated for my wealth."

"Arthur, I cannot believe this either of you or your acquaintances."

"You may," he said, dejectedly, "for the exceptions were few, though I gloried at one time in knowing 'every one' in London! Yet I was not without intellect, Nora; you may remember how I scorned and condemned the life I was leading, when we first met."

Nora remembered that he had done so in words, but not in acts, and could not give the ready assent he

perhaps expected: he observed her silence and answered it.

"Yes, Nora, I saw and understood my position perfectly, and think — in fact I am sure — that a marriage with you then might have saved me from myself."

"Arthur!"

"We are talking of what happened or might have happened ages ago," he continued quietly. "I don't say that you were in love with me, Nora; but you liked me, and would have married me."

"Not without your father's consent, Arthur; and having confessed so much, led us end this useless retrospection."

"It is not useless," he rejoined, gazing gloomily into the fire. "I loved you as I believe a man seldom loves more than once in his life, and had my father consented to our marriage —"

"Arthur," said Nora, rising, "I cannot listen to you, if you talk in this way."

"I have done," he answered: "my father refused his consent: without it we should have been poor; and I was an egotist — unworthy of you — incapable of making a sacrifice even for — well — well — I know — you would not have accepted me. Be it so, and let me tell you, that was my last chance of becoming a useful member of society — my life since then has been a troubled dream."

"Not so," said Nora, compassionately; "you were of use to your country when in Parliament, and —"

"Merely served to fill the house," he said, interrupting her. "I did the work that any paid official could have done as well, gave my vote to those whose political opinions coincided with mine, and from whom I

hoped, in time, to obtain place or power; and when I was disappointed, I retired to Morris Court, to lead a still more worthless and selfish life."

"You judge yourself too severely," interposed Nora.

"Scarcely," said Arthur, without looking up. "Of the thousands lavished on the house and furniture intended for my own enjoyment, not one guinea was spent on the improvement of my tenantry. I knew nothing about them or their wants or wishes, understood nothing of agriculture — what business had I with landed property? Could I but spend my life over again — or — part of it; could I, with my present experience, but return to the time when we first met, what a different life I should lead!" He paused, and then added, "I believe it is now seven years, Nora — seven years and some months since we first sat together, as we are doing now?"

"Seven years," she repeated, thoughtfully; "how long they *were* — how short they now appear!"

"I remember our meeting on the stairs," be continued, "and that first evening, as if it were but yesterday. You were dressed in black velvet and point lace — an odd dress for a girl of sixteen; but it made you look like one of those charming pictures by the old masters on which one can gaze for ever."

"The dear old dress!" said Nora, pensively; "it would certainly appear less unsuitable to me now!"

"Yet you are wonderfully little changed," said Arthur; "and every perceptible alteration is for the better."

Nora smiled. "A great internal change has, I hope, taken place," she said, quietly; "I should be sorry to

think that seven or eight years' uninterrupted reading and meditation have been quite lost upon me."

"That they have not been lost, I am sure," observed Arthur. "With such a foundation as you had to build upon, I have no doubt that by this time your information and learning far exceed those of most women."

"I make no pretension whatever to learning," answered Nora; "and have, I assure you, only arrived at a consciousness of my profound ignorance on the subjects I understand best, and at not at all doubting it on all others."

"And this is the result of eight years' steady reading in the three most literary modern languages!" said Arthur.

"Not quite: I have learned the meaning of the words, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'"

"So have I," said Arthur, with a sigh; "but *my* knowledge has been obtained by painful personal experience."

"Some experience I have had, too," observed Nora; "without it, the words of the Preacher would have made less impression on me; he says, 'Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.'"

"Go on," said Arthur.

She continued: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter — 'Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.'"

At this moment the door opened, and Mr. Nixon, in his chair, was slowly rolled towards the tea-table.

When Nora, the next day, was alone with her uncle, she spoke to him very seriously of Arthur's state of health; but found it extremely difficult to make him believe that anything could be the matter with a man so

full of energy and activity as his son. "His cough? that was constitutional. No one was exempt from colds and coughs during a London winter; and she might remember what he had himself suffered from the influenza the preceding year, though he had never allowed it to detain him one day from his office."

Mr. Nixon was most unwilling to lose either his son's services or society; in the end, however, Nora's influence prevailed, and Arthur left them to meet his wife at Strasburg, and spend the winter and spring at Meran.

When taking leave, he spoke so long and so warmly in praise of Nora to his father, that Mr. Nixon at length said, "I understand you, Arthur; you think I ought to make some small addition to her fortune?"

"Some great addition," replied Arthur, earnestly; "she has devoted the best years of her life to you — has been to you a daughter; never think of her hereafter in any other light."

From Nora he parted early in the morning, before his father was up. She had made breakfast for him in the study, and prepared to follow him into the hall, when he stopped suddenly, turned round, and said, "You told me you had a commission for me, Nora, in case I should go up the Rhine, and, I think, even said I could confer a great favour on you by undertaking it; that your saying this has been an inducement to me to choose that route, I need scarcely assure you; yet in the pain of parting I had nearly forgotten all about it."

"I — have changed my mind," said Nora, with evident embarrassment, "and prefer asking you to undertake this commission for me when you are on your way home."

"Nora, I may never return home, and that you know

as well as I do. You spoke of Dusseldorf, where, I believe, your father lies buried; speak out, like the pious German girl that you are, and tell me to visit his grave, and let you know in what state it is. The commission will not make me die one day sooner; and I see by your face that I have guessed it rightly."

"Dear Arthur," said Nora, with tears in her eyes "I shall be so much obliged to you if you will perform this act of friendship. I have long been in correspondence with the landlady of the hotel where he died; and as soon as I had saved sufficient money to enable me to erect a monument, I sent her a drawing of my mother's tombstone, requesting her to have a similar one made for my father. It is this," she added, taking a paper from her work-table; "I should have preferred leaving the space at the base altogether for flowers; but when no friends or relations are near to see that the grave is properly cared for, and supplied with fresh plants —"

"I know — I know," said Arthur. "The neglected graves of the English in foreign churchyards have always grieved me by their contrast to the others; but one has, at least, the certainty of being left undisturbed to turn to dust there. For this reason," he added, mournfully, "wherever my life ends I shall be interred; and you, Nora, must now promise me, before we part, to visit *my* grave, to have a tombstone such as this erected for *me*, to plant flowers at its base, and with your own hands to place a wreath of evergreens on this ornament so evidently made for the purpose. Will you promise?"

"Life is uncertain, Arthur," said Nora, making a great effort to speak calmly; "but should I outlive you —" She placed her hand in his and turned away.

"Don't waste a tear on me now, dear girl," he con-

tinued; "but bestow a few on the earth that will cover me some — years hence, let us say; for, after all, if Alice take good care of me, who knows but I may hold out as long as Lord Medway, who, to my certain knowledge, has been dying these eight or nine years!"

* * * * * *

Most unwillingly Nora wrote to recal Arthur the following spring, when her uncle's declining strength made his return home, for some time at least, desirable. But they never met again; for, after a somewhat hurried journey through Tyrol, he was obliged to stop at a village in the Bavarian highlands, and there, after a few days' illness, ended his life, and was buried, as he had desired, in the tranquil churchyard of the place. His wife returned to England, and related circumstantially to the broken-hearted father every incident of his last moments; she was also the bearer of letters from him to Nora, to remind her of her promise to visit his grave — to his father, requesting him to increase Lady Trebleton's jointure, and hoping he would henceforward consider Nora his adopted daughter, and provide for her as his now only child.

When Nora showed the letter *she* had received to her uncle, and spoke of her intention, at some future time, to make a pilgrimage to the church at Almenau; he took both her hands, and answered, with a solemnity that often afterwards recurred to her memory, "I shall take care to supply you with money for the journey, Nora."

Not long after she found herself, on his demise, one of the richest heiresses in England, for, with the exception of some legacies to the servants, her uncle had left her everything he possessed. The care of erecting a

monument to the memory of his son was intrusted to her; and this, added to her own strong feeling of having a sacred promise to fulfil, made her long for the expiration of the time that must intervene before she could set out on a journey abroad, which she secretly resolved should end in a residence of some duration in the land, which (ever prone to extremes) she now began to call hers, and to prefer to England!

CHAPTER XV.

Return to Germany after Ten Years' Absence.

NORA did not at first comprehend either her complete independence or immense increase of importance. She felt deeply having lost the only two relations, to whom she had had an opportunity of becoming attached during the nine years she had spent in Russell-square, for of the Gilbert Nixons she, as yet, scarcely knew anything. Her uncle Stephen had taken a dislike to Georgina, and, in a manner, forbidden her his house; Mr. Sam Nixon, as contrast to his son Arthur, he could scarcely learn to tolerate; and it was more to please Nora than himself, that he endured, occasionally during the holidays, the visits of his brother's youngest son John.

John had been, during the first years of Nora's acquaintance with him, as restless, noisy, and rude a schoolboy as could well be imagined, then he had changed into a bashful, awkward hobbledehoy, had afterwards become a wild and idle collegian, and had, latterly, begun to talk incessantly about a commission in the Guards, which was to make a man of him. Through all these periods of his life, a steady and undisguised affection for Nora

had induced him to visit at his uncle's house, and, in return, she had crammed the schoolboy with fruit and sweetmeats, supplied the collegian with small sums of money, and had, for some time, listened patiently to the ravings of the future hero, without, in the least, participating in his longings for "a good smart war likely to give a fellow something to do."

It had never occurred to Gilbert Nixon that Arthur might chance to die before his father, and when the event took place, he greatly regretted that Sam and Georgina had never been on good terms with their uncle, and that even John had by no means succeeded in making himself agreeable to him. The evil could not however be remedied; therefore, though not pleased, he was scarcely surprised to find that Nora alone was his brother's heiress. The fortune was certainly too large for a woman; but he thought it not improbable if she came to live with them, that she might eventually become attached to, and marry one of his sons. Sam was a steady, sensible fellow, likely enough to please such a quiet girl, and for Jack she had for years avowed her affection: it was a pity the latter was so much younger than she was, but if she had any fancy for him, she might have him; the boy required some one to keep him in order in a rational way! So, after the funeral, Jack was sent to condole with her, Sam to assist her in looking over her uncle's papers, and Georgina to invite her to remove to Eaton-place.

With John she went to visit her uncle's grave, and was shown the large damp flag, beneath which the remains of the Nixon family had been laid for two generations. It was in a dismal, high-walled churchyard, with undertakers' establishments in the neighbourhood,

and John, who stood at the gate, soon grew tired of the gloomy objects around him, and called out, "Come away, Nora, there's no use in your making yourself unhappy about the place; he chose to be buried here, and one churchyard is just as good as another in my opinion."

"But not in mine," said Nora.

"Too soon for you to be thinking of such things; and, for my part, I hope to die on a field of battle, but not until I have become a colonel — or, no — a general — I might be a general at fifty, Nora, and after that, a man has not much to live for, eh?"

"I — don't — know," said Nora, who had not heard a word that he said. "Have they no flowers in the churchyards here, Jack?"

"Not that I know of," he answered. "Now do let's get on, Nora — Sam is waiting to help you to look over the papers, you know, and the sooner you come to live with us, and give up thinking in this uncomfortable way about churchyards, the better."

Among Mr. Nixon's papers, Nora found a small packet, on which were the words, "Correspondence with the Hon. Charles Thorpe concerning my niece Leonora." It was immediately transferred to her pocket, and kept for perusal when alone in the evening; the ink was pale and the paper yellow with age, but the unkind construction put on her actions by Charles Thorpe, and the cold worldly tone of his letter, had still the power to produce a deep blush, and renew the strong feeling of resentment against him, that had now for some years lain dormant.

"I wish him no evil," she murmured, as if in reply to the reproaches of her conscience; "I believe I have learned to forgive him too — but he need not have

blamed *me* for his brother's infatuation, as he calls it, and the remark about my foreign education, making me by no means a desirable companion for his sister Jane, was altogether unnecessary. This letter closed my uncle Gilbert's door against me at first, and accounts completely for the coldness and suspicion with which, for such a length of time, all my efforts to please were here received. I know we should 'love our enemies and do good to them that hate us' — and I think I could do good to Charles Thorpe if an opportunity offered, but like him I never can. Never!"

At the end of a few weeks Nora was glad to remove to her uncle Gilbert's more cheerful house. It did not occur to her to make any extraordinary additions to her wardrobe, or to expect the undivided services of a maid; she thankfully received the little assistance she required from Mrs. Nisbett, her cousin's *femme de chambre*, was surprised at her obliging manners, and never for a moment suspected that the worldly little woman was already speculating on entering the service of the heiress! It was only by degrees that Nora learned her new position in the world and in her uncle's family, and discovered that she had become an object of speculation to all around her. Georgina merely hoped and expected that she would make a brilliant match, which would secure them a new connexion; but her uncle observed more frequently than was agreeable, "that it would be a pity to let such a fortune as hers go out of the family, and he hoped she would take a fancy to one of his sons some day or other; that, for his part, he had always liked her, and, as she must remember, would have taken her 'for good,' and made her his daughter eight years ago, if his brother Stephen had given his consent." The con-

clusion of the speech always made Nora forgive the want of delicacy of the commencement, and she thanked him, over and over again, for his former generous intentions towards her, ending with the assurance, that she never should forget his kindness on that occasion. With regard to herself, or, rather, as she suspected, her fortune, she gladly seized an opportunity of being explicit, when, one morning, John, in his boyish way, sounded her on the subject in his sister's presence.

"I say, Nora," he began, whipping his lacquered boots very diligently with a small cane, "I say — it must be pretty evident to you, that our governor expects you and Sam to make a match of it some of these days!"

"I cannot believe that he seriously thinks of anything so absurd," she answered, quietly.

"Just what Sam himself said," observed John, laughing. "Why you'd as soon, perhaps sooner, think of marrying me!"

"I have just as much idea of one as the other, my dear Jack."

"But you like me, Nora? I know you do."

"Be assured of it, Jack," she answered, extending her hand to him, "I like you better than any one else in the world just at present. We have liked each other for ten years, and I have no doubt shall continue to do so as long as we live."

"I suppose, Nora, you agree with Georgina here, in thinking that Nixon marrying Nixon would never answer".

"I think," said Georgina, looking up from her embroidery, "that Nora may now aspire higher, and you and Sam had better try to improve our connexion."

"I suppose that will be easy enough, now that our family has turned out to be so ancient. You know, of course, Nora, that we are of Saxon origin."

"No," she answered, with some surprise, "I really was not aware of the circumstance."

"Why our very name is German, our crest but a play upon the word."

"I don't quite understand —"

"Because your father, I suppose, took the arms of the other numerous Nixon families with whom we have, in fact, no sort of relationship; but my father and Georgy never rested until we had arms found, sketched, and painted at the 'West End Practical Heraldic Office,' parchment a yard long and everything complete. It was easily made out, for you know Nixe is the German for water-sprite, water-fairy, nymph."

"You don't mean to insinuate that we are the descendants of a Naiad!" she said, smiling.

"Now, Nora, you must be serious, and listen to what concerns you as much as any of us. Nothing can be plainer than the derivation of our name from Nix — Nixe — Nixy — Nixon! and the name once traced to its Saxon origin, what more natural than to suppose ourselves descendants of one of the ancient possessors of Britain?"

"Our remotest ancestress being the fair Melusine herself," said Nora, laughing. "She who, half woman, half fish, lived in a dark green grotto, waiting for a faithful lover to release her; but, according to the legend, waited in vain, and sank at last all fish beneath the water — or no — I believe me must take the other one of mysterious parentage, who was only occasionally fish or serpent, and who had a lot of ugly sons."

"I see you have learned from our uncle Stephen to laugh at our arms and name," said John, half offended, "but I only wish you would talk a little to Georgy on the subject — she'll soon convince you!"

"I am quite ready to be convinced," observed Nora, smiling. "No one will be likely to dispute our right to the mermaid, or water-nymph, or even Melusine herself as crest. There is also no reason why we should not be descended from the Anglo-Saxons, and if so, we may suppose that an ancestor of ours fell at the battle of Hastings — his body being found near that of Harold, partly covered with a shield bearing the well-known device of a water-nymph!"

Georgina laughed good-humouredly. "Oh, I see you have seized upon our mermaid as eagerly as my father; but you will introduce her to your acquaintance and friends more judiciously than he did, I have no doubt. I assure you I used to feel quite nervous whenever he raised a spoon or fork at dinner, dreading the long explanation that would follow, he understanding about as much of heraldry as —"

"As I do," said Nora. "The naiad is really a very ingenious discovery, Georgy. I should never have found out anything better than a hogshead for our crest."

"A hog's head or boar's head is a very-much esteemed crest, and I am sure I should have had no objection to it," said Georgina; "but I don't quite understand in what way it could be accounted for."

"By the way in which our grandfather made his fortune," answered Nora. "My mother informed me that he dealt largely in hogsheads of Jamaica rum, casks of sugar, raisins, figs, and so forth."

"Hush!" cried Georgina, playfully; "we only speak

of the funds and railway shares now: and seriously, Nora," she added, "it is not necessary to tell all the world where we lived, and how we lived in days of yore; my plan has been to keep quiet and attract as little attention as possible, and I have found it the most efficacious means of securing a position in society in spite of those who so perseveringly laughed at my father, and treated me with insolence. A few years' hard struggling we had, of course, and I often thought the end obtained not worth the trouble bestowed on it."

"I am sure it was not," said Nora.

"If," sighed Georgina — "if one could but practise as well as preach indifference to all these social distinctions! I assure you I feel at this moment as convinced as you or any one can be of the folly of fagging after fashion; but I have only to visit, or be visited by, one of my acquaintances, and I find myself talking, thinking, and feeling as foolishly as ever! The worst of it, I am happy to say, is now over — I have been dragged about and introduced to people who did not want to know me; I have been a beggar for invitations given with ostentatious unwillingness; I have been patronized by Mrs. Savage Wayward and her friends, and mortified by their inviting our guests and giving concerts in our house! But from all this I am now emancipated, and you may have observed that our visiting list is quite *comme il faut;* and though you refused to make your appearance at our dinners, you must acknowledge that we have had a very pretty sprinkling of nobility at them!"

"Why, yes," said Nora, smiling a little mischievously, "you have certainly entertained a good many Honourable de Boots and Lady Magnolias, as Punch calls them!"

"And do you really and sincerely, Nora, condemn all efforts to make the acquaintance of people of rank?"

"*I* shall never make any effort of the kind," she answered, "and I don't like to see, or let others see *yours*."

"Nine years ago you thought and spoke differently," observed Georgina. "Had you come to live with us then —"

"I should undoubtedly have struggled with you," interposed Nora, "for it is only lately that I have quite perceived the ruin that this false ambition has brought upon the different members of our family. I shall never sacrifice my happiness to fashion, and never live in what is called the world!"

"My dear Nora, what will your brother say to such resolutions?"

"Every thing that is worldly-wise, egotistical, and narrow-minded," she answered.

"Is it possible that you do not like him, — that you are not proud of him?" exclaimed Georgina.

"I know very little about him," said Nora. "He has occasionally paid me a duty visit when in England; but I have ever found him worldly-minded to a degree that was perfectly appalling. The last time I saw him was just after our poor dear Arthur's death, and fancy his saying, "That it would be a famous good thing if old Nick himself (so he always called my uncle) would drop off quietly, and leave me his fortune, as in that case I should be the very thing for Charley Thorpe!"

"How like him!" said Georgina, laughing; "but you must not be too particular about little speeches of this kind, Nora. Young men have got a habit of talking in this manner, without meaning any harm. Your brother

did not exactly want your uncle Stephen to die; he merely thought it probable that he would not live long, and very naturally wished to make you think of Mr. Charles Thorpe, to whom by all accounts he is extremely attached."

"He might have spared himself the trouble," said Nora, indignantly. "Charles Thorpe is the very last man in the world I could ever be induced to marry."

"Suppose, however," observed Georgina — "suppose he should in the course of time become Lord Medway; they say his brother cannot survive the winter."

"To me," said Nora, "he will ever remain Charles Thorpe; and as to his brother he is merely hypochondriacal, complaining alternately of his lungs and liver, and probably encouraged in his fancies by his mother, who wishes to live abroad with him."

"Perhaps you are right," said Georgina; "Lady Medway has been but once in England since we came to live *here*. It was the first year I believe, and I met her frequently and was introduced to her — you may remember I told you at the time that she inquired about you very kindly, said you were such a nice creature, and was *so* glad to hear that my uncle liked you!"

"Her words," said Nora, thoughtfully, "made more impression than you suppose; they filled my head with thoughts of The Willows, and made me half expect an invitation there."

"I should not be surprised if you received one next year," observed Georgina.

"Nor I either," answered Nora; "but I shall not leave Beechfield until I can go abroad."

And to Beechfield, her uncle Gilbert's villa, Nora

went at Christmas, and there remained during the winter and spring. She read in the papers an exaggerated account of the amount of her fortune, and of the perfect seclusion in which the young and beautiful heiress was passing the time of her mourning; but the smile of derision passed from her countenance as her eye glanced to the succeeding paragraph, which announced the death of Lord Medway at Palermo, and the arrival of his brother in England. The same paper informed her, some time afterwards, of the reception of the latter at Thorpe Manor, and at a later period of the return of Lady Medway to The Willows.

It was about this time that Nora informed her uncle of her wish to go abroad, and heard of his intention to accompany her with Georgina and John. He professed himself quite willing to submit to any of the discomforts that might attend a residence of a week or so in the village where the fulfilment of her promise to her cousin Arthur, made it necessary for her to go during the summer, and showed actual alacrity in his preparations for the journey. A stupendous travelling-carriage was purchased, with cabriolet before, and cabriolet behind, imperial above imperial, and every contrivance for the disposal of luggage that had been discovered during the previous twenty years. When Nora first saw this vehicle, she shook her head, and said that on the railroads it would be unnecessary, and in the village where they should spend most of their time, such a carriage would be perfectly useless if not inconvenient to them. But the words of disapprobation were lost in the exultation of her uncle, as heedless of his rotundity of figure he sprang in and out, removing cushions, raising boxes, pulling out secret drawers, mounting to the top and

making the carriage swing, stooping beneath it, and pointing out the construction of various parts, in language sufficiently unintelligible, to convince Nora that he knew all about elliptic and cross-springs, and wheels with patent axles, hoops, nuts, and pins, though she did not.

Gilbert Nixon and his son provided themselves with a few of those eccentric articles of apparel which serve as stamps to Britons on the Continent, and Georgina's protestations against them were silenced by Nora's proposal that every member of the party should be at liberty to dress and act as they pleased, provided it did not interfere with the personal comforts of any of the others. Half playfully, half earnestly, she afterwards wrote out an agreement to this effect, which was unhesitatingly signed by them all, and four-and-twenty hours later they were in a steamer on their way to Paris. Mr. Nixon and his daughter sat with much dignity side-by-side in the spacious carriage: the one declaring he should have crossed the Channel long ago if he had known it was so easy to do so, and looking alternately at the waveless sea and the packet of newspapers with which he had stuffed his numerous pockets before embarking; the other negligently leaning back and occasionally turning over the leaves of a book which she held in her hand, in order that no one might suspect her of travelling for the first time in her life, or taking an undue interest in the things and persons around her. John and Nora, or as they, to Georgina's infinite disgust, familiarly called each other Jack and Norry, amused themselves differently: the former wished to see and hear everything without compromising his dignity as an embryo guardsman and an Englishman; he felt agreeably conscious that he was creating a sort of sensation, and entertained very little

doubt that all the young and pretty women on board were watching and admiring him. Nora seemed to have become several years younger; everything she saw was familiar to her eyes, every language she heard familiar to her ear. On landing, the houses, furniture, and people brought thousands of youthful recollections to her mind, and when in Paris she had wandered about the well-known places with her uncle and cousins, she felt it impossible, on her return to the hotel in the evening, to join in their querulous complaints of fatigue, or believe in her uncle's assurances that all he had seen had made about as much impression on his wearied eyes and confused mind, as the figures of a magic lantern on the senses of a drowsy child.

In short the Nixons "did" Paris in a week, and several other places in still less time, and reached Munich about the month of July. The day after their arrival there, Nora went to the churchyard, and at a stone-mason's in the neighbourhood, ordered a tombstone, such as Arthur had desired to have, but with additional marble ornaments, that she was informed would require at least two months to sculpture. Under these circumstances she ceased to urge her companions to continue their journey southwards, the more so, as her brother on his way to England, joined them and announced his intentions of remaining in Munich as long as they did.

