THE STORY.

FIRST SCENE.--THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

CHAPTER THE FIRST. - THE OWLS.

IN the spring of the year eighteen hundred and sixty-eight there lived, in a certain county of North Britain, two venerable White Owls.

The Owls inhabited a decayed and deserted summer-house. The summer-house stood in grounds attached to a country seat in Perthshire, known by the name of Windygates.

The situation of Windygates had been skillfully chosen in that part of the county where the fertile lowlands first begin to merge into the mountain region beyond. The mansion-house was intelligently laid out, and luxuriously furnished. The stables offered a model for ventilation and space; and the gardens and grounds were fit for a prince.

Possessed of these advantages, at starting, Windygates, nevertheless, went the road to ruin in due course of time. The curse of litigation fell on house and lands. For more than ten years an interminable lawsuit coiled itself closer and closer round the place, sequestering it from human habitation, and even from human approach. The mansion was closed. The garden became a wilderness of weeds. The summer-house was choked up by creeping plants; and the appearance of the creepers was followed by the appearance of the birds of night.

For years the Owls lived undisturbed on the property which they had acquired by the oldest of all existing rights--the right of taking. Throughout the day they sat peaceful and solemn, with closed eyes, in the cool darkness shed round them by the ivy. With the twilight they roused themselves softly to the business of life. In sage and silent companionship of two, they went flying, noiseless, along the quiet lanes in search of a meal. At one time they would beat a field like a setter dog, and drop down in an instant on a mouse unaware of them. At another time--moving spectral over the black surface of

the water--they would try the lake for a change, and catch a perch as they had caught the mouse. Their catholic digestions were equally tolerant of a rat or an insect. And there were moments, proud moments, in their lives, when they were clever enough to snatch a small bird at roost off his perch. On those occasions the sense of superiority which the large bird feels every where over the small, warmed their cool blood, and set them screeching cheerfully in the stillness of the night.

So, for years, the Owls slept their happy sleep by day, and found their comfortable meal when darkness fell. They had come, with the creepers, into possession of the summer-house. Consequently, the creepers were a part of the constitution of the summer-house. And consequently the Owls were the guardians of the Constitution. There are some human owls who reason as they did, and who are, in this respect--as also in respect of snatching smaller birds off their roosts--wonderfully like them.

The constitution of the summer-house had lasted until the spring of the year eighteen hundred and sixty-eight, when the unhallowed footsteps of innovation passed that way; and the venerable privileges of the Owls were assailed, for the first time, from the world outside.

Two featherless beings appeared, uninvited, at the door of the summer-house, surveyed the constitutional creepers, and said, "These must come down"--looked around at the horrid light of noonday, and said, "That must come in"--went away, thereupon, and were heard, in the distance, agreeing together, "To-morrow it shall be done."

And the Owls said, "Have we honored the summer-house by occupying it all these years--and is the horrid light of noonday to be let in on us at last? My lords and gentlemen, the Constitution is destroyed!"

They passed a resolution to that effect, as is the manner of their kind. And then they shut their eyes again, and felt that they had done their duty.

The same night, on their way to the fields, they observed with dismay a light in one of the windows of the house. What did the light mean?

It meant, in the first place, that the lawsuit was over at last. It meant, in the second place that the owner of Windygates, wanting money, had decided on letting the property. It meant, in the third place, that the property had found a tenant, and was to be renovated immediately out of doors and in. The Owls shrieked as they flapped along the lanes in the darkness, And that night they struck at a mouse--and missed him.

The next morning, the Owls--fast asleep in charge of the Constitution--were roused by voices of featherless beings all round them. They opened their eyes, under protest, and saw instruments of destruction attacking the creepers. Now in one direction, and now in another, those instruments let in on the summer-house the horrid light of day. But the Owls were equal to the occasion. They ruffled their feathers, and cried, "No surrender!" The featherless beings plied their work cheerfully, and answered, "Reform!" The creepers were torn down this way and that. The horrid daylight poured in brighter and brighter. The Owls had barely time to pass a new resolution, namely, "That we do stand by the Constitution," when a ray of the outer sunlight flashed into their eyes, and sent them flying headlong to the nearest shade. There they sat winking, while the summer-house was cleared of the rank growth that had choked it up, while the rotten wood-work was renewed, while all the murky place was purified with air and light. And when the world saw it, and said, "Now we shall do!" the Owls shut their eyes in pious remembrance of the darkness, and answered, "My lords and gentlemen, the Constitution is destroyed!"

CHAPTER THE SECOND. - THE GUESTS.

Who was responsible for the reform of the summer-house? The new tenant at Windygates was responsible.

And who was the new tenant?

Come, and see.

In the spring of eighteen hundred and sixty-eight the summer-house had been the dismal dwelling-place of a pair of owls. In the autumn of the same year the summer-house was the lively gathering-place of a crowd of ladies and gentlemen, assembled at a lawn party--the guests of the tenant who had taken Windygates.

The scene--at the opening of the party--was as pleasant to look at as light and beauty and movement could make it.

Inside the summer-house the butterfly-brightness of the women in their summer dresses shone radiant out of the gloom shed round it by the dreary modern clothing of the men. Outside the summer-house, seen through three arched openings, the cool green prospect of a lawn led away, in the distance, to flower-beds and shrubberies, and, farther still, disclosed, through a break in the trees, a grand stone house which closed the view, with a fountain in front of it playing in the sun.

They were half of them laughing, they were all of them talking--the comfortable hum of their voices was at its loudest; the cheery pealing of the laughter was soaring to its highest notes--when one dominant voice, rising clear and shrill above all the rest, called imperatively for silence. The moment after, a young lady stepped into the vacant space in front of the summer-house, and surveyed the throng of guests as a general in command surveys a regiment under review.

She was young, she was pretty, she was plump, she was fair. She was not the least embarrassed by her prominent position. She was dressed in the height of the fashion. A hat, like a cheese-plate, was tilted over her forehead. A balloon of light brown hair soared, fully inflated, from the crown of her head. A cataract of beads poured over her bosom. A pair of cock-chafers in enamel (frightfully like the living originals) hung at her ears. Her scanty skirts shone splendid with the blue of heaven. Her ankles twinkled in

striped stockings. Her shoes were of the sort called "Watteau." And her heels were of the height at which men shudder, and ask themselves (in contemplating an otherwise lovable woman), "Can this charming person straighten her knees?"

The young lady thus presenting herself to the general view was Miss Blanche Lundie--once the little rosy Blanche whom the Prologue has introduced to the reader. Age, at the present time, eighteen. Position, excellent. Money, certain. Temper, quick. Disposition, variable. In a word, a child of the modern time--with the merits of the age we live in, and the failings of the age we live in--and a substance of sincerity and truth and feeling underlying it all.

"Now then, good people," cried Miss Blanche, "silence, if you please! We are going to choose sides at croquet. Business, business, business!"

Upon this, a second lady among the company assumed a position of prominence, and answered the young person who had just spoken with a look of mild reproof, and in a tone of benevolent protest.

The second lady was tall, and solid, and five-and-thirty. She presented to the general observation a cruel aquiline nose, an obstinate straight chin, magnificent dark hair and eyes, a serene splendor of fawn-colored apparel, and a lazy grace of movement which was attractive at first sight, but inexpressibly monotonous and wearisome on a longer acquaintance. This was Lady Lundie the Second, now the widow (after four months only of married life) of Sir Thomas Lundie, deceased. In other words, the step-mother of Blanche, and the enviable person who had taken the house and lands of Windygates.

"My dear," said Lady Lundie, "words have their meanings--even on a young lady's lips. Do you call Croquet, 'business?'"

"You don't call it pleasure, surely?" said a gravely ironical voice in the back-ground of the summer-house.

The ranks of the visitors parted before the last speaker, and disclosed to view, in the midst of that modern assembly, a gentleman of the bygone time.

The manner of this gentleman was distinguished by a pliant grace and courtesy unknown to the present generation. The attire of this gentleman was composed of a many-folded white cravat, a close-buttoned blue dress-coat, and nankeen trousers with gaiters to match, ridiculous to the present

generation. The talk of this gentleman ran in an easy flow--revealing an independent habit of mind, and exhibiting a carefully-polished capacity for satirical retort--dreaded and disliked by the present generation. Personally, he was little and wiry and slim--with a bright white head, and sparkling black eyes, and a wry twist of humor curling sharply at the corners of his lips. At his lower extremities, he exhibited the deformity which is popularly known as "a club-foot." But he carried his lameness, as he carried his years, gayly. He was socially celebrated for his ivory cane, with a snuff-box artfully let into the knob at the top--and he was socially dreaded for a hatred of modern institutions, which expressed itself in season and out of season, and which always showed the same, fatal knack of hitting smartly on the weakest place. Such was Sir Patrick Lundie; brother of the late baronet, Sir Thomas; and inheritor, at Sir Thomas's death, of the title and estates.

Miss Blanche--taking no notice of her step-mother's reproof, or of her uncle's commentary on it--pointed to a table on which croquet mallets and balls were laid ready, and recalled the attention of the company to the matter in hand.

"I head one side, ladies and gentlemen," she resumed. "And Lady Lundie heads the other. We choose our players turn and turn about. Mamma has the advantage of me in years. So mamma chooses first."

With a look at her step-daughter--which, being interpreted, meant, "I would send you back to the nursery, miss, if I could!"--Lady Lundie turned and ran her eye over her guests. She had evidently made up her mind, beforehand, what player to pick out first.

"I choose Miss Silvester," she said--with a special emphasis laid on the name.

At that there was another parting among the crowd. To us (who know her), it was Anne who now appeared. Strangers, who saw her for the first time, saw a lady in the prime of her life--a lady plainly dressed in unornamented white--who advanced slowly, and confronted the mistress of the house.

A certain proportion--and not a small one--of the men at the lawn-party had been brought there by friends who were privileged to introduce them. The moment she appeared every one of those men suddenly became interested in the lady who had been chosen first.

"That's a very charming woman," whispered one of the strangers at the house to one of the friends of the house. "Who is she?"

The friend whispered back.

"Miss Lundie's governess--that's all."

The moment during which the question was put and answered was also the moment which brought Lady Lundie and Miss Silvester face to face in the presence of the company.

The stranger at the house looked at the two women, and whispered again.

"Something wrong between the lady and the governess," he said.

The friend looked also, and answered, in one emphatic word:

"Evidently!"

There are certain women whose influence over men is an unfathomable mystery to observers of their own sex. The governess was one of those women. She had inherited the charm, but not the beauty, of her unhappy mother. Judge her by the standard set up in the illustrated gift-books and the print-shop windows--and the sentence must have inevitably followed. "She has not a single good feature in her face."

There was nothing individually remarkable about Miss Silvester, seen in a state of repose. She was of the average height. She was as well made as most women. In hair and complexion she was neither light nor dark, but provokingly neutral just between the two. Worse even than this, there were positive defects in her face, which it was impossible to deny. A nervous contraction at one corner of her mouth drew up the lips out of the symmetrically right line, when, they moved. A nervous uncertainty in the eye on the same side narrowly escaped presenting the deformity of a "cast." And yet, with these indisputable drawbacks, here was one of those women--the formidable few--who have the hearts of men and the peace of families at their mercy. She moved--and there was some subtle charm, Sir, in the movement, that made you look back, and suspend your conversation with your friend, and watch her silently while she walked. She sat by you and talked to you--and behold, a sensitive something passed into that little twist at the corner of the mouth, and into that nervous uncertainty in the soft gray eye, which turned defect into beauty--which enchained your senses--which made your nerves thrill if she touched you by accident, and set your heart beating if you looked at the same book with her, and felt her breath on your face. All this, let it be well understood, only happened if you were a

man.

If you saw her with the eyes of a woman, the results were of quite another kind. In that case you merely turned to your nearest female friend, and said, with unaffected pity for the other sex, "What can the men see in her!"

The eyes of the lady of the house and the eyes of the governess met, with marked distrust on either side. Few people could have failed to see what the stranger and the friend had noticed alike--that there was something smoldering under the surface here. Miss Silvester spoke first.

"Thank you, Lady Lundie," she said. "I would rather not play."

Lady Lundie assumed an extreme surprise which passed the limits of good-breeding.

"Oh, indeed?" she rejoined, sharply. "Considering that we are all here for the purpose of playing, that seems rather remarkable. Is any thing wrong, Miss Silvester?"

A flush appeared on the delicate paleness of Miss Silvester's face. But she did her duty as a woman and a governess. She submitted, and so preserved appearances, for that time.

"Nothing is the matter," she answered. "I am not very well this morning. But I will play if you wish it."

"I do wish it," answered Lady Lundie.

Miss Silvester turned aside toward one of the entrances into the summer-house. She waited for events, looking out over the lawn, with a visible inner disturbance, marked over the bosom by the rise and fall of her white dress.

It was Blanche's turn to select the next player.

In some preliminary uncertainty as to her choice she looked about among the guests, and caught the eye of a gentleman in the front ranks. He stood side by side with Sir Patrick--a striking representative of the school that is among us--as Sir Patrick was a striking representative of the school that has passed away.

