

FOURTH SCENE.--WINDYGATES.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH - NEAR IT.

THE Library at Windygates was the largest and the handsomest room in the house. The two grand divisions under which Literature is usually arranged in these days occupied the customary places in it. On the shelves which ran round the walls were the books which humanity in general respects--and does not read. On the tables distributed over the floor were the books which humanity in general reads--and does not respect. In the first class, the works of the wise ancients; and the Histories, Biographies, and Essays of writers of more modern times--otherwise the Solid Literature, which is universally respected, and occasionally read. In the second class, the Novels of our own day--otherwise the Light Literature, which is universally read, and occasionally respected. At Windygates, as elsewhere, we believed History to be high literature, because it assumed to be true to Authorities (of which we knew little)--and Fiction to be low literature, because it attempted to be true to Nature (of which we knew less). At Windygates as elsewhere, we were always more or less satisfied with ourselves, if we were publicly discovered consulting our History--and more or less ashamed of ourselves, if we were publicly discovered devouring our Fiction. An architectural peculiarity in the original arrangement of the library favored the development of this common and curious form of human stupidity. While a row of luxurious arm-chairs, in the main thoroughfare of the room, invited the reader of solid literature to reveal himself in the act of cultivating a virtue, a row of snug little curtained recesses, opening at intervals out of one of the walls, enabled the reader of light literature to conceal himself in the act of indulging a vice. For the rest, all the minor accessories of this spacious and tranquil place were as plentiful and as well chosen as the heart could desire. And solid literature and light literature, and great writers and small, were all bounteously illuminated alike by a fine broad flow of the light of heaven, pouring into the room through windows that opened to the floor.

It was the fourth day from the day of Lady Lundie's garden-party, and it wanted an hour or more of the time at which the luncheon-bell usually rang.

The guests at Windygates were most of them in the garden, enjoying the morning sunshine, after a prevalent mist and rain for some days past. Two gentlemen (exceptions to the general rule) were alone in the library. They were the two last gentlemen in the world who could possibly be supposed to have any legitimate motive for meeting each other in a place of literary seclusion. One was Arnold Brinkworth, and the other was Geoffrey Delamayn.

They had arrived together at Windygates that morning. Geoffrey had traveled from London with his brother by the train of the previous night. Arnold, delayed in getting away at his own time, from his own property, by ceremonies incidental to his position which were not to be abridged without giving offense to many worthy people--had caught the passing train early that morning at the station nearest to him, and had returned to Lady Lundie's, as he had left Lady Lundie's, in company with his friend.

After a short preliminary interview with Blanche, Arnold had rejoined Geoffrey in the safe retirement of the library, to say what was still left to be said between them on the subject of Anne. Having completed his report of events at Craig Fernie, he was now naturally waiting to hear what Geoffrey had to say on his side. To Arnold's astonishment, Geoffrey coolly turned away to leave the library without uttering a word.

Arnold stopped him without ceremony.

"Not quite so fast, Geoffrey," he said. "I have an interest in Miss Silvester's welfare as well as in yours. Now you are back again in Scotland, what are you going to do?"

If Geoffrey had told the truth, he must have stated his position much as follows:

He had necessarily decided on deserting Anne when he had decided on joining his brother on the journey back. But he had advanced no farther than this. How he was to abandon the woman who had trusted him, without seeing his own dastardly conduct dragged into the light of day, was more than he yet knew. A vague idea of at once pacifying and deluding Anne, by a marriage which should be no marriage at all, had crossed his mind on the journey. He had asked himself whether a trap of that sort might not be easily set in a country notorious for the looseness of its marriage laws--if a man only knew how? And he had thought it likely that his well-informed brother, who lived in Scotland, might be tricked into innocently telling him

what he wanted to know. He had turned the conversation to the subject of Scotch marriages in general by way of trying the experiment. Julius had not studied the question; Julius knew nothing about it; and there the experiment had come to an end. As the necessary result of the check thus encountered, he was now in Scotland with absolutely nothing to trust to as a means of effecting his release but the chance of accidents, aided by his own resolution to marry Mrs. Glenarm. Such was his position, and such should have been the substance of his reply when he was confronted by Arnold's question, and plainly asked what he meant to do.

"The right thing," he answered, unblushingly. "And no mistake about it."

"I'm glad to hear you see your way so plainly," returned Arnold. "In your place, I should have been all abroad. I was wondering, only the other day, whether you would end, as I should have ended, in consulting Sir Patrick."

Geoffrey eyed him sharply.

"Consult Sir Patrick?" he repeated. "Why would you have done that?"

"I shouldn't have known how to set about marrying her," replied Arnold. "And--being in Scotland--I should have applied to Sir Patrick (without mentioning names, of course), because he would be sure to know all about it."

"Suppose I don't see my way quite so plainly as you think," said Geoffrey. "Would you advise me--"

"To consult Sir Patrick? Certainly! He has passed his life in the practice of the Scotch law. Didn't you know that?"

"No."

"Then take my advice--and consult him. You needn't mention names. You can say it's the case of a friend."

The idea was a new one and a good one. Geoffrey looked longingly toward the door. Eager to make Sir Patrick his innocent accomplice on the spot, he made a second attempt to leave the library; and made it for the second time in vain. Arnold had more unwelcome inquiries to make, and more advice to give unasked.

"How have you arranged about meeting Miss Silvester?" he went on. "You

can't go to the hotel in the character of her husband. I have prevented that. Where else are you to meet her? She is all alone; she must be weary of waiting, poor thing. Can you manage matters so as to see her to-day?"

After staring hard at Arnold while he was speaking, Geoffrey burst out laughing when he had done. A disinterested anxiety for the welfare of another person was one of those refinements of feeling which a muscular education had not fitted him to understand.

"I say, old boy," he burst out, "you seem to take an extraordinary interest in Miss Silvester! You haven't fallen in love with her yourself--have you?"

"Come! come!" said Arnold, seriously. "Neither she nor I deserve to be sneered at, in that way. I have made a sacrifice to your interests, Geoffrey--and so has she."

Geoffrey's face became serious again. His secret was in Arnold's hands; and his estimate of Arnold's character was founded, unconsciously, on his experience of himself. "All right," he said, by way of timely apology and concession. "I was only joking."

"As much joking as you please, when you have married her," replied Arnold. "It seems serious enough, to my mind, till then." He stopped--considered--and laid his hand very earnestly on Geoffrey's arm. "Mind!" he resumed. "You are not to breathe a word to any living soul, of my having been near the inn!"

"I've promised to hold my tongue, once already. What do you want more?"

"I am anxious, Geoffrey. I was at Craig Fernie, remember, when Blanche came there! She has been telling me all that happened, poor darling, in the firm persuasion that I was miles off at the time. I swear I couldn't look her in the face! What would she think of me, if she knew the truth? Pray be careful! pray be careful!"

Geoffrey's patience began to fail him.

"We had all this out," he said, "on the way here from the station. What's the good of going over the ground again?"

"You're quite right," said Arnold, good-humoredly. "The fact is--I'm out of sorts, this morning. My mind misgives me--I don't know why."

"Mind?" repeated Geoffrey, in high contempt. "It's flesh--that's what's the matter with you. You're nigh on a stone over your right weight. Mind he hanged! A man in healthy training don't know that he has got a mind. Take a turn with the dumb-bells, and a run up hill with a great-coat on. Sweat it off, Arnold! Sweat it off!"

With that excellent advice, he turned to leave the room for the third time. Fate appeared to have determined to keep him imprisoned in the library, that morning. On this occasion, it was a servant who got in the way--a servant, with a letter and a message. "The man waits for answer."

Geoffrey looked at the letter. It was in his brother's handwriting. He had left Julius at the junction about three hours since. What could Julius possibly have to say to him now?

He opened the letter. Julius had to announce that Fortune was favoring them already. He had heard news of Mrs. Glenarm, as soon as he reached home. She had called on his wife, during his absence in London--she had been invited to the house--and she had promised to accept the invitation early in the week. "Early in the week," Julius wrote, "may mean to-morrow. Make your apologies to Lady Lundie; and take care not to offend her. Say that family reasons, which you hope soon to have the pleasure of confiding to her, oblige you to appeal once more to her indulgence--and come to-morrow, and help us to receive Mrs. Glenarm."

Even Geoffrey was startled, when he found himself met by a sudden necessity for acting on his own decision. Anne knew where his brother lived. Suppose Anne (not knowing where else to find him) appeared at his brother's house, and claimed him in the presence of Mrs. Glenarm? He gave orders to have the messenger kept waiting, and said he would send back a written reply.