Sir Harry Darwin was a man who had travelled extensively, he had sought notoriety by the ascent of glaciers, had made a faint attempt to discover the sources of the Nile, had ridden on dromedaries, yachted away some years of his life in the Mediterranean, and become a cosmopolite of the purest water. He was a sunburnt, exuberantly-whiskered man, still feeling and

looking younger than his actual age, exclusively devoted to the world and its enjoyments, and perfectly satisfied with himself in every respect. His step-sister had risen immensely in his estimation since she had become an heiress, but he was too experienced a man not to take some pains to prevent her from suspecting that she was the magnet that had drawn him to Munich, — his first few jesting remarks about her present wealth and importance having been received in a manner that convinced him she began already to doubt the motives, and weigh the words of those who in the most distant manner alluded to her fortune or future plans. His attentions, therefore, were almost exclusively bestowed on Georgina, with whom, in fact, he was far better acquainted than with Nora, having not only frequently met her in society, but being in the habit of dining at her father's house, and flirting with her in a remarkable manner during his occasional visits to England. They had, of course, many acquaintances in common, much to talk of, and in Munich enough to see that was mutually interesting; and Nora perceived with pleasure his attentions to her cousin, after having heard from her uncle Gilbert that "Sir Harry had long been an adorer of Georgy's, and that she certainly did not hate him, though he had often enough disappointed her when she had expected him to propose." Georgina herself believed he must be in earnest this time, or he would not have gone out of his way to meet them, and devoted himself to her so completely during his stay at Munich; and so Nora thought also: but Sir Harry had no sooner satisfied himself that there was no immediate danger of his sister's bestowing herself and her fortune on John Nixon, than he resolved to announce his intention of returning

to England for the grouse shooting! It was at the Hôtel de Bavière, on a warm summer's evening, about the hour when the party, after drinking tea together, usually separated for the night, that the well-prepared little speech was made, ending with some civilly expressed regrets that he must at once take leave, as he should be far from Munich before they were up the next morning.

As much surprised as any of the others, Nora watched her brother as he cordially shook hands with Mr. Nixon and his son, and then with the most careless friendliness imaginable approached Georgina. She was sitting at one of the windows, and as he drew near she turned towards him, extended her hand, forced a smile, and then looked again into the street. He murmured some unintelligible words about meeting before long in England, and whispering to Nora to follow him, left the room.

Mr. Nixon, who had been dozing, or, as he himself would have said, "resting his eyes," was disturbed by this sudden leave-taking, and now sat upright in his chair, looking alternately at his son and daughter, until perceiving that silence was desired and expected by the latter, he again leaned back and half closed his eyes.

On the countenance of John there was an expression of complete contentment, an air of only half-concealed triumph in his walk, as, perambulating the room with long strides, he passed and repassed the pier glass, and occasionally stopped to arrange his hair or cravat. On these occasions there was a studied gracefulness and endless variety in his attitudes, denoting a most laudable desire to learn to please on some future occasion, or giving a very amusing exhibition of personal vanity.

After a long, last, and, as it appeared, satisfactory inspection of himself, a pulling up of shirt collar and pulling down of waistcoat, with a slight stamp as he changed the leg on which his body rested, and a curious wriggling of his whole person which shewed him his figure alternately in three-quarters and profile, he turned to his sister, and observed in a low voice, "I say, Georgy, it's a devilish good job that Sir Harry is taking himself off in this pleasant easy sort of way — I don't think I could have stood his quiet impudence much longer! he completely ruled us all lately, and hardly allowed me to speak a word when we dined at the table d'hôte. As to our governor, he treated him precisely as if he were a — a — secretary, or something of that sort, good for nothing but to sign his name at the bankers' and supply Adam, the courier, with money."

He paused for an answer, but his sister remained silent and he continued: — "Of course you cannot dislike him as I do, for he never contradicted or commanded you; but if you think he liked you better for always going against me and approving all his plans you are mistaken. It's too soon for the grouse shooting, and all a sham! — he has other game in view, I can assure you; for Tomkins told me this morning, when I was dressing, that he suspected Sir Harry would not remain much longer with us, as he was engaged to be married to Lady Jane Thorpe, and had got a letter to say that the family were now at The Willows."

"Lady Jane Thorpe," repeated Georgina, turning quickly round.

"Lord Medway's sister, you know. They've been engaged this long time."

Georgina put her hand to her head, and seemed

to think intensely for a few seconds, then rising, hastily left the room.

Nora and her brother were still standing in the corridor. "I am glad to find you here," she said to Sir Harry, "for I wish much to tell you that, though I felt rather vexed and surprised at your leaving us so abruptly, when I supposed it was merely for an additional week's grouse shooting, now that John has told me the real cause of your return to England, I can only applaud your intention, and wonder at your remaining here so long!"

Sir Harry stared at her with a look of amazement.

"Although," she continued, quickly, "although I am personally but slightly acquainted with the Medways, I have heard them so much praised, and Lady Jane is so universally admired and liked, that I may safely congratulate you on your choice. Good-night. Don't quite forget us while we are buried in these Bavarian Highlands, of which Nora speaks with such enthusiasm." While saying these last words, she entered her room, which was close to where they stood, and as she closed the door with a nod and smile, Sir Harry exclaimed,

"Well, Nora, I hope you are satisfied now!"

"You are *not*," she replied, with an arch smile. "You would rather have made Georgina unhappy than have had the conviction forced upon you, that, while you were merely amusing yourself, she was similarly employed."

"Not I," said Sir Harry, carelessly; "I have flirted with Miss Nixon these eight years, more or less, at intervals, and whatever I may have imagined at the beginning of our acquaintance, I took it for granted,

that, by this time, her heart and feelings must be completely worn out from incessant use and abuse."

"How slightingly you speak of the person to whose words you listened with such apparent deference this very morning!" exclaimed Nora, indignantly. "Georgina fortunately understood you better than I did, as I confess I never doubted your intentions since the day you explained at such length that a woman necessarily rises or falls to the rank of her husband."

"That was all intended for you, Nora. I wished to remind you, that if you married either Sam or John Nixon, you would be neither more nor less than —"

"Than Mrs. Sam or Mrs. John Nixon," said Nora, composedly.

"Nora — if I could, for one moment, suppose it possible that you would bestow a thought either on that prig, Sam, or that donkey, John, I —"

"You would remain here to take care of me — perhaps even accompany us to the mountains? The country would be new even to you!"

"New, inasmuch as I have never seen this village to which you are going," he answered; "but after having been in Switzerland and ascended glaciers, I imagine I should find little to interest me on a Bavarian or Tyrolean alp!"

"I don't know that," rejoined Nora, "for I think a picturesque and well-wooded mountain, with its pasture-grounds, inhabited chalets, herds of cattle, and an extensive view from it, might be nearly as interesting, and infinitely more agreeable to most wanderers than a glacier."

"Perhaps so," said Sir Harry. "If the Medways were with us instead of these Nixons, I have no doubt

I should find the Bavarian highlands or Tyrol pleasant enough."

"I can scarcely imagine Lady Medway making excursions such as I mean," said Nora, laughing, "and as to Charles Thorpe — I mean Lord Medway —"

"Charley is a keen sportsman, Nora, and nearly as well acquainted with Germany as you are!"

"That is the first good thing I have heard of him for a long time," said Nora.

"And what have you heard to the contrary?" asked her brother, with an appearance of interest that rather surprised her, adding, without waiting for her answer, "Some of his wild doings, years ago, perhaps? but let me tell you, Nora, a man may occasionally put his life in jeopardy for a wager, or undertake daring and eccentric exploits, who can, at other times, be as quiet and gentle as any woman could desire."

Nora smiled, attempted no explanation, and merely said, "I have heard him praised often enough by his own family, but I know him to be an extremely worldly-minded and selfish man."

Sir Harry shrugged his shoulders. "He has lived constantly in the world and had to work his way in it — that makes the best man worldly in time, and — selfish we all are, more or less. For instance, he would certainly not seek or cultivate the acquaintance of these Nixons, or even tolerate them, as I have done for the last three weeks."

"I am rejoiced to hear it," said Nora, promptly, "as it will prevent me from having the trouble of avoiding him."

"Do not imagine you will have any difficulty in doing so," rejoined her brother, with a malicious smile,

glad perhaps to laugh a little at her in his turn, "for I offered you to him after you became an heiress, and he declined the alliance, saying, that your paternal connexions would prevent him from thinking of you, even were you twice as rich and twice as good looking as you were said to be."

Nora felt greatly irritated, but wisely concealing her annoyance, said quietly, "Did it never occur to you that I might also decline the alliance?"

"Why, no — we concluded your foreign education would have taught you to think rationally on such subjects, and I should have trusted the fulfilment of my wishes on this occasion to time and your pretty face. I have lately been inclined to suspect he spoke in that way in order to appear consistent, and that, having prevented his brother from marrying you, he is resolved, notwithstanding your present very different position in the world, to consider the match unsuitable. All this, however, need not prevent you from becoming good friends when you meet."

"Of course not," she answered ironically; "all you have just said is eminently calculated to remove my prejudices and make me like him! But let us not talk any more on so disagreeable a subject. Jane will, of course, write to me when the arrangements for your marriage are being made, and you can give me hints, at the same time, as to what would be most acceptable in the way of presents. You see I have already learned to play heiress, and know what will be expected from me."

"You are a dear, wilful girl," said her brother, as they parted, "but I still hope you will like Medway as

well as I am sure he will like you when he knows you. Good-bye."

Nora's room adjoined Georgina's; but though, on entering it, she found the door of communication open, some minutes elapsed before she attended to her cousin's request that she would join her.

"Well, Nora — what do you say to your brother's engagement?" began Georgina, abruptly.

"Had he told us of it immediately after his arrival here," she answered, "we — or, at least I, could not but have approved, for Jane is, by all accounts, what she formerly promised to be, a dear, good creature. His silence was quite unpardonable, and when you joined us in the corridor I had just been telling him so, and accusing him of duplicity towards you."

"But you did not betray me!" cried Georgina, anxiously; "you did not say that I —"

"Oh, no!" said Nora; "I only spoke of what I had myself observed and expected."

"I hope you think I acted judiciously in following and speaking to him again."

"Quite right," said Nora; "he looked so completely put out that I could not help laughing at him."

"And he never suspected that I was acting?"

"I think not."

"You, of course, understood me directly?"

"Assuredly; and felt for you, and sympathised with you most sincerely. Events of this description, Georgina, are very annoying — very mortifying; and the only means to avoid them is by never bestowing a serious thought on any man who has not, like the lover in old Ducker's song, said, 'Oh, will you marry me, my dear Ally Croker! oh! will you —'"

"If you can jest —" began Georgina, turning away, offended.

"By no means," said Nora, apologetically; "the words I have just spoken apply, I assure you, as much to myself as you. For my own part, I think it better to reserve every demonstration, and, as much as possible, every feeling of regard, until it becomes time to look over the marriage ceremony, and study properly the meaning of the important words — 'I, N., take thee, M.'"

"You are quite right to say M., Nora."

"Of course, you know those are the letters used."

"That was not what I meant. I have a strong suspicion that your brother wishes and hopes you may be induced to marry Lord Medway."

"Towards whom," said Nora, a blush adding to the already deepened colour of her unusually flushed face, "towards whom I feel so little elective attraction, as Goethe calls it, that there are few things would give me greater pleasure than having an opportunity of proving how little I desire his acquaintance, or value the rank and station he so greatly overvalues."

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed Georgina, surprised at her sudden vehemence; "surely you must know him, whether you like it or not, when you meet, for you are relations."

"The relationship," said Nora, "is not near enough to compel intimacy, and, were it not for this marriage of Harry's, might have been altogether forgotten. As far as I am concerned, it has lain dormant for ten years, and may remain ten more, if any effort on my part be necessary to rouse it. Let us not, however, waste another thought either on my brother or the Medway fa-

mily, but tell me if you would like to leave Munich to-morrow."

"Very much indeed," said Georgina; "I am quite willing to go to your village whenever you please."

"I fear you will be equally ready to leave it, Georgina; for, as I have told you more than once, there are no grand hotels, or English travellers of distinction to be found in the quiet villages of the Bavarian highlands."

CHAPTER XVI.

First Mountain Excursion attempted by the Nixon Family.

NORA'S proposal to leave Munich was received the next morning with evident satisfaction by her uncle; and John's approbation was quickly obtained when she proposed, at the end of the first day's short journey, an ascent of the Peissenberg, to take a panoramic view of the mountains they were about to visit.

"I say, Norry, is this Peissenberg what you call an alp or alm?" he asked, drawing his chair close to hers. "I mean, is it one of those pasture-grounds on the mountains, where you told me the people send their cattle in summer, and pleasant parties are got up, and wild hunters take refuge? I wouldn't give a fig for a mountain, now, that had not alps upon it, with handsome peasant-girls to take care of the cows, and sing the *Ranz des Vaches*, and all that sort of thing."

"The Peissenberg is not an alp," answered Nora; "it is merely a very high hill, running, promontory-like, into the plain, and consequently commanding an unusually extensive view. There is a church, a priest's house, and small inn on the top; and I think it will

in every way suit us as a trial of strength for future excursions."

"What do you say to this plan of Nora's?" asked John, turning to his father.

"Why, aw — if there's a tolerable road, aw — and our carriage —"

"Bless me, sir! you seem to have forgotten all about the Bavarian alps!"

"I never heard of them, that I can remember," said Mr. Nixon.

"Dont't you remember that Nora talked about them for more than an hour the day we decided on going abroad? and when we were planning excursions to them you said you thought mountains must appear infinitely grander from their bases than from their summits."

"The remark was good, Jack," said Mr. Nixon, "very good. I believe I do recollect saying that; and though of the same opinion still, yet, once in a way, with a donkey or a mule, and a steady guide, I'm sure I've no objection to —"

"You are talking as if we were on a tour in Switzerland, or at one of the much-frequented German springs," cried John, impatiently; "and we have explained a dozen times that we are going to the most out-of-the-way places imaginable. Even this Peissenberg, though so near Munich, is not much known to English travellers, is it, Nora?"

"When I was there," she answered, "there was not one English name in the numerous 'Strangers' Books' that had been for years carefully preserved by the priests there."

"I am glad to hear that," cried John; "for a more uncivil set of people than the English I have met since

we left home I never saw in all my life — they scarcely answer when one speaks to them."

"Perhaps because you have not been introduced," suggested Mr. Nixon.

"Not exactly," observed Nora; "the English avoid each other on the continent, to the great surprise of all foreigners; but I have no doubt you would, for various reasons, do the same yourself if you had resided a few years abroad."

"For my part," said John, "I don't want to know anything about them. If I could only speak French tolerably I should apply to the Germans; they all understand and speak it well; and when I can't get on in their language, commence talking it as a matter of course: however it's too late to learn French now, so you must help me on with your 'grunting guttural,' Nora, that I may be able to speak to the people at your village."

Nora laughed, for John wished to be taught German but would not give himself the trouble of learning it.

"Well, I suppose I may order horses," he continued; "for though this place is not exactly on our way to Nora's churchyard, it is at least in a southerly direction, and there are roads from it to the mountains."

On the evening of the following day they left their heavily packed carriage to be stared at by the inhabitants of the village at the base of the Peissenberg, and commenced the easy ascent to the church they had long seen in the distance. Their way lay through cornfields and meadows, bounded by woods, and occasionally past an isolated peasant house. Oaks, beech, and on the south side mulberry trees, grew luxuriantly; and this, and the increasing extent of view, Nora pointed out to Mr Nixon, as, with true English determination, he la-

boured manfully on, heedless of heat and shortened breath, declaring, when he heard that they should soon be at a height of 3000 feet, that "He rather liked the work, and shouldn't wonder if he became a famous mountain climber."

Nora and John were the first to reach the platform on which the church and adjacent buildings stand. They hurried round them, looked into the former, and then surveyed the rows of windows belonging to the priest's house, from the greater number of which groups of inquisitive faces returned their glances. For a few minutes Nora contemplated the wide expanse of plain that lay beneath them, the forests, lakes, rivers, towns, villages, and castles that diversified the level landscape until it reached the distant, thickly-wooded hills, that form a commencement to the chain of mountains extending along the whole horizon, excepting in the direction towards Munich, where the towers rather than steeples of the Frauen church were still dimly visible in the grey cloudy vapour, indicating a long continuation of the plain.

John touched her arm, and with his eyes directed her attention to two figures not far distant from them. One was a young, middle-sized, well-proportioned man, negligently dressed in a suit of that light grey summer stuff which defies the power of the thickest clouds of dust to change its colour. A straw hat shaded his sunburnt face, the features of which, high and sharply defined, were rather intellectual than handsome, especially the long, deepset, dark eyes, which were of extraordinary brilliancy, and seemed constantly in search of objects to amuse or interest him. His mouth was scarcely visible, so well cultivated had been the growth of the black moustache, which covered the upper lip and joined

the barbe Grecque that, thick and short, nearly concealed his well-formed chin. He sat on the low wall which partly encloses the church and adjoining house, and on his knee was placed a portfolio, while on a loose sheet of paper he sketched with extraordinary rapidity and correctness the country around him. At his side stood a handsome, athletic, noble-looking man in the prime of life, who, with folded arms and head very erect, looked alternately at his companion's drawing and the distant range of mountains. As John and Nora approached, and the former endeavoured to satisfy his curiosity by gliding behind the artist, he bestowed on them a glance of haughty interrogation that was by no means agreeable, and yet it was on him that Nora immediately centered her attention; because she thought he looked like an Englishman. It may be asked, What do Englishmen look like? and I believe it was Heinrich Heine who said, "Like statues with the ends of the noses lopped off." Now this man's nose was not deprived of any of its fair proportions, therefore it could not have been that feature which had influenced her judgment; nor, on his broad forehead, of which she could just discern the lower half, was the word Englishman written; nor in the large eyes and low marked meditative eyebrows, though English enough in their way; nor, nor, — In fact she could not tell what it was; but those more experienced in the study of physiognomy would have at once affirmed that it was the whiskers that so plainly said *Civis Britannus sum*, and which, being without that continuation under the chin denominated *barbe Grecque*, were particularly English-looking in a country where lip and chin beards grow so redundantly as in Bavaria. In the year 1850 Mr. Dickens had not yet

asked the English nation why they shaved; nor had the god of war procured for the military part of it the permission to pack up their razors and deposit them in the open temple of Janus. Most Englishmen's faces were, therefore, still carefully shaved, and many still remained in ignorance of the different expressions of countenance that can be produced by a variation in the form of these hairy accessories. A very short study of this important subject, with the aid of a few pencil or chalk sketches, will lead to the conclusion that whiskers *à l' Anglaise*, and ditto with continuations *à la Grecque*, ought to be abolished, as tending greatly to increase that most humiliating resemblance between men and apes; while a moustache may be tolerated from its having the contrary effect, inasmuch as no ape has yet been found with one; and, indeed, a moustache would be bestowed in vain on animals incapable of discovering the expression of cheerfulness imparted to the face by the turning of it upwards, the serenity by a horizontal position, the gravity by an inclination downwards, the ferocity by a shadowing of the under lip with it! Nora knew nothing of all this, and was so unconsciously an observer of whiskers, that had she discovered herself speculating on the subject she would, undoubtedly, have been very much surprised. Just as she had detected a slightly foreign accent in the few correct German sentences that the stranger addressed to his companion, John exclaimed: —

"Look, Nora, here they come, regularly blown, and Georgy as pale as a ghost."

"Hard work, Nora — hard work," cried Mr. Nixon, still panting for breath as he joined her; "but the view is fine — very fine indeed: reminds me of Richmond

— greatly — The country not so cultivated or thickly inhabited, eh?"

"Richmond!" exclaimed John, "who could think of Richmond with such mountains staring one in the face? I must say I cannot discover the slightest resemblance."

"Must be, Jack, or I should not have thought of it — green hill — look downwards — beech trees — water — very like Richmond!" Here he walked up to the young man who was drawing, and after having watched him for a short time in silence, he added, pompously, "Hum — aw — draws well — these Munich artists are clever fellows."

The artist continued his occupation, either unconscious, or indifferent to the commendation bestowed, until Mr. Nixon, unwilling to deprive him of the satisfaction, which he never for one moment doubted the approbation of an Englishman must afford him, touched his shoulder, and first pointing downwards and then to the sketch, signified expressively that he knew perfectly the part of the landscape there represented.

An impatient gesture was all the notice taken of his pantomime; and imagining himself misunderstood, he repeated it, uttering at the same time a succession of those inarticulate, inharmonious sounds or grunts, generally used by dumb persons, while at the same time he nodded his head and smiled good-humouredly.

The young man at last looked up with flashing eyes, but scarcely had they encountered Mr. Nixon's bulky person than the expression totally changed, and placing the end of his pencil under one of his front teeth, he deliberately inspected the whole party without an attempt to conceal the amusement they afforded him.

Nora drew back, while John whispered rather loudly,

"There's an artist for you, Nora! You say they are better worth knowing than other people, that they are always gentlemanlike in manner and picturesque in appearance! Now how should you like to sit to that chap for your picture?"

"Hush," she replied, turning away from the bright, laughing eyes that seemed to have singled her out from the others. "Don't speak so loud, perhaps he may understand what you say. I am afraid he thinks us very rude."

"Rude to admire his drawing! What can an artist desire more than to have his performances admired? Perhaps, however, you think he is not an artist?"

"He may be," answered Nora, "but he is evidently a gentleman also, and does not like to be the object of idle curiosity."

Georgina took her father's arm and retired into the house, her head even higher than usual.

"I say, Nora," cried John, seating himself astride on the wall, at some distance from the strangers, and beginning to pitch the pebbles, and bits of loose lime upon it, down the hill, "the wonderful sunset you promised us from this place seems rather a failure; those thunder-clouds may be very grand, but they are not pleasant to look at."

"I am beginning rather to fear a change of weather," she answered, "so that we may be disappointed in the sunrise as well as sunset. I am sorry for it, as we are not likely to see so extensive a view again."

"What! not on your famous alps, which are so much higher?"

The views from the alps are generally more confined," she replied, "for the mountains are nearer and

more heaped together; and there is seldom such an extent of plain to be seen from them as we have now before us. However, it would never do to keep my uncle up here waiting for a picturesqne sunrise, though I should be tempted to remain a day or two myself for the purpose, were I alone. Let us look at your map, and find out the pleasantest road to Almenau."

"I dare say that fellow with the portfolio could tell us all about it," observed John; "but I suspect civil answers are not in his line. He looked furious when the governor touched him, and I cannot say I have any fancy for figuring among his sketches as a caricature; I dare say he had some intention of the kind or he would not have stared at us so."

"The other," began Nora, "the quiet man, is, I think, an Englishman, and therefore we had better avoid —"

"An Englishman!" he exclaimed. "If that be the case I'll just go at once and —"

"Oh pray, John," cried Nora, catching his arm to detain him; "I entreat — I —," but he broke from her, and, with feelings of indescribable annoyance, she saw him approach and address their haughty-looking countryman.

What he said she could not hear. That he was allowed to speak without the slightest interruption, or even a gesture denoting interest, was evident; but the artist, clapping his portfolio together and placing it in one of his capacious pockets, stood up and seemed more disposed to be communicative than his friend. John turned towards him, and a very animated conversation began, which appeared so displeasing to the "quiet

man, that he thrust his hands into the pockets of his paletot and walked off.

John's map was then produced, spread out on the wall, and for some time the places and roads on it were evidently the subject of discussion. When, however, Nora perceived that elbows instead of fingers were placed upon it, that the intelligent countenance of the artist assumed an expression of intense curiosity, that he spoke less and listened more than at first, she felt convinced that her friend, Jack, was becoming more confidential than was necessary, and after a few moments' hesitation she resolved to interrupt the conference.

As she approached, she heard the artist say in very correct English, but with a strong foreign accent, "I comprehend perfectly; the old gentleman is to be induced to go to Ammergau — but you suppose he will object to the great mystery. It is a great pity, for it is very interesting."

"What mystery?" asked Nora, her curiosity completely overcoming her reserve.

The artist raised his straw hat, and let the wind blow his hair in all directions, while John answered, "Oh, Nora, I have made out such a delightful plan, if we can only get the governor to consent! This Mr. a — a —"

"Waldemar," said the other, with a gay smile, "my name is Waldemar."

"Mr. Waldemar says that he and his friend, who you were quite right in supposing an Englishman, are now on their way to the very place we are going to! and intend to sketch, and fish, and shoot there, until they cross the mountains to the valley of the Inn in Tyrol,

where they have friends expecting them some time about the end of the month!"

"But what is the great mystery?" asked Nora.

"Well may you ask what is the mystery," replied John, laughing; "it is a religious play to be performed at a village called Ober-Ammergau, perhaps the only place in the world where such a thing is now to be seen in such perfection. And only think, Nora, it is altogether got up by the inhabitants of the village — the people who carve those famous figures in wood that you and Georgy bought in Munich! and crowds of people are now on their way there, because, you see, these villagers only perform their mystery every ten years, and Mr. Waldemar says their stage is quite classical and all that sort of thing."

"It is certainly well worth your going a little out of your way to see," observed Waldemar.

"In fact," said Nora, "as we have no way to go out of, no settled plan whatever for some weeks, I do not think there is anything to prevent us."

"The governor," said John, shaking his head.

"What objection can he possibly have?"

