CHAPTER IV.

I GAVE my orders to the colorman, and settled matters with my friend the artist that day.

The next morning, before the hour at which I expected my sitter, having just now as much interest in the life of Lady Malkinshaw as Mr. Batterbury had in her death, I went to make kind inquiries after her ladyship's health. The answer was most reassuring. Lady Malkinshaw had no present intention of permitting me to survive her. She was, at that very moment, meritoriously and heartily engaged in eating her breakfast. My prospects being now of the best possible kind, I felt encouraged to write once more to my father, telling him of my fresh start in life, and proposing a renewal of our acquaintance. I regret to say that he was so rude as not to answer my letter.

Mr. Batterbury was punctual to the moment. He gave a gasp of relief when he beheld me, full of life, with my palette on my thumb, gazing fondly on my new canvas.

"That's right!" he said. "I like to see you with your mind composed. Annabella would have come with me; but she has a little headache this morning. She sends her love and best wishes."

I seized my chalks and began with that confidence in myself which has never forsaken me in any emergency. Being perfectly well aware of

the absolute dependence of the art of portrait-painting on the art of flattery, I determined to start with making the mere outline of my likeness a compliment to my sitter.

It was much easier to resolve on doing this than really to do it. In the first place, my hand would relapse into its wicked old caricaturing habits. In the second place, my brother-in-law's face was so inveterately and completely ugly as to set every artifice of pictorial improvement at flat defiance. When a man has a nose an inch long, with the nostrils set perpendicularly, it is impossible to flatter it--you must either change it into a fancy nose, or resignedly acquiesce in it. When a man has no perceptible eyelids, and when his eyes globularly project so far out of his head, that you expect to have to pick them up for him whenever you see him lean forward, how are mortal fingers and bushes to diffuse the right complimentary expression over them? You must either do them the most hideous and complete justice, or give them up altogether. The late Sir Thomas Lawrence, P.R.A., was undoubtedly the most artful and uncompromising flatterer that ever smoothed out all the natural characteristic blemishes from a sitter's face; but even that accomplished parasite would have found Mr. Batterbury too much for him, and would have been driven, for the first time in his practice of art, to the uncustomary and uncourtly resource of absolutely painting a genuine likeness.

As for me, I put my trust in Lady Malkinshaw's power of living, and portrayed the face of Mr. Batterbury in all its native horror. At

the same time, I sensibly guarded against even the most improbable accidents, by making him pay me the fifty pounds as we went on, by installments. We had ten sittings. Each one of them began with a message from Mr. Batterbury, giving me Annabella's love and apologies for not being able to come and see me. Each one of them ended with an argument between Mr. Batterbury and me relative to the transfer of five pounds from his pocket to mine. I came off victorious on every occasion--being backed by the noble behavior of Lady Malkinshaw, who abstained from tumbling down, and who ate and drank, and slept and grew lusty, for three weeks together. Venerable woman! She put fifty pounds into my pocket. I shall think of her with gratitude and respect to the end of my days.

One morning, while I was sitting before my completed portrait, inwardly shuddering over the ugliness of it, a suffocating smell of musk was wafted into the studio; it was followed by a sound of rustling garments; and that again was succeeded by the personal appearance of my affectionate sister, with her husband at her heels. Annabella had got to the end of her stock of apologies, and had come to see me.

She put her handkerchief to her nose the moment she entered the room.

"How do you do, Frank? Don't kiss me: you smell of paint, and I can't bear it."

I felt a similar antipathy to the smell of musk, and had not the

slightest intention of kissing her; but I was too gallant a man to say so; and I only begged her to favor me by looking at her husband's portrait.

Annabella glanced all round the room, with her handkerchief still at her nose, and gathered her magnificent silk dress close about her superb figure with her disengaged hand.

"What a horrid place!" she said faintly behind her handkerchief. "Can't you take some of the paint away? I'm sure there's oil on the floor. How am I to get past that nasty table with the palette on it? Why can't you bring the picture down to the carriage, Frank?"

Advancing a few steps, and looking suspiciously about her while she spoke, her eyes fell on the chimney-piece. An eau-de-Cologne bottle stood upon it, which she took up immediately with a languishing sigh.

It contained turpentine for washing brushes in. Before I could warn her, she had sprinkled herself absently with half the contents of the bottle. In spite of all the musk that now filled the room, the turpentine betrayed itself almost as soon as I cried "Stop!" Annabella, with a shriek of disgust, flung the bottle furiously into the fireplace. Fortunately it was summer-time, or I might have had to echo the shriek with a cry of "Fire!"