"From Craig Fernie?" asked Arnold, pointing to the letter in his friend's hand.

Geoffrey looked up with a frown. He had just opened his lips to answer that ill-timed reference to Anne, in no very friendly terms, when a voice, calling to Arnold from the lawn outside, announced the appearance of a third person in the library, and warned the two gentlemen that their private interview was at an end.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH.

NEARER STILL.

BLANCHE stepped lightly into the room, through one of the open French windows.

"What are you doing here?" she said to Arnold.

"Nothing. I was just going to look for you in the garden."

"The garden is insufferable, this morning." Saying those words, she fanned herself with her handkerchief, and noticed Geoffrey's presence in the room with a look of very thinly-concealed annoyance at the discovery. "Wait till I am married!" she thought. "Mr. Delamayn will be cleverer than I take him to be, if he gets much of his friend's company then!"

"A trifle too hot--eh?" said Geoffrey, seeing her eyes fixed on him, and supposing that he was expected to say something.

Having performed that duty he walked away without waiting for a reply; and seated himself with his letter, at one of the writing-tables in the library.

"Sir Patrick is quite right about the young men of the present day," said Blanche, turning to Arnold. "Here is this one asks me a question, and doesn't wait for an answer. There are three more of them, out in the garden, who have been talking of nothing, for the last hour, but the pedigrees of horses and the muscles of men. When we are married, Arnold, don't present any of your male friends to me, unless they have turned fifty. What shall we do till luncheon-time? It's cool and quiet in here among the books. I want a mild excitement--and I have got absolutely nothing to do. Suppose you read me some poetry?"

"While he is here?" asked Arnold, pointing to the personified antithesis of poetry--otherwise to Geoffrey, seated with his back to them at the farther end of the library.

"Pooh!" said Blanche. "There's only an animal in the room. We needn't mind him!"

"I say!" exclaimed Arnold. "You're as bitter, this morning, as Sir Patrick

himself. What will you say to Me when we are married if you talk in that way of my friend?"

Blanche stole her hand into Arnold's hand and gave it a little significant squeeze. "I shall always be nice to you," she whispered--with a look that contained a host of pretty promises in itself. Arnold returned the look (Geoffrey was unquestionably in the way!). Their eyes met tenderly (why couldn't the great awkward brute write his letters somewhere else?). With a faint little sigh, Blanche dropped resignedly into one of the comfortable arm-chairs--and asked once more for "some poetry," in a voice that faltered softly, and with a color that was brighter than usual.

"Whose poetry am I to read?" inquired Arnold.

"Any body's," said Blanche. "This is another of my impulses. I am dying for some poetry. I don't know whose poetry. And I don't know why."

Arnold went straight to the nearest book-shelf, and took down the first volume that his hand lighted on--a solid quarto, bound in sober brown.

"Well?" asked Blanche. "What have you found?"

Arnold opened the volume, and conscientiously read the title exactly as it stood:

"Paradise Lost. A Poem. By John Milton."

"I have never read Milton," said Blanche. "Have you?"

"No."

"Another instance of sympathy between us. No educated person ought to be ignorant of Milton. Let us be educated persons. Please begin."

"At the beginning?"

"Of course! Stop! You musn't sit all that way off--you must sit where I can look at you. My attention wanders if I don't look at people while they read."

Arnold took a stool at Blanche's feet, and opened the "First Book" of Paradise Lost. His "system" as a reader of blank verse was simplicity itself. In poetry we are some of us (as many living poets can testify) all for sound; and some of us (as few living poets can testify) all for sense. Arnold was for

sound. He ended every line inexorably with a full stop; and he got on to his full stop as fast as the inevitable impediment of the words would let him. He began:

"Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit. Of that forbidden tree
whose mortal taste. Brought death into the world and all our woe.
With loss of Eden till one greater Man. Restore us and regain the blissful
seat. Sing heavenly Muse--"

"Beautiful!" said Blanche. "What a shame it seems to have had Milton all this time in the library and never to have read him yet! We will have Mornings with Milton, Arnold. He seems long; but we are both young, and we may live to get to the end of him. Do you know dear, now I look at you again, you don't seem to have come back to Windygates in good spirits."

"Don't I? I can't account for it."

"I can. It's sympathy with Me. I am out of spirits too."

"You!"

"Yes. After what I saw at Craig Fernie, I grow more and more uneasy about Anne. You will understand that, I am sure, after what I told you this morning?"

Arnold looked back, in a violent hurry, from Blanche to Milton. That renewed reference to events at Craig Fernie was a renewed reproach to him for his conduct at the inn. He attempted to silence her by pointing to Geoffrey.

"Don't forget," he whispered, "that there is somebody in the room besides ourselves."

Blanche shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"What does he matter?" she asked. "What does he know or care about Anne?"

There was only one other chance of diverting her from the delicate subject. Arnold went on reading headlong, two lines in advance of the place at which he had left off, with more sound and less sense than ever:

"In the beginning how the heavens and earth. Rose out of Chaos or if

Sion hill--"

At "Sion hill," Blanche interrupted him again.

"Do wait a little, Arnold. I can't have Milton crammed down my throat in that way. Besides I had something to say. Did I tell you that I consulted my uncle about Anne? I don't think I did. I caught him alone in this very room. I told him all I have told you. I showed him Anne's letter. And I said, 'What do you think?' He took a little time (and a great deal of snuff) before he would say what he thought. When he did speak, he told me I might quite possibly be right in suspecting Anne's husband to be a very abominable person. His keeping himself out of my way was (just as I thought) a suspicious circumstance, to begin with. And then there was the sudden extinguishing of the candles, when I first went in. I thought (and Mrs. Inchbare thought) it was done by the wind. Sir Patrick suspects it was done by the horrid man himself, to prevent me from seeing him when I entered the room. I am firmly persuaded Sir Patrick is right. What do you think?"

"I think we had better go on," said Arnold, with his head down over his book. "We seem to be forgetting Milton."

"How you do worry about Milton! That last bit wasn't as interesting as the other. Is there any love in Paradise Lost?"

"Perhaps we may find some if we go on."

"Very well, then. Go on. And be quick about it."

Arnold was so quick about it that he lost his place. Instead of going on he went back. He read once more:

"In the beginning how the heavens and earth. Rose out of Chaos or if
Sion hill--"

"You read that before," said Blanche.

"I think not."

"I'm sure you did. When you said 'Sion hill' I recollect I thought of the Methodists directly. I couldn't have thought of the Methodists, if you hadn't said 'Sion hill.' It stands to reason."

"I'll try the next page," said Arnold. "I can't have read that before--for I

haven't turned over yet."

Blanche threw herself back in her chair, and flung her handkerchief resignedly over her face. "The flies," she explained. "I'm not going to sleep. Try the next page. Oh, dear me, try the next page!"

Arnold proceeded:

"Say first for heaven hides nothing from thy view. Nor the deep tract of hell say first what cause. Moved our grand parents in that happy state--"

Blanche suddenly threw the handkerchief off again, and sat bolt upright in her chair. "Shut it up," she cried. "I can't bear any more. Leave off, Arnold--leave off!"

"What's, the matter now?"

"That happy state," said Blanche. "What does 'that happy state' mean? Marriage, of course! And marriage reminds me of Anne. I won't have any more. Paradise Lost is painful. Shut it up. Well, my next question to Sir Patrick was, of course, to know what he thought Anne's husband had done. The wretch had behaved infamously to her in some way. In what way? Was it any thing to do with her marriage? My uncle considered again. He thought it quite possible. Private marriages were dangerous things (he said)--especially in Scotland. He asked me if they had been married in Scotland. I couldn't tell him--I only said, 'Suppose they were? What then?' 'It's barely possible, in that case,' says Sir Patrick, 'that Miss Silvester may be feeling uneasy about her marriage. She may even have reason--or may think she has reason--to doubt whether it is a marriage at all.'"

Arnold started, and looked round at Geoffrey still sitting at the writing-table with his back turned on them. Utterly as Blanche and Sir Patrick were mistaken in their estimate of Anne's position at Craig Fernie, they had drifted, nevertheless, into discussing the very question in which Geoffrey and Miss Silvester were interested--the question of marriage in Scotland. It was impossible in Blanche's presence to tell Geoffrey that he might do well to listen to Sir Patrick's opinion, even at second-hand. Perhaps the words had found their way to him? perhaps he was listening already, of his own accord?

(He was listening. Blanche's last words had found their way to him, while he was pondering over his half-finished letter to his brother. He waited to hear

more--without moving, and with the pen suspended in his hand.)