"Do you really know what this mystery is, Nora?"

"I did not when you first mentioned it; but I understand now that you mean the performance of one of those religious dramas which were as common in the middle ages as they are uncommon now."

"Exactly; but it is the passion of our Saviour — the crucifixion, that is to be represented. I am afraid my father will object — will think it improper — profane, perhaps!"

"He can hardly think it profane," observed Waldemar, "when you remind him that the Christian

mysteries originated among the ecclesiastics, and were, it is said, first acted by monks in the churches. Bishops, and, if I am not mistaken, one of the Popes composed mysteries, and encouraged in every possible way the performances."

"Oh, that would be no sort of recommendation to our governor," cried John, half laughing, while he twisted himself round on his heels. "We'll keep 'dark' about that."

"Then you can tell him," continued Waldemar, "that they were acted in England in the reign of your king James."

"That's a good point at least. Don't forget that when you speak to him, Nora."

"And," added Waldemar, "they were frequently performed at universities and schools."

"Better and better," cried John. "In fact, Nora, you can say that they are most interesting and highly moral performances."

"They may promote morality," said Waldemar, smiling; "but this representation at Ober-Ammergau is not at all what used to be called Moralities."

"I know very little about the matter," said John, "but I confess I should like to see something of the kind."

"Strictly speaking," said Waldemar, "the Mysteries or Miracle plays merely represent stories, according to the letter of Scripture, or the legend to be represented. The Moralities were not altogether destitute of plan and plot, and inculcated a moral by means of allegorical characters."

"Oh, the governor knows nothing about all these

distinctions; — we might call it a Morality, Nora, if you think it would sound better?"

"No," she answered, gravely; "if I am to speak to him, I must know what I am talking about, and call things by their right names."

"I do not think it is called either Mystery or Morality," said Waldemar, drawing from his pocket a pamphlet. "How would you translate that?" he added, pointing to the title-page.

She bent forward and read aloud —

"The Great Sacrifice at Golgatha; or, The Sufferings and Death of Jesus, according to the four Evangelists — with Tableaux from the Old Testament for contemplation and edification —"

Either impelled by impatience or curiosity, the Englishman joined them just as Nora thoughtfully observed, "The name appears unimpeachable; whether or not such sacred subjects can be properly used for the stage, without irreverence or — or — profanation —"

"Pshaw, Nora, don't *you* be squeamish, it was only from my father that I expected opposition — I never thought of your demurring in this way. You look as grave as if we were trying to persuade you to witness a Pagan instead of a Christian mystery."

"Torp," cried Waldemar, turning to his friend, "can you not help us to remove the unnecessary scruples of your countrywoman?"

"No," he answered, gravely, "I can *not*, because I don't think them unnecessary. I feel them myself."

"But you are going to Ammergau all the same!" cried John, with a laugh.

"He is going there to get rid of them," observed Waldemar, with an affectation of gravity; "but Torp is

so strictly evangelical in his ideas, that if he see any thing to displease him he will be sure to leave the theatre in a manner to mark his disapproval."

"A clergyman of course?" said John, turning to Torp.

"No."

"Hum — that's a pity — as you could have spoken to our governor, and —"

"Excuse me —" began Torp, loftily.

"Oh, it's of no consequence," cried John, turning away from him, "you can be of no manner of use to us as you're not a clergyman. Now, Nora, just go to my father and tell him exactly what is necessary for him to know, and no more. If *we* don't approve of all we may see at Ammergau, we can walk off you know, as Mr. Torp here intends to do."

Still Nora hesitated. "If," she said, musingly, "if it were one of those miracle plays taken from the Old Testament, or a legend, my uncertainty how to act would be at an end; but to see our Saviour represented on a stage —"

"Stay," cried Waldemar, eagerly, "on that subject you have really nothing to fear. You have most probably seen pictures both good and bad representing him in every important event of his life, and especially his crucifixion. As you have seen him in the best pictures, so you will see him represented by the wood-carver, Pflunger, in Ammergau, whose appearance and acting, if one can use the word for such dignified tranquillity, is — perfect. But, even if it were not so, the supposition that every thing holy must in the representation equal the ideal formed of it, or be profaned, is an error. How impossible would it be to satisfy the expectations

of such differently constituted minds as must be found in every mixed crowd of people, or to produce the ideal of such various degrees of cultivation! Fortunately, however, it is not necessary; the imagination, naturally more excited by dramatic representation than by any other means, easily and unconsciously supplies what may be wanting, and satisfaction is the result. I have heard," he added, more quietly, "I have heard a competent judge say, that the performance at Ammergau reminded him strongly and incessantly of the best paintings of the middle ages."

"Come, Nora, after hearing all this, you can have no more scruples I should think! if you have I must say it was very improper your spending so many hours looking at those old pictures in the Pinakothek, at Munich."

Nora seemed not to hear, but she followed him slowly into the house.

"So you have advised them to go to Ammergau," observed Torp, with some displeasure, as soon as he perceived they were out of hearing.

"Of course — I could scarcely do otherwise when my advice was asked."

"Hem! but whe shall get rid of them there it is to be hoped!"

"Hope no such thing, for by a singular chance they are going to the same place that we are."

"You are not serious, I hope," said Torp.

"I am," rejoined Waldemar, laughing; "they are going to Almenau, and, in fact, have as good a right to go there as we have."

"Then let me tell you, Waldemar, that you and I must part company."

"Nonsense, Torp! you are not serious."

"Perfectly so, I assure you, for I can scarcely imagine any thing more disagreeable than the intrusion of an English family on our privacy. When I accepted your offer of a few weeks' sporting in the mountains, rather enjoying the idea of the deprivations and hardships you told me to expect, I never for a moment doubted that we should be free from every kind of restraint, and now the very first thing you do is to collect an English colony about us! just the sort of people, too, most likely to worry us with attentions directly they find out that you are not a tinker, or I a journeyman tailor!"

"My dear Torp, it is not my fault that these people are going to Almenau! The young fellow told me something about a monument that they were going to erect in the churchyard there."

"Pshaw! you did not understand him rightly. If they have a monument to erect, they must be on their way to Meran, or some such place where our people generally die. Confess, you advised them to stop at Almenau on their way, quite forgetting that the inn there is small, and that they will of course require all the best rooms."

"No," said Waldemar, quickly, "and the last annoyance I can spare you by sending an express to the landlady to-morrow, so you may depend upon having the best of everything that is to be had in her house."

"But conceive what a bore it will be having these women meeting us at every turn!" exclaimed Torp, with increasing irritation.

"None whatever," replied Waldemar. "In such places women lay aside some of their formality, and one becomes better acquainted in a week than elsewhere in a

year! Their presence makes one overlook a thousand little discomforts, and they give an interest to the most trifling events. You must be greatly changed during the last few years, Torp, if you have any dislike to women's society; and I have a strong idea that if that eark-eyed girl were a German, you would make no sort of objection to her company."

"Perhaps not," said Torp; "but I can tell you I have a very decided objection to becoming acquainted with that intrusive, talkative, vulgar coxcomb, with whom *you* seemed to be on such astonishingly good terms just now."

"I did not observe any of these qualities," replied Waldemar, "and merely supposed him a happy young fellow, fresh from one of your Universities. I can make more allowance for high spirits than you, being afflicted with them myself occasionally, and excuse me for observing, that Englishmen are sometimes much more agreeable companions before they have put on the pompous dignity of their riper years! There was a time, Torp, when you would have resigned yourself willingly enough to the society of two such pretty women, and would have sought rather than avoided opportunities of meeting them. I have no doubt I shall be able to persuade that black-eyed houri to meet us occasionally on an alp after a day's hunting, and shall feel transported into the seventh heaven, the first time she prepares me a schmarn, or a cup of coffee!"

"The English houris are not so useful or complaisant as the German," observed Torp, half laughing; "you will have to wait long for your coffee, I suspect, especially if she and her relations continue to suppose

you a poor, wandering artist, as they evidently do at present."

"Let them think so, I shall get the coffee all the same."

"You may get a cup of tea per — haps — but —"

"No — coffee — and made by that adorable girl called Nora — and brought to me by her, and she shall sit by me while I drink it!"

"Will you bet?" asked Torp, amused.

"Willingly. I shall require a week, perhaps a fortnight after we have reached Almenau."

"Agreed. A month — two months if you like, and a hundred to one."

"Done."

"Done."

Meantime Mr. Nixon's objections to the mystery, as it was explained to him at some length by Nora, proved, as she had expected, insurmountable. "He would accompany her, of course, to Ammergau, and remain there as long as she pleased — he should not attempt to offer her advice — hoped that Georgina would remain at the inn with him, though John, having had the advantage of a classical education, must, he supposed, be allowed to judge for himself."

The discussion had taken place at one of the windows of the large sitting-room in the priest's house, where they, at first, expected to be alone, but soon found themselves, in consequence of the unusually crowded state of the inn, in the midst of a very mixed company collected in expectation of supper. Nora had much difficulty in consoling Mr. Nixon for the want of his tea, which had been forgotten; and even after he had commenced what he called his second dinner, he continued to wonder at

the want of civilization evident on a Bavarian "alp," where tea was an unknown luxury! His son pretended sympathy, all the while bestowing sundry knowing winks and grimaces on Nora and Waldemar, the latter having contrived to procure a place close to them. Mr. Torp was at the other end of the long table, and John observed, with some astonishment, that he was engaged in a lively conversation with a German lady and her daughter, and seemed to have altogether laid aside his taciturnity. As they rose from table, the weather was discussed, and anxious inquiries about it made.

"Is the weather of such very great importance?" asked Nora.

"Undoubtedly," replied Waldemar, "for the theatre in Ammergau is in the open air; if you will go with me to what is called the Belvedere, on the top of the house, we can take a look at the clouds and see what our chances are."

"Georgina, will you go?" asked Nora.

"No, thank you, I am tired, and prefer my bed to any Belvedere on earth."

"Jack," said Nora, looking round, but seeing him engaged in listening and trying to understand what was being read aloud from the "Strangers' Book," she stood with Waldemar watching the group of people who had gathered round the reader as, lazily leaning over the large, soiled volume he sometimes read, sometimes made remarks, which were not unfrequently received with peals of laughter.

"Is that 'Strangers' Book' so very amusing?" asked Nora.

"It depends upon the reader," answered Waldemar. "A dull person would, perhaps, discover but little sub-

ject for laughter, but a lively mind finds amusement in the characteristic remarks and odd effusions with which it abounds, as the bee finds honey in the flower over which the stupid fly hovers in vain."

"He has looked towards us two or three times," she observed, "perhaps you know him?"

"By name and reputation, very well," he answered. "He is a Doctor X—, very clever, very witty, and one of the most popular men of his profession in Vienna."

"A doctor! he does not look at all like one."

"Indeed! Have doctors in England any particular appearance?"

"Oh, no, of course not, but — a — one could not — at least I could not imagine that man soberly feeling pulses and writing prescriptions."

"I dare say not," rejoined Waldemar, amused, "nor has he, during his life, done either the one or the other. He is *Doctor Juris* not *Doctor Medicinæ*, and has studied law not medicine."

At this moment some one touched Nora's arm, and, on looking round, she perceived Georgina, who, drawing her aside, whispered,

"Nora, dear, forgive me, but as I am older than you, and have been so much more *out*, you must allow me to tell you that you are acting against all *usage du monde*, talking in this way to a stranger, a person who has not been introduced to you — of whose name you are ignorant —"

"Who could introduce him here?" asked Nora, laughing. "He told Jack that his name was Waldemar, gave us very good advice about our journey, and —"

"I knew," cried Georgina, interrupting her, "I felt quite sure, that as soon as your brother Harry left us,

John would bring you into all sorts of embarrassments. It is quite provoking to see him talking to all these people as if they were his best friends! What must they think of us?"

"They are not thinking of us at all," answered Nora. "It is quite a common thing in these sort of out-of-the-way places for people to speak to each other without waiting for introductions; for instance, one of those priests inquired, without the slightest hesitation, if we were going to Ammergau, and if we had rooms there?"

"And you, of course, told him all our plans?"

"Of course, and he and his companions informed me that they had bespoken their rooms three months ago, and that we had but a small chance of finding a place to lay our heads."

"If that be the case, would it not be better to change our route? I assure you, Nora, nothing is so destructive to the health and appearance as want of rest."

Nora laughed. "I only mentioned this to you," she said, "in order to prove the advantage of speaking occasionally to strangers when one is travelling as we are now. These most polite priests have advised us to apply to a M. Zwink, a wood carver, and the person who is manager and director of the theatre at Ammergau, and should *he* not be able to arrange everything to our satisfaction, I am to inquire of him for Pater Ignaz. Now you see this Pater Ignaz is one of those who spoke to me without an introduction, and who, having received a civil answer from me, may perhaps be very useful to us in the sort of place to which we are going."

"And in what way do you intend to make use of the

young artist with the fiery eyes?" demanded Georgina, ironically.

"As ambulating guide book," replied Nora, demurely. "I find him even more amusing than Murray!"

"I suspect he will not be satisfied with that arrangement," said Georgina. "He seems to me to expect to be considered as a — gentleman."

"Well," said Nora, "and that he undoubtedly is."

"But," persisted Georgina, "it is even more than that — in fact he appears to imagine himself quite equal, if not superior to us; his manner to John just now was more that of a person conferring a favour than one on whom a favour was being conferred."

"But I don't exactly see in what way we *are* conferring a favour."

"You don't choose to understand me, Nora, and are annoyed at what I said just now about introductions."

"Not in the least, I assure you," she answered, moving aside to allow some people to pass her. A young and pretty girl looked back and smiled, while her mother politely addressing Georgina in French, asked her if she would accompany them to the Belvedere, to see what chance there was of fine weather for the next day.

With a look of affected astonishment at being addressed by a stranger, Georgina drew herself up, and coldly declined the proffered civility.

"I should like to go very much," said Nora, perceiving that her cousin John was just then too much engaged to be at her service.

"Oh, pray come," cried the younger stranger, eagerly. "I know you are a foreigner, but my governess was an Englishwoman, and I can explain everything to you in your own language."

Nora moved on while Waldemar looked away, and seemed to have no inclination to accompany them, although she had observed, that, on entering the room, he had appeared well acquainted with both her companions, and had introduced his friend Torp to them.

Mr. Nixon was sitting near the door in a lamentable state of bewilderment. "Oh, Nora," he cried, despondingly, "these doings don't answer for a man at my time of life! whether it's the second dinner, or the jabbering about me which I don't understand, I can't exactly say, but I never felt so oddish in all my life. My tea, if I had had it, would have set me all to rights, I am sure. What that cooreer, that French fellow, Adong, was thinking about when he forgot it, I'm sure I can't tell, for I don't understand a word the mustachioed rascal says to me! If Jack had got an English cooreer, as I asked him, this would never have happened, and I don't and won't believe a word about his not being able to find an Englishman! I only wish we had given the tea in charge to Tomkins, or even Mrs. Nesbitt — I'll answer for it — it would not have been forgotten! Why they will be just as much inconvenienced as I am, and what we are to have for breakfast to-morrow, *I* don't know!"

"Coffee," answered Nora, consolingly; "and pray don't make yourself unhappy about Tomkins, who can take care of himself, or Nesbitt, who will be taken care of by Adam;" then bending down, she whispered, "Don't you think it would be a good plan if you went to bed now?"

"Perhaps it would; but as there is a doctor in the room, I think I'll just ask if I ought not to take something."

Nora did not wait to hear his answer; and no sooner

was he joined by his daughter than he approached Dr. X—, and having bowed in a pleasant, condescending manner, drew a chair to the table, and sat down beside him. Imagining he wished to see the "Strangers' Book," the doctor politely moved it towards him. Mr. Nixon shook his head mournfully.

"Can I in any way be of use to you?" asked the doctor, in French, vainly endeavouring to suppress a smile.

Again Mr. Nixon shook his head, sighing out the words — "English, English."

"My father can only speak English," explained Georgina.

"Ah!" said the doctor, leaning on his elbow, and pausing for a moment, before he added, "Well, I can speak English. Do you wish me to interpret for you?"

"Sir!" cried Mr. Nixon, with that feeling of relief which only those who have heard unknown tongues spoken around them for some weeks *can* experience on again unexpectedly hearing their own — "Sir, I am delighted to make your acquaintance!" and with a good-humoured laugh he continued, "When I saw you reading these books full of names to the company, I desired my son to find out who you were; and he has just now informed me that you are the celebrated Dr. X—! I know, sir, that men of your profession do not like to be asked for advice when they are travelling for their amusement; but, as they say, 'Necessity has no laws,' and 'Needs must when the devil drives.'"

The doctor turned to an acquaintance at the other side of him, and muttered between his teeth, "Mad, or not mad? — that is the question."

"Now the fact is, doctor," continued Mr. Nixon, "I

have always been a remarkably healthy man, and though, when our travelling-carriage was being built, I consented to the portable medicine-chest, it was with the firm belief that none of the patent medicines would ever find their way down my throat. Now, my daughter, Miss Nixon, is quite different — she likes medicine, and takes her pill every night regular."

"Is it possible?" asked the doctor, slowly, and looking with unfeigned astonishment at Georgina, whose face became crimson: "is it possible you like eating pills?"

"Papa is only jesting," she answered, in a voice tremulous from vexation.

"Not a bit of it, Georgy. I assure you, doctor, no apothecary could manage the little scales, or weigh and measure with greater nicety than my daughter; she can make up pills, and —"

"Good night, papa," said Georgina, in that distinct, quick manner, which is so very demonstrative of female displeasure.

"Stay, Georgy, stay; I have only a few words to say to the doctor, and then we can go together."

She sat down at a little distance, slightly contracting her brows, and biting her under lip, while her father continued, in a low, confidential tone — "You must know, doctor, that late hours never did, and never will, agree with me. I like living at the West End, and being in good society, amazingly; but only those who have been brought up to it, like my son and daughter, can find riding in the park, and dining at eight o'clock, and going to evening swarries, quite easy and natural. I moved too late in life, and can't get used to it, especially the late hours; so that I often wish myself back again in — in — the street we used to live in, as my

daughter says. We knew many pleasant, sociable people there, who dined at rational hours, and better and more plentifully than at more fashionable places. *My* father used to dine at five o'clock; by degrees, to please Mrs. Nixon, *we* got on to six o'clock; my daughter has brought us on to seven or eight; and I suppose my grandchildren will dine at nine or ten, as I have done to-day! But it has disagreed with me, doctor — disagreed in the most uncomfortable manner. Perhaps the walk up the alp may have increased my appetite — I *may* have eaten more than usual: the fish and the omelettes were good, the beer excellent, but the wine was sourish; all Rhine wine *is* sourish. Give me the curious old sherry, ever so many years in bottle, or even cape, good and clever, such as we used to drink when alone in — in the street we used to live in. Now, doctor, you see, the late — the second dinner and the wine having disagreed with me, I should be very much obliged to you if you would tell me what I ought to take before I go to bed."

"Punch," said the doctor, who had listened to him with undeviating attention.

"What?" cried Mr. Nixon, opening his eyes as wide as the lids would permit.

"Punch," repeated the doctor, nodding his head.

"Hush!" cried Mr. Nixon, with a wink and a gesture of his thumb towards his daughter, to whom he then turned, and affectionately observed, "I say, Georgy, dear, I'm keeping you up a great deal too long; you had better not wait for me any longer;" adding, in a whisper, "Uncommon clever man, this doctor; he thinks I ought to take something before I go to bed, and is just going to prescribe for me."

Glad to be released, Georgina immediately left the

room; and Mr. Nixon, drawing still closer to the table and the doctor, observed, "My daughter does not like punch."

To this observation no answer was made. The doctor did not seem to think it of any importance whether or not Miss Nixon liked punch; and Mr. Nixon continued, as it were in explanation, "She may, for all I know, in point of fact, like the taste of punch, and it may be only the vulgarity of the thing that she so specially abhors —"

"Vulgarity!" repeated the doctor; "I never heard that punch was vulgar."

"Why, sir," cried Mr. Nixon, "my daughter says it is so shocking vulgar, that since we left the — street we used to live in, and come to Eaton-place, I have never been allowed to see anything of the kind at my table! I can conscientiously say that I have not tasted punch for nine, or perhaps ten, years; but if you recommend it, I shall have no sort of objection to try a tumbler — medicinally, you know, medicinally. I say, just order the materials, will you?"

"I know nothing about the materials," said the doctor; "but I can order the punch if you wish it." He made a sign, while speaking, to a girl who was in waiting; and before Mr. Nixon could express half the satisfaction he felt on hearing that punch was not considered vulgar in Germany, the waitress returned, carrying a covered glass in one hand, and a plate, on which was a large slice of cake, in the other.

"Hey? ha! what's that? Must I eat that with it?" asked Mr. Nixon, hastily.

"Not if you do not choose," answered the doctor, with a smile, quite unconscious that he was being con-

sulted as a physician, and thinking his companion singularly simple for a person who looked so intelligent.

Mr. Nixon accordingly made a negative motion with his hand towards the cake, uttering some of the "grunting gutturals," which he seemed to consider so like German that they might pass for the language, and then took the glass, remarking that "It was very small, and did not deserve the name of tumbler."

Just as he had pronounced the punch excellent, and deposited his glass on the table, he caught his son's eye fixed on him from the other end of the room. He pushed the punch towards the doctor, who, however, slightly bowing, refused what he supposed was an English token of conviviality, while he observed, "I prefer beer or wine — it is a matter of taste, you know, or habit."

"Hem!" coughed Mr. Nixon, again pushing the glass towards him, "but you see my son is looking this way just now, and —"

"And he thinks punch vulgar, too, perhaps," said the doctor, amused.

"Why, as to that, he must, indeed, we must all, in such things, do as my daughter chooses, for she knows the world and how people live in it, and has for many years had the complete management of my establishment."

"Hallo, governor, what have you got there?" cried John, leaning across the table.

"Why, Jack, the doctor here recommended me, after my late dinner, to try a glass of punch."

"Where's Georgy?"

"Gone to bed."

John drew the glass towards him, and seemed to like the contents so well that his father laughed, and

desired him to use his German in order to procure a fresh supply. Several of the guests followed his example, and almost all began to smoke — Now tobacco was an abomination to Gilbert Nixon.

* * * *

In the mean time, Nora and her companions, accompanied by a chamber-maid with a candle, ascended the long steep flight of stairs which led to the roof of the house. There, however, even before they reached the door that opened on the small enclosed space called the Bel-vedere, the wind, which was blowing strongly, extinguished their light. Yet still they groped on, stepped out on the roof, and even while making some jesting remarks on the inappropriateness of the name, just then their eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and they began to perceive the widely extending horizon, marked out by vivid flashes of lightning that, playing noiselessly along the dark sky, rendered at intervals the outline of the mountains visible, and shewed the distant thunder-storm that was raging among them.

"It looks better than I expected," observed the elder lady. "The thunder-clouds are driving towards Tyrol, and the moon will soon be visible to *us* at least! After all it may be fine to-morrow."

"It *will* be fine to-morrow and for some weeks afterwards," said Nora, gaily; "I have bespoken fine weather, as we are going to a pretty mountain village where M. Waldemar has promised to shew us some beautiful views from the alps in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, Count Waldemar is of your party then? I understood he was on a hunting-excursion with that Englishman, that friend of his whose acquaintance he made at Vienna so many years ago."

"He is not of our party," said Nora, quickly; "we met him here accidentally to-day; he told us his name was Waldemar, gave us advice about our route, and —"

"And invited you to visit him at his castle in the Valley of the Inn," said the elder lady, laughing, "it would be just like him."

"No," answered Nora, "the fact is, we saw him sketching when we arrived here, and without further consideration concluded he must be an artist, and his friend, Mr. Torp —"

"Torp," repeated the lady; "that was not he name he said, was it Sophie?"

"No, mamma, he said Lord Medvey, but he afterwards called him Torp, once or twice; and the name sounded so oddly that I asked him about it, and he told me that the family name of the Medveys was —"

"Thorpe," said Nora.

"Exactly, but as Count Waldemar never could learn to pronounce the 'th' — he called him Torp. He said he had become acquainted with him when his name was Torp, and could not now learn to call him anything else without a great deal of trouble."

The lady and her daughter talked on, and Nora heard the murmuring of voices, but the words conveyed no sense to her mind, so completely had she been surprised by what she had heard. Could it be true that chance had brought her into the immediate neighbourhood of the only person in the world she wished to avoid? Was it indeed certain that he was going to Almenau, where they must necessarily often meet? Would he claim acquaintance when he heard her name? What would be his manner towards her uncle, Georgina, and John? Could she, in fact, receive him with even

a semblance of cordiality after her last conversation with her brother? She had not time to answer any of these questions before her companions proposed going down stairs again. At the door of her room they stopped, and as they wished her good night hoped she would not be too much fatigued to get up the next morning to see the sun rise.