The modern gentleman was young and florid, tall and strong. The parting of his curly Saxon locks began in the center of his forehead, traveled over the

top of his head, and ended, rigidly-central, at the ruddy nape of his neck. His features were as perfectly regular and as perfectly unintelligent as human features can be. His expression preserved an immovable composure wonderful to behold. The muscles of his brawny arms showed through the sleeves of his light summer coat. He was deep in the chest, thin in the flanks, firm on the legs--in two words a magnificent human animal, wrought up to the highest pitch of physical development, from head to foot. This was Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn--commonly called "the honorable;" and meriting that distinction in more ways than one. He was honorable, in the first place, as being the son (second son) of that once-rising solicitor, who was now Lord Holchester. He was honorable, in the second place, as having won the highest popular distinction which the educational system of modern England can bestow--he had pulled the stroke-oar in a University boat-race. Add to this, that nobody had ever seen him read any thing but a newspaper, and that nobody had ever known him to be backward in settling a bet--and the picture of this distinguished young Englishman will be, for the present, complete.

Blanche's eye naturally rested on him. Blanche's voice naturally picked him out as the first player on her side.

"I choose Mr. Delamayn," she said.

As the name passed her lips the flush on Miss Silvester's face died away, and a deadly paleness took its place. She made a movement to leave the summer-house--checked herself abruptly--and laid one hand on the back of a rustic seat at her side. A gentleman behind her, looking at the hand, saw it clench itself so suddenly and so fiercely that the glove on it split. The gentleman made a mental memorandum, and registered Miss Silvester in his private books as "the devil's own temper."

Meanwhile Mr. Delamayn, by a strange coincidence, took exactly the same course which Miss Silvester had taken before him. He, too, attempted to withdraw from the coming game.

"Thanks very much," he said. "Could you additionally honor me by choosing somebody else? It's not in my line."

Fifty years ago such an answer as this, addressed to a lady, would have been considered inexcusably impertinent. The social code of the present time hailed it as something frankly amusing. The company laughed. Blanche lost her temper.

"Can't we interest you in any thing but severe muscular exertion, Mr. Delamayn?" she asked, sharply. "Must you always be pulling in a boat-race, or flying over a high jump? If you had a mind, you would want to relax it. You have got muscles instead. Why not relax them?"

The shafts of Miss Lundie's bitter wit glided off Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn like water off a duck's back.

"Just as you please," he said, with stolid good-humor. "Don't be offended. I came here with ladies--and they wouldn't let me smoke. I miss my smoke. I thought I'd slip away a bit and have it. All right! I'll play."

"Oh! smoke by all means!" retorted Blanche. "I shall choose somebody else. I won't have you!"

The honorable young gentleman looked unaffectedly relieved. The petulant young lady turned her back on him, and surveyed the guests at the other extremity of the summer-house.

"Who shall I choose?" she said to herself.

A dark young man--with a face burned gipsy-brown by the sun; with something in his look and manner suggestive of a roving life, and perhaps of a familiar acquaintance with the sea--advanced shyly, and said, in a whisper:

"Choose me!"

Blanche's face broke prettily into a charming smile. Judging from appearances, the dark young man had a place in her estimation peculiarly his own.

"You!" she said, coquettishly. "You are going to leave us in an hour's time!"

He ventured a step nearer. "I am coming back," he pleaded, "the day after to-morrow."

"You play very badly!"

"I might improve--if you would teach me."

"Might you? Then I will teach you!" She turned, bright and rosy, to her step-mother. "I choose Mr. Arnold Brinkworth," she said.

Here, again, there appeared to be something in a name unknown to celebrity, which nevertheless produced its effect--not, this time, on Miss Silvester, but on Sir Patrick. He looked at Mr. Brinkworth with a sudden interest and curiosity. If the lady of the house had not claimed his attention at the moment he would evidently have spoken to the dark young man.

But it was Lady Lundie's turn to choose a second player on her side. Her brother-in-law was a person of some importance; and she had her own motives for ingratiating herself with the head of the family. She surprised the whole company by choosing Sir Patrick.

"Mamma!" cried Blanche. "What can you be thinking of? Sir Patrick won't play. Croquet wasn't discovered in his time."

Sir Patrick never allowed "his time" to be made the subject of disparaging remarks by the younger generation without paying the younger generation back in its own coin.

"In my time, my dear," he said to his niece, "people were expected to bring some agreeable quality with them to social meetings of this sort. In your time you have dispensed with all that. Here," remarked the old gentleman, taking up a croquet mallet from the table near him, "is one of the qualifications for success in modern society. And here," he added, taking up a ball, "is another. Very good. Live and learn. I'll play! I'll play!"

Lady Lundie (born impervious to all sense of irony) smiled graciously.

"I knew Sir Patrick would play," she said, "to please me."

Sir Patrick bowed with satirical politeness.

"Lady Lundie," he answered, "you read me like a book." To the astonishment of all persons present under forty he emphasized those words by laying his hand on his heart, and quoting poetry. "I may say with Dryden," added the gallant old gentleman:

"'Old as I am, for ladies' love unfit, The power of beauty I remember yet.'"

Lady Lundie looked unaffectedly shocked. Mr. Delamayn went a step farther. He interfered on the spot--with the air of a man who feels himself imperatively called upon to perform a public duty.

"Dryden never said that," he remarked, "I'll answer for it."

Sir Patrick wheeled round with the help of his ivory cane, and looked Mr. Delamayn hard in the face.

"Do you know Dryden, Sir, better than I do?" he asked.

The Honorable Geoffrey answered, modestly, "I should say I did. I have rowed three races with him, and we trained together."

Sir Patrick looked round him with a sour smile of triumph.

"Then let me tell you, Sir," he said, "that you trained with a man who died nearly two hundred years ago."

Mr. Delamayn appealed, in genuine bewilderment, to the company generally:

"What does this old gentleman mean?" he asked. "I am speaking of Tom Dryden, of Corpus. Every body in the University knows him."

"I am speaking," echoed Sir Patrick, "of John Dryden the Poet. Apparently, every body in the University does not know him!"

Mr. Delamayn answered, with a cordial earnestness very pleasant to see:

"Give you my word of honor, I never heard of him before in my life! Don't be angry, Sir. I'm not offended with you." He smiled, and took out his brier-wood pipe. "Got a light?" he asked, in the friendliest possible manner.

Sir Patrick answered, with a total absence of cordiality:

"I don't smoke, Sir."

Mr. Delamayn looked at him, without taking the slightest offense:

"You don't smoke!" he repeated. "I wonder how you get through your spare time?"

Sir Patrick closed the conversation:

"Sir," he said, with a low bow, "you may wonder."

While this little skirmish was proceeding Lady Lundie and her step-daughter had organized the game; and the company, players and spectators, were beginning to move toward the lawn. Sir Patrick stopped his niece on her way out, with the dark young man in close attendance on her.

"Leave Mr. Brinkworth with me," he said. "I want to speak to him."

Blanche issued her orders immediately. Mr. Brinkworth was sentenced to stay with Sir Patrick until she wanted him for the game. Mr. Brinkworth wondered, and obeyed.

During the exercise of this act of authority a circumstance occurred at the other end of the summer-house. Taking advantage of the confusion caused by the general movement to the lawn, Miss Silvester suddenly placed herself close to Mr. Delamayn.

"In ten minutes," she whispered, "the summer-house will be empty. Meet me here."

The Honorable Geoffrey started, and looked furtively at the visitors about him.

"Do you think it's safe?" he whispered back.

The governess's sensitive lips trembled, with fear or with anger, it was hard to say which.

"I insist on it!" she answered, and left him.

Mr. Delamayn knitted his handsome eyebrows as he looked after her, and then left the summer-house in his turn. The rose-garden at the back of the building was solitary for the moment. He took out his pipe and hid himself among the roses. The smoke came from his mouth in hot and hasty puffs. He was usually the gentlest of masters--to his pipe. When he hurried that confidential servant, it was a sure sign of disturbance in the inner man.

CHAPTER THE THIRD. - THE DISCOVERIES.

BUT two persons were now left in the summer-house--Arnold Brinkworth and Sir Patrick Lundie.

"Mr. Brinkworth," said the old gentleman, "I have had no opportunity of speaking to you before this; and (as I hear that you are to leave us, to-day) I may find no opportunity at a later time. I want to introduce myself. Your father was one of my dearest friends--let me make a friend of your father's son."

He held out his hands, and mentioned his name.

Arnold recognized it directly. "Oh, Sir Patrick!" he said, warmly, "if my poor father had only taken your advice--"

"He would have thought twice before he gambled away his fortune on the turf; and he might have been alive here among us, instead of dying an exile in a foreign land," said Sir Patrick, finishing the sentence which the other had begun. "No more of that! Let's talk of something else. Lady Lundie wrote to me about you the other day. She told me your aunt was dead, and had left you heir to her property in Scotland. Is that true?--It is?--I congratulate you with all my heart. Why are you visiting here, instead of looking after your house and lands? Oh! it's only three-and-twenty miles from this; and you're going to look after it to-day, by the next train? Quite right. And--what? what?--coming back again the day after to-morrow? Why should you come back? Some special attraction here, I suppose? I hope it's the right sort of attraction. You're very young--you're exposed to all sorts of temptations. Have you got a solid foundation of good sense at the bottom of you? It is not inherited from your poor father, if you have. You must have been a mere boy when he ruined his children's prospects. How have you lived from that time to this? What were you doing when your aunt's will made an idle man of you for life?"

The question was a searching one. Arnold answered it, without the slightest hesitation; speaking with an unaffected modesty and simplicity which at once won Sir Patrick's heart.

"I was a boy at Eton, Sir," he said, "when my father's losses ruined him. I had to leave school, and get my own living; and I have got it, in a roughish way, from that time to this. In plain English, I have followed the sea--in the

merchant-service."

"In plainer English still, you met adversity like a brave lad, and you have fairly earned the good luck that has fallen to you," rejoined Sir Patrick. "Give me your hand--I have taken a liking to you. You're not like the other young fellows of the present time. I shall call you 'Arnold.' You mus'n't return the compliment and call me 'Patrick,' mind--I'm too old to be treated in that way. Well, and how do you get on here? What sort of a woman is my sister-in-law? and what sort of a house is this?"

Arnold burst out laughing.

"Those are extraordinary questions for you to put to me," he said. "You talk, Sir, as if you were a stranger here!"

Sir Patrick touched a spring in the knob of his ivory cane. A little gold lid flew up, and disclosed the snuff-box hidden inside. He took a pinch, and chuckled satirically over some passing thought, which he did not think it necessary to communicate to his young friend.

"I talk as if I was a stranger here, do I?" he resumed. "That's exactly what I am. Lady Lundie and I correspond on excellent terms; but we run in different grooves, and we see each other as seldom as possible. My story," continued the pleasant old man, with a charming frankness which leveled all differences of age and rank between Arnold and himself, "is not entirely unlike yours; though I am old enough to be your grandfather. I was getting my living, in my way (as a crusty old Scotch lawyer), when my brother married again. His death, without leaving a son by either of his wives, gave me a lift in the world, like you. Here I am (to my own sincere regret) the present baronet. Yes, to my sincere regret! All sorts of responsibilities which I never bargained for are thrust on my shoulders. I am the head of the family; I am my niece's guardian; I am compelled to appear at this lawn-party--and (between ourselves) I am as completely out of my element as a man can be. Not a single familiar face meets me among all these fine people. Do you know any body here?"

"I have one friend at Windygates," said Arnold. "He came here this morning, like you. Geoffrey Delamayn."

As he made the reply, Miss Silvester appeared at the entrance to the summer-house. A shadow of annoyance passed over her face when she saw that the place was occupied. She vanished, unnoticed, and glided back to the game.

Sir Patrick looked at the son of his old friend, with every appearance of being disappointed in the young man for the first time.

"Your choice of a friend rather surprises me," he said.

Arnold artlessly accepted the words as an appeal to him for information.

"I beg your pardon, Sir--there's nothing surprising in it," he returned. "We were school-fellows at Eton, in the old times. And I have met Geoffrey since, when he was yachting, and when I was with my ship. Geoffrey saved my life, Sir Patrick," he added, his voice rising, and his eyes brightening with honest admiration of his friend. "But for him, I should have been drowned in a boat-accident. Isn't that a good reason for his being a friend of mine?"

"It depends entirely on the value you set on your life," said Sir Patrick.

"The value I set on my life?" repeated Arnold. "I set a high value on it, of course!"

"In that case, Mr. Delamayn has laid you under an obligation."

"Which I can never repay!"

"Which you will repay one of these days, with interest--if I know any thing of human nature," answered Sir Patrick.

He said the words with the emphasis of strong conviction. They were barely spoken when Mr. Delamayn appeared (exactly as Miss Silvester had appeared) at the entrance to the summer-house. He, too, vanished, unnoticed--like Miss Silvester again. But there the parallel stopped. The Honorable Geoffrey's expression, on discovering the place to be occupied, was, unmistakably an expression of relief.

Arnold drew the right inference, this time, from Sir Patrick's language and Sir Patrick's tones. He eagerly took up the defense of his friend.

"You said that rather bitterly, Sir," he remarked. "What has Geoffrey done to offend you?"

"He presumes to exist--that's what he has done," retorted Sir Patrick. "Don't stare! I am speaking generally. Your friend is the model young Briton of the present time. I don't like the model young Briton. I don't see the sense of

crowing over him as a superb national production, because he is big and strong, and drinks beer with impunity, and takes a cold shower bath all the year round. There is far too much glorification in England, just now, of the mere physical qualities which an Englishman shares with the savage and the brute. And the ill results are beginning to show themselves already! We are readier than we ever were to practice all that is rough in our national customs, and to excuse all that is violent and brutish in our national acts. Read the popular books--attend the popular amusements; and you will find at the bottom of them all a lessening regard for the gentler graces of civilized life, and a growing admiration for the virtues of the aboriginal Britons!"

Arnold listened in blank amazement. He had been the innocent means of relieving Sir Patrick's mind of an accumulation of social protest, unprovided with an issue for some time past. "How hot you are over it, Sir!" he exclaimed, in irrepressible astonishment.