Blanche proceeded, absently winding her fingers in and out of Arnold's hair as he sat at her feet:

"It flashed on me instantly that Sir Patrick had discovered the truth. Of course I told him so. He laughed, and said I mustn't jump at conclusions. We were guessing quite in the dark; and all the distressing things I had noticed at the inn might admit of some totally different explanation. He would have gone on splitting straws in that provoking way the whole morning if I hadn't stopped him. I was strictly logical. I said I had seen Anne, and he hadn't--and that made all the difference. I said, 'Every thing that puzzled and frightened me in the poor darling is accounted for now. The law must, and shall, reach that man, uncle--and I'll pay for it!' I was so much in earnest that I believe I cried a little. What do you think the dear old man did? He took me on his knee and gave me a kiss; and he said, in the nicest way, that he would adopt my view, for the present, if I would promise not to cry any more; and--wait! the cream of it is to come!--that he would put the view in quite a new light to me as soon as I was composed again. You may imagine how soon I dried my eyes, and what a picture of composure I presented in the course of half a minute. 'Let us take it for granted,' says Sir Patrick, 'that this man unknown has really tried to deceive Miss Silvester, as you and I suppose. I can tell you one thing: it's as likely as not that, in trying to overreach her, he may (without in the least suspecting it) have ended in overreaching himself.'"

(Geoffrey held his breath. The pen dropped unheeded from his fingers. It was coming. The light that his brother couldn't throw on the subject was dawning on it at last!)

Blanche resumed:

"I was so interested, and it made such a tremendous impression on me, that I haven't forgotten a word. 'I mustn't make that poor little head of yours ache with Scotch law,' my uncle said; 'I must put it plainly. There are marriages allowed in Scotland, Blanche, which are called Irregular Marriages--and very abominable things they are. But they have this accidental merit in the present case. It is extremely difficult for a man to pretend to marry in Scotland, and not really to do it. And it is, on the other hand, extremely easy for a man to drift into marrying in Scotland without feeling the slightest suspicion of having done it himself.' That was exactly what he said, Arnold. When we are married, it sha'n't be in Scotland!"

(Geoffrey's ruddy color paled. If this was true he might be caught himself in the trap which he had schemed to set for Anne! Blanche went on with her narrative. He waited and listened.)

"My uncle asked me if I understood him so far. It was as plain as the sun at noonday, of course I understood him! 'Very well, then--now for the application!' says Sir Patrick. 'Once more supposing our guess to be the right one, Miss Silvester may be making herself very unhappy without any real cause. If this invisible man at Craig Fernie has actually meddled, I won't say with marrying her, but only with pretending to make her his wife, and if he has attempted it in Scotland, the chances are nine to one (though he may not believe it, and though she may not believe it) that he has really married her, after all.' My uncle's own words again! Quite needless to say that, half an hour after they were out of his lips, I had sent them to Craig Fernie in a letter to Anne!"

(Geoffrey's stolidly-staring eyes suddenly brightened. A light of the devil's own striking illuminated him. An idea of the devil's own bringing entered his mind. He looked stealthily round at the man whose life he had saved--at the man who had devotedly served him in return. A hideous cunning leered at his mouth and peeped out of his eyes. "Arnold Brinkworth pretended to be married to her at the inn. By the lord Harry! that's a way out of it that never struck me before!" With that thought in his heart he turned back again to his half-finished letter to Julius. For once in his life he was strongly, fiercely agitated. For once in his life he was daunted--and that by his Own Thought! He had written to Julius under a strong sense of the necessity of gaining time to delude Anne into leaving Scotland before he ventured on paying his addresses to Mrs. Glenarm. His letter contained a string of clumsy excuses, intended to delay his return to his brother's house. "No," he said to himself, as he read it again. "Whatever else may do--this won't!" He looked round once more at Arnold, and slowly tore the letter into fragments as he looked.)

In the mean time Blanche had not done yet. "No," she said, when Arnold proposed an adjournment to the garden; "I have something more to say, and you are interested in it, this time." Arnold resigned himself to listen, and worse still to answer, if there was no help for it, in the character of an innocent stranger who had never been near the Craig Fernie inn.

"Well," Blanche resumed, "and what do you think has come of my letter to Anne?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Nothing has come of it!"

"Indeed?"

"Absolutely nothing! I know she received the letter yesterday morning. I ought to have had the answer to-day at breakfast."

"Perhaps she thought it didn't require an answer."

"She couldn't have thought that, for reasons that I know of. Besides, in my letter yesterday I implored her to tell me (if it was one line only) whether, in guessing at what her trouble was, Sir Patrick and I had not guessed right. And here is the day getting on, and no answer! What am I to conclude?"

"I really can't say!"

"Is it possible, Arnold, that we have not guessed right, after all? Is the wickedness of that man who blew the candles out wickedness beyond our discovering? The doubt is so dreadful that I have made up my mind not to bear it after to-day. I count on your sympathy and assistance when to-morrow comes!"

Arnold's heart sank. Some new complication was evidently gathering round him. He waited in silence to hear the worst. Blanche bent forward, and whispered to him.

"This is a secret," she said. "If that creature at the writing-table has ears for any thing but rowing and racing, he mustn't hear this! Anne may come to me privately to-day while you are all at luncheon. If she doesn't come and if I don't hear from her, then the mystery of her silence must be cleared up; and You must do it!"

"I!"

"Don't make difficulties! If you can't find your way to Craig Fernie, I can help you. As for Anne, you know what a charming person she is, and you know she will receive you perfectly, for my sake. I must and will have some news of her. I can't break the laws of the household a second time. Sir Patrick sympathizes, but he won't stir. Lady Lundie is a bitter enemy. The servants are threatened with the loss of their places if any one of them goes near Anne. There is nobody but you. And to Anne you go to-morrow, if I don't see her or hear from her to-day!"

This to the man who had passed as Anne's husband at the inn, and who had been forced into the most intimate knowledge of Anne's miserable secret! Arnold rose to put Milton away, with the composure of sheer despair. Any other secret he might, in the last resort, have confided to the discretion of a third person. But a woman's secret--with a woman's reputation depending on his keeping it--was not to be confided to any body, under any stress of circumstances whatever. "If Geoffrey doesn't get me out of this," he thought, "I shall have no choice but to leave Windygates to-morrow."

As he replaced the book on the shelf, Lady Lundie entered the library from the garden.

"What are you doing here?" she said to her step-daughter.

"Improving my mind," replied Blanche. "Mr. Brinkworth and I have been reading Milton."

"Can you condescend so far, after reading Milton all the morning, as to help me with the invitations for the dinner next week?"

"If you can condescend, Lady Lundie, after feeding the poultry all the morning, I must be humility itself after only reading Milton!"

With that little interchange of the acid amenities of feminine intercourse, step-mother and step-daughter withdrew to a writing-table, to put the virtue of hospitality in practice together.

Arnold joined his friend at the other end of the library.

Geoffrey was sitting with his elbows on the desk, and his clenched fists dug into his cheeks. Great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead, and the fragments of a torn letter lay scattered all round him. He exhibited symptoms of nervous sensibility for the first time in his life--he started when Arnold spoke to him.

"What's the matter, Geoffrey?"

"A letter to answer. And I don't know how."

"From Miss Silvester?" asked Arnold, dropping his voice so as to prevent the ladies at the other end of the room from hearing him.

"No," answered Geoffrey, in a lower voice still.

"Have you heard what Blanche has been saying to me about Miss Silvester?"

"Some of it."

"Did you hear Blanche say that she meant to send me to Craig Fernie to-morrow, if she failed to get news from Miss Silvester to-day?"

"No."

"Then you know it now. That is what Blanche has just said to me."

"Well?"

"Well--there's a limit to what a man can expect even from his best friend. I hope you won't ask me to be Blanche's messenger to-morrow. I can't, and won't, go back to the inn as things are now."

"You have had enough of it--eh?"

"I have had enough of distressing Miss Silvester, and more than enough of deceiving Blanche."

"What do you mean by 'distressing Miss Silvester?'"

"She doesn't take the same easy view that you and I do, Geoffrey, of my passing her off on the people of the inn as my wife."

Geoffrey absently took up a paper-knife. Still with his head down, he began shaving off the topmost layer of paper from the blotting-pad under his hand. Still with his head down, he abruptly broke the silence in a whisper.

"I say!"

"Yes?"

"How did you manage to pass her off as your wife?"

"I told you how, as we were driving from the station here."

"I was thinking of something else. Tell me again."

Arnold told him once more what had happened at the inn. Geoffrey listened,

without making any remark. He balanced the paper-knife vacantly on one of his fingers. He was strangely sluggish and strangely silent.