"Oh Nesbitt, I am so sorry I forgot to tell you to go to bed," said Nora, when she saw Georgina's maid waiting in her room and vainly endeavouring to suppress her yawns; "just put my things in order for to-morrow morning, and then yon can sleep until Miss Nixon wants you."

"Yes, ma'am, thank you. Miss Nixon does not wish to be wakened for the sunrise, ma'am."

"Nor you either," said Nora, laughing.

"Why, ma'am, Monsieur Adong says that a sunset is much finer."

"Of course what Adam says must be right!"

"Yes, ma'am — only in one thing he is wrong, very wrong — he always calls master, Lord Nixon, ma'am, since Sir 'Arry left us — he says it makes people think more of us."

"But, Nesbitt, you ought to explain to him —"

"So I have, ma'am, but he says he has been so accustomed to travel with noblemen, that he cannot do otherwise. It's all very well with the hignorant Germans, who don't know the difference, but when English people hear him, I am so ashamed I don't know where to look."

"There is an Englishman here now — a Mr. Torp —" began Nora, quickly.

"Yes, ma'am, and as ill-luck would have it, he and

a young gentleman with a face and beard just such as one sees in the pictures of the galleries, ma'am, passed the kitchen when I was getting candles for this room. The young gentleman turned back suddenly, and asked Mr. Adong the name of the fambly he was cooreer to? "My Lor Nixone," says he, "from London," says he, and immediately the other gentleman, who had walked on very high and mighty, stopped and laughed a little, and said something of the creation, which I did not quite hear, and of a pleasant addition to the peerage, and then he too turned back and said London was a large place, and might contain a great many Nixons; that he knew something about one of that name, and wished to be informed where Mr. Adong's present employer lived in London. And no sooner, ma'am, did he hear of Eaton-place, than he became more inquisitive a great deal than the other gentleman, and asked if you were all of one fambly, and especially if you and Miss Nixon were *sisters;* and Mr. Adong, knowing no better, said, 'yes,' ma'am, that you were 'all one fambly, tray distinguey;' and then they walked away, laughing, and I had the greatest mind to run after them and explain that you, ma'am —"

"I am very glad you did not," said Nora, quickly, "and you will oblige me very much by never entering into any explanation whatever. I am quite satisfied to pass for a daughter of my uncle's, in fact, I prefer it just at present."

Mrs. Nesbitt seemed for a moment surprised, remained a short time silent, and then observed, "I suppose, ma'am, you think it better for us while in this wild part of the country to remain incog."

"Exactly," said Nora, laughing; "it is quite unnecessary that these strangers should be informed of my

relationship to my uncle; nor can it in any way interest Monsieur Adam either, so for the present let us leave him in ignorance also. In short, Nesbitt," she added, with unusual emphasis and seriousness, "the less you speak of me and my affairs for the next six weeks, the better pleased I shall be."

These words made the impression intended, for Mrs. Nesbitt greatly desired to enter Nora's service; and she actually was scrupulously silent during the time required.

The Peissenberg is not a place for tranquil slumbers on a moonlight night, and but a few hours had elapsed before bright moonbeams in her chamber, and on her bed, wakened Nora so completely, that she looked at her watch, rose, slowly dressed herself, and having from her window seen several dark figures already moving about before the house, she descended quietly and passed through a small gate that opened to the east. The daylight, which began to pervade the horizon, was so faint and the wind so high, that she returned to the front of the buildings, and had scarcely reached the parapet wall when John sprang towards her.

"Good morning, Nora; I knew you would be one of the first up! Did you hear the row in the house about midnight?"

"No, I slept too soundly."

"The governor was ill — got up a regular scene — thought he was dying!"

"Oh, Jack, if these sort of excursions disagree with him, let us give them up at once."

"Nonsense, dear girl, it wasn't the walk up here, nor the late dinner either, though he still tries to think so — it was — but don't peach — don't tell Georgy — it was the rum-punch he drank; and even that would

not have upset him, perhaps, if he had not sat sipping it in a room full of tobacco-smoke. It was too much for me at last; for though I like my own cigar, I don't choose, as that quiet fellow, Torp, said, to inhale the —"

"Never mind what he said," cried Nora, "but tell me about my uncle."

"Well, either the punch or the smoke, or perhaps both together, disagreed with him — he really *was* ill for half an hour or so, and then he sent for the doctor."

"How fortunate there happened to be one in the house!" exclaimed Nora.

"So we thought, and sent for him at once; but he refused so obstinately to get up, that I went to him myself and explained, as well as I could do so in German, my father's situation, and the duties of a man of his profession. I did not know, at first, that he understood English, and supposed my German, spoken in a hurry, was not so intelligible as usual; he listened to me, however, civilly enough, said something about being very sorry, drew up the monstrous down bed with which people half smother themselves in this country, and composed himself to sleep in my very presence!"

"How very unfeeling!" cried Nora, indignantly.

"Wait until you hear the end," continued John, laughing; "my father, alarmed as you know he always is when anything is the matter with him, got out of his bed, and in order not to catch cold, took the bright red-wadded quilt from his bed and threw it over his dressing-gown. Now don't try to look grave, Nora; his appearance *was* comical, and when, accompanied by Tomkins, we commenced a regular pilgrimage to the

doctor, I could not keep my countenance. Some people in our vicinity had been wakened, doors were ajar, and I heard whispering and tittering in all directions. The tassel of my father's monstrous white night-cap —"

"I really could laugh," said Nora, "if it were not for anxiety about my uncle."

"Oh, laugh as much as you like," cried John; "I laughed too, and amused myself making bows to all the half-opened doors as I passed. Now that I know the true state of the case, I cannot conceive why the doctor did not get up and lock his door when I left him. I should have done so in his place; however, it proves satisfactorily that the Germans are a phlegmatic nation. The door was still unlocked, and in the few minutes I had been absent he had actually contrived to fall asleep again!"

"And you were obliged to waken him?" interposed Nora.

"Of course. And after staring at us all for a few seconds, rather savagely, he began to mutter the most extraordinary words I ever heard. I did not understand them, but I can imagine their import, and it struck me at the time that the German language was very powerful for the expression of rage. The governor sat down by him, and mildly began a detailed account of his sufferings; but the doctor interrupted him by an impatient and fruitless endeavour to make him understand that though a doctor he was no doctor."

"Ah," said Nora, "that was the man who was reading the 'Strangers' Book' this evening; I made the same mistake myself."

"Yes, and if he had only used the word physician, perhaps the governor would have understood him — but

I am not sure — these things are out of his line, you know; so they kept shouting at each other, doctor or no doctor, until at length, finding English, German, and French insufficient, he explained, with a couple of Latin words, that he was a lawyer, and not a physician. I understood him, of course, and with some difficulty made my father comprehend the state of the case; but no sooner did a light break upon him, than he thought it necessary, as an apology for having got up such a row, to commence a history of his neglected education, and how *his* father had considered a classical education unnecessary, and how often he had intended to learn Greek and Latin, but had never had time for it! The old story, you know; if Georgy had been there he would not have been so communicative, I suspect —"

Here they both became conscious that Torp was within hearing distance of them, and John added quickly, "In short, all was at last satisfactorily explained, and we left the doctor in peace — but even then he did not bolt his door — curious people these Germans!"

At that moment Waldemar advanced towards them, and while he leaned against the wall, and was still eagerly speaking to Nora, the wind caught his light straw hat, balanced it a moment high above his head, and then blew it down the steep green hill. John laughed loudly. Waldemar smiled good-humouredly, looked after it for a moment, and perceiving that it was already out of sight, continued speaking as if nothing had occurred to interrupt him. "I scarcely, in fact, know which I prefer," he said, looking round him, "a sunrise from a quite dark night, or this protracted struggle between moonlight and breaking day! But we

must go to the other side of the church, Mees Nixe, if we intend to see the sun rise in all its glory."

"I wonder," cried John, leaning over the wall, "I wonder how far down the hill your hat is at this moment!"

"If you feel the slightest curiosity on the subject," said Waldemar, "I advise you to gratify it."

John jumped over the wall, and directly he was out of sight, Torp joined Nora and Waldemar. Several groups of people from the neighbouring inn were assembled, all eyes turned to the east. Nora's acquaintances of the previous evening moved towards her, and Waldemar seemed for a moment inclined to retire; but when he perceived that both ladies turned to Torp and began to speak English, he remained standing with his arms folded, his eyes sweeping eagerly over the plain before him, while he began again to speak to Nora, as if in continuation of what he had before said. "Moonlight is more adapted for confined landscapes than for a view like this: there it can produce strong shadow and make insignificant objects appear grand; here it serves but to create confusion; the eye labours in vain to find a distinct outline or place of repose — just light enough to make us painfully aware of the imperfection of the noblest sense that we possess! — I believe I give the preference to that gradual transition from night to morning, which I witnessed the last time I was on this spot at this hour. Impenetrable darkness changed by degrees into grey twilight — the first glimmer of light caught by the mountain tops and shewing their outline in dark masses, — then the boundaries of forest and long dark-coloured lakes became visible — last of all the towns, villages, churches. Do not look again at that pale fading

moon," he added, turning once more with Nora towards the east, and fixing his eyes on the spot where, bright and glowing, the sun's disk began to appear above the horizon.

With the others they gazed undazzled on the magnificent fiery orb as long as his rays "shot parallel to the earth," and were tempered by its misty atmosphere. Soon, however, the deep red colour changed to the pale hue of intense heat and light — the admiring eyes were averted and tongues were loosed and — talked of breakfast.

Nora took advantage of the general movement leisurely to examine Mr. Torp. The moment was favourable for him: he was listening to the broken English of her acquaintances of the previous evening; and though none of that suavity of manner which men frequently feel or feign when speaking to women with whom they are but slightly acquainted was perceptible in his person or features, there was an unaffected cordial smile on his lips, and a mirthful glance in his eyes, that made her unwillingly acknowledge to herself that he was handsomer than she had expected to find him. The scrutiny, however, was short, for with that inexplicable feeling of consciousness from which even the most near-sighted are seldom quite free when closely watched, Torp soon became aware that eyes were fixed on him, and turned to meet them. Indifferent and haughty was the glance he bestowed on Nora, but the look that met his, though a mere flashing of the eye, instantly arrested his attention — there was recognition in it, and few are ignorant of the change which that produces in the human eye. Did it remind him of somebody he had seen before? When? where? Pshaw! Often as he had heard of the Nixon

family, he certainly never had seen one of them! The eyes were handsome, very — very handsome, and he rather wished she would look at him again — it would greatly assist his memory. For this purpose he followed her into the house and to the sitting-room; but in vain. Nora would not look at him any more, and seemed altogether occupied with John, who, after a fruitless chase of Waldemar's straw hat, had ordered his breakfast, and now assured her he had had an excellent view of the sunrise from the window opposite him. They then lowered their voices, spoke for a few minutes, and finally left the room together, John to induce his father to get up, Nora to bribe Georgina to exertion, by a proposal to stop at Sultzbad, at the foot of the hill, until they had all had warm baths.

By the time they were ready to commence their descent, not a trace of the numerous travellers of the previous evening was to be seon.

CHAPTER XVII.

Peasant Artists.

The road from the Peissenberg to Ober-Ammergau, though not uninteresting, presents little worthy of notice until, after having passed Murnau, the mountains appear gradually to close around it; soon after the summit of the Wetterstein rises majestically in the background, and the steep ascent of the Ettal mountain commences. It was here that the carriages, carts, omnibuses, and crowds of pedestrians assumed the appearance of a procession to a pilgrimage, and here that the justness of some of Nora's remarks on her uncle's heavy and

unwieldy travelling carriage first became manifest; for had not the neighbouring peasants been prepared to supply additional horses they would have been obliged to have either procured a lighter vehicle or have pursued their way on foot. The church and former monastery of Ettal, an immense pile of building, became visible at the top of the mountain, and there they once more found themselves in a valley, above the green hills on each side of which rocky peaks again presented themselves.

A short drive then brought them to the village of Ober-Ammergau, where with much noise and pretension the Nixons' carriage drew up before the door of the inn, and the courier sprang to the ground. Nora, quite prepared for the intelligence that they could not get rooms there, had descended, and was beginning to make inquiries about Herr Zwink and Pater Ignaz, when their acquaintance of the previous evening, Waldemar, advanced towards her, and with the assurance that the inhabitants of the village were quite willing to inconvenience themselves in any way to afford travellers shelter for the night, added that, if they did not mind being separated, he doubted not being able to provide for them some way or other. Nora and John accompanied him in his search, and before long Mr. Nixon and his son were put in possession of a small room, Georgina was given one still more diminutive, and immediately under the roof, but in the same house; while Nora, accompanied by the half-wondering, half-discontented Mrs. Nesbitt, proceeded to a neighbouring peasant's cottage, where, Waldemar observed carelessly, he and his friend Torp had been so fortunate as to get lodgings for the night.

As is usual in the Bavarian Highlands, the houses

composing the village were detached, each in its orchard, and generally furnished with a little garden in front. Most picturesque and sanctified they looked, with their low overhanging roofs, ornamented gables, and walls covered with frescos, the subjects of which were all from holy writ, while the Ettal Madonna, conspicuously placed, seemed framed at it were in flourishes and ornaments of the most elaborate description.

The interiors of these houses are as similar as their exteriors: there is the long narrow passage leading through the house to the offices, the steep staircase and kitchen in the distance, the doors right and left on entering, one of which invariably conducts into the sitting-room of the family, with its large green stove surrounded by wooden benches that, as fixtures, are continued along the walls of the room, the windows almost covered by luxuriant exotics, and the massive table of well scoured maple-wood in the corner where the cross light of a front and side window falls upon it.

The inhabitants of Ammergau are scarcely peasants in the common acceptation of the word: the ground and country about them is not favourable for the growth of corn, they occupy themselves but little with field labour, and neglect the usual resource of other Alpine districts — the breeding of cattle. As manufacturers of toys and carvers of wood they at first appear to have improved their condition, and attained a higher position in the world; but though, in an intellectual point of view, this may be the case, in material well-being they are far behind the other peasants of the mountainous parts of Bavaria. The chief profits fall into the hands of foreign agents and the possessors of ware-houses; yet so artistically inclined are these people, and so experienced

are they in the carving of wood, that they prefer it to all other occupation. The very children from earliest infancy make rude attempts, and assist in colouring and varnishing the ordinary toys that serve as playthings to little beings of their own age, whose chief pleasure and occupation seem to be the speedy destruction of them.

At the door of one of these houses Waldemar stopped, apparently surprised at finding the benches outside occupied by a row of people who rose as he approached. They proved to be acquaintances, for he extended his hand to an athletic old man in a hunter's dress, made some inquiries about his family, and nodding familiarly to the others before entering the house, he passed Nora in order to open the door of the sitting-room of the proprietor. She heard a hasty discussion about rooms — regret that he had not explained his wishes before the arrival of the Forstward from Almenau, and a proposal to lodge the daughter of the latter elsewhere.

"No, no, no," cried Waldemar, returning to the passage and requesting Nora to follow him up the stairs.

"Miss Nixe," he said, throwing open the door of a small low room, "this apartment is quite at your service, and I believe I must advise you to take possession of it without delay, as it has already happened more than once this summer that travellers have been obliged to pass the night in their carriages."

"But," said Nora, glancing towards a portmanteau and some already unpacked toilet requisites, "but this is your room, and I cannot think of depriving you of it until you have secured another."

"Torp must share his with me," answered Waldemar,

opening the door of the adjoining apartment, and beginning to shove his portmanteau into it with his foot.

Nora motioned to Nesbitt to assist, and perhaps might herself have aided had not the voice of Torp announced his presence.

"Hollo! what are you at now, Waldemar?" he said good-humouredly. "Have you repented giving me the best room and come to dislodge me?"

"Not exactly," answered Waldemar, "I only want you to share it with me, as I have resigned mine to —" here he lowered his voice and spoke rapidly in German, "to your fair countrywoman, the naiad, the nymph, the black-eyed Nixie!"

"Better than the old alderman or his son," said Torp, drily; "but you must refrain from smoking, Waldemar, if you do not mean to cancel the whole obligation, for English nymphs eschew the smell of tobacco, and I am much mistaken if that door will effectually prevent the entrance of the fumes of your cigars, or the most subdued tones of our melodious voices. Singing is out of the question to-night, Waldemar, neither hunting-song nor —"

"Hush, Torp! she's there and may hear what you say," cried Waldemar.

She had in fact more than heard; she had caught a glimpse of his figure, stretched at full length on a row of chairs, so placed as to represent a sofa, while with arms folded, and head thrown back, his eyes followed his friend's energetic movements with an expression of lazy amusement.

The arrangements were soon completed; and then Waldemar stepped up close to Torp, laid his hand on his shoulder, and whispered, "You're a better fellow

than I thought you, Charley. I half expected you to be dissatisfied, as, on our way here to-day, you seemed so strangely averse to any interchange of civilities with your countrymen, or the slightest acquaintance with the family of Nix."

"I shall make no attempt to interfere with your civilities in future," said Torp, quietly; "the more so, as I flatter myself that I can keep these people at a distance, and avoid an acquaintance which I confess *would* be disagreeable, and might be embarrassing to me."

"*Con*-found your arrogance!" exclaimed Waldemar impatiently, turning away.

In the meantime, Nesbitt had been looking round the small apartment rather disconsolately. She could find nothing to interest her in the coloured prints that decorated the white-washed walls — the painted bedstead, with bright yellow arabesques on the head and foot-board, and the letters I.H.S. above the pillows — or the large wardrobe before which Nora stood, apparently lost in contemplation of the Madonna and Saviour that were painted on the upper panels, and the gaudy flower-vases that decorated the lower.

"I shall send your courier to you for orders," said Waldemar, re-entering the room, "and I hope you may be able to make yourself tolerably comfortable for one night."

"I really do not know how to thank you for resigning your room in this generous manner," began Nora.

"Pray do not attempt it, or even think of it," said Waldemar, smiling, as he took up his hat and the little drawing book that lay on the window-stool.

"I suppose, ma'am," said Nesbitt, after he had left

them, "I suppose he has gone about a room for me now, ma'am?"

"Suppose no such thing," said Nora; "but consider yourself fortunate in getting from me this great feather-bed and a pillow on the floor!"

"Lor, ma'am, you don't mean that you will sleep on the palliasse?"

"Many will have to sleep on straw or hay to-night, Mrs. Nesbitt," answered Nora: "do you think the thousands of people now in this village are likely to find beds?"

"P'raps not, ma'am, but peasants —"

"Peasants," said Nora, "are here accustomed to rooms and beds such as we now see. Every one must be satisfied with what they can get to-night, Nesbitt; and you had better now return to Miss Nixon, and make yourself useful, while I find out the people of the house and get acquainted with them."

She found the peasant's wife in the kitchen, preparing supper for her numerous expected and unexpected guests and was received by her with the warmest expressions of hospitality, and many regrets that her room was not what such a young lady was accustomed to.

Nora assured her she considered herself very fortunate in being so well provided for; she had not expected it when she had seen the crowds on the road.

The peasant laughed, and observed that all the garrets, lofts, and even barns would be filled with people throughout the whole neighbourhood; and how many would arrive in the morning it would be hard to say! She only hoped there would be places enough in the theatre, for, large as it was, it had already happened that some thousands had to be refused admittance,

and the play performed over again for them the day after!

She said all this with such evident pride and satisfaction, that Nora continued the conversation, and soon discovered that there was no inconvenience to which the villagers would not submit cheerfully, in order to accommodate strangers who came to see their "play," considering them guests whose presence would serve to increase the brilliancy and reputation of the great performance.

Here it may be observed, that no advantage whatever is taken on such occasions by the inhabitants of Ammergau to obtain profit of any kind; they barely allow themselves to be remunerated for actual outlay in the purchase of provisions, giving their houses and time willingly to all who require their assistance.

While Nora still lingered in the kitchen, two young girls entered it, followed by the children of the house, joyously shouting "The miller's Madeleine, and the forester's Rosel, from Almenau!"

This meant that they were the daughters of the miller and forester of that place, and therefore the greeting of the peasant's wife was listened to attentively by Nora.

It was hearty in the extreme, — she shook their hands, laughed, patted their shoulders, and then turned the miller's remarkably pretty daughter round and round, declaring she did so to ascertain if she had grown taller since the morning.

The girl blushed and said, if she were not taller she was certainly happier.

"And when is the wedding?"

"About Michaelmas. I wish Rosel's father would

let her marry the Crags peasant's Seppel at the same time."

Rosel did not blush at all as she seconded this wish, adding that "there was little chance, as her father could not forget nor forgive Seppel's having joined the other peasant lads in the year forty-eight, and taken advantage of the short time he was at home on leave to shoot the best herd of chamois in the whole district; "he said then," she continued, "and says now, that he will never give any one belonging to him to a — a — wild hunter!"

"Ah, bah!" cried the peasant's wife; "there was scarcely a lad in the village of Almenau, or anywhere else in the Highlands, that did not do the same in forty-eight, and no one thought the worse of them for doing what was allowed by law."

"That's true," said Rosel, "and I've often told him so; for, saving Seppel's brother Anderl, and the miller's man, black Seppel, they were all out more or less."

"No doubt of it, Rosel — and here too, and everywhere in the land. But now that Crags Seppel has served his six years as cuirassier, and got a discharge that any man might be proud of, your father should overlook his having used his rifle too freely in former times, and let by-gones be by-gones."

"If it had not been for that unlucky chamois last year, perhaps he might," rejoined Rosel, "I mean the one that came over the mountain from Tyrol, and that father had watched and preserved for Count Waldemar. Game was so scarce just then, and mostly up high among the rocks. As ill-luck would have it, Seppel —"

"No, but he didn't, though!" exclaimed the woman, evidently amazed at this instance of temerity.

"I was going to tell you," continued Rosel, "that Seppel just then had to see after the cattle on his father's Alp, and unluckily took it into his head to go on to the fisherman's at the Kerbstein lake, passing over the very ground that my father cannot hear named without vowing vengeance on all wild hunters. Well, and so he and the count hunted afterwards for two days and a night together without getting a shot, and went over the mountains into Tyrol, but never saw or heard more of the chamois."

The peasant's wife seemed to consider this conclusive, and went on with her cooking.

"It appears to me," said Nora, "that they condemned this Seppel on very slight evidence. Might not another have been the offender? Was no one else absent from the village at the same time?"

"No one but Seppel would have dared to do it," observed the peasant's wife, without looking up.

"Though he may be suspected, he ought not to be condemned without stronger proof," continued Nora.

"So I always say," observed Rosel in reply; "but my father declares that that buck was so old and wary, that no one in the village but Seppel could have followed and hunted him down. And you see," she continued — and Nora fancied she detected a sort of suppressed exultation in the voice of the bright-eyed girl — "you see Seppel never hunts anything but chamois, and when he finds them high up on the rocks, he thinks it no crime to take a shot, and — and — he never misses, never!"

"That's true," chimed in the miller's daughter. "Every one says Seppel ought to be made an underkeeper, or wood-ranger, or something of that sort, and

then the forester would like him as much as he now dislikes him."

"His being an under-keeper would not be much gain for Rosel," said the peasant's wife; "he might as well be a cuirassier for all the chance of marriage he would have. I would rather hear that his old father was going to resign house and land at the Crags to him, and that —"

Here a loud tapping at the window was heard, which made them all start and look round.

"Bless me!" exclaimed the peasant's wife, "if there isn't Seppel himself, on his way from Munich, and in his handsome uniform, to astonish us all! We greet you a thousand times," she added, springing to the window and throwing it open, while hands were extended, and then eagerly protruded through the iron bars; one of these he retained, giving it an occasional jerk, while he explained that a letter having informed him he should meet friends if he went to Ammergau, he had not required long to make up his mind to see them and the great play at the same time. All he now wanted was to find somebody who would give him shelter for the night.

"Shelter and a bundle of hay you can have, Sepp," laughed the peasant's wife; "I had nothing better to give my own sister's son, Florian, when he was here last week."

"I suspect I can sleep better on hay than Florian," said Seppel. "He came to see the great play, of course?"

"Yes, and brought his mother with him. It was long since we sisters had been together, but we knew we should see little more of each other when she married into Almenau, and we should hear nothing either if

Florian had not taken after our family, and been, as I may say, born an artist. He alone keeps up the relationship now, by coming here so often for one thing or another. Last week he ordered some ornaments to be carved for St. Hubert's Chapel in the wood. He's been given the renovation of the altars there, and he says it will be a troublesome job, as the new parts must be made exactly to match the rest, which is very curious, and ever so many hundred years old. If you should go to Almenau, miss," she added, turning to Nora, "you ought to make a pilgrimage to St. Hubert's."

"I shall certainly do so," answered Nora, "and if you have any message to your nephew Florian, I can be the bearer of it, as I intend to remain some time at Almenau."

"He lives at the end of the village with his mother, who has the shop there," said the peasant's wife, evidently pleased at Nora's willingness to visit her relations. "Any one can show you Meister Florian's studio, for he is quite an artist, and has been at the academy in Munich."