Sir Patrick instantly recovered himself. The genuine wonder expressed in the young man's face was irresistible.

"Almost as hot," he said, "as if I was cheering at a boat-race, or wrangling over a betting-book--eh? Ah, we were so easily heated when I was a young man! Let's change the subject. I know nothing to the prejudice of your friend, Mr. Delamayn. It's the cant of the day," cried Sir Patrick, relapsing again, "to take these physically-wholesome men for granted as being morally-wholesome men into the bargain. Time will show whether the cant of the day is right.--So you are actually coming back to Lady Lundie's after a mere flying visit to your own property? I repeat, that is a most extraordinary proceeding on the part of a landed gentleman like you. What's the attraction here--eh?"

Before Arnold could reply Blanche called to him from the lawn. His color rose, and he turned eagerly to go out. Sir Patrick nodded his head with the air of a man who had been answered to his own entire satisfaction. "Oh!" he said, "that's the attraction, is it?"

Arnold's life at sea had left him singularly ignorant of the ways of the world on shore. Instead of taking the joke, he looked confused. A deeper tinge of color reddened his dark cheeks. "I didn't say so," he answered, a little irritably.

Sir Patrick lifted two of his white, wrinkled old fingers, and good-humoredly patted the young sailor on the cheek.

"Yes you did," he said. "In red letters."

The little gold lid in the knob of the ivory cane flew up, and the old gentleman rewarded himself for that neat retort with a pinch of snuff. At the same moment Blanche made her appearance on the scene.

"Mr. Brinkworth," she said, "I shall want you directly. Uncle, it's your turn to play."

"Bless my soul!" cried Sir Patrick, "I forgot the game." He looked about him, and saw his mallet and ball left waiting on the table. "Where are the modern substitutes for conversation? Oh, here they are!" He bowled the ball out before him on to the lawn, and tucked the mallet, as if it was an umbrella, under his arm. "Who was the first mistaken person," he said to himself, as he briskly hobbled out, "who discovered that human life was a serious thing? Here am I, with one foot in the grave; and the most serious question before me at the present moment is, Shall I get through the Hoops?"

Arnold and Blanche were left together.

Among the personal privileges which Nature has accorded to women, there are surely none more enviable than their privilege of always looking their best when they look at the man they love. When Blanche's eyes turned on Arnold after her uncle had gone out, not even the hideous fashionable disfigurements of the inflated "chignon" and the tilted hat could destroy the triple charm of youth, beauty, and tenderness beaming in her face. Arnold looked at her--and remembered, as he had never remembered yet, that he was going by the next train, and that he was leaving her in the society of more than one admiring man of his own age. The experience of a whole fortnight passed under the same roof with her had proved Blanche to be the most charming girl in existence. It was possible that she might not be mortally offended with him if he told her so. He determined that he would tell her so at that auspicious moment.

But who shall presume to measure the abyss that lies between the Intention and the Execution? Arnold's resolution to speak was as firmly settled as a resolution could be. And what came of it? Alas for human infirmity! Nothing came of it but silence.

"You don't look quite at your ease, Mr. Brinkworth," said Blanche. "What has Sir Patrick been saying to you? My uncle sharpens his wit on every body. He has been sharpening it on you?"

Arnold began to see his way. At an immeasurable distance--but still he saw it.

"Sir Patrick is a terrible old man," he answered. "Just before you came in he discovered one of my secrets by only looking in my face." He paused, rallied his courage, pushed on at all hazards, and came headlong to the point. "I wonder," he asked, bluntly, "whether you take after your uncle?"

Blanche instantly understood him. With time at her disposal, she would have taken him lightly in hand, and led him, by fine gradations, to the object in view. But in two minutes or less it would be Arnold's turn to play. "He is going to make me an offer," thought Blanche; "and he has about a minute to do it in. He shall do it!"

"What!" she exclaimed, "do you think the gift of discovery runs in the family?"

Arnold made a plunge.

"I wish it did!" he said.

Blanche looked the picture of astonishment.

"Why?" she asked.

"If you could see in my face what Sir Patrick saw--"

He had only to finish the sentence, and the thing was done. But the tender passion perversely delights in raising obstacles to itself. A sudden timidity seized on Arnold exactly at the wrong moment. He stopped short, in the most awkward manner possible.

Blanche heard from the lawn the blow of the mallet on the ball, and the laughter of the company at some blunder of Sir Patrick's. The precious seconds were slipping away. She could have boxed Arnold on both ears for being so unreasonably afraid of her.

"Well," she said, impatiently, "if I did look in your face, what should I see?"

Arnold made another plunge. He answered: "You would see that I want a little encouragement."

"From me?"

"Yes--if you please."

Blanche looked back over her shoulder. The summer-house stood on an eminence, approached by steps. The players on the lawn beneath were audible, but not visible. Any one of them might appear, unexpectedly, at a moment's notice. Blanche listened. There was no sound of approaching footsteps--there was a general hush, and then another bang of the mallet on the ball and then a clapping of hands. Sir Patrick was a privileged person. He had been allowed, in all probability, to try again; and he was succeeding at the second effort. This implied a reprieve of some seconds. Blanche looked back again at Arnold.

"Consider yourself encouraged," she whispered; and instantly added, with the ineradicable female instinct of self-defense, "within limits!"

Arnold made a last plunge--straight to the bottom, this time.

"Consider yourself loved," he burst out, "without any limits at all."

It was all over--the words were spoken--he had got her by the hand. Again the perversity of the tender passion showed itself more strongly than ever. The confession which Blanche had been longing to hear, had barely escaped her lover's lips before Blanche protested against it! She struggled to release her hand. She formally appealed to Arnold to let her go.

Arnold only held her the tighter.

"Do try to like me a little!" he pleaded. "I am so fond of you!"

Who was to resist such wooing as this?--when you were privately fond of him yourself, remember, and when you were certain to be interrupted in another moment! Blanche left off struggling, and looked up at her young sailor with a smile.

"Did you learn this method of making love in the merchant-service?" she inquired, saucily.

Arnold persisted in contemplating his prospects from the serious point of view.

"I'll go back to the merchant-service," he said, "if I have made you angry with me."

Blanche administered another dose of encouragement.

"Anger, Mr. Brinkworth, is one of the bad passions," she answered, demurely. "A young lady who has been properly brought up has no bad passions."

There was a sudden cry from the players on the lawn--a cry for "Mr. Brinkworth." Blanche tried to push him out. Arnold was immovable.

"Say something to encourage me before I go," he pleaded. "One word will do. Say, Yes."

Blanche shook her head. Now she had got him, the temptation to tease him was irresistible.

"Quite impossible!" she rejoined. "If you want any more encouragement, you must speak to my uncle."

"I'll speak to him," returned Arnold, "before I leave the house."

There was another cry for "Mr. Brinkworth." Blanche made another effort to push him out.

"Go!" she said. "And mind you get through the hoop!"

She had both hands on his shoulders--her face was close to his--she was simply irresistible. Arnold caught her round the waist and kissed her. Needless to tell him to get through the hoop. He had surely got through it already! Blanche was speechless. Arnold's last effort in the art of courtship had taken away her breath. Before she could recover herself a sound of approaching footsteps became plainly audible. Arnold gave her a last squeeze, and ran out.

She sank on the nearest chair, and closed her eyes in a flutter of delicious confusion.

The footsteps ascending to the summer-house came nearer. Blanche opened her eyes, and saw Anne Silvester, standing alone, looking at her. She sprang to her feet, and threw her arms impulsively round Anne's neck.

"You don't know what has happened," she whispered. "Wish me joy, darling. He has said the words. He is mine for life!"

All the sisterly love and sisterly confidence of many years was expressed in that embrace, and in the tone in which the words were spoken. The hearts of the mothers, in the past time, could hardly have been closer to each other--as it seemed--than the hearts of the daughters were now. And yet, if Blanche had looked up in Anne's face at that moment, she must have seen that Anne's mind was far away from her little love-story.

"You know who it is?" she went on, after waiting for a reply.

"Mr. Brinkworth?"

"Of course! Who else should it be?"

"And you are really happy, my love?"

"Happy?" repeated Blanche "Mind! this is strictly between ourselves. I am ready to jump out of my skin for joy. I love him! I love him! I love him!" she cried, with a childish pleasure in repeating the words. They were echoed by a heavy sigh. Blanche instantly looked up into Anne's face. "What's the matter?" she asked, with a sudden change of voice and manner.

"Nothing."

Blanche's observation saw too plainly to be blinded in that way.

"There is something the matter," she said. "Is it money?" she added, after a moment's consideration. "Bills to pay? I have got plenty of money, Anne. I'll lend you what you like."

"No, no, my dear!"

Blanche drew back, a little hurt. Anne was keeping her at a distance for the first time in Blanche's experience of her.

"I tell you all my secrets," she said. "Why are you keeping a secret from me? Do you know that you have been looking anxious and out of spirits for some time past? Perhaps you don't like Mr. Brinkworth? No? you do like him? Is it my marrying, then? I believe it is! You fancy we shall be parted, you goose? As if I could do without you! Of course, when I am married to Arnold, you will come and live with us. That's quite understood between us--isn't it?"

Anne drew herself suddenly, almost roughly, away from Blanche, and

pointed out to the steps.

"There is somebody coming," she said. "Look!"

The person coming was Arnold. It was Blanche's turn to play, and he had volunteered to fetch her.

Blanche's attention--easily enough distracted on other occasions--remained steadily fixed on Anne.

"You are not yourself," she said, "and I must know the reason of it. I will wait till to-night; and then you will tell me, when you come into my room. Don't look like that! You shall tell me. And there's a kiss for you in the mean time!"

She joined Arnold, and recovered her gayety the moment she looked at him.

"Well? Have you got through the hoops?"

"Never mind the hoops. I have broken the ice with Sir Patrick."

"What! before all the company!"

"Of course not! I have made an appointment to speak to him here."

They went laughing down the steps, and joined the game.

Left alone, Anne Silvester walked slowly to the inner and darker part of the summer-house. A glass, in a carved wooden frame, was fixed against one of the side walls. She stopped and looked into it--looked, shuddering, at the reflection of herself.

"Is the time coming," she said, "when even Blanche will see what I am in my face?"

She turned aside from the glass. With a sudden cry of despair she flung up her arms and laid them heavily against the wall, and rested her head on them with her back to the light. At the same moment a man's figure appeared--standing dark in the flood of sunshine at the entrance to the summer-house. The man was Geoffrey Delamayn.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH. - THE TWO.

He advanced a few steps, and stopped. Absorbed in herself, Anne failed to hear him. She never moved.

"I have come, as you made a point of it," he said, sullenly. "But, mind you, it isn't safe."

At the sound of his voice, Anne turned toward him. A change of expression appeared in her face, as she slowly advanced from the back of the summer-house, which revealed a likeness to her moth er, not perceivable at other times. As the mother had looked, in by-gone days, at the man who had disowned her, so the daughter looked at Geoffrey Delamayn--with the same terrible composure, and the same terrible contempt.

"Well?" he asked. "What have you got to say to me?"

"Mr. Delamayn," she answered, "you are one of the fortunate people of this world. You are a nobleman's son. You are a handsome man. You are popular at your college. You are free of the best houses in England. Are you something besides all this? Are you a coward and a scoundrel as well?"

He started--opened his lips to speak--checked himself--and made an uneasy attempt to laugh it off. "Come!" he said, "keep your temper."

The suppressed passion in her began to force its way to the surface.

"Keep my temper?" she repeated. "Do you of all men expect me to control myself? What a memory yours must be! Have you forgotten the time when I was fool enough to think you were fond of me? and mad enough to believe you could keep a promise?"

He persisted in trying to laugh it off. "Mad is a strongish word to use, Miss Silvester!"

"Mad is the right word! I look back at my own infatuation--and I can't account for it; I can't understand myself. What was there in you," she asked, with an outbreak of contemptuous surprise, "to attract such a woman as I am?"

His inexhaustible good-nature was proof even against this. He put his hands

in his pockets, and said, "I'm sure I don't know."

She turned away from him. The frank brutality of the answer had not offended her. It forced her, cruelly forced her, to remember that she had nobody but herself to blame for the position in which she stood at that moment. She was unwilling to let him see how the remembrance hurt her--that was all. A sad, sad story; but it must be told. In her mother's time she had been the sweetest, the most lovable of children. In later days, under the care of her mother's friend, her girlhood had passed so harmlessly and so happily--it seemed as if the sleeping passions might sleep forever! She had lived on to the prime of her womanhood--and then, when the treasure of her life was at its richest, in one fatal moment she had flung it away on the man in whose presence she now stood.

Was she without excuse? No: not utterly without excuse.

She had seen him under other aspects than the aspect which he presented now. She had seen him, the hero of the river-race, the first and foremost man in a trial of strength and skill which had roused the enthusiasm of all England. She had seen him, the central object of the interest of a nation; the idol of the popular worship and the popular applause. His were the arms whose muscle was celebrated in the newspapers. He was first among the heroes hailed by ten thousand roaring throats as the pride and flower of England. A woman, in an atmosphere of red-hot enthusiasm, witnesses the apotheosis of Physical Strength. Is it reasonable--is it just--to expect her to ask herself, in cold blood, What (morally and intellectually) is all this worth?--and that, when the man who is the object of the apotheosis, notices her, is presented to her, finds her to his taste, and singles her out from the rest? No. While humanity is humanity, the woman is not utterly without excuse.

Has she escaped, without suffering for it?