"All that is done and ended," said Arnold shaking him by the shoulder. "It rests with you now to get me out of the difficulty I'm placed in with Blanche. Things must be settled with Miss Silvester to-day."

"Things shall be settled."

"Shall be? What are you waiting for?"

"I'm waiting to do what you told me."

"What I told you?"

"Didn't you tell me to consult Sir Patrick before I married her?"

"To be sure! so I did."

"Well--I am waiting for a chance with Sir Patrick."

"And then?"

"And then--" He looked at Arnold for the first time. "Then," he said, "you may consider it settled."

"The marriage?"

He suddenly looked down again at the blotting-pad. "Yes--the marriage."

Arnold offered his hand in congratulation. Geoffrey never noticed it. His eyes were off the blotting-pad again. He was looking out of the window near him.

"Don't I hear voices outside?" he asked.

"I believe our friends are in the garden," said Arnold. "Sir Patrick may be among them. I'll go and see."

The instant his back was turned Geoffrey snatched up a sheet of note-paper. "Before I forget it!" he said to himself. He wrote the word "Memorandum" at the top of the page, and added these lines beneath it:

"He asked for her by the name of his wife at the door. He said, at dinner,

before the landlady and the waiter, 'I take these rooms for my wife.' He made her say he was her husband at the same time. After that he stopped all night. What do the lawyers call this in Scotland?--(Query: a marriage?)"

After folding up the paper he hesitated for a moment. "No!" he thought, "It won't do to trust to what Miss Lundie said about it. I can't be certain till I have consulted Sir Patrick himself."

He put the paper away in his pocket, and wiped the heavy perspiration from his forehead. He was pale--for him, strikingly pale--when Arnold came back.

"Any thing wrong, Geoffrey?--you're as white as ashes."

"It's the heat. Where's Sir Patrick?"

"You may see for yourself."

Arnold pointed to the window. Sir Patrick was crossing the lawn, on his way to the library with a newspaper in his hand; and the guests at Windygates were accompanying him. Sir Patrick was smiling, and saying nothing. The guests were talking excitedly at the tops of their voices. There had apparently been a collision of some kind between the old school and the new. Arnold directed Geoffrey's attention to the state of affairs on the lawn.

"How are you to consult Sir Patrick with all those people about him?"

"I'll consult Sir Patrick, if I take him by the scruff of the neck and carry him into the next county!" He rose to his feet as he spoke those words, and emphasized them under his breath with an oath.

Sir Patrick entered the library, with the guests at his heels.

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH. - CLOSE ON IT.

THE object of the invasion of the library by the party in the garden appeared to be twofold.

Sir Patrick had entered the room to restore the newspaper to the place from which he had taken it. The guests, to the number of five, had followed him, to appeal in a body to Geoffrey Delamayn. Between these two apparently dissimilar motives there was a connection, not visible on the surface, which was now to assert itself.

Of the five guests, two were middle-aged gentlemen belonging to that large, but indistinct, division of the human family whom the hand of Nature has painted in unobtrusive neutral tint. They had absorbed the ideas of their time with such receptive capacity as they possessed; and they occupied much the same place in society which the chorus in an opera occupies on the stage. They echoed the prevalent sentiment of the moment; and they gave the solo-talker time to fetch his breath.

The three remaining guests were on the right side of thirty. All profoundly versed in horse-racing, in athletic sports, in pipes, beer, billiards, and betting. All profoundly ignorant of every thing else under the sun. All gentlemen by birth, and all marked as such by the stamp of "a University education." They may be personally described as faint reflections of Geoffrey; and they may be numerically distinguished (in the absence of all other distinction) as One, Two, and Three.

Sir Patrick laid the newspaper on the table and placed himself in one of the comfortable arm-chairs. He was instantly assailed, in his domestic capacity, by his irrepressible sister-in-law. Lady Lundie dispatched Blanche to him with the list of her guests at the dinner. "For your uncle's approval, my dear, as head of the family."

While Sir Patrick was looking over the list, and while Arnold was making his way to Blanche, at the back of her uncle's chair, One, Two, and Three--with the Chorus in attendance on them--descended in a body on Geoffrey, at the other end of the room, and appealed in rapid succession to his superior authority, as follows:

"I say, Delamayn. We want You. Here is Sir Patrick running a regular Muck at us. Calls us aboriginal Britons. Tells us we ain't educated. Doubts if we

could read, write, and cipher, if he tried us. Swears he's sick of fellows showing their arms and legs, and seeing which fellow's hardest, and who's got three belts of muscle across his wind, and who hasn't, and the like of that. Says a most infernal thing of a chap. Says--because a chap likes a healthy out-of-door life, and trains for rowing and running, and the rest of it, and don't see his way to stewing over his books--therefore he's safe to commit all the crimes in the calendar, murder included. Saw your name down in the newspaper for the Foot-Race; and said, when we asked him if he'd taken the odds, he'd lay any odds we liked against you in the other Race at the University--meaning, old boy, your Degree. Nasty, that about the Degree--in the opinion of Number One. Bad taste in Sir Patrick to rake up what we never mention among ourselves--in the opinion of Number Two. Un-English to sneer at a man in that way behind his back--in the opinion of Number Three. Bring him to book, Delamayn. Your name's in the papers; he can't ride roughshod over You."

The two choral gentlemen agreed (in the minor key) with the general opinion. "Sir Patrick's views are certainly extreme, Smith?" "I think, Jones, it's desirable to hear Mr. Delamayn on the other side."

Geoffrey looked from one to the other of his admirers with an expression on his face which was quite new to them, and with something in his manner which puzzled them all.

"You can't argue with Sir Patrick yourselves," he said, "and you want me to do it?"

One, Two, Three, and the Chorus all answered, "Yes."

"I won't do it."

One, Two, Three, and the Chorus all asked, "Why?"

"Because," answered Geoffrey, "you're all wrong. And Sir Patrick's right."

Not astonishment only, but downright stupefaction, struck the deputation from the garden speechless.

Without saying a word more to any of the persons standing near him, Geoffrey walked straight up to Sir Patrick's arm-chair, and personally addressed him. The satellites followed, and listened (as well they might) in wonder.

"You will lay any odds, Sir," said Geoffrey "against me taking my Degree? You're quite right. I sha'n't take my Degree. You doubt whether I, or any of those fellows behind me, could read, write, and cipher correctly if you tried us. You're right again--we couldn't. You say you don't know why men like Me, and men like Them, may not begin with rowing and running and the like of that, and end in committing all the crimes in the calendar: murder included. Well! you may be right again there. Who's to know what may happen to him? or what he may not end in doing before he dies? It may be Another, or it may be Me. How do I know? and how do you?" He suddenly turned on the deputation, standing thunder-struck behind him. "If you want to know what I think, there it is for you, in plain words."

There was something, not only in the shamelessness of the declaration itself, but in the fierce pleasure that the speaker seemed to feel in making it, which struck the circle of listeners, Sir Patrick included, with a momentary chill.

In the midst of the silence a sixth guest appeared on the lawn, and stepped into the library--a silent, resolute, unassuming, elderly man who had arrived the day before on a visit to Windygates, and who was well known, in and out of London, as one of the first consulting surgeons of his time.

"A discussion going on?" he asked. "Am I in the way?"

"There's no discussion--we are all agreed," cried Geoffrey, answering boisterously for the rest. "The more the merrier, Sir!"

After a glance at Geoffrey, the surgeon suddenly checked himself on the point of advancing to the inner part of the room, and remained standing at the window.

"I beg your pardon," said Sir Patrick, addressing himself to Geoffrey, with a grave dignity which was quite new in Arnold's experience of him. "We are not all agreed. I decline, Mr. Delamayn, to allow you to connect me with such an expression of feeling on your part as we have just heard. The language you have used leaves me no alternative but to meet your statement of what you suppose me to have said by my statement of what I really did say. It is not my fault if the discussion in the garden is revived before another audience in this room--it is yours."

He looked as he spoke to Arnold and Blanche, and from them to the surgeon standing at the window.

The surgeon had found an occupation for himself which completely isolated him among the rest of the guests. Keeping his own face in shadow, he was studying Geoffrey's face, in the full flood of light that fell on it, with a steady attention which must have been generally remarked, if all eyes had not been turned toward Sir Patrick at the time.

It was not an easy face to investigate at that moment.