During the last few minutes some hurried whisperings had been going on at the window, which Nora did not consider it necessary to interrupt, or even appear to observe, so she walked out of the kitchen, and turned into the dwelling-room, where she found the peasant himself, finishing a most elaborate piece of carving — a goblet with figures in high relief and gothic ornaments. He stopped working for a moment, to raise a small Greek cap that covered his bald head, pointed to a seat, and perceiving that she did not intend to interrupt him, continued his occupation, first nodding to a man who

was sitting opposite to him, and then murmuring something about wishing to hear the end of the affair.

The person addressed was the elderly man to whom Waldemar had spoken before entering the house. His dress and manner, joined to his bearded sunburnt face, made Nora suppose him a forester or woodranger, and she was soon not only confirmed in this idea, but also convinced that he was to be the future father-in-law of the miller's daughter Madeleine.

"The end is soon told," he continued, playing with some carving tools that lay temptingly near his hands. "You may easily suppose that I expected a right good match for my son Franz, after having sent him to the foresters' academy, and secured him a chance of being before long set far above myself, for I have not the learning required for a forst-meister now-a-days. Well, back comes Franz to me as assistant forester, by way of a beginning, and gets one of our best rooms, and writes and studies, and is treated with that respect by my old woman, that you would suppose he had taken orders and was priest of the parish at least; all that was wanting was that she should say 'sir' to him. His sister Rosel made much of him too, and it was her friendship with the mountain miller's family, added to the nearness of the houses and long acquaintance, that brought about the match. Now you see, money there must be on one side or the other. My son has education and good prospects, and the mountain miller's daughter will inherit the mill and a good fortune besides. Franz always had a fancy for Madeleine, but I did not choose to hear of it when he was last at home, for it was well known that the miller's affairs were in a ruinous condition, and so they continued until his mill was burnt down a few

years ago. I dare say you heard when it happened, for there was a good deal of talk about it at the time."

"I remember," said the wood-carver, looking up for a moment, "I remember hearing that it was supposed the miller himself —"

"The miller had gone to his brother in Munich when the fire took place," said the forester, interrupting him hastily, "I ought to know all about it, living so near you know! He came home the day after, and was in a state of distraction, such as I never saw — his brother had promised to help him out of his difficulties, and advance him money for better works, and a new water-course, so that he hoped to have begun a new life, as he said, over and over again. It was an awful sight to see him sitting moaning among the blackened ruins of the old mill as if quite out of his mind, and indeed he has never been the same man since. We did all we could to console him, took his daughter to live with us until the house was rebuilt, and —"

"People here," observed the wood-carver, once more looking up, "people here said the insurance was high — far beyond the value of the mill."

"Well it *was* high," replied the forester, "and so much the better for him, he required less assistance from his brother, rebuilt both house and mill, and since that time the world has prospered with him in every respect."

"If," said the wood-carver, putting down his work, "if he were not encumbered with that righthand man of his — black Seppel, the Tyrolean!"

"I have advised him more than once to get rid of black Seppel," said the forester, "but he says he can't do without him, and the truth is Seppel certainly does

understand not only the management of the mill, but the ground about it, far better than the miller himself."

The peasant artist began to arrange his carving tools in a cupboard, Nora requested him to allow her to examine the goblet on which he had been working, and while she was doing so, he turned to the forester and said, "No doubt Seppel is a clever fellow, but they say he manages the miller as well as the mill, and through him both wife and daughter."

"I suppose Florian has told you all this," said the forester, "perhaps he also mentioned that the miller's brother, the locksmith in Munich, died not long ago, and has left him everything he possessed."

"Of course he told me that, and talked so much of Madeleine, that I suspected he had thoughts of becoming one of her suitors himself."

"Ah! poor Florian — little chance for him when my Franz was in the way! It was all settled between me and the miller this morning, and there is to be a betrothal when we get home."

"And what will black Seppel say?" persisted the wood-carver.

"What business is it of his?" asked the forester.

"Why, many suppose he had an eye on Madeleine himself, and he comes of respectable people you know — the son of a miller in Tyrol they say!"

"Yet he must be ill off at home," observed the forester, "or he would not remain so long in service. Men obliged to serve cannot think of marriage."

"Florian says that Seppel remains at the mill on account of Madeleine," rejoined the wood-carver, "and that he watches her better than either her father or mother. Last year at the church festival, when she

only danced once round the room with Florian, up he came and reminded her quite sternly that she was not yet eighteen years of age, consequently a Sunday-school scholar, and not allowed to dance in public! and then he walked her off home threatening a reprimand from the priest."

"I think my Franz will put an end to his interference in future," observed the forester, "and you'll come to the wedding, won't you?"

"I believe," answered the wood-carver, "my wife will be with her sister in Almenau about that time, and we can't well leave home together, not to mention the orders for work that I have lately received."

At this moment John entered the room, and hastily informed Nora that they were waiting dinner for her at the inn. Waldemar was with him, and advanced to look at the goblet still in her hands.

"I should like to purchase this," she said, turning to the wood-carver, "that is," she added, perceiving he hesitated, "that is, provided it be not already bespoken."

"Not just that," he answered, "but —— we are expected to send these things to the warehouse, where you can have the choice of all the carving in Ammergau."

"Am I to understand that you are not at liberty to sell me this?" said Nora.

"At liberty! oh yes, of course -- but I don't like to lose, or run a chance of losing, my certain sale at the warehouse for the small advantage of disposing of one or two articles privately."

"Are you well paid for work of this kind?" she asked.

"Well, I suppose so — it is slow gain at best, and

I sometimes think that out-door labour though harder is healthier, and brings more surely abundance into one's house. Had I turned out a mere toy-maker, I might have given it up, perhaps, but having arrived at carving in this style," he added, looking approvingly at his goblet, "and made a name for myself as an artist, nothing would induce me to turn my hand to any other kind of work now!"

"So the hope of fame asserts its rights even in this cottage," observed Nora in English, half to herself, half to John, who stood beside her, a perfect personification of impatience.

"Come, Norry, let's go to dinner," he answered, "I never was so hungry in all my life, and Georgy says she's quite exhausted."

As Nora followed him out of the room, Waldemar joined her, and said, "You smiled at our peasant artist's ambition, Mees Nixe, without knowing the full extent of his aspirations. He dares to hope that his goblet may be deemed worthy of a place at your Great Exhibition in London next year."

"Where it will undoubtedly be much admired," replied Nora, "but I fear the name of the artist seldom asked, and soon forgotten."

"Perhaps so," rejoined Waldemar; "but it would be cruel to enlighten him on this subject."

"You need not fear my doing so," said Nora; "I shall soon forget his innocent ambition, but not so easily his remark, that out-of-door labour was not alone more healthy, but even more profitable than wood carving, though of the very finest description."

"And he was right, Mees Nixe; the peasants here and in Grödner Valley in Tyrol are almost altogether

manufacturers, and manufacturing districts are never so healthy and seldom so wealthy in the best sense of the word, as agricultural."

"Many people," said Nora, "suppose that no other peasants but the Swiss and Tyroleans are wood carvers, and most English travellers have very obscure notions of the boundaries between the Highlands of Bavaria and Tyrol."

"And in fact," said Waldemar, "the scenery is so similar, that if it were not for the Custom Houses, and the black and yellow painted bars and posts, a stranger could scarcely discover that he was in another land. You, however, who have evidently been long in Germany, must be aware of the great difference in the inhabitants."

"Of course I am," answered Nora; "the Tyroleans are a much handsomer, much poorer, and much more melancholy people than the Bavarians."

"Poor and melancholy," repeated Waldemar; "it is time for me to tell you that I am a Tyrolean from the Valley of the Inn."

"Then you must be aware of the truth of my observation," continued Nora; "for though the inhabitants of your valley, from being on the high road to Innsbruck, may be better off than those of other parts of Tyrol, the contrast on entering Bavaria is too striking to be overseen by any but very unobservant travellers. I do not require to see your Custom House, or painted boards, to know where I am! The first little inn on the roadside with its room full of shouting, laughing, and singing peasants, would tell me that I had passed the frontiers, and entered the merry Highlands of Bavaria."

"They do shout and sing a good deal about here," said Waldemar.

"And they do *not* sing much in Tyrol," rejoined Nora, "excepting in the Ziller valley, known to us English people as the birthplace of the Reiner family, who made themselves rich by singing their Alpine songs all over Europe."

"I am surprised to find that the habits and manners of the peasants can interest you so much," observed Waldemar.

"On the present occasion in an unusual degree," she answered. "I — that is, we — we are about to erect a monument in the churchyard at Almenau to the memory of a near relation who died there, and I have undertaken to find out a family worthy to be entrusted with the care of this grave."

"Ah, I understand. You intend to deposit a sum of money the interest of which will be paid to the family for that purpose."

"Some such idea has occupied my mind lately," said Nora, as they stopped at the door of the inn; "so you may imagine that the inhabitants of Almenau interest me at present in no common degree."

She did not wait to hear his answer, for perceiving Torp approaching, she entered the inn, and soon afterwards found herself seated at the end of a long table beside her uncle and cousins in a room crowded with the most extraordinary mixture of all ranks of people.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Remnant of the Middle Ages.

As the evening drew to a close, the melodious bells of the village church pealed long and loudly. The arrivals of strangers became still more frequent, carriage followed carriage, until the street was almost blocked up, and the unwieldy omnibuses scarcely found place to discharge their muffled contents. Mr. Nixon and his family had dined, and those around him supped, on precisely the same succession of viands at the crowded table d'hôte of the inn, when the report of cannon and the sound of distant music caused fresh, and, if possible, increased commotion in the room.

Some hurried to the windows, others rushed to the door, among the latter John, followed more leisurely by Nora. They reached the street in time to witness some violent efforts that were made to remove the various vehicles from their places, so as to open a passage for the procession of the Ammergau musicians, who were marching from one end of the long village to the other playing slow and solemn music intended to remind the assembled multitude that the vigil of the great holiday had commenced. They played well, and created much sensation as they passed by, drawing all the inhabitants of the village to their doors or windows, and most strangers fairly into the street.

John and Nora were soon separated, and the latter, finding herself in the neighbourhood of the forester's daughter, joined her, and partly to avoid the vicinity of some cattle returning late from pasture, partly to make inquiries about Almenau, she sauntered with her beyond the houses of the village, until she unexpectedly found

herself at the one where she was to sleep that night; she might have passed it too without notice had not the peasant who was seated before the door raised his little cap as she approached, and his wife smiled recognition. Nora's companion pointed to the miller and his wife, who, with the forester, were seated at the other side of the door, the robust frame and face of the latter forming a strong contrast to the emaciated figure and pallid features of the former. The eyes of all were following the steps of the newly betrothed pair, who having perhaps left them to join the musicians, now lingered on the road together, unconscious alike of these looks of pride and affection, and the arch smiles and jocose nudges and winks passing among the homeward-bound peasants who hurried along the road.

There was something about the young assistant forester that immediately prepossessed Nora in his favour. The strongly built muscular figure accorded well with the dark complexioned and profusely bearded face, while both contributed to render conspicuous the mild, almost pensive expression of his clear hazel eyes. He was dressed in a loose grey shooting jacket, green waistcoat, and shorts of black chamois leather; his knees were bare, and he wore grey worsted leggings with fanciful green clocks, that reached but did not cover the ankles, while his feet rested, uncovered by socks, in heavy nailed shoes, seemingly formed to defy all weather and roads: his shirt was scarcely held together by the light black kerchief that served as cravat, and left exposed a large portion of a broad brown chest shining like polished wood. His green felt hat, with its tuft of black-cock feathers, was in the hands of Madeleine, and he smiled while watching her decorating it still more with a gay

bouquet of wild flowers. Rosel introduced him to Nora by proudly exclaiming, "This is my brother Franz!" and had his dress led to the expectation of a peasant's greeting, Nora was immediately reminded that education had made him a gentleman. Nothing could be more easy and unembarrassed than his manner, and Rosel's bright intelligent eyes watched eagerly the impression he was making on the English lady, who seemed to speak to him quite as if he were Count Waldemar himself!

Nora had while speaking moved towards the house, and then sat with the peasants and their guests until they retired to the sitting-room, when having been joined by Mrs. Nesbitt, and received a tall slim candle, she mounted the steep staircase conducting to her room, and went to bed.

The weather was sultry — Nora's room over the kitchen, where the peasant's wife, "on hospitable thoughts intent," had cooked the live-long day. The pillows and plumeau, well-aired on sunny balcony, rose like mountains on each side of her: they seemed to glow, and though want of rest on the previous night made her painfully sleepy, the heat at length became so intolerable that she sprang from her bed, and threw wide open the little lattice window, actually gasping for breath as she leaned out of it. The sound of voices in the orchard beneath made her shrink back again, but the moon had not yet risen, and the night was still so dark that she need not have bound up so carefully her long hair, dishevelled by the recent tossings on downy pillows, or drawn her dressing-gown so very closely round her, as she once more approached the source of fresh air. A slight odour of tobacco was wafted towards her with the words,

"Well, I don't deny that she is pretty and interesting, and that her figure is slight and graceful, but you must allow me to doubt her being so very youthful as you seem to suppose."

"I don't care what her age may be," answered a voice that Nora knew to be Waldemar's, "she's very charming, and I shall take advantage of the first convenient opportunity to tell her that I think so."

"Better not," replied Torp; "for although I have been too seldom in England, during the last ten years, to know much about the pecuniary affairs of these people, I can, at least, tell you that a lot of sons being in the family will prevent this new object of your adoration from having a sufficiently large fortune to induce your father to overlook her want of pedigree. I happened once by a singular chance to have an interest in ascertaining that the lineage of these Nixons loses itself mysteriously in the obscurity of that part of the city of London where fogs are thickest, and days are shortest."

"What matter!" cried Waldemar, laughing, "that need not prevent me from admiring her to any reasonable extent. I was not so serious as you supposed, notwithstanding my somewhat strong expression of commendation just now, and merely meditate lending her my heart for a week or two while we are at Almenau, nothing more, I assure you."

"I wish," said Torp, "you would be rational, and do what would be infinitely pleasanter for me than being thrown among these people, and that is, go at once from hence to the Valley of the Inn; your father expects us at Herrenburg, and when these English people have left Almenau there will still be time enough for

us to have a few weeks' sport before the end of the season."

"Very likely," answered Waldemar, "but by that time Irene Schaumberg will be with us, and I shall not be able to leave home."

"What! Do you expect the widowed countess with daughter and dogs from the banks of the Danube?"

"Yes. She comes ostensibly to be present at my brother Carl's marriage, which takes place some time next month; he has been engaged these three years to Lotta Falkner of St. Benedict's."

Nora, who had withdrawn from the window unwilling to overhear this conversation, found that unless she closed the casement every word distinctly reached her ear in the profound silence of the night. That they had been speaking of her she more than suspected, but she thought not of them or herself either just then, so completely had her interest been absorbed by the name of Irene Schaumberg and the few words following. Back, back, back she went to her earliest recollections, and the ground-floor of a large house in Vienna was her home. In the *bel étage* Count Schaumberg lived, and he had sons — rude boys of whom she was much afraid; they ran after her when she played in the court, chased her up and down the stairs, and one day fairly carried her struggling into their father's apartments, where, pushing her towards a springing little girl of her own age, they exclaimed — "There, Irene, there she is for you; don't let her go, or she'll be off again like an arrow." But when Irene had whispered, "Oh, come and play with me, mamma says we may!" she had gone willingly enough to the drawing-room, and from that time forward they had become constant companions.

Irene's parents had probably found the little English girl a desirable playmate for their daughter, and were kind and attentive to her in consequence, while Mr. Nixon and his wife had encouraged an intimacy that procured them much pleasant society. Though often, at a later period, separated for long intervals, the regard of the young girls had suffered no diminution, and about a year before Nora had left Germany she had spent some time with the Schaumbergs, and, as a parting service, had officiated as bridesmaid when Irene had married her cousin, the chief of another branch of their family. A correspondence of the most unreserved description had, in the course of time, slowly worn itself out. The brilliant and fashionable inmate of one of the gayest houses in Vienna could have but little in common with the solitary girl whose days were passed in reading, and the contemplation of the dingy vegetation of Russell Square. It gave Nora, however, sincere pleasure to hear that she should soon be so near the person who had supplied the place of sister to her, but her wish to remain unknown to Torp as long as possible, made her resolve to defer her inquiries about her friend for some time. While these thoughts passed through her mind, she closed the window in a manner to attract attention, and so effectually that, on opening it again soon afterwards, the speakers had left the orchard, and on the road near the house she thought she perceived two figures sauntering slowly towards the banks of the Ammer.

The drums of the Ammergau musicians proclaimed the break of day. At a very early hour the next morning they beat a réveille through the whole village, which, with the sound of church bells entering Nora's

room through the still open casement, wakened her and her companion most effectually, and about the time she had completed her toilet the band commenced playing in a manner to draw her irresistibly towards the window. As she stretched out her head in eager attention, two other heads from neighbouring windows were protruded also, for the same purpose no doubt, but while one determinately looked away, the other turned towards her to wish a cheerful "good morning," and to hope she had slept well.

"Thank you — quite well. Is the representation about to begin?"

"Not yet. But you ought to see the church and hear high mass: every one in the village who can sing will assist, and the performers in the drama consider it a duty to begin the day with Divine service."

At this moment the peasant's wife appeared at the door and told Nora that she would find her breakfast and her brother in the room below.

Waldemar heard, and smilingly observed that brothers were not often so punctual, and he had rather begun to hope she would have required him as cicerone.

Early as it still was when John and Nora had breakfasted, they found the village streets crowded to excess, and hundreds of people already on their way to the theatre to secure places. John persuaded Nora to go there also, assuring her that from day-break the arrival of spectators had been incessant, and that no theatre could possibly contain them all.

Perhaps he was right — at all events figures in Oriental dresses and draperies began to flit about the village; groups of children assembled before the houses to have their costumes inspected; but the report of a

cannon from the precincts of the theatre made all turn in that direction; and in the midst of a rather motley multitude, Nora and John found their way to the large enclosure formed by wooden planks, and alone remarkable from its enormous circumference.

A short flight of steps brought them into one of the boxes that were erected behind, and a little above the space that descended amphitheatrically to the orchestra, which contained seats for six thousand persons. The stage was of sufficient extent to suit this theatre, and the great drama about to be performed on it. There was a proscenium of considerable depth, and beyond it a closed theatre of smaller dimensions, for the representation of interior scenes, and tableaux from the Old Testament: and this theatre within a theatre had at each side a building, with balconies, joined by arches to the side-scenes of the proscenium. Through these arches, two long streets of Jerusalem were constantly visible; and when the middle theatre was closed by its curtain, representing also a street in perspective, the whole formed a view of the city of Jerusalem.

Crowds of people soon began to pour in at all the entrances; and the various costumes of the different parts of Tyrol and Bavaria found numerous representatives, in the brightest and freshest colours. John found time to become an enthusiastic admirer of the black boddices, and fantastic head-dresses, of the women; while some vague ideas entered his mind, of procuring for himself one of those loose jackets and picturesque hats, that seemed to make "the commonest fellows," as he expressed it to Nora, "look something like!" She paid little attention to his remarks, being at first too much occupied with the construction of the stage, and after-

wards with the demeanour of the audience, as they defiled slowly between the benches, and reverentially took their places, as if in a church — even their greetings to each other were subdued; the men exchanged silent nods, the women whispered gravely, while spreading out their text-books, and seemed wholly occupied with the great drama about to be enacted.

It was curious that, on observing all this, Nora's doubts and scruples about the propriety of witnessing the representation returned in full force, and that she turned towards Torp, who, with Waldemar, had taken a place in the adjacent box, to see if he shared her uneasiness. Leaning forward, with an elbow placed on his crossed knees, his chin resting on his hand, he gazed at the landscape beyond the theatre, with a calm earnestness that might perhaps have re-assured a less careful observer; but Nora would just then have preferred seeing him watching the progress of Waldemar's rapid sketch of the classical stage with its proscenium, or interested in the groups of picturesque peasants standing immediately below him.

To Waldemar she would not speak: how could a Tyrolean, accustomed from infancy to see his Saviour represented in every possible way, pictorial and sculptural, understand the fear of profanation with which a living representative inspired her? She herself believed she could, ten years previously, have taken her place among the spectators, with feelings of more curiosity and interest than uneasiness and awe. Familiar then with pictures and images of the crucified Redeemer, not only in churches and chapels, on the high-road, and beside the scarcely trodden woodland path, but in every cottage, in every house, almost in every dwelling-room, while

lithographs of the same mild face might be shaken from among the leaves of most books of prayer, she would have found far less to shock her in the representation that now filled her mind with anxiety and dismay. She recalled to her memory every argument that could tend to reassure her, — it would be but a succession of living pictures, she had heard they were eminently well-arranged, the performers were simple religious peasants, full of enthusiasm, deeply impressed with the necessity of fulfilling a solemn vow,* and with intentions and objects as pure as could be found on earth.

As the echo of the last cannon was lost in the surrounding hills, the overture commenced. Soon after the chorus filled the proscenium, and all Nora's remaining scruples were absorbed in the most intense interest. The stage arrangements possessed all the charms of novelty to her, and, with the assistance of a text-book, she easily followed the leaders of the chorus, as, generally singing, but occasionally reciting, they explained the tableaux represented on the enclosed and smaller stage, or prepared the audience for the next act of the drama, while exhorting them to devotion and repentance.

And this chorus, so fantastically dressed in white tunics, coloured sandals, girdles, and mantles, with crown-like plumed head-dresses, soon became so familiar, as not in the least to detract from the reality given to all else by the bright daylight, the summer sky with

* In the year 1633, when the village was visited by a devastating and contagious disorder, the monks of Ettal induced the parish to make a vow, "That in thankful devotion, and for edifying contemplation, they would, every ten years, publicly represent the Passion of Jesus, the Saviour of the world." Whereupon the parish that had made the vow was immediately freed from the pestilence.

its passing clouds, and the pasture-land, hills and woods, seen beyond the streets and above the houses of Jerusalem.

It would be difficult to describe Nora's feelings as the representative of Jesus appeared on the scene, but so completely did the person and manner of the artist performer satisfy her high wrought expectations, that dissatisfaction or disappointment was certainly not among them. She perceived instantly that what was then before her, would take the place of all the pictures and statues she had ever seen, and remain indelibly impressed on her mind for ever. It was, therefore, this one deeply interesting figure, with the pale face, finely chiselled features, and parted waving hair which has become typical, that she followed with breathless interest and anxiety throughout, and never did the eminence of the character of Christ strike her so forcibly, or the worthlessness of mankind, and the ignoble motives that are the springs of their actions become so glaringly apparent as on this occasion. The monologues of the principal actors, shewing the current of their thoughts without reserve, made each as it were a psychological study, yet so simple and forcible, as to be within the comprehension of the most illiterate among the audience. The sending of Jesus from one tribunal to another, the wish of those who knew his innocence to avoid the responsibility of his martyrdom, yet determination that he should suffer, his being forsaken by every friend at the moment of danger, in short, all that habit enables us to read and hear read almost unmoved, and as a matter of history, was brought before Nora, with a force so perfectly irresistible, that, various and eloquent as had often been the sermons she had heard, excellent and

celebrated as were the pictures she had seen, never had she been moved as on the present occasion. A sceptic might perhaps have followed the representation with criticizing curiosity, a less imaginative mind with calm self-possession, Nora forgot herself, time, place, spectators, everything, and saw, heard, and felt, with a vividness that at length completely overwhelmed her. As the crucifixion was completed a shudder of horror passed through her whole frame, a sensation of extreme cold seemed to chill her blood, and after some ineffectual efforts to control, at least outwardly, her emotion, she bent down her head and covered her face with her hands, remaining motionless, until roused by a whisper from Waldemar. "Mademoiselle," he said, "allow me to advise you to leave the theatre now; another scene might weaken an impression well worth preserving in all its strength."

Nora rose, looked back for a moment, saw the commencement of the removal from the cross, and soon after found herself outside the wooden building with Waldemar and John, both more tranquil than she had yet seen them, as they walked slowly beside her towards the silent and deserted village.

The pause at the end of the first four hours of the performance had been that day unusually short, in consequence of a threatening thunder storm, which, however, had greatly heightened the effect of the latter part of the drama, by the gloom cast on the scene from the darkening clouds and the incessant rolling of distant thunder. A favourable wind seemed now about to waft the storm away from Ammergau, and leave the evening sky clear and cloudless.

Followed by Torp at a distance, which his curiosity to hear what they were saying induced him by degrees

to lessen, Waldemar and Nora reached the cottage, which they had left much about the same time in the morning. The door was open, and Nora entered, turning into the little sitting-room, while Waldemar, instead of following, remained outside, and leaning on the window-sill looked into the room, apparently continuing their conversation when he observed, "So you have no curiosity — no wish — to see Pflunger? Not even when I can assure you that you will not be at all disappointed by a nearer acquaintance with him? His resemblance to the pictures of our Saviour does not lose in the least by close observation, and there is even something in his manner which accords perfectly with all our preconceived ideas. Let me delay my departure for an hour and take you to his house."