Look at her as she stands there, tortured by the knowledge of her own secret--the hideous secret which she is hiding from the innocent girl, whom she loves with a sister's love. Look at her, bowed down under a humiliation which is unutterable in words. She has seen him below the surface--now, when it is too late. She rates him at his true value--now, when her reputation is at his mercy. Ask her the question: What was there to love in a man who can speak to you as that man has spoken, who can treat you as that man is treating you now? you so clever, so cultivated, so refined--what,

in Heaven's name, could you see in him? Ask her that, and she will have no answer to give. She will not even remind you that he was once your model of manly beauty, too--that you waved your handkerchief till you could wave it no longer, when he took his seat, with the others, in the boat--that your heart was like to jump out of your bosom, on that later occasion when he leaped the last hurdle at the foot-race, and won it by a head. In the bitterness of her remorse, she will not even seek for that excuse for herself. Is there no atoning suffering to be seen here? Do your sympathies shrink from such a character as this? Follow her, good friends of virtue, on the pilgrimage that leads, by steep and thorny ways, to the purer atmosphere and the nobler life. Your fellow-creature, who has sinned and has repented--you have the authority of the Divine Teacher for it--is your fellow-creature, purified and ennobled. A joy among the angels of heaven--oh, my brothers and sisters of the earth, have I not laid my hand on a fit companion for You?

There was a moment of silence in the summer-house. The cheerful tumult of the lawn-party was pleasantly audible from the distance. Outside, the hum of voices, the laughter of girls, the thump of the croquet-mallet against the ball. Inside, nothing but a woman forcing back the bitter tears of sorrow and shame--and a man who was tired of her.

She roused herself. She was her mother's daughter; and she had a spark of her mother's spirit. Her life depended on the issue of that interview. It was useless--without father or brother to take her part--to lose the last chance of appealing to him. She dashed away the tears--time enough to cry, is time easily found in a woman's existence--she dashed away the tears, and spoke to him again, more gently than she had spoken yet.

"You have been three weeks, Geoffrey, at your brother Julius's place, not ten miles from here; and you have never once ridden over to see me. You would not have come to-day, if I had not written to you to insist on it. Is that the treatment I have deserved?"

She paused. There was no answer.

"Do you hear me?" she asked, advancing and speaking in louder tones.

He was still silent. It was not in human endurance to bear his contempt. The warning of a coming outbreak began to show itself in her face. He met it, beforehand, with an impenetrable front. Feeling nervous about the interview, while he was waiting in the rose-garden--now that he stood

committed to it, he was in full possession of himself. He was composed enough to remember that he had not put his pipe in its case--composed enough to set that little matter right before other matters went any farther. He took the case out of one pocket, and the pipe out of another.

"Go on," he said, quietly. "I hear you."

She struck the pipe out of his hand at a blow. If she had had the strength she would have struck him down with it on the floor of the summer-house.

"How dare you use me in this way?" she burst out, vehemently. "Your conduct is infamous. Defend it if you can!"

He made no attempt to defend it. He looked, with an expression of genuine anxiety, at the fallen pipe. It was beautifully colored--it had cost him ten shillings. "I'll pick up my pipe first," he said. His face brightened pleasantly--he looked handsomer than ever--as he examined the precious object, and put it back in the case. "All right," he said to himself. "She hasn't broken it." His attitude as he looked at her again, was the perfection of easy grace--the grace that attends on cultivated strength in a state of repose. "I put it to your own common-sense," he said, in the most reasonable manner, "what's the good of bullying me? You don't want them to hear you, out on the lawn there--do you? You women are all alike. There's no beating a little prudence into your heads, try how one may."

There he waited, expecting her to speak. She waited, on her side, and forced him to go on.

"Look here," he said, "there's no need to quarrel, you know. I don't want to break my promise; but what can I do? I'm not the eldest son. I'm dependent on my father for every farthing I have; and I'm on bad terms with him already. Can't you see it yourself? You're a lady, and all that, I know. But you're only a governess. It's your interest as well as mine to wait till my father has provided for me. Here it is in a nut-shell: if I marry you now, I'm a ruined man."

The answer came, this time.

"You villain if you don't marry me, I am a ruined woman!"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. Don't look at me in that way."

"How do you expect me to look at a woman who calls me a villain to my face?"

She suddenly changed her tone. The savage element in humanity--let the modern optimists who doubt its existence look at any uncultivated man (no matter how muscular), woman (no matter how beautiful), or child (no matter how young)--began to show itself furtively in his eyes, to utter itself furtively in his voice. Was he to blame for the manner in which he looked at her and spoke to her? Not he! What had there been in the training of his life (at school or at college) to soften and subdue the savage element in him? About as much as there had been in the training of his ancestors (without the school or the college) five hundred years since.

It was plain that one of them must give way. The woman had the most at stake--and the woman set the example of submission.

"Don't be hard on me," she pleaded. "I don't mean to be hard on you. My temper gets the better of me. You know my temper. I am sorry I forgot myself. Geoffrey, my whole future is in your hands. Will you do me justice?"

She came nearer, and laid her hand persuasively on his arm.

"Haven't you a word to say to me? No answer? Not even a look?" She waited a moment more. A marked change came over her. She turned slowly to leave the summer-house. "I am sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Delamayn. I won't detain you any longer."

He looked at her. There was a tone in her voice that he had never heard before. There was a light in her eyes that he had never seen in them before. Suddenly and fiercely he reached out his hand, and stopped her.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

She answered, looking him straight in the face, "Where many a miserable woman has gone before me. Out of the world."

He drew her nearer to him, and eyed her closely. Even his intelligence discovered that he had brought her to bay, and that she really meant it!

"Do you mean you will destroy yourself?" he said.

"Yes. I mean I will destroy myself."

He dropped her arm. "By Jupiter, she does mean it!"

With that conviction in him, he pushed one of the chairs in the summer-house to her with his foot, and signed to her to take it. "Sit down!" he said, roughly. She had frightened him--and fear comes seldom to men of his type. They feel it, when it does come, with an angry distrust; they grow loud and brutal, in instinctive protest against it. "Sit down!" he repeated. She obeyed him. "Haven't you got a word to say to me?" he asked, with an oath. No! there she sat, immovable, reckless how it ended--as only women can be, when women's minds are made up. He took a turn in the summer-house and came back, and struck his hand angrily on the rail of her chair. "What do you want?"

"You know what I want."

He took another turn. There was nothing for it but to give way on his side, or run the risk of something happening which might cause an awkward scandal, and come to his father's ears.

"Look here, Anne," he began, abruptly. "I have got something to propose."

She looked up at him.

"What do you say to a private marriage?"

Without asking a single question, without making objections, she answered him, speaking as bluntly as he had spoken himself:

"I consent to a private marriage."

He began to temporize directly.

"I own I don't see how it's to be managed--"

She stopped him there.

"I do!"

"What!" he cried out, suspiciously. "You have thought of it yourself, have you?"

"Yes."

"And planned for it?"

"And planned for it!"

"Why didn't you tell me so before?"

She answered haughtily; insisting on the respect which is due to women--the respect which was doubly due from him, in her position.

"Because you owed it to me, Sir, to speak first."

"Very well. I've spoken first. Will you wait a little?"

"Not a day!"

The tone was positive. There was no mistaking it. Her mind was made up.

"Where's the hurry?"

"Have you eyes?" she asked, vehemently. "Have you ears? Do you see how Lady Lundie looks at me? Do you hear how Lady Lundie speaks to me? I am suspected by that woman. My shameful dismissal from this house may be a question of a few hours." Her head sunk on her bosom; she wrung her clasped hands as they rested on her lap. "And, oh, Blanche!" she moaned to herself, the tears gathering again, and falling, this time, unchecked. "Blanche, who looks up to me! Blanche, who loves me! Blanche, who told me, in this very place, that I was to live with her when she was married!" She started up from the chair; the tears dried suddenly; the hard despair settled again, wan and white, on her face. "Let me go! What is death, compared to such a life as is waiting for me?" She looked him over, in one disdainful glance from head to foot; her voice rose to its loudest and firmest tones. "Why, even you; would have the courage to die if you were in my place!"

Geoffrey glanced round toward the lawn.

"Hush!" he said. "They will hear you!"

"Let them hear me! When I am past hearing them, what does it matter?"

He put her back by main force on the chair. In another moment they must have heard her, through all the noise and laughter of the game.

"Say what you want," he resumed, "and I'll do it. Only be reasonable. I can't marry you to-day."

"You can!"

"What nonsense you talk! The house and grounds are swarming with company. It can't be!"

"It can! I have been thinking about it ever since we came to this house. I have got something to propose to you. Will you hear it, or not?"

"Speak lower!"

"Will you hear it, or not?"

"There's somebody coming!"

"Will you hear it, or not?"

"The devil take your obstinacy! Yes!"

The answer had been wrung from him. Still, it was the answer she wanted--it opened the door to hope. The instant he had consented to hear her her mind awakened to the serious necessity of averting discovery by any third person who might stray idly into the summer-house. She held up her hand for silence, and listened to what was going forward on the lawn.

The dull thump of the croquet-mallet against the ball was no longer to be heard. The game had stopped.

In a moment more she heard her own name called. An interval of another instant passed, and a familiar voice said, "I know where she is. I'll fetch her."

She turned to Geoffrey, and pointed to the back of the summer-house.

"It's my turn to play," she said. "And Blanche is coming here to look for me. Wait there, and I'll stop her on the steps."

She went out at once. It was a critical moment. Discovery, which meant moral-ruin to the woman, meant money-ruin to the man. Geoffrey had not exaggerated his position with his father. Lord Holchester had twice paid his debts, and had declined to see him since. One more outrage on his father's

rigid sense of propriety, and he would be left out of the will as well as kept out of the house. He looked for a means of retreat, in case there was no escaping unperceived by the front entrance. A door--intended for the use of servants, when picnics and gipsy tea-parties were given in the summer-house--had been made in the back wall. It opened outward, and it was locked. With his strength it was easy to remove that obstacle. He put his shoulder to the door. At the moment when he burst it open he felt a hand on his arm. Anne was behind him, alone.

"You may want it before long," she said, observing the open door, without expressing any surprise, "You don't want it now. Another person will play for me--I have told Blanche I am not well. Sit down. I have secured a respite of five minutes, and I must make the most of it. In that time, or less, Lady Lundie's suspicions will bring her here--to see how I am. For the present, shut the door."

She seated herself, and pointed to a second chair. He took it--with his eye on the closed door.

"Come to the point!" he said, impatiently. "What is it?"

"You can marry me privately to-day," she answered. "Lis ten--and I will tell you how!"

CHAPTER THE FIFTH. - THE PLAN.

SHE took his hand, and began with all the art of persuasion that she possessed.

"One question, Geoffrey, before I say what I want to say. Lady Lundie has invited you to stay at Windygates. Do you accept her invitation? or do you go back to your brother's in the evening?"

"I can't go back in the evening--they've put a visitor into my room. I'm obliged to stay here. My brother has done it on purpose. Julius helps me when I'm hard up--and bullies me afterward. He has sent me here, on duty for the family. Somebody must be civil to Lady Lundie--and I'm the sacrifice."

She took him up at his last word. "Don't make the sacrifice," she said. "Apologize to Lady Lundie, and say you are obliged to go back."

"Why?"

"Because we must both leave this place to-day."

There was a double objection to that. If he left Lady Lundie's, he would fail to establish a future pecuniary claim on his brother's indulgence. And if he left with Anne, the eyes of the world would see them, and the whispers of the world might come to his father's ears.

"If we go away together," he said, "good-by to my prospects, and yours too."

"I don't mean that we shall leave together," she explained. "We will leave separately--and I will go first."

"There will be a hue and cry after you, when you are missed."

"There will be a dance when the croquet is over. I don't dance--and I shall not be missed. There will be time, and opportunity to get to my own room. I shall leave a letter there for Lady Lundie, and a letter"--her voice trembled for a moment--"and a letter for Blanche. Don't interrupt me! I have thought of this, as I have thought of every thing else. The confession I shall make will be the truth in a few hours, if it's not the truth now. My letters will say I am privately married, and called away unexpectedly to join my husband. There

will be a scandal in the house, I know. But there will be no excuse for sending after me, when I am under my husband's protection. So far as you are personally concerned there are no discoveries to fear--and nothing which it is not perfectly safe and perfectly easy to do. Wait here an hour after I have gone to save appearances; and then follow me."

"Follow you?" interposed Geoffrey. "Where?" She drew her chair nearer to him, and whispered the next words in his ear.

"To a lonely little mountain inn--four miles from this."

"An inn!"

"Why not?"

"An inn is a public place."

A movement of natural impatience escaped her--but she controlled herself, and went on as quietly as before:

"The place I mean is the loneliest place in the neighborhood. You have no prying eyes to dread there. I have picked it out expressly for that reason. It's away from the railway; it's away from the high-road: it's kept by a decent, respectable Scotchwoman--"

"Decent, respectable Scotchwomen who keep inns," interposed Geoffrey, "don't cotton to young ladies who are traveling alone. The landlady won't receive you."

It was a well-aimed objection--but it missed the mark. A woman bent on her marriage is a woman who can meet the objections of the whole world, single-handed, and refute them all.

"I have provided for every thing," she said, "and I have provided for that. I shall tell the landlady I am on my wedding-trip. I shall say my husband is sight-seeing, on foot, among the mountains in the neighborhood--"

"She is sure to believe that!" said Geoffrey.

"She is sure to disbelieve it, if you like. Let her! You have only to appear, and to ask for your wife--and there is my story proved to be true! She may be the most suspicious woman living, as long as I am alone with her. The moment you join me, you set her suspicions at rest. Leave me to do my part. My part

is the hard one. Will you do yours?"