While Sir Patrick had been speaking Geoffrey had seated himself near the window, doggedly impenetrable to the reproof of which he was the object. In his impatience to consult the one authority competent to decide the question of Arnold's position toward Anne, he had sided with Sir Patrick, as a means of ridding himself of the unwelcome presence of his friends--and he had defeated his own purpose, thanks to his own brutish incapability of bridling himself in the pursuit of it. Whether he was now discouraged under these circumstances, or whether he was simply resigned to bide his time till his time came, it was impossible, judging by outward appearances, to say. With a heavy dropping at the corners of his mouth, with a stolid indifference staring dull in his eyes, there he sat, a man forearmed, in his own obstinate neutrality, against all temptation to engage in the conflict of opinions that was to come.

Sir Patrick took up the newspaper which he had brought in from the garden, and looked once more to see if the surgeon was attending to him.

No! The surgeon's attention was absorbed in his own subject. There he was in the same position, with his mind still hard at work on something in Geoffrey which at once interested and puzzled it! "That man," he was thinking to himself, "has come here this morning after traveling from London all night. Does any ordinary fatigue explain what I see in his face? No!"

"Our little discussion in the garden," resumed Sir Patrick, answering Blanche's inquiring look as she bent over him, "began, my dear, in a paragraph here announcing Mr. Delamayn's forthcoming appearance in a foot-race in the neighborhood of London. I hold very unpopular opinions as to the athletic displays which are so much in vogue in England just now. And it is possible that I may have expressed those opinions a little too strongly, in the heat of discussion, with gentlemen who are opposed to me--I don't doubt, conscientiously opposed--on this question."

A low groan of protest rose from One, Two, and Three, in return for the little compliment which Sir Patrick had paid to them. "How about rowing and

running ending in the Old Bailey and the gallows? You said that, Sir--you know you did!"

The two choral gentlemen looked at each other, and agreed with the prevalent sentiment. "It came to that, I think, Smith." "Yes, Jones, it certainly came to that."

The only two men who still cared nothing about it were Geoffrey and the surgeon. There sat the first, stolidly neutral--indifferent alike to the attack and the defense. There stood the second, pursuing his investigation--with the growing interest in it of a man who was beginning to see his way to the end.

"Hear my defense, gentlemen," continued Sir Patrick, as courteously as ever. "You belong, remember, to a nation which especially claims to practice the rules of fair play. I must beg to remind you of what I said in the garden. I started with a concession. I admitted--as every person of the smallest sense must admit--that a man will, in the great majority of cases, be all the fitter for mental exercise if he wisely combines physical exercise along with it. The whole question between the two is a question of proportion and degree, and my complaint of the present time is that the present time doesn't see it. Popular opinion in England seems to me to be, not only getting to consider the cultivation of the muscles as of equal importance with the cultivation of the mind, but to be actually extending--in practice, if not in theory--to the absurd and dangerous length of putting bodily training in the first place of importance, and mental training in the second. To take a case in point: I can discover no enthusiasm in the nation any thing like so genuine and any thing like so general as the enthusiasm excited by your University boat-race. Again: I see this Athletic Education of yours made a matter of public celebration in schools and colleges; and I ask any unprejudiced witness to tell me which excites most popular enthusiasm, and which gets the most prominent place in the public journals--the exhibition, indoors (on Prize-day), of what the boys can do with their minds? or the exhibition, out of doors (on Sports-day), of what the boys can do with their bodies? You know perfectly well which performance excites the loudest cheers, which occupies the prominent place in the newspapers, and which, as a necessary consequence, confers the highest social honors on the hero of the day."

Another murmur from One, Two, and Three. "We have nothing to say to that, Sir; have it all your own way, so far."

Another ratification of agreement with the prevalent opinion between Smith and Jones.

"Very good," pursued Sir Patrick. "We are all of one mind as to which way the public feeling sets. If it is a feeling to be respected and encouraged, show me the national advantage which has resulted from it. Where is the influence of this modern outburst of manly enthusiasm on the serious concerns of life? and how has it improved the character of the people at large? Are we any of us individually readier than we ever were to sacrifice our own little private interests to the public good? Are we dealing with the serious social questions of our time in a conspicuously determined, downright, and definite way? Are we becoming a visibly and indisputably purer people in our code of commercial morals? Is there a healthier and higher tone in those public amusements which faithfully reflect in all countries the public taste? Produce me affirmative answers to these questions, which rest on solid proof, and I'll accept the present mania for athletic sports as something better than an outbreak of our insular boastfulness and our insular barbarity in a new form."

"Question! question!" in a general cry, from One, Two, and Three.

"Question! question!" in meek reverberation, from Smith and Jones.

"That is the question," rejoined Sir Patrick. "You admit the existence of the public feeling and I ask, what good does it do?"

"What harm does it do?" from One, Two, and Three.

"Hear! hear!" from Smith and Jones.

"That's a fair challenge," replied Sir Patrick. "I am bound to meet you on that new ground. I won't point, gentlemen, by way of answer, to the coarseness which I can see growing on our national manners, or to the deterioration which appears to me to be spreading more and more widely in our national tastes. You may tell me with perfect truth that I am too old a man to be a fair judge of manners and tastes which have got beyond my standards. We will try the issue, as it now stands between us, on its abstract merits only. I assert that a state of public feeling which does practically place physical training, in its estimation, above moral and mental training, is a positively bad and dangerous state of feeling in this, that it encourages the inbred reluctance in humanity to submit to the demands which moral and mental cultivation must inevitably make on it. Which am I, as a boy, naturally most ready to do--to try how high I can jump? or to try how much I can learn? Which training comes easiest to me as a young man? The training which teaches me to handle an oar? or the training which teaches me to return

good for evil, and to love my neighbor as myself? Of those two experiments, of those two trainings, which ought society in England to meet with the warmest encouragement? And which does society in England practically encourage, as a matter of fact?"

"What did you say yourself just now?" from One, Two, and Three.

"Remarkably well put!" from Smith and Jones.

"I said," admitted Sir Patrick, "that a man will go all the better to his books for his healthy physical exercise. And I say that again--provided the physical exercise be restrained within fit limits. But when public feeling enters into the question, and directly exalts the bodily exercises above the books--then I say public feeling is in a dangerous extreme. The bodily exercises, in that case, will be uppermost in the youth's thoughts, will have the strongest hold on his interest, will take the lion's share of his time, and will, by those means--barring the few purely exceptional instances--slowly and surely end in leaving him, to all good moral and mental purpose, certainly an uncultivated, and, possibly, a dangerous man."

A cry from the camp of the adversaries: "He's got to it at last! A man who leads an out-of-door life, and uses the strength that God has given to him, is a dangerous man. Did any body ever hear the like of that?"

Cry reverberated, with variations, by the two human echoes: "No! Nobody ever heard the like of that!"

"Clear your minds of cant, gentlemen," answered Sir Patrick. "The agricultural laborer leads an out-of-door life, and uses the strength that God has given to him. The sailor in the merchant service does the same. Both are uncultivated, a shamefully uncultivated, class--and see the result! Look at the Map of Crime, and you will find the most hideous offenses in the calendar, committed--not in the towns, where the average man doesn't lead an out-of-door life, doesn't as a rule, use his strength, but is, as a rule, comparatively cultivated--not in the towns, but in the agricultural districts. As for the English sailor--except when the Royal Navy catches and cultivates him--ask Mr. Brinkworth, who has served in the merchant navy, what sort of specimen of the moral influence of out-of-door life and muscular cultivation he is."

"In nine cases out of ten," said Arnold, "he is as idle and vicious as ruffian as walks the earth."

Another cry from the Opposition: "Are we agricultural laborers? Are we sailors in the merchant service?"

A smart reverberation from the human echoes: "Smith! am I a laborer?"
"Jones! am I a sailor?"

"Pray let us not be personal, gentlemen," said Sir Patrick. "I am speaking generally, and I can only meet extreme objections by pushing my argument to extreme limits. The laborer and the sailor have served my purpose. If the laborer and the sailor offend you, by all means let them walk off the stage! I hold to the position which I advanced just now. A man may be well born, well off, well dressed, well fed--but if he is an uncultivated man, he is (in spite of all those advantages) a man with special capacities for evil in him, on that very account. Don't mistake me! I am far from saying that the present rage for exclusively muscular accomplishments must lead inevitably downward to the lowest deep of depravity. Fortunately for society, all special depravity is more or less certainly the result, in the first instance, of special temptation. The ordinary mass of us, thank God, pass through life without being exposed to other than ordinary temptations. Thousands of the young gentlemen, devoted to the favorite pursuits of the present time, will get through existence with no worse consequences to themselves than a coarse tone of mind and manners, and a lamentable incapability of feeling any of those higher and gentler influences which sweeten and purify the lives of more cultivated men. But take the other case (which may occur to any body), the case of a special temptation trying a modern young man of your prosperous class and of mine. And let me beg Mr. Delamayn to honor with his attention what I have now to say, because it refers to the opinion which I did really express--as distinguished from the opinion which he affects to agree with, and which I never advanced."