"No, thank you," said Nora, quickly, "not for any consideration would I see him in another dress. I intend to forget that he exists otherwise than as he appeared to me this day. Not even ten years hence would I desire to witness this great drama again; he will then most probably have lost in appearance some of his present eminent advantages, and I wish to preserve the impression made on me to-day as pure as may be, and as long as possible."

Waldemar seemed to consider this conclusive; he raised his hat without speaking another word, and followed the evidently impatient Torp, who, having caught a glimpse of John advancing to meet him, had begun to stride towards the village in a more resolute than civil manner.

CHAPTER XIX.

Almenau.

NORA was perfectly sincere in what she had said to Waldemar, for, much as the artist peasants of Ammergau had interested her, she was so unwilling to weaken the impression of what she had just witnessed by a personal acquaintance with any of the actors of the drama, that she used all her influence to induce her uncle to leave the village without delay. Her account of the classical arrangements of the theatre, its immense dimensions, the hundreds of actors and thousands of spectators, joined to a performance that had lasted eight hours without producing a moment's lassitude, made Georgina half regret her absence; but Mr. Nixon continued to condemn, in terms of the strongest censure, what he called "the whole concern;" he would not listen to any explanations, and on reference being made to pictures and statutes declared equally strongly his objections to either in churches, never failing, during their journey of the succeeding days, to express his serious disapprobation of every shrine of the Madonna, or way-side crucifix, that they passed. The wax and wooden images which abounded in the small inns where they stopped to dine or sleep he pronounced an abomination, treating with contempt Nora's quotation from Goethe, that they served perhaps occasionally to recal wide wandering thoughts, and turn them into a higher and better channel.

Travelling for the first time in his life, and strongly imbued with every description of English prejudice, Mr. Nixon found much to surprise, still more to condemn, in all he saw; but Nora perceived, with secret satisfaction, that the scenery was beginning to make an

impression on him that she had scarcely ventured to expect. He first "allowed" that the country itself was "well enough," then he admitted that the woods were very extensive, and the mountains high and picturesque, and ended by acknowledging that the scenery was grand, very grand. "But he had always known that Tyrol abounded in mountains, on the map it was quite black with them."

"This is not Tyrol!" exclaimed Nora, for the hundredth time, "we are in the Bavarian highlands!"

"Well, well," he answered testily, "it's all the same you know to us; but having seen this sort of thing, I'm glad to think that we too have highlands — very. Nora, you're very clever, but you'll not be able to show me anything here that we have not at home — and better."

"Woods and forests for instance!" said Nora, laughing; "however, as my knowledge of England is chiefly derived from books, and yours of Germany from maps, we had better not attempt a discussion."

What resemblance to England there might be in the beautiful country through which they were travelling, Nora knew not, and could therefore make no mental comparison. She gazed with profound admiration at the vast extent of forest that covered long ranges of mountains; for Almenau was essentially a forest district, and the road as it approached the village, formed in the side of a mountain, presented a wall of blasted stone on one hand, while on the other, a wooded precipice descended to a foaming torrent that forced its way boisterously through, and over masses of rock. Innumerable Alpine plants still flowered luxuriantly wherever the dark heath-mould could find a resting-place, and nothing as yet marked the approach towards autumn.

The windings of the road brought various changes; sometimes an opening shewed the rocky-pointed or rugged summits of the mountains, that had appeared far distant but a few hours before, now quite close to them, at others, enclosed in wood, an occasional glade gave an opportunity of admiring the foliage of the beech, birch, and maple, that seemed to have replaced the pine in every sheltered nook. On reaching the top of a long ascent, where on a guide-post the words, "Drag chain, or fine," were printed in large letters beneath a sketch of something greatly resembling a ploughshare, the postilions having descended and commenced a clattering with chains beneath the carriage, totally indifferent to the courier's entreaties, in broken German, that they would not injure the wheels, Nora learned, between their muttering about the monstrous weight and proportions of the carriage, that the journey was drawing to a close, and that the next village was Almenau.

Directly before her lay a valley with a river winding through it, and bounded on each side by wooded mountains, beyond which she saw still higher with summits of stone, and still further distant than these last, others partially covered with snow. A tall pointed church steeple formed the middle of the view, denoting the site of the village, and on reaching that part of the road which partially followed the course of the river, some isolated cottages already formed a sort of suburb to it.

"Well now — aw — really — all this — is very pretty," observed Mr. Nixon.

"Whose place is that?" asked Georgina, with more than usual animation, as she caught a glimpse of a large building close beside a small but picturesque lake, on

the calm waters of which the golden coloured clouds were distinctly reflected.

"It's the brewery," said the postilion, on being questioned, and Nora, as usual, interpreted.

"But there is a church with Gothic windows and a belfry."

"He says it was a monastery in former times," explained Nora.

"I declare I should not at all dislike living there," continued Georgina. "What beautiful trees! and those little promontories running into the lake make it so pretty! I wonder is there a good neighbourhood here!"

"In that case perhaps you would marry the brewer?" suggested John.

Georgina threw back her head, and smiled disdainfully.

"If this place, or anything similar, is to be sold," said Nora, "I shall be tempted to purchase it, and remain here for the rest of my life."

"You are not serious, Nora?" added Mr. Nixon, gravely.

"Perfectly, I assure you," she answered; "but I shall not be in a hurry, for I might perhaps prefer that ruined castle on the hill. You, who understand so perfectly the state of my affairs, will be able to tell me if I can afford to rebuild as well as purchase it."

"I should rather have expected to hear you talk in this way ten years ago," began Mr. Nixon, seriously, "but after having resided so long in England —"

"So long in Russell Square, you mean," said Nora, interrupting him, laughingly; "I know nothing of England — but a great deal about such places as this; and

even if I return to London with you, I am afraid you will never be able to persuade me to remain long there."

"I perceive that you will marry a foreigner, and desert us altogether, Nora."

"Let me assure you that I have no thought of mar riage at present, though a very strong desire to have a home of my own somewhere or other. By that lake for instance, or on that hill, in the valley of the Inn, or — or — anywhere provided I can look at such mountains as these, and feel young again! What wonderful castles in the air I used to build in such places, with my mother, when I was a child! I wish," she added, with a sigh, "I wish she were now alive, and able to join me in the more solid kind of architecture in which I may soon be tempted to indulge."

The road had turned from the river, the valley widened perceptibly, the houses, with their long fancifully painted wooden balconies, and their overhanging shingle-covered roofs secured from the ravages of storm by large stones placed at irregular distances upon them, seemed to draw closer to each other, until they were at length merely separated by their respective orchards, or a clump of old trees; yet so little appearance of what might be called a street was visible, that they were all a good deal surprised when the carriage drew up before a house perfectly similar to the others in form, though on a much larger scale. It was the inn, and presented a large gable with double balconies, to the road; looked very freshly white-washed, very spacious, and very clean; and a very stout landlady with a good-humoured face, and rosy cheeks, advanced towards them, while the ostler in his linen apron, red waistcoat, black velveteen jacket, and tasselled cap, busied himself about the horses

The necessary questions about rooms were asked, and Georgina not a little astonished when informed that she could not have the number she required, and that there was not a single private sitting-room in the whole house! Nora explained in vain that there was a parlour little used by strangers during the day, and that people passed their time chiefly in the open air in summer; and she pointed across the road to a grass garden where, under the shade of luxuriant chestnut and lime trees, tables and benches of every size were arranged, while a long many-windowed wooden building, equally well furnished, had been erected in continuation of an enclosure for the favourite game of skittles.

Georgina shook her head and murmured something about the impossibility of existing without a drawing-room; but she descended from the carriage and followed Nora into the house. At one side of the broad passage where they entered there was the parlour mentioned by Nora, containing tables covered with green oil cloth, glazed cupboards filled with china and silver, a row of pegs for the hanging up of hats on the wall, numerous portraits of the royal family in black frames, and — a guitar. On the other side a wide open door permitted a full view of the capacious peasants' room, where at some of the numerous deal tables about fifteen or twenty men were drinking their evening tankard of beer, and at intervals singing loudly in chorus. Here John remained, while the others ascended the broad staircase, preceded by the landlady jingling a monstrous bunch of keys. She passed by the rooms on the first floor, observing to Nora that they had been engaged some days previously by Count Waldemar Benndorff, and his friend Milor Torp.

These last words Georgina understood, and Torp himself had not been more amused when he heard of Milor Nixon, than she now was. "I think," she said, laughing, "I think, Nora, we must give him strawberry leaves, and call him the Marquis of Carabbas — he really seems to be everywhere."

The landlady, proud of her house and its capacious corridors, could not resist the temptation to show her ball-room and its adjoining apartments to the strangers, and Georgina would willingly have taken one of the latter for a drawing-room, notwithstanding its bare walls and want of proper furniture, had she not been informed that these rooms were required for weddings and other festivities, and that the church consecration fête was to be celebrated in them before long. Nora, who interpreted, added, "I shall resign whatever room I may get to you, to-morrow, Georgina, as I have been offered a lodging at the forester's house, which is close by, and will be a much quieter place than the inn; and now let us lose no more time, for I wish to go to the churchyard before it is dark."

On a well chosen prominent spot in the midst of the village stood the large massively built church, with its high, pointed, green steeple. An ascent of several stone steps, and a wooden gate, led to it and the churchyard, which was enclosed by a low wall, and appeared tolerably full of monuments both in stone and iron. The wish to be remembered, talked of, and thought of after death, seems much stronger in Germany than in England, and manifests itself in the churchyard of the most insignificant hamlets. Not only the innkeeper, smith, miller, and other leading families of the villages, have their burying places furnished with handsome monu-

ments, in or near she walls of the church, but every peasant in the neighbourhood who makes any pretension to being well off, possesses likewise his burying ground, more or less furnished with ornament, and all carefully tended by the survivors. The most common monument is in the form of a cross, frequently of iron, painted, varnished, and gilt; on a plate of copper, in the centre of the cross, one often sees, painted in oil, a miniature full-length portrait of the peasant whose body is moulder-ing beneath the turf; the figure generally kneeling with clasped hands, gazing upwards at a Madonna or an ascending figure of the Saviour. If the village painter be skilful, or chance sends a wandering artist to the neighbourhood who will undertake such work, the whole peasant family appear kneeling side by side — no great demand for striking resemblance in the portraits being made on such occasions, or any artistical arrangement considered necessary. The dead and living take the places assigned them by custom — father and mother generally somewhat apart, their offspring before them placed according to size, like organ pipes, and sometimes as back-ground a rather incongruous pillar and red cur-tain, which latter being draped aside discloses a view of the village with its church and surrounding mountains. English eyes resting on such a picture would scarcely be able to discover that those represented with hands clasping a crucifix, were deceased, the other members of the family alive, at least at the time the picture in question was painted.

The churchyard at Almenau possessed many such pictures; they were not new to Nora, yet she lingered beside them — read the long epitaph of the maiden Marie Maier, rich in virtue and honour — stooped to

decipher the name of the infant represented being borne in swaddling clothes on the arms of a bright winged angel to heaven — and even glanced at the unusually numerous triangles in which an eye of large dimensions was used as an emblem of the Supreme Being, until the eyes, many of which were newly and well painted, seemed to turn and watch her as she at length moved slowly towards the grave she had travelled so far to visit. It was, as had been described to her, somewhat apart from the others, and on a black wooden tablet, a couple of feet above the surface of the ground, and already partially hid by the long rank grass that grew wildly around it, she read the name of Arthur Nixon, and the date of his demise.

Having pulled up by the roots some offensively luxuriant weeds, she held them unconsciously in her hand, while memory brought Arthur before her with all his worldly ambition, his self-made cares and sorrows, disappointments and early death. The end of all a few feet of earth — not more than was accorded to the poorest peasant in Almenau! Yet he had chosen well when he had desired to rest in that peaceful churchyard, for a more lovely spot could scarcely be imagined. Slight as was the elevation, it sufficed to render visible the course of the river, and to give a view into an adjacent valley, the mountains of which formed distances that would have delighted a painter, while through an opening in them the setting sun cast a long bright parting ray of light on the village and its old church, lingering on Arthur's grave, as Nora observed, with a sort of fanciful superstitious pleasure, for some time after shade had fallen on the others.

At length the sun disappeared, but the summits of

the mountains continued to glow in fiery light, changing imperceptibly in colour, and apparently reflecting on their rocky heights the gorgeous hues of the evening sky, where red deepened into crimson, with which the darkening blue of the sky mixed, producing various shades of violet that in their turn were lost in the neutral tint of night. Before this last change Nora had felt the light evening breeze that in fine weather invariably blows from the mountains to the plain, heard the rustling of leaves in the not distant wood, saw groups of labourers returning from their work, and was slowly roused from the meditations suggested by the place in which she stood, and the magnificent scenery around it, by the approach of a noisy party of peasants, who, with some sunburnt merry girls, passed through the churchyard on their way home. The laughter ceased, and the loud voices were hushed when they entered the hallowed place: while some walked gravely on, others dispersed to visit the graves that were the object of their constant pious care. One strongly-built healthy-looking girl drew near the place where Nora stood — on her arm a wreath of fresh ivy, and in her hand a bunch of bright blue cornflowers bound together by the stalk of a still green ear of wheat. For a few seconds she stood with downcast eyes and moving lips beside an iron cross, and then prepared to decorate it. The cornflowers had already found a place in the little receptacle for water, and the wreath of ivy was being raised in both hands when her eyes fell on Nora, and in a moment she guessed that she was the person who was expected to visit the grave of the Englishman. Moved either by Nora's dejected countenance, or a feeling of regret that the stranger's grave should be found in a condition of such obvious neglect, the girl advanced

awkwardly, and after a moment's hesitation shyly placed the ivy wreath so as to form a frame to the space containing Arthur's name and the date of his death.

"Thank you," said Nora, warmly, "I am very much obliged to you, for I have just been regretting that there was no one here to decorate this grave with a few flowers occasionally. It must in future be better cared for than during the year that is past."

"I think it may be something more than a year since he was buried here," said the girl, using her reaping-hook to remove the long grass from the grave. "They say the first thing he did the evening he came to the village was to walk to the churchyard here and admire the view from it; and when he was taken ill next day, and there was no hope of his getting better, he said they must bury him at this side near the wall, and that there was *one* who he knew would come to see his grave and have it taken care of, and that's you, of course."

Nora bent her head. Arthur had evidently attached great importance to the performance of her promise — perhaps he had stood where she was then standing and thought of her. Large tears gathered in her eyes, and, falling on the mound before her, she unconsciously fulfilled his last request as completely as he could have desired.

When she looked up she was alone, but she heard the sound of joyous voices and children's laughter from the nearest houses, mixed with the distant bark of dogs and the tinkling bells of cattle driven out to graze in the woods.

Nora was certainly not a strong-minded woman, for she left the churchyard rejoicing that Arthur's grave was within reach of all these cheerful sounds.

CHAPTER XX.

Saint Benedict's and its Inhabitants.

GEORGINA was made happy the next day by Nora's resignation of her apartment, which was immediately converted into a sitting-room. Its large dimensions and five windows made it appear but scantily furnished when divested of everything but its hard sofa, six chairs, round table, and looking-glass between the windows, placed so high that it nearly touched the ceiling, where it slanted forwards in a manner to render it just possible to obtain a glimpse into it from some distant parts of the room. In vain had Nora pleaded the cause of a massive chest of drawers with brass ornaments, and a glass cupboard filled with all that was most precious in the house of gilt china and silver spoons. Georgina wondered how she could think of having such things in a drawing-room.

"But," suggested Nora, "you could put your books on the drawers, and your worsted-work into them."

"I rather expect," said Georgina, "that our landlady will find me some furniture when she sees the room so completely destitute of every comfort."

Nora shook her head. "You had better ask at once for a few tables and benches from the ball-room," she said, smiling, "for if you will not dine in the garden or the parlour, like other people, this one table, though large, will scarcely answer for working and writing, breakfasting, dining, and —"

"I see, I see," cried Georgina. "Yes, we must have in the deal tables; they will be very ugly, but very convenient; and as we are not likely to have any visitors, it is of little importance of what wood they are made.

I hope *you* have got a comfortable room at the forester's. Had you no difficulty in making your arrangements with the family?"

"None whatever. They have a spare room, and even proposed my breakfasting in the garden, where there is an arbour, or on the balcony. The temptation is strong, it would so remind me of old times."

"Oh, Nora, this will never do! If you do not come here every morning papa will be angry with me, and say it is because I have turned you out of your room."

"I intend to come here every day to luncheon," said Nora, "but in case of rain, it may suit me to remain at the forester's in the morning. Besides, I shall probably sometimes be absent, as I intend to make excursions to all the lakes, waterfalls, and alps in the neighbourhood, and hope to induce you to join me in most of them, though, as you have never lived in a country like this, you can form no idea of the longing that I feel to be again in such places."

No answer was made, for the attention of both, as they leaned together out of the window, was just then attracted by a light carriage, or rather cart, that drove rapidly up to the inn door. There was a sort of cabriolet seat in front, and a peasant driver was perched on its foot-board, his feet hanging in trustful proximity to the hind legs of a horse that seemed to have been taken from the plough or some such agricultural occupation, and forced into the service of a couple of hunters, in whom, notwithstanding their change of costume, it was easy to recognise Torp and Waldemar.

"I wonder who, or rather what, that man is!" exclaimed Georgina, as Torp sprang to the ground, ac-

coutred in English shooting habiliments of unimpeachable correctness.

"I think his companion infinitely more interesting," said Nora; "he is just now one of the most picturesque-looking men I have seen for a long time."

"You mean the artist? Well I confess he does look handsome and even gentlemanlike, though he is dressed completely like a peasant."

"Rather like a forester or hunter," said Nora.

"But," continued Georgina, "I have seen several peasants pass the inn this morning with precisely such grey jackets as his, and you see he has a green hat and naked knees, and nailed shoes, and even a leather belt with letters upon it!"

"The baldric or broad belt was formerly worn as a distinguishing badge by persons of high station," observed Nora, smiling. "Suppose now, he were a prince in disguise —"

"Nonsense, Nora."

"Or a nobleman of high degree," persisted Nora, laughingly; "let me, at all events, advise you not to judge too rashly of the station of men in a dress such as he now wears, while you are in the Bavarian highlands; — it is popular in the mountains here, and I have seen odd mistakes made from too hastily drawn conclusions."

The innkeeper, his wife, a couple of waitresses with black bodices into which silver spoons were thrust as badges of office, and some labourers about to return to their work, now gathered round the carriage, and began to peep, one after the other, underneath a cloth of green baize spread over something that was laid in the cart-like back of the vehicle, and which from its uneven

surface excited their curiosity in no common degree. Waldemar threw aside the cloth and disclosed a large roebuck and a chamois; the graceful head of the latter he raised, and pointing to a scarcely perceptible wound in it, observed, with a commendatory nod to Torp, "Not a bad shot for an Englishman!"

Now Torp was in all probability exceedingly pleased, but Englishmen generally think it dignified to conceal their feelings or moderate the expression of them, so, with the imperturbability of a North-American Indian, he turned away while Waldemar good-humouredly expatiated on the difficulties they had encountered, and the excellence of the shot, to John Nixon and his father, who had left the garden to join them, dwelling especially on the fact that the chamois had been brought down by a rifle, and at a distance of at least a hundred and fifty paces!

Mr. Nixon, to whom this last remark sounded rather ambiguous, inasmuch as he had never in the course of his life had a rifle in his hand, perceived, nevertheless, that surprise and admiration on his part were expected, and therefore murmured some of those ejaculations in which the English language abounds.

"Aw — ah — exactly! Well — really now! Ah — to be sure — aw — capital — hem — famous!"

John wished for further information, but unwilling to be overheard by Torp, moved quite close to Waldemar, and leaning on the back of the cart, pretended to examine the chamois, while he observed in a low voice, "Well, now, I should have thought it was pretty much the same thing, whether rifle or fowling-piece were used."

"By no means," said Waldemar; "there is a great

difference between one shot and another. Surely you would rather hit and kill with a bullet, like a good marksman, than perhaps make an ugly wound or mangle with a discharge of shot, and —"

"Oh I see, I understand," cried John, "I am not a bad shot at a target, or — pigeons, and am sure I should enjoy this deer-stalking amazingly; it must be capital sport in such a country as this, and I wish you would let me go out with you next time!"

Torp's ears were as good as his eyes; before Waldemar could answer, he called out impatiently, "Come, come, Waldemar, let's have something to eat; you seem to forget that you have been complaining of hunger for the last two hours!"

Waldemar turned to the garden, while Torp, stretching himself at full length on one of the wooden benches, added in German, "If you intend to invite that youth to go out with you, let me know in proper time, that I may take my fishing-rod and seek amusement elsewhere, for I strongly suspect he is more likely to shoot one of us than anything else."

These words were spoken so deliberately and distinctly that they were heard by the forester and his son as they approached the inn, and both smiled significantly, while unceremoniously removing the chamois from John Nixon's sight. Nora too had heard, and thought to herself, "Is it worth that man's while being so very ill-natured and rude to us?" and then she called from the window to John, who instantly ran into the house and up stairs to her.

"Did you understand what was said?" she asked, as he took his sister's place beside her at the window.

"Not exactly all the words," he answered; "but it is

very evident that this Mr. Torp is a disobliging, disagreeable fellow, and won't let the other be civil to us. I must now try to make up to the forester and his son, and if they cannot or will not give me a day's sport, I shall borrow a gun from some one here, and go out deerstalking by myself."

"No, Jack, you must not do any such thing," cried Nora, quickly; "that would be turning wild hunter, and you might run a chance of being shot yourself!"

"Oh I don't imagine the danger is so great after all," said John, "and wild hunting sounds uncommonly tempting."

"Call it poachiug, then," said Nora.

"No, I won't — because you see there is a fellow here who will help me if I ask him. He was just outside the village breaking a horse this morning, and rode so well that I asked about him, and heard that he had been six years in a cuirassier regiment, and was now a free man as they call it, to the great vexation of the foresters in the neighbourhood, as he is, or was, a notorious *wild-shoots*."

"You mean Long Seppel from the Crags," said Nora, "but I can tell you he is not likely to attempt anything of that kind now for many reasons, so you had better leave it to me to speak to the forester for you. I have got a room at his house, and can easily find out what he can do for you, and when this Mr. Torp is likely to be out of the way. In the mean time you must take some walks with me, and perhaps my uncle and Georgy may be tempted to join us."

Immediately after their early dinner, or luncheon, as Georgina chose to call it, Adam brought the letters and newspapers that had accumulated for them under the

address "*poste restante*" at the neighbouring town; they afforded occupation for a couple of hours, and it was late in the afternoon before Nora could persuade her uncle to walk to Saint Benedict's, the secularized monastery, with an extensive brewery, the situation of which beside a small lake, and almost completely surrounded by wooded mountains, had so greatly pleased them the day before.

Their way led them along the banks of a clear stream, in which, from time to time, they could see small trout darting backwards and forwards in all directions, which so interested Mr. Nixon and his son that they spent nearly an hour in watching and waiting and poking long sticks under the banks to dislodge the fish hiding, or supposed to be hiding there.

They all stopped on a bridge of planks where a boy of about twelve years old stood fishing, with a rod of such simple structure that John could not repress a loud "Bravo!" as almost immediately after they drew near him he flung a tolerably large trout on the grass.

The young angler was not alone; beside him stood a man in the prime of life, but what his station in the world might be it was at first difficult to guess, as his toilet gave no clue whatever to it. His head was covered by a straw hat of the same materials as those worn by the reapers in the neighbouring fields, nor was it in much better condition than the most of them, being rather dingy and of uncertain form; a black kerchief was very carelessly slung round his throat: he wore one of the loose grey jackets that seemed to be common to all ranks: and his trousers, of the same rather coarse material, were nevertheless carefully turned up above

his nailed shoes to prevent them from being injured by the marshy ground or water into which he occasionally splashed with perfect unconcern. The boy called him Ernst, and danced round him while he disengaged the struggling fish and arranged another bait upon the angle, which consisted merely of a piece of twine fastened to the end of a still green branch of hazel-wood.

Mr. Nixon's knowledge of fish was confined to a market or a dinner-table; of the art of angling he was utterly ignorant, but it seemed to be such child's play in that clear shallow brook that he was suddenly seized with a desire to become a fisherman, and accordingly advanced with an air of grave interest to look on; while John, in execrable German, wondered that anything could be done with such miserable tackle: he supposed fish must be very plenty thereabouts.

"We are not badly off," replied Ernst, in very good French; "the streams have small fry such as this, the river below the village large trout and greylings, and the lake is well stocked with carp, pike, and so forth."

Nora interpreted to her uncle, but no sooner had the stranger heard her speak English than he turned to Mr. Nixon and said, with a smile, "If you are a fisherman you can have much sport here — but Englishman fisherman — fisherman Englishman — is all the same."