It was impossible to say No: she had fairly cut the ground from under his feet. He shifted his ground. Any thing rather than say Yes!

"I suppose you know how we are to be married?" he asked. "All I can say is--I don't."

"You do!" she retorted. "You know that we are in Scotland. You know that there are neither forms, ceremonies, nor delays in marriage, here. The plan I have proposed to you secures my being received at the inn, and makes it easy and natural for you to join me there afterward. The rest is in our own hands. A man and a woman who wish to be married (in Scotland) have only to secure the necessary witnesses and the thing is done. If the landlady chooses to resent the deception practiced on her, after that, the landlady may do as she pleases. We shall have gained our object in spite of her--and, what is more, we shall have gained it without risk to you."

"Don't lay it all on my shoulders," Geoffrey rejoined. "You women go headlong at every thing. Say we are married. We must separate afterward--or how are we to keep it a secret?"

"Certainly. You will go back, of course, to your brother's house, as if nothing had happened."

"And what is to become of you?"

"I shall go to London."

"What are you to do in London?"

"Haven't I already told you that I have thought of every thing? When I get to London I shall apply to some of my mother's old friends--friends of hers in the time when she was a musician. Every body tells me I have a voice--if I had only cultivated it. I will cultivate it! I can live, and live respectably, as a concert singer. I have saved money enough to support me, while I am learning--and my mother's friends will help me, for her sake."

So, in the new life that she was marking out, was she now unconsciously reflecting in herself the life of her mother before her. Here was the mother's career as a public singer, chosen (in spite of all efforts to prevent it) by the child! Here (though with other motives, and under other circumstances) was the mother's irregular marriage in Ireland, on the point of being followed by

the daughter's irregular marriage in Scotland! And here, stranger still, was the man who was answerable for it--the son of the man who had found the flaw in the Irish marriage, and had shown the way by which her mother was thrown on the world! "My Anne is my second self. She is not called by her father's name; she is called by mine. She is Anne Silvester as I was. Will she end like Me?"--The answer to those words--the last words that had trembled on the dying mother's lips--was coming fast. Through the chances and changes of many years, the future was pressing near--and Anne Silvester stood on the brink of it.

"Well?" she resumed. "Are you at the end of your objections? Can you give me a plain answer at last?"

No! He had another objection ready as the words passed her lips.

"Suppose the witnesses at the inn happen to know me?" he said. "Suppose it comes to my father's ears in that way?"

"Suppose you drive me to my death?" she retorted, starting to her feet. "Your father shall know the truth, in that case--I swear it!"

He rose, on his side, and drew back from her. She followed him up. There was a clapping of hands, at the same moment, on the lawn. Somebody had evidently made a brilliant stroke which promised to decide the game. There was no security now that Blanche might not return again. There was every prospect, the game being over, that Lady Lundie would be free. Anne brought the interview to its crisis, without wasting a moment more.

"Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn," she said. "You have bargained for a private marriage, and I have consented. Are you, or are you not, ready to marry me on your own terms?"

"Give me a minute to think!"

"Not an instant. Once for all, is it Yes, or No?"

He couldn't say "Yes," even then. But he said what was equivalent to it. He asked, savagely, "Where is the inn?"

She put her arm in his, and whispered, rapidly, "Pass the road on the right that leads to the railway. Follow the path over the moor, and the sheep-track up the hill. The first house you come to after that is the inn. You understand!"

He nodded his head, with a sullen frown, and took his pipe out of his pocket again.

"Let it alone this time," he said, meeting her eye. "My mind's upset. When a man's mind's upset, a man can't smoke. What's the name of the place?"

"Craig Fernie."

"Who am I to ask for at the door?"

"For your wife."

"Suppose they want you to give your name when you get there?"

"If I must give a name, I shall call myself Mrs., instead of Miss, Silvester. But I shall do my best to avoid giving any name. And you will do your best to avoid making a mistake, by only asking for me as your wife. Is there any thing else you want to know?"

"Yes."

"Be quick about it! What is it?"

"How am I to know you have got away from here?"

"If you don't hear from me in half an hour from the time when I have left you, you may be sure I have got away. Hush!"

Two voices, in conversation, were audible at the bottom of the steps--Lady Lundie's voice and Sir Patrick's. Anne pointed to the door in the back wall of the summer-house. She had just pulled it to again, after Geoffrey had passed through it, when Lady Lundie and Sir Patrick appeared at the top of the steps.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH - THE SUITOR.

LADY LUNDIE pointed significantly to the door, and addressed herself to Sir Patrick's private ear.

"Observe!" she said. "Miss Silvester has just got rid of somebody."

Sir Patrick deliberately looked in the wrong direction, and (in the politest possible manner) observed--nothing.

Lady Lundie advanced into the summer-house. Suspicious hatred of the governess was written legibly in every line of her face. Suspicious distrust of the governess's illness spoke plainly in every tone of her voice.

"May I inquire, Miss Silvester, if your sufferings are relieved?"

"I am no better, Lady Lundie."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said I was no better."

"You appear to be able to stand up. When I am ill, I am not so fortunate. I am obliged to lie down."'

"I will follow your example, Lady Lundie. If you will be so good as to excuse me, I will leave you, and lie down in my own room."

She could say no more. The interview with Geoffrey had worn her out; there was no spirit left in her to resist the petty malice of the woman, after bearing, as she had borne it, the brutish indifference of the man. In another moment the hysterical suffering which she was keeping down would have forced its way outward in tears. Without waiting to know whether she was excused or not, without stopping to hear a word more, she left the summer-house.

Lady Lundie's magnificent black eyes opened to their utmost width, and blazed with their most dazzling brightness. She appealed to Sir Patrick, poised easily on his ivory cane, and looking out at the lawn-party, the picture of venerable innocence.

"After what I have already told you, Sir Patrick, of Miss Silvester's conduct, may I ask whether you consider that proceeding at all extraordinary?"

The old gentleman touched the spring in the knob of his cane, and answered, in the courtly manner of the old school:

"I consider no proceeding extraordinary Lady Lundie, which emanates from your enchanting sex."

He bowed, and took his pinch. With a little jaunty flourish of the hand, he dusted the stray grains of snuff off his finger and thumb, and looked back again at the lawn-party, and became more absorbed in the diversions of his young friends than ever.

Lady Lundie stood her ground, plainly determined to force a serious expression of opinion from her brother-in-law. Before she could speak again, Arnold and Blanche appeared together at the bottom of the steps. "And when does the dancing begin?" inquired Sir Patrick, advancing to meet them, and looking as if he felt the deepest interest in a speedy settlement of the question.

"The very thing I was going to ask mamma," returned Blanche. "Is she in there with Anne? Is Anne better?"

Lady Lundie forthwith appeared, and took the answer to that inquiry on herself.

"Miss Silvester has retired to her room. Miss Silvester persists in being ill. Have you noticed, Sir Patrick, that these half-bred sort of people are almost invariably rude when they are ill?"

Blanche's bright face flushed up. "If you think Anne a half-bred person, Lady Lundie, you stand alone in your opinion. My uncle doesn't agree with you, I'm sure."

Sir Patrick's interest in the first quadrille became almost painful to see. "Do tell me, my dear, when is the dancing going to begin?"

"The sooner the better," interposed Lady Lundie; "before Blanche picks another quarrel with me on the subject of Miss Silvester."

Blanche looked at her uncle. "Begin! begin! Don't lose time!" cried the ardent Sir Patrick, pointing toward the house with his cane. "Certainly, uncle! Any

thing that you wish!" With that parting shot at her step-mother, Blanche withdrew. Arnold, who had thus far waited in silence at the foot of the steps, looked appealingly at Sir Patrick. The train which was to take him to his newly inherited property would start in less than an hour; and he had not presented himself to Blanche's guardian in the character of Blanche's suitor yet! Sir Patrick's indifference to all domestic claims on him--claims of persons who loved, and claims of persons who hated, it didn't matter which--remained perfectly unassailable. There he stood, poised on his cane, humming an old Scotch air. And there was Lady Lundie, resolute not to leave him till he had seen the governess with her eyes and judged the governess with her mind. She returned to the charge--in spite of Sir Patrick, humming at the top of the steps, and of Arnold, waiting at the bottom. (Her enemies said, "No wonder poor Sir Thomas died in a few months after his marriage!" And, oh dear me, our enemies are sometimes right!)

"I must once more remind you, Sir Patrick, that I have serious reason to doubt whether Miss Silvester is a fit companion for Blanche. My governess has something on her mind. She has fits of crying in private. She is up and walking about her room when she ought to be asleep. She posts her own letters--and, she has lately been excessively insolent to Me. There is something wrong. I must take some steps in the matter--and it is only proper that I should do so with your sanction, as head of the family."

"Consider me as abdicating my position, Lady Lundie, in your favor."

"Sir Patrick, I beg you to observe that I am speaking seriously, and that I expect a serious reply."

"My good lady, ask me for any thing else and it is at your service. I have not made a serious reply since I gave up practice at the Scottish Bar. At my age," added Sir Patrick, cunningly drifting into generalities, "nothing is serious--except Indigestion. I say, with the philosopher, 'Life is a comedy to those who think, and tragedy to those who feel.'" He took his sister-in-law's hand, and kissed it. "Dear Lady Lundie, why feel?"

Lady Lundie, who had never "felt" in her life, appeared perversely determined to feel, on this occasion. She was offended--and she showed it plainly.

"When you are next called on, Sir Patrick, to judge of Miss Silvester's conduct," she said, "unless I am entirely mistaken, you will find yourself compelled to consider it as something beyond a joke." With those words, she walked out of the summer-house--and so forwarded Arnold's interests by

leaving Blanche's guardian alone at last.

It was an excellent opportunity. The guests were safe in the house--there was no interruption to be feared, Arnold showed himself. Sir Patrick (perfectly undisturbed by Lady Lundie's parting speech) sat down in the summer-house, without noticing his young friend, and asked himself a question founded on profound observation of the female sex. "Were there ever two women yet with a quarrel between them," thought the old gentleman, "who didn't want to drag a man into it? Let them drag me in, if they can!"

Arnold advanced a step, and modestly announced himself. "I hope I am not in the way, Sir Patrick?"

"In the way? of course not! Bless my soul, how serious the boy looks! Are you going to appeal to me as the head of the family next?"

It was exactly what Arnold was about to do. But it was plain that if he admitted it just then Sir Patrick (for some unintelligible reason) would decline to listen to him. He answered cautiously, "I asked leave to consult you in private, Sir; and you kindly said you would give me the opportunity before I left Windygates?"

"Ay! ay! to be sure. I remember. We were both engaged in the serious business of croquet at the time--and it was doubtful which of us did that business most clumsily. Well, here is the opportunity; and here am I, with all my worldly experience, at your service. I have only one caution to give you. Don't appeal to me as 'the head of the family.' My resignation is in Lady Lundie's hands."

He was, as usual, half in jest, half in earnest. The wry twist of humor showed itself at the corners of his lips. Arnold was at a loss how to approach Sir Patrick on the subject of his niece without reminding him of his domestic responsibilities on the one hand, and without setting himself up as a target for the shafts of Sir Patrick's wit on the other. In this difficulty, he committed a mistake at the outset. He hesitated.

"Don't hurry yourself," said Sir Patrick. "Collect your ideas. I can wait! I can wait!"

Arnold collected his ideas--and committed a second mistake. He determined on feeling his way cautiously at first. Under the circumstances (and with such a man as he had now to deal with), it was perhaps the rashest

resolution at which he could possibly have arrived--it was the mouse attempting to outmanoeuvre the cat.

"You have been very kind, Sir, in offering me the benefit of your experience," he began. "I want a word of advice."

"Suppose you take it sitting?" suggested Sir Patrick. "Get a chair." His sharp eyes followed Arnold with an expression of malicious enjoyment. "Wants my advice?" he thought. "The young humbug wants nothing of the sort--he wants my niece."

Arnold sat down under Sir Patrick's eye, with a well-founded suspicion that he was destined to suffer, before he got up again, under Sir Patrick's tongue.

"I am only a young man," he went on, moving uneasily in his chair, "and I am beginning a new life--"

"Any thing wrong with the chair?" asked Sir Patrick. "Begin your new life comfortably, and get another."

"There's nothing wrong with the chair, Sir. Would you--"

"Would I keep the chair, in that case? Certainly."

"I mean, would you advise me--"

"My good fellow, I'm waiting to advise you. (I'm sure there's something wrong with that chair. Why be obstinate about it? Why not get another?)"

"Please don't notice the chair, Sir Patrick--you put me out. I want--in short--perhaps it's a curious question--"

"I can't say till I have heard it," remarked Sir Patrick. "However, we will admit it, for form's sake, if you like. Say it's a curious question. Or let us express it more strongly, if that will help you. Say it's the most extraordinary question that ever was put, since the beginning of the world, from one human being to another."

"It's this!" Arnold burst out, desperately. "I want to be married!"

"That isn't a question," objected Sir Patrick. "It's an assertion. You say, I want to be married. And I say, Just so! And there's an end of it."

Arnold's head began to whirl. "Would you advise me to get married, Sir?" he said, piteously. "That's what I meant."

"Oh! That's the object of the present interview, is it? Would I advise you to marry, eh?"

(Having caught the mouse by this time, the cat lifted his paw and let the luckless little creature breathe again. Sir Patrick's manner suddenly freed itself from any slight signs of impatience which it might have hitherto shown, and became as pleasantly easy and confidential as a manner could be. He touched the knob of his cane, and helped himself, with infinite zest and enjoyment, to a pinch of snuff.)