Geoffrey's indifference showed no signs of giving way. "Go on!" he said--and still sat looking straight before him, with heavy eyes, which noticed nothing, and expressed nothing.

"Take the example which we have now in view," pursued Sir Patrick--"the example of an average young gentleman of our time, blest with every advantage that physical cultivation can bestow on him. Let this man be tried by a temptation which insidiously calls into action, in his own interests, the savage instincts latent in humanity--the instincts of self-seeking and cruelty which are at the bottom of all crime. Let this man be placed toward some other person, guiltless of injuring him, in a position which demands one of two sacrifices: the sacrifice of the other person, or the sacrifice of his own interests and his own desires. His neighbor's happiness, or his neighbor's

life, stands, let us say, between him and the attainment of something that he wants. He can wreck the happiness, or strike down the life, without, to his knowledge, any fear of suffering for it himself. What is to prevent him, being the man he is, from going straight to his end, on those conditions? Will the skill in rowing, the swiftness in running, the admirable capacity and endurance in other physical exercises, which he has attained, by a strenuous cultivation in this kind that has excluded any similarly strenuous cultivation in other kinds--will these physical attainments help him to win a purely moral victory over his own selfishness and his own cruelty? They won't even help him to see that it is selfishness, and that it is cruelty. The essential principle of his rowing and racing (a harmless principle enough, if you can be sure of applying it to rowing and racing only) has taught him to take every advantage of another man that his superior strength and superior cunning can suggest. There has been nothing in his training to soften the barbarous hardness in his heart, and to enlighten the barbarous darkness in his mind. Temptation finds this man defenseless, when temptation passes his way. I don't care who he is, or how high he stands accidentally in the social scale--he is, to all moral intents and purposes, an Animal, and nothing more. If my happiness stands in his way--and if he can do it with impunity to himself--he will trample down my happiness. If my life happens to be the next obstacle he encounters--and if he can do it with impunity to himself--he will trample down my life. Not, Mr. Delamayn, in the character of a victim to irresistible fatality, or to blind chance; but in the character of a man who has sown the seed, and reaps the harvest. That, Sir, is the case which I put as an extreme case only, when this discussion began. As an extreme case only--but as a perfectly possible case, at the same time--I restate it now."

Before the advocates of the other side of the question could open their lips to reply, Geoffrey suddenly flung off his indifference, and started to his feet.

"Stop!" he cried, threatening the others, in his fierce impatience to answer for himself, with his clenched fist.

There was a general silence.

Geoffrey turned and looked at Sir Patrick, as if Sir Patrick had personally insulted him.

"Who is this anonymous man, who finds his way to his own ends, and pities nobody and sticks at nothing?" he asked. "Give him a name!"

"I am quoting an example," said Sir Patrick. "I am not attacking a man."

"What right have you," cried Geoffrey--utterly forgetful, in the strange exasperation that had seized on him, of the interest that he had in controlling himself before Sir Patrick--"what right have you to pick out an example of a rowing man who is an infernal scoundrel--when it's quite as likely that a rowing man may be a good fellow: ay! and a better fellow, if you come to that, than ever stood in your shoes!"

"If the one case is quite as likely to occur as the other (which I readily admit)," answered Sir Patrick, "I have surely a right to choose which case I please for illustration. (Wait, Mr. Delamayn! These are the last words I have to say and I mean to say them.) I have taken the example--not of a specially depraved man, as you erroneously suppose--but of an average man, with his average share of the mean, cruel, and dangerous qualities, which are part and parcel of unreformed human nature--as your religion tells you, and as you may see for yourself, if you choose to look at your untaught fellow-creatures any where. I suppose that man to be tried by a temptation to wickedness, out of the common; and I show, to the best of my ability, how completely the moral and mental neglect of himself, which the present material tone of public feeling in England has tacitly encouraged, leaves him at the mercy of all the worst instincts in his nature; and how surely, under those conditions, he must go down (gentleman as he is) step by step--as the lowest vagabond in the streets goes down under his special temptation--from the beginning in ignorance to the end in crime. If you deny my right to take such an example as that, in illustration of the views I advocate, you must either deny that a special temptation to wickedness can assail a man in the position of a gentleman, or you must assert that gentlemen who are naturally superior to all temptation are the only gentlemen who devote themselves to athletic pursuits. There is my defense. In stating my case, I have spoken out of my own sincere respect for the interests of virtue and of learning; out of my own sincere admiration for those young men among us who are resisting the contagion of barbarism about them. In their future is the future hope of England. I have done."

Angrily ready with a violent personal reply, Geoffrey found himself checked, in his turn by another person with something to say, and with a resolution to say it at that particular moment.

For some little time past the surgeon had discontinued his steady investigation of Geoffrey's face, and had given all his attention to the discussion, with the air of a man whose self-imposed task had come to an

end. As the last sentence fell from the last speaker's lips, he interposed so quickly and so skillfully between Geoffrey and Sir Patrick, that Geoffrey himself was taken by surprise,

"There is something still wanting to make Sir Patrick's statement of the case complete," he said. "I think I can supply it, from the result of my own professional experience. Before I say what I have to say, Mr. Delamayn will perhaps excuse me, if I venture on giving him a caution to control himself."

"Are you going to make a dead set at me, too?" inquired Geoffrey.

"I am recommending you to keep your temper--nothing more. There are plenty of men who can fly into a passion without doing themselves any particular harm. You are not one of them."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't think the state of your health, Mr. Delamayn, is quite so satisfactory as you may be disposed to consider it yourself."

Geoffrey turned to his admirers and adherents with a roar of derisive laughter. The admirers and adherents all echoed him together. Arnold and Blanche smiled at each other. Even Sir Patrick looked as if he could hardly credit the evidence of his own ears. There stood the modern Hercules, self-vindicated as a Hercules, before all eyes that looked at him. And there, opposite, stood a man whom he could have killed with one blow of his fist, telling him, in serious earnest, that he was not in perfect health!

"You are a rare fellow!" said Geoffrey, half in jest and half in anger. "What's the matter with me?"

"I have undertaken to give you, what I believe to be, a necessary caution," answered the surgeon. "I have not undertaken to tell you what I think is the matter with you. That may be a question for consideration some little time hence. In the meanwhile, I should like to put my impression about you to the test. Have you any objection to answer a question on a matter of no particular importance relating to yourself?"

"Let's hear the question first."

"I have noticed something in your behavior while Sir Patrick was speaking. You are as much interested in opposing his views as any of those gentlemen about you. I don't understand your sitting in silence, and leaving it entirely

to the others to put the case on your side--until Sir Patrick said something which happened to irritate you. Had you, all the time before that, no answer ready in your own mind?"

"I had as good answers in my mind as any that have been made here to-day."

"And yet you didn't give them?"

"No; I didn't give them."

"Perhaps you felt--though you knew your objections to be good ones--that it was hardly worth while to take the trouble of putting them into words? In short, you let your friends answer for you, rather than make the effort of answering for yourself?"

Geoffrey looked at his medical adviser with a sudden curiosity and a sudden distrust.

"I say," he asked, "how do you come to know what's going on in my mind--without my telling you of it?"

"It is my business to find out what is going on in people's bodies--and to do that it is sometimes necessary for me to find out (if I can) what is going on in their minds. If I have rightly interpreted what was going on in your mind, there is no need for me to press my question. You have answered it already."

He turned to Sir Patrick next

"There is a side to this subject," he said, "which you have not touched on yet. There is a Physical objection to the present rage for muscular exercises of all sorts, which is quite as strong, in its way, as the Moral objection. You have stated the consequences as they may affect the mind. I can state the consequences as they do affect the body."

"From your own experience?"

"From my own experience. I can tell you, as a medical man, that a proportion, and not by any means a small one, of the young men who are now putting themselves to violent athletic tests of their strength and endurance, are taking that course to the serious and permanent injury of their own health. The public who attend rowing-matches, foot-races, and other exhibitions of that sort, see nothing but the successful results of

muscular training. Fathers and mothers at home see the failures. There are households in England--miserable households, to be counted, Sir Patrick, by more than ones and twos--in which there are young men who have to thank the strain laid on their constitutions by the popular physical displays of the present time, for being broken men, and invalided men, for the rest of their lives."

"Do you hear that?" said Sir Patrick, looking at Geoffrey.