"Why — yes — I believe we *are* considered pretty good in that line, but for my own part I have never thought it worth while to fish; the London markets afford such choice and variety that, aw — a man is not likely to think of providing for his table himself, as he might be obliged to do here."

The stranger looked at him with some wonder, and

suggested that the sport was generally the strongest inducement.

"Well perhaps you are right. I can imagine it a pleasant enough sort of pastime in such a place as this, and confess I should like to try my hand at it."

"In that case," said the other, "I may venture to offer you the fishing of this stream and the lake during the time you remain in this neighbourhood."

"You are very kind — very liberal indeed!" said Mr. Nixon.

"Not at all," said Ernst, giving his young companion his rod again, and directing him where to throw it, "not at all, for were you what the English call a 'complete angler,' I should probably not have made the offer. One a year is as much as I can permit here, and there is now at Almenau an Englishman —"

"Mr. Torp?" said John.

"That was not the name — the note, I think, mentioned a Lord somebody."

"Oh they call him Lord Torp at the inn —"

"And is he not a Lord?" asked Ernst, turning round.

"Not he!" answered John, laughing ironically, "not more Lord Torp than I am Lord Nixon. Titles are not so plenty in England as in Germany!"

"I suppose you know him well?" said Ernst, half interrogatively.

"No — not at all — and I don't want to," replied John, with ill-concealed pique.

"Very odd — very odd —," murmured the other. "The English, when they meet in a foreign country, always seem to avoid and dislike each other! Now Monsieur Torp," he added, laughing, "will perhaps say

just the same thing of you when he comes here to-morrow."

"Very likely," replied John. "I don't myself think there is much love lost between us."

"It is not improbable," observed Mr. Nixon, rather pompously, "that this Mr. Torp is a highly respectable person, but we do not know him; he has not moved in our circle in London, and the name is utterly unknown to us; his friend, the young German artist, made altogether a pleasanter impression on us!"

"Do you mean Bendorff?"

"They call him Waldemar," said Mr. Nixon, "my son says he is quite a gentleman."

"I should think he was," replied Ernst, almost laughing.

As he spoke they reached the high road from Almenau to the monastery, and at a short distance perceived, advancing towards them, the two men of whom they had been speaking.

Nora prepared herself to hear Torp presented to their new acquaintance by his true name, and to see the change which she did not for a moment doubt it would produce in the manner and conduct of all her relations, but John hurried forward, saying, "Let us go on and look at the monastery church that the people in the village talk so much about."

"Must we not ask permission to see it?" asked Georgina, speaking for the first time.

"By no means," answered the stranger, stopping to let them pass him, "our churches are always open."

He raised his hat, and then turned to meet Waldemar and Torp.

"Now who may that man be?" soliloquized John, as soon as they were alone.

"The proprietor of the monastery or his son," said Nora.

"That is, you suppose him to be either the brewer himself or the brewer's son and heir?"

"Yes."

"Might he not be the steward or book-keeper?"

"Certainly not," said Georgina, with more than usual decision.

John laughed. "Well, do you know I took him, in the first instance, for something of that kind, and as to Georgy, I am sure his hat and hob-nailed shoes disgusted her at once, to say nothing of the way in which he stood in the water and washed his hands. I have known her call a man vulgar for less."

"And yet," said Georgina, "I suspect I discovered that he was a gentleman before you did."

"Because he spoke French, perhaps? but I can tell you that is a common accomplishment here. However, whatever he may be, he seemed very much inclined to be civil, and I dare say would have shown us all over the place if that Torp had not, as usual, come in our way."

They turned from the lake towards the church, the entrance to which was through one of those carved stone Byzantine portals, with mysterious combinations of human figures and animals, that are supposed to represent the triumph of Christianity over paganism; and having found the door wide open, to admit the warm air from without, they wandered up and down the long aisles, looking at the pictures and monuments, altars and curiously-carved confessionals, until their attention was attracted by a noise in the gallery, and on looking up towards the organ, they perceived Waldemar, Torp,

and their new acquaintance, striding over the musicians' benches until they reached the front row, where, seating themselves, a whispered conversation began, which, from the direction of their eyes, Nora strongly suspected was as much about her relations and herself, as the church of St. Benedict's.

She had been much pleased at the permission to fish given so unrestrictedly to her uncle; had even begun to indulge a hope that John would, in the course of time, be allowed to shoot on the grounds belonging to the monastery; and now she beheld her enemy pouring his English prejudices into the ears of the attentively listening Ernst, and, in all probability, obliterating any agreeable impression that she and her relatives might perchance have made on him a quarter of an hour previously.

This time Nora did Torp injustice; he had not spoken until Ernst had made direct inquiries, giving, as a reason, that he wished to be civil to the travellers, and show them the monastery, but considered it necessary to ascertain that they were people who might be introduced to his mother and sister, who happened just then to be at home.

Torp's answer seemed to amuse more than enlighten, when he observed, that he believed them to be highly respectable people, but, as they did not exactly move in the same circle as his family in England, he had never chanced to see them until a few days ago.

"The fact is, you know nothing about them," said Ernst, laughing; "and I had better reserve the acquaintance for myself, and show them our cells and corridors some other day. If I had considered a moment, I should not have questioned you; for how could you

give me information concerning a family who, I had already ascertained, knew nothing of you — not even your name?"

"They have not yet heard it properly pronounced," replied Torp; "nor is it necessary that they should. I consider it quite a fortunate circumstance that Waldemar has furnished me with so short and insignificant a *nom-de-guerre*, and you will much oblige me by not entering into any explanations on the subject with any one, especially with any member of this English family. I believe I must add that, though personally unacquainted with these Nixons, they are not altogether unknown to me, and you need have no hesitation in presenting them to either your mother or sister."

"But," said Ernst, hesitatingly, "a day can make no great difference; and my people are going to-morrow to spend a week or two with the Bendorffs, at Herrenburg in the Valley of the Inn. Waldemar has perhaps told you that his brother Carl has long been engaged to my sister, and their marriago is to take place next month. Carl and I have served many years in the same regiment; we always applied for leave of absence at the same time; he preferred spending his with us, instead of going home, and, as a matter of course, fell in love with my sister. Their engagement has caused great intimacy between our family and the Bendorffs; and if it had not been for Waldemar's arrival, I should have left St. Benedict's to-morrow with the others. I mention this to convince you that I really do remain here on his account and yours, and therefore wish you would both take up your quarters with me as I proposed."

"Thank you," said Torp, "I should have accepted your offer, were I not likely to be here for several

weeks; and before I leave Almenau your house will be so full of wedding guests that you would scarcely know where to put me."

"We have plenty of cells," answered Ernst, laughing; "and the only person we expect who requires more than a reasonable quantity of room, is the Countess Schaumberg; she generally travels with so many servants, and horses, and dogs, that she overwhelms quiet people such as we are. To do her justice, however, she puts aside some of her grandeur when with us, and can be very charming when she chooses to please, as you know perhaps better than I do, for no friend of Waldemar's could avoid intimacy with the Schaumbergs."

"Yet it was through them that I became acquainted with *him*," said Torp, smiling; "their house was one of the pleasantest in Vienna, and Waldemar almost lived with them!"

"That was natural enough," rejoined Ernst, "as he and Schaumberg had been educated together, and were like brothers. Waldemar is now guardian to the Countess's daughter; and I suppose it is in consequence of that, and his intimacy with her, that, directly after she became a widow, people said he was engaged to be married to her. At all events, I know he likes her, and the sooner she comes here the better pleased he will be."

"I don't know that," said Torp, looking towards Waldemar, and smiling, as he observed him leaning eagerly forward, forgetful of their presence, and wholly occupied with the persons moving about in the church beneath. "I rather think that until Waldemar is actually affianced or married, he will always contrive to find some one to interest him, or, as he says himself,

some one to whom he can lend his heart for a few weeks occasionally."

"One of these, perhaps?" said Ernst, looking significantly downwards.

Torp nodded. "That one standing at the door," he said; "and now, if you feel disposed to show these people your monastery, Herr von Falkner, let me again assure you, that there is nothing whatever to prevent you from introducing them to your mother and sister, should chance bring them together. In the mean time Waldemar must take me to your father."

Ernst called Waldemar, and having shown him a door leading from the gallery into the interior of the building, he himself descended by a narrow staircase to the church, whence he followed and overtook the Nixons, just as they reached the court in which the principal entrance to the monastery was situated.

Unconscious that any one was near them, Nora observed, that this part of the building seemed of much later date than the church, and was neither very ancient nor very modern, as far as she could judge. She believed she was rather disappointed — the monastery certainly looked better when seen from the road, with its dark background and pretty lake.

Mr. Nixon said it was a prodigious pile of stone, and would require monastic revenues to keep so many different buildings, and such an extent of roof in order — to say nothing of the innumerable windows!

John thought it must be a confoundedly gloomy sort of barrack inside.

Georgina pronounced it an interesting, fine old place, and declared she should have no objection whatever to live in it.

"Perhaps you would like to see the interior," said Ernst, who was so close beside her that she started, and left it to the others to accept his offer.

They did so eagerly enough, and followed him as he mounted a handsome stone staircase — their impressions with respect to the immense proportions of the building being confirmed on seeing long, wide, well-lighted corridors branching off in different directions. The one through which they were conducted was decorated with well-painted coats-of-arms, and led to several large, lofty, but simply-furnished apartments; a long row of cells had been converted into bed-rooms, but did not seem to be at present in use; and there were apparently endless suites of apartments quite unoccupied. There was a handsome library, without books; and a music-room, or rather hall, of beautiful proportions, with marble pillars, paintings in fresco, elaborate stucco-work ornaments, and church-like windows, of which the upper parts were of painted glass. The only furniture of this room was a marble fountain, at the end opposite the windows; and Georgina, after expressing unqualified admiration of the apartment, could not help adding, that she wondered it had not become the favourite resort of the whole family.

"My mother thinks it too large for our small household," said Ernst, "and in fact we only occupy ten or twelve rooms at the lake side when we are alone."

"Is it long since you purchased the place?" asked Mr. Nixon.

"It has been in our possession as far back as my recollection reaches."

"Then I suppose you cannot tell me what the value of a property of this kind may be?"

"I fear I must refer you to my father," answered Ernst; "the woods and brewery make it rather valuable, but both have long been greatly mismanaged, as until a couple of years ago we never resided here."

"The — vicinity of the brewery — was not agreeable perhaps?" suggested Georgina.

"Oh, not at all!" answered Ernst. "Brewing is a very good business in Bavaria, and my father has quite a predilection for it, but until very lately he was in active service in the Austrian army: I have also been many years a soldier, and could only get a few weeks' leave of absence occasionally, so there was no one to attend properly to our affairs here, and the place was going to ruin as fast as possible."

While speaking they had reached the cloisters that were open towards a small court, in the midst of which a fountain played in the almost eternal shade of the surrounding buildings, throwing showers of light drops beyond its stone cistern on the dark grass around.

Here Nora and Georgina stopped, while Ernst, springing lightly up a few stone steps, threw open the nearest door, saying, "This is my cell: here I do penance for my sins on rainy days."

Mr. Nixon and John followed him, and found so much to interest and amuse them that a considerable time elapsed before they again made their appearance; when they did so they were supplied with fishing-rods, and Nora heard with infinite satisfaction an appointment made for the next day at the trout stream near the lake.

They passed soon after through a garden: at one end of it was an arbour close to the lake, and two ladies were sitting there with Torp, but they did not look

round or seem conscious of the presence of strangers, although Waldemar and an old man with snow white hair left them, and the latter approaching the Nixons was immediately introduced to them by Ernst with the words, "My father." Being, however, unable to speak English like his son, he could only bow to Mr. Nixon, and then turn (not as it appeared unwillingly) to Georgina and Nora.

Before they parted he seemed sincerely to regret that "business and pleasure," as he termed it, obliged him to leave home the next day; he hoped, however, to find them at Almenau on his return, and in the mean time offered them the use of his lake, boat, and garden.

As they slowly walked back towards the village, John observed that it was a great bore not being able to speak either French or German well, adding, "I dare say now the old fellow would have let me shoot on his grounds as well as fish in his lake, if I could have mustered German enough to have asked him properly."

"Uncommonly civil people indeed," said Mr. Nixon; "they evidently wish to become acquainted with us. I suppose because we are English!"

"I rather think that Mr. Waldemar has kindly recommended us to them," observed Nora; "but at all events I am glad that you and Jack have found an occupation likely to amuse you for a week or two."

CHAPTER XXI.

The Mountain Mill.

NORA was put in possession of a cheerful little room at the forester's, and her uncle and John went regularly every day to St. Benedict's. Georgina frequently accompanied them, preferring the garden there to that of the inn, which was more the resort of beer-drinking gentlemen and coffee-drinking ladies than she approved.

"It seems," — she observed one day to Nora, when preparing to follow her father to the lake, — "it seems to me as if the whole neighbourhood had chosen the place as rendezvous."

"Not at all improbable," said Nora.

"But surely, Nora, you do not approve of your Germans being so constantly lounging about the inns, as seems the custom here?"

"That entirely depends upon the circumstances in which *my* Germans live."

"I can tell you from personal observation, for I have watched them, that there are some — many, in fact — who come here regularly every day. I begin to know their faces!"

"Well?" said Nora.

"The young men amuse themselves rolling those horrid wooden balls that make a noise like distant thunder — quite irritating to one's nerves, the more elderly are occasionally accompanied by wives and shoals of children, but they also frequently come alone, and may be seen day after day smoking and drinking coffee while reading a small newspaper that seems to contain nothing but advertisements."

"These people," said Nora, "are probably men who

have situations in the offices of the neighbouring town; the distance to this village is about an hour's walk, and as such perhaps they use it daily for exercise and recreation."

"But," continued Georgina, "some who come in the afternoon remain until quite late at night. Even after you have gone to your room at the forester's, and I have dismissed Nesbitt, they may be seen, sitting in the garden, smoking, talking, and singing by candlelight!"

"This," said Nora, "is a southern German custom that I cannot take upon me to defend."

Georgina was silent for a few moments, and then observed hesitatingly, "The custom does not appear to be altogether confined to the *employés* of the neighbouring town. M. Waldemar, and even the Englishman Torp, are sometimes among the company, which is of a very mixed description. I cannot tell you how surprised I was to see that gentleman-like Austrian officer, Captain Falkner, from St. Benedict's, here also."

Nora was not at all surprised, and merely suggested that he might perhaps find it dull at home without his family.

"Oh, I perceive you have turned completely German again," said Georgina; "but you manage to keep John very nicely from these beer-drinking parties."

"Who? — I?"

"Yes, — you. I dare say Mr. Torp's disagreeable manner to him was at first the cause of his ceasing to frequent the garden, but now we see him regularly every day either go with you, or follow you to the forester's directly after luncheon."

"When he goes with me," said Nora, "it is to take a walk, but I am much more frequently obliged to

engage Rosel as guide and companion, and naturally supposed that when he did not call for me, he was fishing at St. Benedict's."

"He will never learn to fish," said Georgina, "and does nothing but mutter and grumble, and destroy Captain Falkner's tackle whenever he is with us. Papa, however, is very successful and yesterday caught quite a large trout at the bridge near the brewery. Captain Falkner was with him, and was so polite and good-natured, that we took quite a fancy to him."

Nora, who had at first turned to Georgina, and listened with marked attention, seemed wonderfully little interested either about the fish, or Captain Falkner, so that even when her cousin added, "He remained with us afterwards during the afternoon, and chatted very pleasantly," she scarcely appeared to hear her, and proved her inattention by asking abruptly,

"Has Jack been talking of chamois hunting lately?"

"Not so much as at first," answered Georgina! "it is provoking that the forester takes care of, and rents the game on the lands of St. Benedict's, so that Captain Falkner has no longer a right to give permission to shoot on them. He mentioned having used all his influence lately in favour of M. Waldemar's friend, or something to that purport; so you see, dear Nora, this tiresome Torp is again in our way."

"Tiresome!" exclaimed Nora, "he is perfectly detestable. The most complete egotist I ever met. That good-natured M. Waldemar and the forester would, I know, have made no difficulties about allowing Jack to go out with them occasionally, if this odious man had not objected. I heard what he said myself, and as there is no chance of his going away for some time, there is

every probability that Jack will end, by making the acquaintance, and hunting with a young man here who is a noted wildschütz! Do you not remember his threatening to do so the very day after we came here?"

No. Georgina had no recollection of anything of the kind, nor the remotest idea of the danger to which her brother might be exposed, should he put his threat into execution. Nora did not think it necessary to alarm her, but resolved to endeavour to keep John out of temptation, by communicating her apprehensions to the forester's daughter Rosel, and inducing her to speak to Seppel. She therefore parted from Georgina at the turn to St. Benedict's, and, pursuing the course of the stream in a contrary direction, was soon again close to the village, somewhat beyond the last houses of which the forester's was conspicuous, from its dazzling white walls, bright green jalousies, and the gigantic antlers of a stag that decorated the gable beneath which the entrance was placed. It was separated from the road by a trim garden, with a rustic paling, and also by the stream, which here began to give unmistakeable tokens of its mountain origin, by brawling over large stones, and working its way beneath rocks protruding from the banks, effectually undermining the roots of the few old trees that still remained in its immediate vicinity.

Nora entered the ever open door, and in order to put her plan at once into execution, requested Rosel to accompany her to the Crags, informing her immediately after they left the house why she wished to go there, and making no attempt to conceal her anxiety about her cousin.

Every trace of colour forsook Rosel's face as she listened. She remembered having seen the young

Englishman pass their house frequently; she had observed Seppel standing with him near the inn on Sunday morning; and recollected, with dismay, her lover's unqualified praise of young Herr Nix, whom he had declared to be "a lad of spirit, — up to anything, — afraid of nobody, and the making of a good soldier!" Yet a natural inclination to defend Seppel from suspicion, even in the mind of Nora, made her refrain from giving utterance to her misgivings, and when she spoke, it was with a forced smile, and in assumed confidence.

"He promised me never to go out wild-hunting again," she said, "and I don't think he will. Not that he wouldn't dare, but his father has been brought round, to promise to resign the Crags to him, and with such a prospect in view, he will not be easily tempted!"

"Don't you think, however, it would be better if you were to speak to him?" said Nora.

"Of course I'll speak to him, but it's hard to know what to say, when he tells me he is no longer a wildschütz, and that I ought to believe him when he says so."

"At least," said Nora, "you can recommend him not to venture his life, and injure his future prospects, by attempting anything of the kind now, when your father, and brother, Count Waldemar, Mr. Torp, and Captain Falkner, may meet him any day, and at any hour."

"That's not the way to talk to him," answered Rosel, "the danger is just what he likes best. I am more afraid of suspicion falling on him than anything else; there is not much chance of their either seeing, or taking him prisoner, for he knows the mountains better than any of them."

"Remember," said Nora, "my cousin will be with

him, who, perhaps, cannot so easily make his escape in case of danger, and they may both be fired at as armed poachers, and wounded —"

"Or killed," said Rosel, with a shudder, "killed by my father or brother if they do not instantly stop when called to, and deliver up their rifles on the first summons; and that, Seppel will never do, though he knows that when my eldest brother lost his life in an encounter with a wildschütz, my father swore that in future his second call should be the whistle of a bullet, and he would henceforward hunt a wildschütz with as little compunction as if he were a chamois or deer."

"And your father is, probably, a good marksman?" said Nora, half-inquiringly.

"Few better," answered Rosel.

"And is it possible, that, under such circumstances, there are men in this neighbourhood daring enough to venture out deer-stalking?"

"More than I like to say," replied Rosel, nodding her head; "the danger is the last thing they take into consideration, and many are only prevented from going out by want of time, or the chance that their absence from home might excite suspicion. There is no use in trying to make our young men here look upon this hunting as a crime — only those who have served their two or three years in the army can understand the game laws, and refrain altogether from hunting."

"I thought they were obliged to serve six years," observed Nora.

"So they do, nominally, but when the frequent leave of absence is reckoned, it is in the end not more than half the time. Serving in the army improves and steadies them all, more or less: and even Seppel has

become quite another man since he has been in the cuirassiers."

While speaking they had sauntered in slow ascent along the banks of the stream, which began to fall in noisy cascades, and form deep green pools among rocks, that as they advanced imperceptibly assumed larger proportions. The valley narrowed, the high road seemed to dwindle into a pathway far up on the side of the mountain, and a sudden turn brought them so near the mill, that they could see the stream splashing over the labouring wheels, which, with all the demoniacal breathless energy of machinery, ground corn in one building, while in another the trunks of trees were sawed into boards with undeviating accuracy.

A little further back, at the base of an abruptly-rising, thickly-wooded mountain, the handsome house of the miller came into view; its balconies, as is usual in the Bavarian highlands in fine weather, draped, as it were, with feather-beds, and pillows, the size and number of which, with their blue and red striped covers, being considered a sort of criterion among the peasants of the wealth and cleanliness of the inhabitants. Inflated with warm summer air, they presented a so satisfactory appearance to Rosel, that she became loud in their praise and in that of the miller's wife, who was the most active and indefatigable woman in the parish.

"And her daughter?" said Nora, interrogatively.

"Madeleine is young," she answered, evasively; "and, as my father says, has now money enough to make one overlook a little want of steadiness."

"So then," said Nora, "she is not exactly the sort of sister-in-law you desired?"

"My mother and I looked higher for Franz, and my

father too, until the miller inherited his brother's fortune. Franz has studied and passed his examinations, and there is nothing to prevent him from becoming a forstmeister and marrying a lady."

"And would that be more agreeable to you than his choosing one of the friends and companions of your youth?"

"A good connexion," answered Rosel, "such as the daughter of a counsellor of the forest board, might have helped him on in his profession. My father often said that connexion was better than money for a man who wished to rise in the world."

"Must I hear this even *here*?" murmured Nora.

"It is true," continued Rosel, "I have gone to school with Madeleine, and known her all my life. Perhaps I know her too well. In a small village like ours one hears and sees everything that goes on in the houses of one's neighbours."

"And what did you see here to displease you?" asked Nora. "Madeleine seems to be a remarkably quiet and extremely pretty young woman."

"She is not so quiet as you suppose," answered Rosel, "and is always trying to make people love her. I saw myself the trouble she took to please Florian, until he downright asked her in marriage."

"You mean the painter, Florian?"

"Yes; he was as sure of her as my brother himself could have been, but Madeleine laughed, said that nothing was further from her thoughts, and that she had only talked to him because he was less unmannerly than the other men in the village."

"I believe I had better not attempt her defence," said Nora, "though she is pretty enough to be pardoned a little coquetry."

"Florian forgave her at all events," said Rosel. "He is a kind soul, and bears no malice; but there is another who will not be put off so easily, and that is black Seppel, the Tyrolean."

"Black Seppel!" repeated Nora, "I have heard of him somewhere."

"He is the miller's man, who manages everything, and has lived with them upwards of six years. He is come of as good people as the miller's family, and need not have served if it had not been for an accident that caused a quarrel with his father, and forced him to leave home for a while. I suspect Madeleine is not easy in her mind about him, for she has been lately teasing her father to dismiss him; and it seemed quite a relief to both when he left them to spend a month in the Valley of the Inn. They may expect his return any day now, however, and what he'll say to the betrothal I'm sure I don't know."

"Is your brother aware of all this?" asked Nora.

"I believe," she answered, "Madeleine tells him just what she thinks necessary, and in such a pleasant sort of way, that he only laughs and likes her all the better."

Nora stopped before the house, which looked so clean and cheerful that she was induced to ascend the stone steps to the door. The miller's wife peered out of her kitchen, and then came bustling towards her, leading the way to the dwelling-room with many expressions of pleasure at so unexpected a visit. The room was large; the windows well furnished with geraniums; the clock filled the place made for it in the wall; the great green stove occupied the usual space; the benches round the room, and cross-legged table, were scoured to an unusual degree of whiteness; and in cages at an open casement

two canary-birds warbled loudly, straining their little throats to drown the voice of the miller's wife as she repeated her welcome to Nora, and very unnecessarily swept the spotless table with her apron.

"What a very nice house," said Nora, looking round her with unaffected pleasure; "so beautifully situated! so large and airy!"

"Well, the house is one of the best built hereabouts, and ought to be, having cost money enough," answered the miller's wife; "and I don't deny that I could have my pride and pleasure in it if my old man wasn't always wishing for the old house back again, and talking of how happily we lived in it. Rosel knows better, and young as she is, can remember the sorrow and poverty we had to endure there, and the state it was in. I might say the fire that burnt both house and mill was the greatest piece of luck that ever happened to us, if the miller had not quite broken down from fright, and never been the same since. And he grows worse from year to year, Rosel, and takes no interest in anything, so that but for our man, Seppel, the business could not be carried on at all."

"I have heard of this Seppel," said Nora, perceiving that Rosel would not speak, and that an answer of some kind was expected; "he is your head workman, I believe?"