"Would I advise you to marry?" repeated Sir Patrick. "Two courses are open to us, Mr. Arnold, in treating that question. We may put it briefly, or we may put it at great length. I am for putting it briefly. What do you say?"

"What you say, Sir Patrick."

"Very good. May I begin by making an inquiry relating to your past life?"

"Certainly!"

"Very good again. When you were in the merchant service, did you ever have any experience in buying provisions ashore?"

Arnold stared. If any relation existed between that question and the subject in hand it was an impenetrable relation to him. He answered, in unconcealed bewilderment, "Plenty of experience, Sir."

"I'm coming to the point," pursued Sir Patrick. "Don't be astonished. I'm coming to the point. What did you think of your moist sugar when you bought it at the grocer's?"

"Think?" repeated Arnold. "Why, I thought it was moist sugar, to be sure!"

"Marry, by all means!" cried Sir Patrick. "You are one of the few men who can try that experiment with a fair chance of success."

The suddenness of the answer fairly took away Arnold's breath. There was something perfectly electric in the brevity of his venerable friend. He stared harder than ever.

"Don't you understand me?" asked Sir Patrick.

"I don't understand what the moist sugar has got to do with it, Sir."

"You don't see that?"

"Not a bit!"

"Then I'll show you," said Sir Patrick, crossing his legs, and setting in comfortably for a good talk "You go to the tea-shop, and get your moist sugar. You take it on the understanding that it is moist sugar. But it isn't any thing of the sort. It's a compound of adulterations made up to look like sugar. You shut your eyes to that awkward fact, and swallow your adulterated mess in various articles of food; and you and your sugar get on together in that way as well as you can. Do you follow me, so far?"

Yes. Arnold (quite in the dark) followed, so far.

"Very good," pursued Sir Patrick. "You go to the marriage-shop, and get a wife. You take her on the understanding--let us say--that she has lovely yellow hair, that she has an exquisite complexion, that her figure is the perfection of plumpness, and that she is just tall enough to carry the plumpness off. You bring her home, and you discover that it's the old story of the sugar over again. Your wife is an adulterated article. Her lovely yellow hair is--dye. Her exquisite skin is--pearl powder. Her plumpness is--padding. And three inches of her height are--in the boot-maker's heels. Shut your eyes, and swallow your adulterated wife as you swallow your adulterated sugar--and, I tell you again, you are one of the few men who can try the marriage experiment with a fair chance of success."

With that he uncrossed his legs again, and looked hard at Arnold. Arnold read the lesson, at last, in the right way. He gave up the hopeless attempt to circumvent Sir Patrick, and--come what might of it--dashed at a direct allusion to Sir Patrick's niece.

"That may be all very true, Sir, of some young ladies," he said. "There is one I know of, who is nearly related to you, and who doesn't deserve what you have said of the rest of them."

This was coming to the point. Sir Patrick showed his approval of Arnold's frankness by coming to the point himself, as readily as his own whimsical humor would let him.

"Is this female phenomenon my niece?" he inquired.

"Yes, Sir Patrick."

"May I ask how you know that my niece is not an adulterated article, like the rest of them?"

Arnold's indignation loosened the last restraints that tied Arnold's tongue. He exploded in the three words which mean three volumes in every circulating library in the kingdom.

"I love her."

Sir Patrick sat back in his chair, and stretched out his legs luxuriously.

"That's the most convincing answer I ever heard in my life," he said.

"I'm in earnest!" cried Arnold, reckless by this time of every consideration but one. "Put me to the test, Sir! put me to the test!"

"Oh, very well. The test is easily put." He looked at Arnold, with the irrepressible humor twinkling merrily in his eyes, and twitching sharply at the corners of his lips. "My niece has a beautiful complexion. Do you believe in her complexion?"

"There's a beautiful sky above our heads," returned Arnold. "I believe in the sky."

"Do you?" retorted Sir Patrick. "You were evidently never caught in a shower. My niece has an immense quantity of hair. Are you convinced that it all grows on her head?"

"I defy any other woman's head to produce the like of it!"

"My dear Arnold, you greatly underrate the existing resources of the trade in hair! Look into the shop-windows. When you next go to London pray look into the show-windows. In the mean time, what do you think of my niece's figure?"

"Oh, come! there can't be any doubt about that! Any man, with eyes in his head, can see it's the loveliest figure in the world."

Sir Patrick laughed softly, and crossed his legs again.

"My good fellow, of course it is! The loveliest figure in the world is the commonest thing in the world. At a rough guess, there are forty ladies at this lawn-party. Every one of them possesses a beautiful figure. It varies in price; and when it's particularly seductive you may swear it comes from Paris. Why, how you stare! When I asked you what you thought of my niece's figure, I meant--how much of it comes from Nature, and how much of it comes from the Shop? I don't know, mind! Do you?"

"I'll take my oath to every inch of it!"

"Shop?"

"Nature!"

Sir Patrick rose to his feet; his satirical humor was silenced at last.

"If ever I have a son," he thought to himself, "that son shall go to sea!" He took Arnold's arm, as a preliminary to putting an end to Arnold's suspense. "If I can be serious about any thing," he resumed, "it's time to be serious with you. I am convinced of the sincerity of your attachment. All I know of you is in your favor, and your birth and position are beyond dispute. If you have Blanche's consent, you have mine." Arnold attempted to express his gratitude. Sir Patrick, declining to hear him, went on. "And remember this, in the future. When you next want any thing that I can give you, ask for it plainly. Don't attempt to mystify me on the next occasion, and I will promise, on my side, not to mystify you. There, that's understood. Now about this journey of yours to see your estate. Property has its duties, Master Arnold, as well as its rights. The time is fast coming when its rights will be disputed, if its duties are not performed. I have got a new interest in you, and I mean to see that you do your duty. It's settled you are to leave Windygates to-day. Is it arranged how you are to go?"

"Yes, Sir Patrick. Lady Lundie has kindly ordered the gig to take me to the station, in time for the next train."

"When are you to be ready?"

Arnold looked at his watch. "In a quarter of an hour."

"Very good. Mind you are ready. Stop a minute! you will have plenty of time to speak to Blanche when I have done with you. You don't appear to me to be sufficiently anxious about seeing your own property."

"I am not very anxious to leave Blanche, Sir--that's the truth of it."

"Never mind Blanche. Blanche is not business. They both begin with a B--and that's the only connection between them. I hear you have got one of the finest houses in this part of Scotland. How long are you going to stay in Scotland? How long are you going to stay in it?"

"I have arranged (as I have already told you, Sir) to return to Windygates the day after to-morrow."

"What! Here is a man with a palace waiting to receive him--and he is only going to stop one clear day in it!"

"I am not going to stop in it at all, Sir Patrick--I am going to stay with the steward. I'm only wanted to be present to-morrow at a dinner to my tenants--and, when that's over, there's nothing in the world to prevent my coming back here. The steward himself told me so in his last letter."

"Oh, if the steward told you so, of course there is nothing more to be said!"

"Don't object to my coming back! pray don't, Sir Patrick! I'll promise to live in my new house when I have got Blanche to live in it with me. If you won't mind, I'll go and tell her at once that it all belongs to her as well as to me."

"Gently! gently! you talk as if you were married to her already!"

"It's as good as done, Sir! Where's the difficulty in the way now?"

As he asked the question the shadow of some third person, advancing from the side of the summer-house, was thrown forward on the open sunlit space at the top of the steps. In a moment more the shadow was followed by the substance--in the shape of a groom in his riding livery. The man was plainly a stranger to the place. He started, and touched his hat, when he saw the two gentlemen in the summer-house.

"What do you want?" asked Sir Patrick

"I beg your pardon, Sir; I was sent by my master--"

"Who is your master?"

"The Honorable Mr. Delamayn, Sir."

"Do you mean Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn?" asked Arnold.

"No, Sir. Mr. Geoffrey's brother--Mr. Julius. I have ridden over from the house, Sir, with a message from my master to Mr. Geoffrey."

"Can't you find him?"

"They told me I should find him hereabouts, Sir. But I'm a stranger, and don't rightly know where to look." He stopped, and took a card out of his pocket. "My master said it was very important I should deliver this immediately. Would you be pleased to tell me, gentlemen, if you happen to know where Mr. Geoffrey is?"

Arnold turned to Sir Patrick. "I haven't seen him. Have you?"

"I have smelt him," answered Sir Patrick, "ever since I have been in the summer-house. There is a detestable taint of tobacco in the air--suggestive (disagreeably suggestive to my mind) of your friend, Mr. Delamayn."

Arnold laughed, and stepped outside the summer-house.

"If you are right, Sir Patrick, we will find him at once." He looked around, and shouted, "Geoffrey!"

A voice from the rose-garden shouted back, "Hullo!"

"You're wanted. Come here!"

Geoffrey appeared, sauntering doggedly, with his pipe in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets.

"Who wants me?"

"A groom--from your brother."

That answer appeared to electrify the lounging and lazy athlete. Geoffrey hurried, with eager steps, to the summer-house. He addressed the groom before the man had time to speak With horror and dismay in his face, he exclaimed:

"By Jupiter! Ratcatcher has relapsed!"

Sir Patrick and Arnold looked at each other in blank amazement.

"The best horse in my brother's stables!" cried Geoffrey, explaining, and appealing to them, in a breath. "I left written directions with the coachman, I measured out his physic for three days; I bled him," said Geoffrey, in a voice broken by emotion--"I bled him myself, last night."

"I beg your pardon, Sir--" began the groom.

"What's the use of begging my pardon? You're a pack of infernal fools! Where's your horse? I'll ride back, and break every bone in the coachman's skin! Where's your horse?"

"If you please, Sir, it isn't Ratcatcher. Ratcatcher's all right."

"Ratcatcher's all right? Then what the devil is it?"

"It's a message, Sir."

"About what?"

"About my lord."

"Oh! About my father?" He took out his handkerchief, and passed it over his forehead, with a deep gasp of relief. "I thought it was Ratcatcher," he said, looking at Arnold, with a smile. He put his pipe into his mouth, and rekindled the dying ashes of the tobacco. "Well?" he went on, when the pipe was in working order, and his voice was composed again: "What's up with my father?"

"A telegram from London, Sir. Bad news of my lord."

The man produced his master's card.

Geoffrey read on it (written in his brother's handwriting) these words:

"I have only a moment to scribble a line on my card. Our father is dangerously ill--his lawyer has been sent for. Come with me to London by the first train. Meet at the junction."

Without a word to any one of the three persons present, all silently looking at him, Geoffrey consulted his watch. Anne had told him to wait half an hour, and to assume that she had gone if he failed to hear from her in that

time. The interval had passed--and no communication of any sort had reached him. The flight from the house had been safely accomplished. Anne Silvester was, at that moment, on her way to the mountain inn.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH. - THE DEBT.

ARNOLD was the first who broke the silence. "Is your father seriously ill?" he asked.

Geoffrey answered by handing him the card.

Sir Patrick, who had stood apart (while the question of Ratcatcher's relapse was under discussion) sardonically studying the manners and customs of modern English youth, now came forward, and took his part in the proceedings. Lady Lundie herself must have acknowledged that he spoke and acted as became the head of the family, on t his occasion.

"Am I right in supposing that Mr. Delamayn's father is dangerously ill?" he asked, addressing himself to Arnold.

"Dangerously ill, in London," Arnold answered. "Geoffrey must leave Windygates with me. The train I am traveling by meets the train his brother is traveling by, at the junction. I shall leave him at the second station from here."

"Didn't you tell me that Lady Lundie was going to send you to the railway in a gig?"

"Yes."

"If the servant drives, there will be three of you--and there will be no room."

"We had better ask for some other vehicle," suggested Arnold.

Sir Patrick looked at his watch. There was no time to change the carriage. He turned to Geoffrey. "Can you drive, Mr. Delamayn?"

Still impenetrably silent, Geoffrey replied by a nod of the head.

Without noticing the unceremonious manner in which he had been answered, Sir Patrick went on:

"In that case, you can leave the gig in charge of the station-master. I'll tell the servant that he will not be wanted to drive."

"Let me save you the trouble, Sir Patrick," said Arnold.

Sir Patrick declined, by a gesture. He turned again, with undiminished courtesy, to Geoffrey. "It is one of the duties of hospitality, Mr. Delamayn, to hasten your departure, under these sad circumstances. Lady Lundie is engaged with her guests. I will see myself that there is no unnecessary delay in sending you to the station." He bowed--and left the summer-house.

Arnold said a word of sympathy to his friend, when they were alone.

"I am sorry for this, Geoffrey. I hope and trust you will get to London in time."

He stopped. There was something in Geoffrey's face--a strange mixture of doubt and bewilderment, of annoyance and hesitation--which was not to be accounted for as the natural result of the news that he had received. His color shifted and changed; he picked fretfully at his finger-nails; he looked at Arnold as if he was going to speak--and then looked away again, in silence.

"Is there something amiss, Geoffrey, besides this bad news about your father?" asked Arnold.

"I'm in the devil's own mess," was the answer.

"Can I do any thing to help you?"

Instead of making a direct reply, Geoffrey lifted his mighty hand, and gave Arnold a friendly slap on the shoulder which shook him from head to foot. Arnold steadied himself, and waited--wondering what was coming next.

"I say, old fellow!" said Geoffrey.

"Yes."

"Do you remember when the boat turned keel upward in Lisbon Harbor?"