Geoffrey carelessly nodded his head. His irritation had had time to subside; the stolid indifference had got possession of him again. He had resumed his chair--he sat, with outstretched legs, staring stupidly at the pattern on the carpet. "What does it matter to Me?" was the sentiment expressed all over him, from head to foot.

The surgeon went on.

"I can see no remedy for this sad state of things," he said, "as long as the public feeling remains what the public feeling is now. A fine healthy-looking young man, with a superb muscular development, longs (naturally enough) to distinguish himself like others. The training-authorities at his college, or elsewhere, take him in hand (naturally enough again) on the strength of outward appearances. And whether they have been right or wrong in choosing him is more than they can say, until the experiment has been tried, and the mischief has been, in many cases, irretrievably done. How many of them are aware of the important physiological truth, that the muscular power of a man is no fair guarantee of his vital power? How many of them know that we all have (as a great French writer puts it) two lives in us--the surface life of the muscles, and the inner life of the heart, lungs, and brain? Even if they did know this--even with medical men to help them--it would be in the last degree doubtful, in most cases, whether any previous examination would result in any reliable discovery of the vital fitness of the man to undergo the stress of muscular exertion laid on him. Apply to any of my brethren; and they will tell you, as the result of their own professional observation, that I am, in no sense, overstating this serious evil, or exaggerating the deplorable and dangerous consequences to which it leads. I have a patient at this moment, who is a young man of twenty, and who possesses one of the finest muscular developments I ever saw in my life. If that young man had consulted me, before he followed the example of the other young men about him, I can not honestly say that I could have foreseen the results. As things are, after going through a certain amount of muscular training, after performing a certain number of muscular feats, he suddenly fainted one day, to the astonishment of his family and friends. I

was called in and I have watched the case since. He will probably live, but he will never recover. I am obliged to take precautions with this youth of twenty which I should take with an old man of eighty. He is big enough and muscular enough to sit to a painter as a model for Samson--and only last week I saw him swoon away like a young girl, in his mother's arms."

"Name!" cried Geoffrey's admirers, still fighting the battle on their side, in the absence of any encouragement from Geoffrey himself.

"I am not in the habit of mentioning my patients' names," replied the surgeon. "But if you insist on my producing an example of a man broken by athletic exercises, I can do it."

"Do it! Who is he?"

"You all know him perfectly well."

"Is he in the doctor's hands?"

"Not yet."

"Where is he?"

"There!"

In a pause of breathless silence--with the eyes of every person in the room eagerly fastened on him--the surgeon lifted his hand and pointed to Geoffrey Delamayn.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH. - TOUCHING IT.

As soon as the general stupefaction was allayed, the general incredulity asserted itself as a matter of course.

The man who first declared that "seeing" was "believing" laid his finger (whether he knew it himself or not) on one of the fundamental follies of humanity. The easiest of all evidence to receive is the evidence that requires no other judgment to decide on it than the judgment of the eye--and it will be, on that account, the evidence which humanity is most ready to credit, as long as humanity lasts. The eyes of every body looked at Geoffrey; and the judgment of every body decided, on the evidence there visible, that the surgeon must be wrong. Lady Lundie herself (disturbed over her dinner invitations) led the general protest. "Mr. Delamayn in broken health!" she exclaimed, appealing to the better sense of her eminent medical guest. "Really, now, you can't expect us to believe that!"

Stung into action for the second time by the startling assertion of which he had been made the subject, Geoffrey rose, and looked the surgeon, steadily and insolently, straight in the face.

"Do you mean what you say?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You point me out before all these people--"

"One moment, Mr. Delamayn. I admit that I may have been wrong in directing the general attention to you. You have a right to complain of my having answered too publicly the public challenge offered to me by your friends. I apologize for having done that. But I don't retract a single word of what I have said on the subject of your health."

"You stick to it that I'm a broken-down man?"

"I do."

"I wish you were twenty years younger, Sir!"

"Why?"

"I'd ask you to step out on the lawn there and I'd show you whether I'm a broken-down man or not."

Lady Lundie looked at her brother-in-law. Sir Patrick instantly interfered.

"Mr. Delamayn," he said, "you were invited here in the character of a gentleman, and you are a guest in a lady's house."

"No! no!" said the surgeon, good humoredly. "Mr. Delamayn is using a strong argument, Sir Patrick--and that is all. If I were twenty years younger," he went on, addressing himself to Geoffrey, "and if I did step out on the lawn with you, the result wouldn't affect the question between us in the least. I don't say that the violent bodily exercises in which you are famous have damaged your muscular power. I assert that they have damaged your vital power. In what particular way they have affected it I don't consider myself bound to tell you. I simply give you a warning, as a matter of common humanity. You will do well to be content with the success you have already achieved in the field of athletic pursuits, and to alter your mode of life for the future. Accept my excuses, once more, for having said this publicly instead of privately--and don't forget my warning."

He turned to move away to another part of the room. Geoffrey fairly forced him to return to the subject.

"Wait a bit," he said. "You have had your innings. My turn now. I can't give it words as you do; but I can come to the point. And, by the Lord, I'll fix you to it! In ten days or a fortnight from this I'm going into training for the Foot-Race at Fulham. Do you say I shall break down?"

"You will probably get through your training."

"Shall I get through the race?"

"You may possibly get through the race. But if you do--"

"If I do?"

"You will never run another."

"And never row in another match?"

"Never."

"I have been asked to row in the Race, next spring; and I have said I will. Do you tell me, in so many words, that I sha'n't be able to do it?"

"Yes--in so many words."

"Positively?"

"Positively."

"Back your opinion!" cried Geoffrey, tearing his betting-book out of his pocket. "I lay you an even hundred I'm in fit condition to row in the University Match next spring."

"I don't bet, Mr. Delamayn."

With that final reply the surgeon walked away to the other end of the library. Lady Lundie (taking Blanche in custody) withdrew, at the same time, to return to the serious business of her invitations for the dinner. Geoffrey turned defiantly, book in hand, to his college friends about him. The British blood was up; and the British resolution to bet, which successfully defies common decency and common-law from one end of the country to the other, was not to be trifled with.

"Come on!" cried Geoffrey. "Back the doctor, one of you!"

Sir Patrick rose in undisguised disgust, and followed the surgeon. One, Two, and Three, invited to business by their illustrious friend, shook their thick heads at him knowingly, and answered with one accord, in one eloquent word--"Gammon!"

"One of you back him!" persisted Geoffrey, appealing to the two choral gentlemen in the back-ground, with his temper fast rising to fever heat. The two choral gentlemen compared notes, as usual. "We weren't born yesterday, Smith?" "Not if we know it, Jones."

"Smith!" said Geoffrey, with a sudden assumption of politeness ominous of something unpleasant to come.

Smith said "Yes?"--with a smile.

"Jones!"

Jones said "Yes?"--with a reflection of Smith.

"You're a couple of infernal cads--and you haven't got a hundred pound between you!"

"Come! come!" said Arnold, interfering for the first time. "This is shameful, Geoffrey!"

"Why the"--(never mind what!)--"won't they any of them take the bet?"

"If you must be a fool," returned Arnold, a little irritably on his side, "and if nothing else will keep you quiet, I'll take the bet."

"An even hundred on the doctor!" cried Geoffrey. "Done with you!"

His highest aspirations were satisfied; his temper was in perfect order again. He entered the bet in his book; and made his excuses to Smith and Jones in the heartiest way. "No offense, old chaps! Shake hands!" The two choral gentlemen were enchanted with him. "The English aristocracy--eh, Smith?" "Blood and breeding--ah, Jones!"

As soon as he had spoken, Arnold's conscience reproached him: not for betting (who is ashamed of that form of gambling in England?) but for "backing the doctor." With the best intention toward his friend, he was speculating on the failure of his friend's health. He anxiously assured Geoffrey that no man in the room could be more heartily persuaded that the surgeon was wrong than himself. "I don't cry off from the bet," he said. "But, my dear fellow, pray understand that I only take it to please you."

"Bother all that!" answered Geoffrey, with the steady eye to business, which was one of the choicest virtues in his character. "A bet's a bet--and hang your sentiment!" He drew Arnold by the arm out of ear-shot of the others. "I say!" he asked, anxiously. "Do you think I've set the old fogey's back up?"

"Do you mean Sir Patrick?"

Geoffrey nodded, and went on.

"I haven't put that little matter to him yet--about marrying in Scotland, you know. Suppose he cuts up rough with me if I try him now?" His eye wandered cunningly, as he put the question, to the farther end of the room. The surgeon was looking over a port-folio of prints. The ladies were still at work on their notes of invitation. Sir Patrick was alone at the book-shelves immersed in a volume which he had just taken down.