"You wretch! you brute! you low, mischievous, swindling blackguard!"

cried my amiable sister, shaking her skirts with all her might, "you have done this on purpose! Don't tell me! I know you have. What do you mean by pestering me to come to this dog-kennel of a place?" she continued, turning fiercely upon the partner of her existence and legitimate receptacle of all her superfluous wrath. "What do you mean by bringing me here, to see how you have been swindled? Yes, sir, swindled! He has no more idea of painting than you have. He has cheated you out of your money. If he was starving tomorrow he would be the last man in England to make away with himself--he is too great a wretch--he is too vicious--he is too lost to all sense of respectability--he is too much of a discredit to his family. Take me away! Give me your arm directly! I told you not to go near him from the first. This is what comes of your horrid fondness for money. Suppose Lady Malkinshaw does outlive him; suppose I do lose my legacy. What is three thousand pounds to you? My dress is ruined. My shawl's spoiled. He die! If the old woman lives to the age of Methuselah, he won't die. Give me your arm. No! Go to my father. I want medical advice. My nerves are torn to pieces. I'm giddy, faint, sick--SICK, Mr. Batterbury!"

Here she became hysterical, and vanished, leaving a mixed odor of musk and turpentine behind her, which preserved the memory of her visit for nearly a week afterward.

"Another scene in the drama of my life seems likely to close in before long," thought I. "No chance now of getting my amiable sister to patronize struggling genius. Do I know of anybody else who will sit to

me? No, not a soul. Having thus no portraits of other people to paint, what is it my duty, as a neglected artist, to do next? Clearly to take a portrait of myself."

I did so, making my own likeness quite a pleasant relief to the ugliness of my brother-in-law's. It was my intention to send both portraits to the Royal Academy Exhibition, to get custom, and show the public generally what I could do. I knew the institution with which I had to deal, and called my own likeness, Portrait of a Nobleman.

That dexterous appeal to the tenderest feelings of my distinguished countrymen very nearly succeeded. The portrait of Mr. Batterbury (much the more carefully-painted picture of the two) was summarily turned out. The Portrait of a Nobleman was politely reserved to be hung up, if the Royal Academicians could possibly find room for it. They could not. So that picture also vanished back into the obscurity of the artist's easel. Weak and well-meaning people would have desponded under these circumstances; but your genuine Rogue is a man of elastic temperament, not easily compressible under any pressure of disaster. I sent the portrait of Mr. Batterbury to the house of that distinguished patron, and the Portrait of a Nobleman to the Pawnbroker's. After this I had plenty of elbow-room in the studio, and could walk up and down briskly, smoking my pipe, and thinking about what I should do next.

I had observed that the generous friend and vagabond brother artist, whose lodger I now was, never seemed to be in absolute want of money;

and yet the walls of his studio informed me that nobody bought his pictures. There hung all his great works, rejected by the Royal Academy, and neglected by the patrons of Art; and there, nevertheless, was he, blithely plying the brush; not rich, it is true, but certainly never without money enough in his pocket for the supply of all his modest wants. Where did he find his resources? I determined to ask him the question the very next time he came to the studio.

"Dick," I said (we called each other by our Christian names), "where do you get your money?"

"Frank," he answered, "what makes you ask that question?"

"Necessity," I proceeded. "My stock of money is decreasing, and I don't know how to replenish it. My pictures have been turned out of the exhibition-rooms; nobody comes to sit to me; I can't make a farthing; and I must try another line in the Arts, or leave your studio. We are old friends now. I've paid you honestly week by week; and if you can oblige me, I think you ought. You earn money somehow. Why can't I?"

"Are you at all particular?" asked Dick.

"Not in the least," I answered.

Dick nodded, and looked pleased; handed me my hat, and put on his own.

"You are just the sort of man I like," he remarked, "and I would sooner trust you than any one else I know. You ask how I contrive to earn money, seeing that all my pictures are still in my own possession. My dear fellow, whenever my pockets are empty, and I want a ten-pound note to put into them, I make an Old Master."

I stared hard at him, not at first quite understanding what he meant.

"The Old Master I can make best," continued Dick, "is Claude Lorraine, whom you may have heard of occasionally as a famous painter of classical landscapes. I don't exactly know (he has been dead so long) how many pictures he turned out, from first to last; but we will say, for the sake of argument, five hundred. Not five of these are offered for sale, perhaps, in the course of five years. Enlightened collectors of old pictures pour into the market by fifties, while genuine specimens of Claude, or of any other Old Master you like to mention, only dribble in by ones and twos. Under these circumstances, what is to be done? Are unoffending owners of galleries to be subjected to disappointment? Or are the works of Claude, and the other fellows, to be benevolently increased in number, to supply the wants of persons of taste and quality? No man of humanity but must lean to the latter alternative. The collectors, observe, don't know anything about it--they buy Claude (to take an instance from my own practice) as they buy all the other Old Masters, because of his reputation, not because of the pleasure they get from his works. Give them a picture with a good large ruin, fancy trees, prancing nymphs, and a watery sky; dirty it down dexterously to the

right pitch; put it in an old frame; call it a Claude; and the sphere of the Old Master is enlarged, the collector is delighted, the picture-dealer is enriched, and the neglected modern artist claps a joyful hand on a well-filled pocket. Some men have a knack at making Rembrandts, others have a turn for Raphaels, Titians, Cuyps, Watteaus, and the rest of them. Anyhow, we are all made happy--all pleased with each other--all benefited alike. Kindness is propagated and money is dispersed. Come along, my boy, and make an Old Master!"