Arnold started. If he could have called to mind his first interview in the summer-house with his father's old friend he might have remembered Sir Patrick's prediction that he would sooner or later pay, with interest, the debt he owed to the man who had saved his life. As it was his memory reverted at a bound to the time of the boat-accident. In the ardor of his gratitude and the innocence of his heart, he almost resented his friend's question as a reproach which he had not deserved.

"Do you think I can ever forget," he cried, warmly, "that you swam ashore with me and saved my life?"

Geoffrey ventured a step nearer to the object that he had in view.

"One good turn deserves another," he said, "don't it?"

Arnold took his hand. "Only tell me!" he eagerly rejoined--"only tell me what I can do!"

"You are going to-day to see your new place, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Can you put off going till to-morrow?"

"If it's any thing serious--of course I can!"

Geoffrey looked round at the entrance to the summer-house, to make sure that they were alone.

"You know the governess here, don't you?" he said, in a whisper.

"Miss Silvester?"

"Yes. I've got into a little difficulty with Miss Silvester. And there isn't a living soul I can ask to help me but you."

"You know I will help you. What is it?"

"It isn't so easy to say. Never mind--you're no saint either, are you? You'll keep it a secret, of course? Look here! I've acted like an infernal fool. I've gone and got the girl into a scrape--"

Arnold drew back, suddenly understanding him.

"Good heavens, Geoffrey! You don't mean--"

"I do! Wait a bit--that's not the worst of it. She has left the house."

"Left the house?"

"Left, for good and all. She can't come back again."

"Why not?"

"Because she's written to her missus. Women (hang 'em!) never do these things by halves. She's left a letter to say she's privately married, and gone off to her husband. Her husband is--Me. Not that I'm married to her yet, you understand. I have only promised to marry her. She has gone on first (on the sly) to a place four miles from this. And we settled I was to follow, and marry her privately this afternoon. That's out of the question now. While she's expecting me at the inn I shall be bowling along to London. Somebody must tell her what has happened--or she'll play the devil, and the whole business will burst up. I can't trust any of the people here. I'm done for, old chap, unless you help me."

Arnold lifted his hands in dismay. "It's the most dreadful situation, Geoffrey, I ever heard of in my life!"

Geoffrey thoroughly agreed with him. "Enough to knock a man over," he said, "isn't it? I'd give something for a drink of beer." He produced his everlasting pipe, from sheer force of habit. "Got a match?" he asked.

Arnold's mind was too preoccupied to notice the question.

"I hope you won't think I'm making light of your father's illness," he said, earnestly. "But it seems to me--I must say it--it seems to me that the poor girl has the first claim on you."

Geoffrey looked at him in surly amazement.

"The first claim on me? Do you think I'm going to risk being cut out of my father's will? Not for the best woman that ever put on a petticoat!"

Arnold's admiration of his friend was the solidly-founded admiration of many years; admiration for a man who could row, box, wrestle, jump--above all, who could swim--as few other men could perform those exercises in contemporary England. But that answer shook his faith. Only for the moment--unhappily for Arnold, only for the moment.

"You know best," he returned, a little coldly. "What can I do?"

Geoffrey took his arm--roughly as he took every thing; but in a companionable and confidential way.

"Go, like a good fellow, and tell her what has happened. We'll start from here as if we were both going to the railway; and I'll drop you at the foot-path, in the gig. You can get on to your own place afterward by the evening train. It puts you to no inconvenience, and it's doing the kind thing by an old friend. There's no risk of being found out. I'm to drive, remember! There's no servant with us, old boy, to notice, and tell tales."

Even Arnold began to see dimly by this time that he was likely to pay his debt of obligation with interest--as Sir Patrick had foretold.

"What am I to say to her?" he asked. "I'm bound to do all I can do to help you, and I will. But what am I to say?"

It was a natural question to put. It was not an easy question to answer. What a man, under given muscular circumstances, could do, no person living knew better than Geoffrey Delamayn. Of what a man, under given social circumstances, could say, no person living knew less.

"Say?" he repeated. "Look here! say I'm half distracted, and all that. And--wait a bit--tell her to stop where she is till I write to her."

Arnold hesitated. Absolutely ignorant of that low and limited form of knowledge which is called "knowledge of the world," his inbred delicacy of mind revealed to him the serious difficulty of the position which his friend was asking him to occupy as plainly as if he was looking at it through the warily-gathered experience of society of a man of twice his age.

"Can't you write to her now, Geoffrey?" he asked.

"What's the good of that?"

"Consider for a minute, and you will see. You have trusted me with a very awkward secret. I may be wrong--I never was mixed up in such a matter before--but to present myself to this lady as your messenger seems exposing her to a dreadful humiliation. Am I to go and tell her to her face: 'I know what you are hiding from the knowledge of all the world;' and is she to be expected to endure it?"

"Bosh!" said Geoffrey. "They can endure a deal more than you think. I wish you had heard how she bullied me, in this very place. My good fellow, you don't understand women. The grand secret, in dealing with a woman, is to take her as you take a cat, by the scruff of the neck--"

"I can't face her--unless you will help me by breaking the thing to her first. I'll stick at no sacrifice to serve you; but--hang it!--make allowances, Geoffrey, for the difficulty you are putting me in. I am almost a stranger; I don't know how Miss Silvester may receive me, before I can open my lips."

Those last words touched the question on its practical side. The matter-of-fact view of the difficulty was a view which Geoffrey instantly recognized and understood.

"She has the devil's own temper," he said. "There's no denying that. Perhaps I'd better write. Have we time to go into the house?"

"No. The house is full of people, and we haven't a minute to spare. Write at once, and write here. I have got a pencil."

"What am I to write on?"

"Any thing--your brother's card."

Geoffrey took the pencil which Arnold offered to him, and looked at the card. The lines his brother had written covered it. There was no room left. He felt in his pocket, and produced a letter--the letter which Anne had referred to at the interview between them--the letter which she had written to insist on his attending the lawn-party at Windygates.

"This will do," he said. "It's one of Anne's own letters to me. There's room on the fourth page. If I write," he added, turning suddenly on Arnold, "you promise to take it to her? Your hand on the bargain!"

He held out the hand which had saved Arnold's life in Lisbon Harbor, and received Arnold's promise, in remembrance of that time.

"All right, old fellow. I can tell you how to find the place as we go along in the gig. By-the-by, there's one thing that's rather important. I'd better mention it while I think of it."

"What is that?"

"You mustn't present yourself at the inn in your own name; and you mustn't ask for her by her name."

"Who am I to ask for?"

"It's a little awkward. She has gone there as a married woman, in case they're particular about taking her in--"

"I understand. Go on."

"And she has planned to tell them (by way of making it all right and straight for both of us, you know) that she expects her husband to join her. If I had been able to go I should have asked at the door for 'my wife.' You are going in my place--"

"And I must ask at the door for 'my wife,' or I shall expose Miss Silvester to unpleasant consequences?"

"You don't object?"

"Not I! I don't care what I say to the people of the inn. It's the meeting with Miss Silvester that I'm afraid of."

"I'll put that right for you--never fear!"

He went at once to the table and rapidly scribbled a few lines--then stopped and considered. "Will that do?" he asked himself. "No; I'd better say something spooney to quiet her." He considered again, added a line, and brought his hand down on the table with a cheery smack. "That will do the business! Read it yourself, Arnold--it's not so badly written."

Arnold read the note without appearing to share his friend's favorable opinion of it.

"This is rather short," he said.

"Have I time to make it longer?"

"Perhaps not. But let Miss Silvester see for herself that you have no time to make it longer. The train starts in less than half an hour. Put the time."

"Oh, all right! and the date too, if you like."

He had just added the desired words and figures, and had given the revised letter to Arnold, when Sir Patrick returned to announce that the gig was waiting.

"Come!" he said. "You haven't a moment to lose!"

Geoffrey started to his feet. Arnold hesitated.

"I must see Blanche!" he pleaded. "I can't leave Blanche without saying good-by. Where is she?"

Sir Patrick pointed to the steps, with a smile. Blanche had followed him from the house. Arnold ran out to her instantly.

"Going?" she said, a little sadly.

"I shall be back in two days," Arnold whispered. "It's all right! Sir Patrick consents."

She held him fast by the arm. The hurried parting before other people seemed to be not a parting to Blanche's taste.

"You will lose the train!" cried Sir Patrick.

Geoffrey seized Arnold by the arm which Blanche was holding, and tore him--literally tore him--away. The two were out of sight, in the shrubbery, before Blanche's indignation found words, and addressed itself to her uncle.

"Why is that brute going away with Mr. Brinkworth?" she asked.

"Mr. Delamayn is called to London by his father's illness," replied Sir Patrick. "You don't like him?"

"I hate him!"

Sir Patrick reflected a little.

"She is a young girl of eighteen," he thought to himself. "And I am an old man of seventy. Curious, that we should agree about any thing. More than curious that we should agree in disliking Mr. Delamayn."

He roused himself, and looked again at Blanche. She was seated at the table, with her head on her hand; absent, and out of spirits--thinking of Arnold, and set, with the future all smooth before them, not thinking happily.

"Why, Blanche! Blanche!" cried Sir Patrick, "one would think he had gone for a voyage round the world. You silly child! he will be back again the day after

to-morrow."

"I wish he hadn't gone with that man!" said Blanche. "I wish he hadn't got that man for a friend!"

"There! there! the man was rude enough I own. Never mind! he will leave the man at the second station. Come back to the ball-room with me. Dance it off, my dear--dance it off!"

"No," returned Blanche. "I'm in no humor for dancing. I shall go up stairs, and talk about it to Anne."

"You will do nothing of the sort!" said a third voice, suddenly joining in the conversation.

Both uncle and niece looked up, and found Lady Lundie at the top of the summer-house steps.

"I forbid you to mention that woman's name again in my hearing," pursued her ladyship. "Sir Patrick! I warned you (if you remember?) that the matter of the governess was not a matter to be trifled with. My worst anticipations are realized. Miss Silvester has left the house!"

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH. - THE SCANDAL.

IT was still early in the afternoon when the guests at Lady Lundie's lawn-party began to compare notes together in corners, and to agree in arriving at a general conviction that "some thing was wrong."

Blanche had mysteriously disappeared from her partners in the dance. Lady Lundie had mysteriously abandoned her guests. Blanche had not come back. Lady Lundie had returned with an artificial smile, and a preoccupied manner. She acknowledged that she was "not very well." The same excuse had been given to account for Blanche's absence--and, again (some time previously), to explain Miss Silvester's withdrawal from the croquet! A wit among the gentlemen declared it reminded him of declining a verb. "I am not very well; thou art not very well; she is not very well"--and so on. Sir Patrick too! Only think of the sociable Sir Patrick being in a state of seclusion--pacing up and down by himself in the loneliest part of the garden. And the servants again! it had even spread to the servants! They were presuming to whisper in corners, like their betters. The house-maids appeared, spasmodically, where house maids had no business to be. Doors banged and petticoats whisked in the upper regions. Something wrong--depend upon it, something wrong! "We had much better go away. My dear, order the carriage"--"Louisa, love, no more dancing; your papa is going."--"Good-afternoon, Lady Lundie!"--"Haw! thanks very much!"--"So sorry for dear Blanche!"--"Oh, it's been too charming!" So Society jabbered its poor, nonsensical little jargon, and got itself politely out of the way before the storm came.

This was exactly the consummation of events for which Sir Patrick had been waiting in the seclusion of the garden.

There was no evading the responsibility which was now thrust upon him. Lady Lundie had announced it as a settled resolution, on her part, to trace Anne to the place in which she had taken refuge, and discover (purely in the interests of virtue) whether she actually was married or not. Blanche (already overwrought by the excitement of the day) had broken into an hysterical passion of tears on hearing the news, and had then, on recovering, taken a view of her own of Anne's flight from the house. Anne would never have kept her marriage a secret from Blanche; Anne would never have written such a formal farewell letter as she had written to Blanche--if things were going as smoothly with her as she was trying to make them believe at Windygates. Some dreadful trouble had fallen on Anne

and Blanche was determined (as Lady Lundie was determined) to find out where she had gone, and to follow, and help her.

It was plain to Sir Patrick (to whom both ladies had opened their hearts, at separate interviews) that his sister-in-law, in one way, and his niece in another, were equally likely--if not duly restrained--to plunge headlong into acts of indiscretion which might lead to very undesirable results. A man in authority was sorely needed at Windygates that afternoon--and Sir Patrick was fain to acknowledge that he was the man.

"Much is to be said for, and much is to be said against a single life," thought the old gentleman, walking up and down the sequestered garden-path to which he had retired, and applying himself at shorter intervals than usual to the knob of his ivory cane. "This, however, is, I take it, certain. A man's married friends can't prevent him from leading the life of a bachelor, if he pleases. But they can, and do, take devilish good care that he sha'n't enjoy it!"

Sir Patrick's meditations were interrupted by the appearance of a servant, previously instructed to keep him informed of the progress of events at the house.

"They're all gone, Sir Patrick," said the man.

"That's a comfort, Simpson. We have no visitors to deal with now, except the visitors who are staying in the house?"

"None, Sir Patrick."

"They're all gentlemen, are they not?"

"Yes, Sir Patrick."

"That's another comfort, Simpson. Very good. I'll see Lady Lundie first."

Does any other form of human resolution approach the firmness of a woman who is bent on discovering the frailties of another woman whom she hates? You may move rocks, under a given set of circumstances. But here is a delicate being in petticoats, who shrieks if a spider drops on her neck, and shudders if you approach her after having eaten an onion. Can you move her, under a given set of circumstances, as set forth above? Not you!