"He's everything," answered the miller's wife, "saved me and my daughter the night of the fire, and when, in the midst of the confusion, I remembered that we had not had money to pay the high insurance, and thought everything we had in the world was lost, never shall I forget his telling me that he had himself gone to the town a month before and paid it for us out of his own

money. From that time he has been like a son to me, and if I had another daughter, Rosel, I'd give her to Seppel."

"People say he would take Madeleine if she would have him," observed Rosel.

"Well, I don't know but he would," she answered, with a smirk indicative of satisfied motherly vanity; "and if she wasn't promised to your brother he'd be worth thinking of, I can tell you. Perhaps," she added, on observing Nora turn from the window and the canary-birds towards the door, "perhaps the young lady would like to see the house; strangers often ask to look at it."

Nora smiled a ready acquiescence, and followed her across the passage to the miller's room, when, after admiring some jugs and mugs of china and earthenware in glass cases, the drawers beneath them were pulled out, and she was requested to inspect the Sunday and holiday suits of the old couple. Without explanation much might have escaped Nora's notice, notwithstanding all her quickness of comprehension; but the miller's wife liked talking, and had no desire whatever that the double row of buttons on her husband's coat and waistcoat should pass for ordinary workmanship, when they were good pieces of silver money coined at the mint. This peasant mode of exhibiting wealth was new to Nora, and she showed the necessary portion of respect for the buttons, but was naturally more interested in the wardrobe of the female part of the family. The high heavy fur cap of the miller's wife — a curious grenadier sort of head-dress, worn on state occasions, and too costly to become common — the silk spencers, aprons, black boddices with silver chains and pendent crown-pieces, were all admired in a most satisfactory manner; and

then they went up stairs, where, with a look of subdued exultation, the door of one of the front rooms was thrown open by the miller's wife, while she observed with proud humility, "This is our best room, a poor place for a young lady like you to look at, but peasant people such as we are have a pride in it somehow."

"And with reason," said Nora, as she unaffectedly admired the handsome bedsteads and beds, with elaborately flounced pillow-cases and coverlets. As completing furniture to the room there were tables and chairs, white curtains to the windows, a chest of drawers, and a remarkably large double-doored wardrobe, which last when opened disclosed a sufficient quantity of linen to have furnished a small shop. Carefully bleached and pressed, the pieces were folded and bound round with red tape as if for sale, and with surprising accuracy the miller's wife could tell the number of ells contained in each, the winter when the flax had been spun, the spring when it had been woven, and the summer during which it had been bleached.

Nora remarked that a great number of wax tapers, gilt and decorated with foil, or brilliantly coloured, were placed in front of the shelves, and soon learned from her loquacious companion that when they disposed of their hives they generally took some wax in part payment. "For it would look poor not to have a store of these," she explained, "and some we want, at all events, for the church. You may be sure, Rosel," she added, turning to the admiring girl, "you may be sure that our Madeleine will not enter your family empty handed. These silver spoons and my mother's necklace go with her to the Forest-house."

This latter she now held towards Nora. It was com-

posed of twelve rows of heavy silver chains, fastened in front by a roccoco clasp of immense dimensions, containing some garnets, topaz, and other gems more remarkable for their colour than intrinsic value.

"Indeed all that you see will be given to Madeleine when she marries," continued the miller's wife, "for my old man talks of nothing now but selling the mill, and settling in some other part of the country."

"Oh you must not let him do that," cried Rosel, eagerly, "I could not bear even the thought of having strangers living here, where I have spent the happiest days of my life playing with Madeleine and Seppel from the Crags."

"Rosel," said Nora, looking at her watch, "you have just reminded me that we were on our way to Seppel and the Crags, and I perceive it is much later than I supposed."

Rosel led the way to a steep mountain path, Nora followed, but before they again entered the wood she stopped and looked back.

"What a lovely spot it is!" she said to her companion, "I think I could live here myself with pleasure if — it were a little — less noisy."

"Noisy!" repeated Rosel. "Surely you don't mean the water?"

"Not exactly, I could easily get accustomed to that."

"Or the canary-birds?"

"No, I like them; but I think the clatter of the mill, and the grating of the saw, must be intolerable when heard incessantly."

"That's just what makes the mill so pleasant and cheerful," rejoined Rosel. "I love the place and everything in and about it, for it was here I played as a child,

climbing over the planks at the saw-mill when they appeared like mountains to me, and running into the mill to be chased out of it by the miller or one of his men, whom we children called the dragons."

"You seem to like the mill better than the Forest-house."

"I believe I do. My father was feared by the children of the village, but the miller let us jump about him as much as we pleased, so we got the habit of coming here, and to this day I like to take my knitting and sit on the rocks beside the stream, and think of the years that are past."

"And perhaps," said Nora, merrily, "perhaps also of those that are to come?"

"I cannot deny it," answered Rosel, moving on while her cheeks crimsoned with a blush. "It was here that I saw Seppel first and last, as I may say: he used to come down from the Crags when we jodel'd where the echo is."

As Rosel finished speaking, she placed a hand at each side of her mouth, bent her body backwards, and uttered a long, loud, clear musical shout composed of a succession of notes that were repeated, as she had expected, by the echo; but scarcely was the last faint sound lost in the distance when an equally loud and still more joyous answering shout reached them, and then Rosel, laughing gaily, sprang forward with an ease and elasticity of step that obliged Nora to use some exertion in order not to be left behind

CHAPTER XXII.

The Crags.

THE Crags was an isolated place, and might, from its elevated situation on the side of a mountain, have been supposed an autumn alp, had not the surrounding corn-fields and well-filled orchard proved that the ground was good and the climate temperate. In fact, it was a well sheltered nook; and though the upper fields and some extent of pasture land were bounded by the wild bare weather-beaten crags from which it derived its name, a wood of fir and pine trees flourished above them, reaching the summit of the mountain in spite of the frequent interruptions caused by colossal masses of protruding rocks, in the fissures of which not only plants but trees contrived to find sustenance, and grow in the most fantastic and unaccountable manner.

The peasant's house bore evident marks of age, and was picturesque in no common degree; the ground-floor alone was built of stone, all else of wood, brown, and weather-stained; the small lattice windows were glazed with round pieces of the most ordinary glass; and so low was the balcony that a tall man standing at the door might easily have touched it with his hand, or even plucked one of the crimson pinks that hung temptingly downwards from the half decayed boxes on the shelf above the balustrade. There were scarlet geraniums there also, and stiff balsams flowering exuberantly in broken pitchers and cracked earthenware kitchen utensils, adding more to the picturesque interest of the abode than the inhabitants could easily have imagined.

The barn, an extensive wooden building forming a continuation of the house, and under the same roof, had

an entrance from the fields so constructed that by means of a short and steep ascent the loaded carts could be driven into it. The gate was now wide open, for the corn was being brought home, and seemed to have required the hands of all the household: no one was to be seen, though the sound of cheerful voices and the barking of dogs might be heard at no great distance.

Nora sat down on one of the benches before the house, taking care not to displace any of the bright yellow milk-basins ranged against the wall, and then looking round her, perceived a small house at a little distance, with closed door and window-shutters, evidently uninhabited, though on its diminutive balcony large heaps of peas were drying in their pods for winter use, and some well-grown green and yellow gourds had been placed there for ornament or to ripen their seeds.

"That's the house for the old couple when they resign," said Rosel in a whisper.

"Which for your sake I hope they may do before long," answered Nora; "the place is charming, but the house seems very, very old, and rather neglected too. I dare say it will look quite different when you and Seppel enter into possession."

"A little tidier, perhaps," said Rosel; "but we could not make any great changes as long as the old people live, though a new house would not cost much, as the neighbours would help, of course, and the forest rights are as good here as on the miller's property."

"You must tell me all you know about these forest rights, and foresters, some other time," said Nora.

"I don't know as much as I ought to do," answered Rosel, "for after hearing all my life of forest laws, and

rights, and revenues, and regulations, I only understand what I have seen with my own eyes."

"Quite enough for me," said Nora, rising, "and now as these people won't come to us we must go to them."

"They are taking advantage of the fine weather to bring in their first corn," said Rosel, apologetically. "Seppel will be sure to come to us as soon as the cart is loaded."

"We need not take him from his work," observed Nora, smiling at her eagerness to excuse his absence. "I can ask him a few questions about my cousin, or you can give him a little good advice in the corn-field as well as anywhere else."

They found the whole family working together — father, mother, sons, and servants all equally busy, Seppel alone perhaps not completely engrossed by his occupation. That his eyes wandered round the field, and that he was the first to perceive Rosel's approach, was remarked by his mother with a laugh as she followed him, when, shouldering his pitchfork, he advanced to meet the visitors. There was much friendliness in the pump-handle handshakes that followed; but a good deal less warmth in the manner of the Crags peasant, who continued to give directions to the servants, until Nora was close behind him, when, slowly turning round, he formally raised his battered straw hat, and held it pertinaciously in his hand until repeatedly requested by her to replace it. His figure was a good deal bent by age and hard work, his large marked features furrowed with wrinkles; but the red and brown tints of the face denoted health, and contrasted well with the long snow white hair that hung down to his shoulders:

he wore black leather shorts, white stockings, shoes, and a red waistcoat with silver buttons: coat he had none, nor any of the men present, but the shirt sleeves appeared in keeping with every costume, excepting that of Seppel, whose blue cuirassier trousers, foraging cap, erect figure, and well-trimmed moustache made the want of coat, waistcoat, and cravat rather remarkable. The peasant's wife was a stout, elderly woman, wearing a black boddice, a red-printed calico petticoat, and a broad-brimmed man's hat of coarse black straw. Her cheerful face was lighted up with smiles, and once in possession of Rosel's hand she kept it fast, swinging her arm backwards and forwards while assuring her that she was delighted to see her, and hoping before long "to be with her old man on a pleasant mission to the forester house."

Nora had walked on with the old peasant, and before long had heard the history of his rheumatic pains during the winter, been made acquainted with his doubts that he would ever again be what he was, and his resolution, in consequence, to resign the Crags to his son Seppel, reserving a reasonable maintenance for himself and his wife, and a sum of money for Anderl, which he expected would be paid out of the dowry that the forester would give his daughter.

The peasant spoke at if he took it for granted that Nora had heard of the projected marriage, and knew the plans of the family; so she nodded approval, and then said, "Shall I tell them you will come down and talk the matter over to-morrow evening?"

"I don't mind if you do," he answered; "they can discourse about it among themselves, and I don't object to your letting them know also that Anderl must

have his two thousand florins down before I or my old woman turn into the off house. Anderl has been always a good and steady lad, never caused me a day's trouble since he came into the world, and has as good a right to his share as another, and let that other be who he may!"

This was said in a very determined manner, and was succeeded by a succession of nods of the head, evidently intended to challenge opposition. Now Nora, who knew that the two thousand florins amounted to something less than two hundred pounds English, considered the sum so moderate a provision for a younger son, that she remained silent, wondering what he meant, until he continued, "And the money must be raised at once, by hook or by crook — for Anderl after being, as I may say, master and man here for the last three years, is not likely to turn into a day-labourer on his brother's ground!"

"Of course not," said Nora.

"Yet it's a common thing about here," said the old man, who seemed possessed with a spirit of contradiction. "I've known two or three brothers living on together, so that there wasn't a hired servant in their house."

"Most creditable to the family who so lived," observed Nora.

"May be so," he rejoined, peevishly, "but they never came to anything after all. Now my Anderl is ambitious, and intends to make a fortune as ostler in an inn where the custom is good."

"I was not aware that ostlers were so well paid as to enable them to make fortunes," said Nora.

"It's not a bad thing in a house where waggoners

stop the night, and there is a regular business on the road in salt, corn, or hides. If you would mention this to the forester it would be doing a service, as he's a sensible man, and will understand why we must have the money paid down and no put off in any way."

Nora promised, and stopped for a moment to look at the double row of beehives ranged on shelves along the side of the house, while the peasant advanced towards a tall, strongly-built, dark-complexioned man, who with long strides was descending from the Crags directly towards the path leading to the mill.

"Hallo Sepp," was shouted by the peasant and his sons with stentorian voices, "stop a minute and tell us how you are, and if you have seen our people at the Kerbstein lake."

The man turned back, not very willingly as it appeared, answered the various greetings of the family with ill-concealed impatience, and then informed them that he had been that morning at the Kerbstein lake with their relations, who were all well, and expected a visit from long Seppel the first convenient holiday.

"Which may be next week," observed Seppel, "and perhaps to invite them to my wedding!"

"Oh, ho!" cried the other, glancing quickly towards Rosel, "wish you joy with all my heart — it will be the first wedding in the village this year, and the sooner it takes place the better. A wedding's as good as a church fête any day, and at yours there well be the best music and —"

"Not so fast," crield old Crags, interrupting him, "the betrothal must come before the wedding, and we are not clear about that yet. If the forester does handsomer by his son than his daughter, why, all I have to

say is — that the son will be married sooner than the daughter. No offence to you, Rosel; my old woman has of course told you that Anderl must have his portion in hand the day I turn out of this house, and all depends on *your* father now."

"Don't be cast down, Rosel," said the peasant's wife, consolingly, "leave me to manage for you and Seppel. Your brother Franz will be a forester himself in no time, I dare say, and the miller's Madeleine is so rich that a thousand florins more or less just at first will not —"

"Franz and Madeleine?" repeated the Tyrolean, interrupting her, while a dark shade seemed to pass over his features and his brows contracted into a fearful frown. "What do you mean?"

"That they are to be married at Michaelmas," she answered, "and we fear the forester may do more for his son than his daughter."

"His son will require little from him on this occasion," he rejoined, with flashing eyes.

"Well, that's just what we all said," observed the peasant's wife, "Madeleine is so well off that it cannot be of the least importance when Franz receives what the forester may be able to give him."

"Set your mind at rest," said the Tyrolean, his deep voice trembling perceptibly, while his colourless lips were forced into a smile; "Michaelmas will come and pass over often enough before the miller's Madeleine is the wife of the forester's Franz."

Without waiting to observe the effect produced by his words he turned to the mill path and was out of sight in a moment.

A few exclamations of astonishment from the peasant

and his wife preceded Nora's leavetaking. Rosel and Seppel, who perfectly understood the cause of the Tyrolean's ire, merely exchanged looks of intelligence, and prepared to follow her; they loitered however considerably while fastening the rustic gate in the fence towards the wood, in order to give her time to precede them, which little manœuvre so delighted the peasant's wife, that she showed her appreciation of their tactics by a shout of laughter, and by bawling after them a profusion of those coarse epithets that the tone of voice in which they are uttered can make alternately terms of intense endearment or virulent abuse.

That Seppel and Rosel had much to talk about, and many hopes and fears to communicate to each other may easily be imagined. Certain it is that the distance between them and Nora lengthened as they proceeded, and that she descended the steep path and reached the mill alone. The saws worked on through the quivering wood with a harsh grating sound, the water plashed over the heavy wheels and made them labour round, creaking and clattering without intermission, and so great was the din within the corn mill, that as Nora stopped for a moment at the door, the civil requests to enter of the men at work there were perfectly unintelligible excepting as far as gestures and smiles expressed them.

It was perhaps in consequence of these noises, that she reached the miller's house before she heard the sound of the loud angry voices within, though they were accompanied by a shuffling and tramping of feet, to which was soon added a succession of half-suppressed screams, ending in a loud cry of murder. Then Nora rushed into the house, and the door of the sitting-room being open, she beheld black Seppel, with eyes rolling

wildly beneath his frowning eyebrows, and features perfectly livid with rage, holding at a distance the miller's wife with one hand, while with the other he grasped her husband's cravat and shirt-collar, pressing his knuckles on the old man's throat, and shaking him in a manner that threatened strangulation. Breathlessly, and through his fixed teeth, he muttered huskily, "Miserable villain, did you dare to forget that you were in my power! Was it not with your consent that I set fire to your cursed old mill?"

"Ye — ye — yes," gasped the miller, with great difficulty.

"And did you not say I should have your Madeleine as bride the day my father resigned his mill to me?"

The miller made some inarticulate sound, intended perhaps for affirmation.

"Let him go, Seppel, for the love of heaven!" cried his wife, in a voice of agony, while endeavouring in vain to the place herself between them.

At that moment Nora rushed forward, and as she vainly tried to remove the rough hand, or even loosen its grasp of the neck-cloth, the miller's wife called out, "Untie it! — untie it or he will be choked!"

With trembling hand Nora caught the long ends and drew them towards her, but the knot yielded with great difficulty, and only after repeated efforts, leaving both cravat and shirt-collar still in the hands of the enraged Seppel, who, staggering backwards a few steps, dragged the miller after him to the bench beside the table, where with a jerk he released him, and then, as the storm of passion began to subside, gloomily watched the old man's efforts to arrange his disordered dress.

To the miller's wife, who had burst into tears the moment her terror had been allayed, and was now sobbing violently, Nora turned and whispered, "Adieu, Frau; I can be of no further use here, and must return to the village."

The woman looked up anxiously, followed her into the passage, and said hurriedly, "You — you have not been here long, I believe?"

"Only a moment before you saw me."

"Did you hear —"

"Not more than a few words," said Nora, anxious to re-assure her.

"It will be better not to mention this quarrel at the forester's," she began, with evident embarrassment.

"Neither there nor elsewhere," answered Nora; "you may depend upon me."

She walked towards the garden, and looked up in the direction of the Crags, but instead of Rosel, perceived Madeleine tripping gaily homewards. She had gone at daybreak to her father's alp, having heard from the forester and his son that they were likely to hunt in that neighbourhood with Captain Falkner, Count Waldemar, and Mr. Torp; and after having done the honours of her hut, by supplying them with cream, butter, and cheese, she had in requital been flattered and cajoled to her heart's content by the mirthful and hungry sportsmen. They had accompanied her down the mountain, parted from her but a few minutes before, and the flush of gratified vanity was still on her dimpled cheek as she approached her home, adroitly carrying on her head a flat basket, in which, covered with a napkin, she had put some fresh butter and a cheese for her parents.

She was still singing a snatch of one of the *Schna-*

derhüpfeln with which Captain Falkner and Waldemar had beguiled the time of rest on the alp, and in clear loud tones was offering a bunch of green ribbons to some imaginary deserted lover, when her mother called out, "Hush, Madeleine! — hush! or you'll make him as mad as ever!"

"Who?" asked Madeleine, with a careless smile, removing her basket from her head, and then curtseying in her best manner to Nora.

"Seppel. He's within," said her mother.

"Does he know — has he heard —," began Madeleine, and then she paused, raised her apron, and passed it across her face, which became colourless as her mother nodded despondingly, and pointed to the door of the adjacent room.

"I don't see why I should be more afraid of him than any one else," she said, forcing an appearance of courage that her pale lips belied. "I've chosen Franz, and I'm not likely to change my mind for anything Seppel may say!"

Impatiently shaking off her mother's detaining hand, she advanced into the room, and, in a half conciliatory half defiant manner, held out her hand, exclaiming, "Welcome back, Sepp; we almost thought you had forgotten us."

He took her hand, but only to fling it from him with such violence that she reeled to the wall, and with difficulty kept herself from falling.

"Unmannerly boor!" she cried, angrily, "the next time I offer you my hand you'll take it, or I'm much mistaken."

"Madeleine," said her mother, coming forward, "I

am afraid he has a right to it and yourself, any day, for the asking."

"I should like to know who gave him such a right?" she asked, saucily.

"Your father," answered the miller's wife, beginning to sob afresh. "I did not know until to-day that he was bound by a promise."

"*I*'ve made no promise," said Madeleine, angrily interrupting her; "and if I had I wouldn't keep it."

"Have you not? — Would you not?" cried Seppel, fiercely, catching her arm, and drawing her towards him.

"No," she answered, boldly; "and I won't be made answerable for every thoughtless word I may have spoken to you when I was a child."

"Child!" he repeated, in angry derision, "why it is but two years ago, and you were as tall as you are now, and nearly as stout, and quite as handsome, and a deal quieter and humbler; but at that time, Madeleine, you did not know that an uncle would die suddenly and make you rich; you thought that few in the village — and least of all the forester's Franz — would think of you as a wife; and you knew — and right well too — that I was the son of the rich miller at the other side of the mountains. One thing you did *not* know," he added, gloomily, "but your father might have told you any day, that as long as he lives you can never marry any one but me."

"I don't believe you!" cried Madeleine, vehemently; "and if you think I'm afraid of you, you're greatly mistaken."

"You're so completely in my power," continued Seppel, with savage tranquillity, "that I can insist on

our bans being published next week, and maybe I'll do it. Your father daren't object; for we've done *that* together which makes us more than friends for life."

"You have no proof," cried the miller, interrupting him, in a harsh, discordant voice; "no proof of any kind."

"Have you forgotten the letter you wrote me from Munich, telling me not to do the deed we had planned together?" asked Seppel, malevolently. "It reached me twelve hours too late, but I have kept it by me carefully, and on my person, ever since. It is here — here!" he said, tapping the breast-pocket of his jacket; "and though for my own sake I shall not use it, unless driven by jealousy to revenge myself, you may as well remember that I am not a man to be trifled with. Give me your daughter, as you promised, and —"

"I won't be given to you!" cried Madeleine, passionately; "for I like Franz's little finger better than your whole body. If you had twenty letters from my father I would not marry you!"

"Wait till you know what the letter's about," said Seppel, with a bitter smile. "You have worried me enough for more than three years, Madeleine, and I'm tired of this sort of life. As to your fancy for the forester's son, it will pass away, like your love for many another that I could name. I was the first, as you've often told me — I intend to be the last; and the sooner you make up your mind to cross the mountains with me, the better for both perhaps."

He strode across the room, bent his tall figure when passing through the doorway, and as he ascended the stairs to his room, Nora left the garden, to join Rosel and her companion, too much occupied with all she had

heard and seen, to remember that she had intended to question and warn the latter about her cousin John. It occurred to her after he had left them to return to the Crags, and Rosel had honestly confessed having forgotten to mention the young Englishman to her lover; but Nora, though greatly provoked at their mutual forgetfulness, had no time to repair it, as she was obliged to hurry on to the village to dine with her relations.

Mr. Nixon was in high spirits: he had caught a trout of considerable size, and had invited Captain Falkner to dine with him and partake of it. Fish and fishing was the chief topic of conversation, which in no way interested Nora, excepting inasmuch as she observed John's indifference on the subject. When questioned by her after dinner, he said he had no patience for fishing, preferred making excursions on the mountains, and had been that day at Saint Hubert's chapel, and in Tyrol, where, at a shabby little inn on the frontiers, he had drunk some capital wine, and made the acquaintance of a miller returning to Almenau.

"Black Seppel?" suggested Nora.

"I don't know his name," answered John; "he is head man at the new mill outside the village here, and had been to see his father, who is very old and infirm. He often crosses the mountains for that purpose, and appeared known to all the people we met — indeed he seemed quite at home at most of the peasants' houses, especially on the Tyrolean side."

"That was black Seppel, I am sure," said Nora.

"Very likely," replied John; "half the men about here are called Seppel, or Sepp, which I believe means Joseph. You have only to call a fellow Sepp on chance, and nine times out of ten you will be right."

"I saw this man at the Crags to-day," observed Nora, "and took no fancy to him whatever."

"Nor I either," said John; "so we parted company soon after passing the frontiers, and I returned to the village by St. Benedict's. By-the-by, Nora, *that* Torp and the others had famous sport this morning; they were out at daybreak, and, I hear, shot black cock and a gigantic bird called *Auerhahn*. Georgy *might* say something for me to Captain Falkner; she sees him every day, and I suspect he fishes with the governor that he may talk to her; but when I asked her to give him another hint about me, she declared she could not possibly do so, it would have such an odd appearance."

Nora smiled. "Have patience, Jack, and you will find that Mr. Torp will tire of the village and its inhabitants before long; another week's shooting will probably satisfy him, for the forester told me he had already begun to talk of going to Herrenburg in Tyrol."

"Where the Falkners are?" asked John.

"Yes; and when he is gone the forester and his son will do whatever I ask them. In the mean time you must be satisfied with exploring the mountains about here; and I think you had better not ask long Seppel to go with you as guide, for his father wants him at the Crags, where they have a great deal of field-work to do just now."

"Oh, I know that," he said, impatiently. "I was up there yesterday for two or three hours."

"Jack," said Nora, reproachfully, "you went there to borrow a gun, and ask him to go out with you; I'm sure you did."

John did not attempt denial, and she continued, "If no fears of the consequences, as far as you are yourself

concerned, can deter you, have at least some consideration for this young man, whose prospects would be completely ruined if he engaged in any exploit of the kind just now."

"Do not be uneasy, my dear Norry," said John, evidently wishing to end the conversation. "Your young man has, as you observed just now, no time, and, it appears, but little inclination, to do anything but wield a reaping-hook at present. I never was so disappointed in any fellow as in this long Seppel."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Nora. "It seems that Rosel was right when she supposed a few years' service in the army had quieted him."

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.