Sir Patrick found her ladyship instituting her inquiries on the same

admirably exhaustive system which is pursued, in cases of disappearance, by the police. Who was the last witness who had seen the missing person? Who was the last servant who had seen Anne Silvester? Begin with the men-servants, from the butler at the top to the stable boy at the bottom. Go on with the women-servants, from the cook in all her glory to the small female child who weeds the garden. Lady Lundie had cross-examined her way downward as far as the page, when Sir Patrick joined her.

"My dear lady! pardon me for reminding you again, that this is a free country, and that you have no claim whatever to investigate Miss Silvester's proceedings after she has left your house."

Lady Lundie raised her eyes, devotionally, to the ceiling. She looked like a martyr to duty. If you had seen her ladyship at that moment, you would have said yourself, "A martyr to duty."

"No, Sir Patrick! As a Christian woman, that is not my way of looking at it. This unhappy person has lived under my roof. This unhappy person has been the companion of Blanche. I am responsible--I am, in a manner, morally responsible. I would give the world to be able to dismiss it as you do. But no! I must be satisfied that she is married. In the interests of propriety. For the quieting of my own conscience. Before I lay my head on my pillow to-night, Sir Patrick--before I lay my head on my pillow to-night!"

"One word, Lady Lundie--"

"No!" repeated her ladyship, with the most pathetic gentleness. "You are right, I dare say, from the worldly point of view. I can't take the worldly point of view. The worldly point of view hurts me." She turned, with impressive gravity, to the page. "You know where you will go, Jonathan, if you tell lies!"

Jonathan was lazy, Jonathan was pimply, Jonathan was fat--but Jonathan was orthodox. He answered that he did know; and, what is more, he mentioned the place.

Sir Patrick saw that further opposition on his part, at that moment, would be worse than useless. He wisely determined to wait, before he interfered again, until Lady Lundie had thoroughly exhausted herself and her inquiries. At the same time--as it was impossible, in the present state of her ladyship's temper, to provide against what might happen if the inquiries after Anne unluckily proved successful--he decided on taking measures to clear the house of the guests (in the interests of all parties) for the next four-and-twenty hours.

"I only want to ask you a question, Lady Lundie," he resumed. "The position of the gentlemen who are staying here is not a very pleasant one while all this is going on. If you had been content to let the matter pass without notice, we should have done very well. As things are, don't you think it will be more convenient to every body if I relieve you of the responsibility of entertaining your guests?"

"As head of the family?" stipulated Lady Lundie.

"As head of the family!" answered Sir Patrick.

"I gratefully accept the proposal," said Lady Lundie.

"I beg you won't mention it," rejoined Sir Patrick.

He quitted the room, leaving Jonathan under examination. He and his brother (the late Sir Thomas) had chosen widely different paths in life, and had seen but little of each other since the time when they had been boys. Sir Patrick's recollections (on leaving Lady Lundie) appeared to have taken him back to that time, and to have inspired him with a certain tenderness for his brother's memory. He shook his head, and sighed a sad little sigh. "Poor Tom!" he said to himself, softly, after he had shut the door on his brother's widow. "Poor Tom!"

On crossing the hall, he stopped the first servant he met, to inquire after Blanche. Miss Blanche was quiet, up stairs, closeted with her maid in her own room. "Quiet?" thought Sir Patrick. "That's a bad sign. I shall hear more of my niece."

Pending that event, the next thing to do was to find the guests. Unerring instinct led Sir Patrick to the billiard-room. There he found them, in solemn conclave assembled, wondering what they had better do. Sir Patrick put them all at their ease in two minutes.

"What do you say to a day's shooting to-morrow?" he asked.

Every man present--sportsman or not--said yes.

"You can start from this house," pursued Sir Patrick; "or you can start from a shooting-cottage which is on the Windygates property--among the woods, on the other side of the moor. The weather looks pretty well settled (for Scotland), and there are plenty of horses in the stables. It is useless to

conceal from you, gentlemen, that events have taken a certain unexpected turn in my sister-in-law's family circle. You will be equally Lady Lundie's guests, whether you choose the cottage or the house. For the next twenty-four hours (let us say)--which shall it be?"

Every body--with or without rheumatism--answered "the cottage."

"Very good," pursued Sir Patrick, "It is arranged to ride over to the shooting-cottage this evening, and to try the moor, on that side, the first thing in the morning. If events here will allow me, I shall be delighted to accompany you, and do the honors as well as I can. If not, I am sure you will accept my apologies for to-night, and permit Lady Lundie's steward to see to your comfort in my place."

Adopted unanimously. Sir Patrick left the guests to their billiards, and went out to give the necessary orders at the stables.

In the mean time Blanche remained portentously quiet in the upper regions of the house; while Lady Lundie steadily pursued her inquiries down stairs. She got on from Jonathan (last of the males, indoors) to the coachman (first of the males, out-of-doors), and dug down, man by man, through that new stratum, until she struck the stable-boy at the bottom. Not an atom of information having been extracted in the house or out of the house, from man or boy, her ladyship fell back on the women next. She pulled the bell, and summoned the cook--Hester Dethridge.

A very remarkable-looking person entered the room.

Elderly and quiet; scrupulously clean; eminently respectable; her gray hair neat and smooth under her modest white cap; her eyes, set deep in their orbits, looking straight at any person who spoke to her--here, at a first view, was a steady, trust-worthy woman. Here also on closer inspection, was a woman with the seal of some terrible past suffering set on her for the rest of her life. You felt it, rather than saw it, in the look of immovable endurance which underlain her expression--in the deathlike tranquillity which never disappeared from her manner. Her story was a sad one--so far as it was known. She had entered Lady Lundie's service at the period of Lady Lundie's marriage to Sir Thomas. Her character (given by the clergyman of her parish) described her as having been married to an inveterate drunkard, and as having suffered unutterably during her husband's lifetime. There were drawbacks to engaging her, now that she was a widow. On one of the many

occasions on which her husband had personally ill-treated her, he had struck her a blow which had produced very remarkable nervous results. She had lain insensible many days together, and had recovered with the total loss of her speech. In addition to this objection, she was odd, at times, in her manner; and she made it a condition of accepting any situation, that she should be privileged to sleep in a room by herself As a set-off against all this, it was to be said, on the other side of the question, that she was sober; rigidly honest in all her dealings; and one of the best cooks in England. In consideration of this last merit, the late Sir Thomas had decided on giving her a trial, and had discovered that he had never dined in his life as he dined when Hester Dethridge was at the head of his kitchen. She remained after his death in his widow's service. Lady Lundie was far from liking her. An unpleasant suspicion attached to the cook, which Sir Thomas had over-looked, but which persons less sensible of the immense importance of dining well could not fail to regard as a serious objection to her. Medical men, consulted about her case discovered certain physiological anomalies in it which led them to suspect the woman of feigning dumbness, for some reason best known to herself. She obstinately declined to learn the deaf and dumb alphabet--on the ground that dumbness was not associated with deafness in her case. Stratagems were invented (seeing that she really did possess the use of her ears) to entrap her into also using her speech, and failed. Efforts were made to induce her to answer questions relating to her past life in her husband's time. She flatly declined to reply to them, one and all. At certain intervals, strange impulses to get a holiday away from the house appeared to seize her. If she was resisted, she passively declined to do her work. If she was threatened with dismissal, she impenetrably bowed her head, as much as to say, "Give me the word, and I go." Over and over again, Lady Lundie had decided, naturally enough, on no longer keeping such a servant as this; but she had never yet carried the decision to execution. A cook who is a perfect mistress of her art, who asks for no perquisites, who allows no waste, who never quarrels with the other servants, who drinks nothing stronger than tea, who is to be trusted with untold gold--is not a cook easily replaced. In this mortal life we put up with many persons and things, as Lady Lundie put up with her cook. The woman lived, as it were, on the brink of dismissal--but thus far the woman kept her place--getting her holidays when she asked for them (which, to do her justice, was not often) and sleeping always (go where she might with the family) with a locked door, in a room by herself.

Hester Dethridge advanced slowly to the table at which Lady Lundie was sitting. A slate and pencil hung at her side, which she used for making such replies as were not to be expressed by a gesture or by a motion of the head. She took up the slate and pencil, and waited with stony submission for her

mistress to begin.

Lady Lundie opened the proceedings with the regular formula of inquiry which she had used with all the other servants,

"Do you know that Miss Silvester has left the house?"

The cook nodded her head affirmatively.

"Do you know at what time she left it?"

Another affirmative reply. The first which Lady Lundie had received to that question yet. She eagerly went on to the next inquiry.

"Have you seen her since she left the house?"

A third affirmative reply.

"Where?"

Hester Dethridge wrote slowly on the slate, in singularly firm upright characters for a woman in her position of life, these words:

"On the road that leads to the railway. Nigh to Mistress Chew's Farm."

"What did you want at Chew's Farm?"

Hester Dethridge wrote: "I wanted eggs for the kitchen, and a breath of fresh air for myself."

"Did Miss Silvester see you?"

A negative shake of the head.

"Did she take the turning that leads to the railway?"

Another negative shake of the head.

"She went on, toward the moor?"

An affirmative reply.

"What did she do when she got to the moor?"

Hester Dethridge wrote: "She took the footpath which leads to Craig Fernie."

Lady Lundie rose excitedly to her feet. There was but one place that a stranger could go to at Craig Fernie. "The inn!" exclaimed her ladyship. "She has gone to the inn!"

Hester Dethridge waited immovably. Lady Lundie put a last precautionary question, in these words:

"Have you reported what you have seen to any body else?"

An affirmative reply. Lady Lundie had not bargained for that. Hester Dethridge (she thought) must surely have misunderstood her.

"Do you mean that you have told somebody else what you have just told me?"

Another affirmative reply.

"A person who questioned you, as I have done?"

A third affirmative reply.

"Who was it?"

Hester Dethridge wrote on her slate: "Miss Blanche."

Lady Lundie stepped back, staggered by the discovery that Blanche's resolution to trace Anne Silvester was, to all appearance, as firmly settled as her own. Her step-daughter was keeping her own counsel, and acting on her own responsibility--her step-daughter might be an awkward obstacle in the way. The manner in which Anne had left the house had mortally offended Lady Lundie. An inveterately vindictive woman, she had resolved to discover whatever compromising elements might exist in the governess's secret, and to make them public property (from a paramount sense of duty, of course) among her own circle of friends. But to do this--with Blanche acting (as might certainly be anticipated) in direct opposition to her, and openly espousing Miss Silvester's interests--was manifestly impossible.

The first thing to be done--and that instantly--was to inform Blanche that she was discovered, and to forbid her to stir in the matter.

Lady Lundie rang the bell twice--thus intimating, according to the laws of the household, that she required the attendance of her own maid. She then turned to the cook--still waiting her pleasure, with stony composure, slate in hand.

"You have done wrong," said her ladyship, severely. "I am your mistress. You are bound to answer your mistress--"

Hester Dethridge bowed her head, in icy acknowledgment of the principle laid down--so far.

The bow was an interruption. Lady Lundie resented it.

"But Miss Blanche is not your mistress," she went on, sternly. "You are very much to blame for answering Miss Blanche's inquiries about Miss Silvester."

Hester Dethridge, perfectly unmoved, wrote her justification on her slate, in two stiff sentences: "I had no orders not to answer. I keep nobody's secrets but my own."

That reply settled the question of the cook's dismissal--the question which had been pending for months past.

"You are an insolent woman! I have borne with you long enough--I will bear with you no longer. When your month is up, you go!"

In those words Lady Lundie dismissed Hester Dethridge from her service.

Not the slightest change passed over the sinister tranquillity of the cook. She bowed her head again, in acknowledgment of the sentence pronounced on her--dropped her slate at her side--turned about--and left the room. The woman was alive in the world, and working in the world; and yet (so far as all human interests were concerned) she was as completely out of the world as if she had been screwed down in her coffin, and laid in her grave.

Lady Lundie's maid came into the room as Hester left it.

"Go up stairs to Miss Blanche," said her mistress, "and say I want her here. Wait a minute!" She paused, and considered. Blanche might decline to submit to her step-mother's interference with her. It might be necessary to appeal to the higher authority of her guardian. "Do you know where Sir Patrick is?" asked Lady Lundie.

"I heard Simpson say, my lady, that Sir Patrick was at the stables."

"Send Simpson with a message. My compliments to Sir Patrick--and I wish to see him immediately."

* * * * *

The preparations for the departure to the shooting-cottage were just completed; and the one question that remained to be settled was, whether Sir Patrick could accompany the party--when the man-servant appeared with the message from his mistress.

"Will you give me a quarter of an hour, gentlemen?" asked Sir Patrick. "In that time I shall know for certain whether I can go with you or not."

As a matter of course, the guests decided to wait. The younger men among them (being Englishmen) naturally occupied their leisure time in betting. Would Sir Patrick get the better of the domestic crisis? or would the domestic crisis get the better of Sir Patrick? The domestic crisis was backed, at two to one, to win.

Punctually at the expiration of the quarter of an hour, Sir Patrick reappeared. The domestic crisis had betrayed the blind confidence which youth and inexperience had placed in it. Sir Patrick had won the day.

"Things are settled and quiet, gentlemen; and I am able to accompany you," he said. "There are two ways to the shooting-cottage. One--the longest--passes by the inn at Craig Fernie. I am compelled to ask you to go with me by that way. While you push on to the cottage, I must drop behind, and say a word to a person who is staying at the inn."

He had quieted Lady Lundie--he had even quieted Blanche. But it was evidently on the condition that he was to go to Craig Fernie in their places, and to see Anne Silvester himself. Without a word more of explanation he mounted his horse, and led the way out. The shooting-party left Windygates.