"Make an apology," suggested Arnold. "Sir Patrick may be a little irritable and bitter; but he's a just man and a kind man. Say you were not guilty of any intentional disrespect toward him--and you will say enough."

"All right!"

Sir Patrick, deep in an old Venetian edition of The Decameron, found himself suddenly recalled from medieval Italy to modern England, by no less a person than Geoffrey Delamayn.

"What do you want?" he asked, coldly.

"I want to make an apology," said Geoffrey. "Let by-gones be by-gones--and that sort of thing. I wasn't guilty of any intentional disrespect toward you. Forgive and forget. Not half a bad motto, Sir--eh?"

It was clumsily expressed--but still it was an apology. Not even Geoffrey could appeal to Sir Patrick's courtesy and Sir Patrick's consideration in vain.

"Not a word more, Mr. Delamayn!" said the polite old man. "Accept my excuses for any thing which I may have said too sharply, on my side; and let us by all means forget the rest."

Having met the advance made to him, in those terms, he paused, expecting Geoffrey to leave him free to return to the Decameron. To his unutterable astonishment, Geoffrey suddenly stooped over him, and whispered in his ear, "I want a word in private with you."

Sir Patrick started back, as if Geoffrey had tried to bite him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Delamayn--what did you say?"

"Could you give me a word in private?"

Sir Patrick put back the Decameron; and bowed in freezing silence. The confidence of the Honorable Geoffrey Delamayn was the last confidence in the world into which he desired to be drawn. "This is the secret of the apology!" he thought. "What can he possibly want with Me?"

"It's about a friend of mine," pursued Geoffrey; leading the way toward one of the windows. "He's in a scrape, my friend is. And I want to ask your advice. It's strictly private, you know." There he came to a full stop--and

looked to see what impression he had produced, so far.

Sir Patrick declined, either by word or gesture, to exhibit the slightest anxiety to hear a word more.

"Would you mind taking a turn in the garden?" asked Geoffrey.

Sir Patrick pointed to his lame foot. "I have had my allowance of walking this morning," he said. "Let my infirmity excuse me."

Geoffrey looked about him for a substitute for the garden, and led the way back again toward one of the convenient curtained recesses opening out of the inner wall of the library. "We shall be private enough here," he said.

Sir Patrick made a final effort to escape the proposed conference--an undisguised effort, this time.

"Pray forgive me, Mr. Delamayn. Are you quite sure that you apply to the right person, in applying to me?"

"You're a Scotch lawyer, ain't you?"

"Certainly."

"And you understand about Scotch marriages--eh?"

Sir Patrick's manner suddenly altered.

"Is that the subject you wish to consult me on?" he asked.

"It's not me. It's my friend."

"Your friend, then?"

"Yes. It's a scrape with a woman. Here in Scotland. My friend don't know whether he's married to her or not."

"I am at your service, Mr. Delamayn."

To Geoffrey's relief--by no means unmixed with surprise--Sir Patrick not only showed no further reluctance to be consulted by him, but actually advanced to meet his wishes, by leading the way to the recess that was nearest to them. The quick brain of the old lawyer had put Geoffrey's

application to him for assistance, and Blanche's application to him for assistance, together; and had built its own theory on the basis thus obtained. "Do I see a connection between the present position of Blanche's governess, and the present position of Mr. Delamayn's 'friend?'" thought Sir Patrick. "Stranger extremes than that have met me in my experience. Something may come out of this."

The two strangely-assorted companions seated themselves, one on each side of a little table in the recess. Arnold and the other guests had idled out again on to the lawn. The surgeon with his prints, and the ladies with their invitations, were safely absorbed in a distant part of the library. The conference between the two men, so trifling in appearance, so terrible in its destined influence, not over Anne's future only, but over the future of Arnold and Blanche, was, to all practical purposes, a conference with closed doors.

"Now," said Sir Patrick, "what is the question?"

"The question," said Geoffrey, "is whether my friend is married to her or not?"

"Did he mean to marry her?"

"No."

"He being a single man, and she being a single woman, at the time? And both in Scotland?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Now tell me the circumstances."

Geoffrey hesitated. The art of stating circumstances implies the cultivation of a very rare gift--the gift of arranging ideas. No one was better acquainted with this truth than Sir Patrick. He was purposely puzzling Geoffrey at starting, under the firm conviction that his client had something to conceal from him. The one process that could be depended on for extracting the truth, under those circumstances, was the process of interrogation. If Geoffrey was submitted to it, at the outset, his cunning might take the alarm. Sir Patrick's object was to make the man himself invite interrogation. Geoffrey invited it forthwith, by attempting to state the circumstances, and by involving them in the usual confusion. Sir Patrick waited until he had thoroughly lost the thread of his narrative--and then played for the winning trick.

"Would it be easier to you if I asked a few questions?" he inquired, innocently.

"Much easier."

"I am quite at your service. Suppose we clear the ground to begin with? Are you at liberty to mention names?"

"No."

"Places?"

"No."

"Dates?"

"Do you want me to be particular?"

"Be as particular as you can."

"Will it do, if I say the present year?"

"Yes. Were your friend and the lady--at some time in the present year--traveling together in Scotland?"

"No."

"Living together in Scotland?"

"No."

"What were they doing together in Scotland?"

"Well--they were meeting each other at an inn."

"Oh? They were meeting each other at an inn. Which was first at the rendezvous?"

"The woman was first. Stop a bit! We are getting to it now." He produced from his pocket the written memorandum of Arnold's proceedings at Craig Fernie, which he had taken down from Arnold's own lips. "I've got a bit of note here," he went on. "Perhaps you'd like to have a look at it?"

Sir Patrick took the note--read it rapidly through to himself--then re-read it, sentence by sentence, to Geoffrey; using it as a text to speak from, in making further inquiries.

"He asked for her by the name of his wife, at the door," read Sir Patrick. "Meaning, I presume, the door of the inn? Had the lady previously given herself out as a married woman to the people of the inn?"

"Yes."

"How long had she been at the inn before the gentleman joined her?"

"Only an hour or so."

"Did she give a name?"

"I can't be quite sure--I should say not."

"Did the gentleman give a name?"

"No. I'm certain he didn't."

Sir Patrick returned to the memorandum.

"He said at dinner, before the landlady and the waiter, I take these rooms for my wife. He made her say he was her husband, at the same time.' Was that done jocosely, Mr. Delamayn--either by the lady or the gentleman?"

"No. It was done in downright earnest."

"You mean it was done to look like earnest, and so to deceive the landlady and the waiter?"

"Yes."

Sir Patrick returned to the memorandum.

"After that, he stopped all night.' Stopped in the rooms he had taken for himself and his wife?"

"Yes."

"And what happened the next day?"

"He went away. Wait a bit! Said he had business for an excuse."

"That is to say, he kept up the deception with the people of the inn? and left the lady behind him, in the character of his wife?"

"That's it."

"Did he go back to the inn?"

"No."

"How long did the lady stay there, after he had gone?"

"She staid--well, she staid a few days."

"And your friend has not seen her since?"

"No."

"Are your friend and the lady English or Scotch?"

"Both English."

"At the time when they met at the inn, had they either of them arrived in Scotland, from the place in which they were previously living, within a period of less than twenty-one days?"

Geoffrey hesitated. There could be no difficulty in answering for Anne. Lady Lundie and her domestic circle had occupied Windygates for a much longer period than three weeks before the date of the lawn-party. The question, as it affected Arnold, was the only question that required reflection. After searching his memory for details of the conversation which had taken place between them, when he and Arnold had met at the lawn-party, Geoffrey recalled a certain reference on the part of his friend to a performance at the Edinburgh theatre, which at once decided the question of time. Arnold had been necessarily detained in Edinburgh, before his arrival at Windygates, by legal business connected with his inheritance; and he, like Anne, had certainly been in Scotland, before they met at Craig Fernie, for a longer period than a period of three weeks. He accordingly informed Sir Patrick that the lady and gentleman had been in Scotland for more than twenty-one days--and then added a question on his own behalf: "Don't let me hurry you,

Sir--but, shall you soon have done?"

"I shall have done, after two more questions," answered Sir Patrick. "Am I to understand that the lady claims, on the strength of the circumstances which you have mentioned to me, to be your friend's wife?"

Geoffrey made an affirmative reply. The readiest means of obtaining Sir Patrick's opinion was, in this case, to answer, Yes. In other words, to represent Anne (in the character of "the lady") as claiming to be married to Arnold (in the character of "his friend").

Having made this concession to circumstances, he was, at the same time, quite cunning enough to see that it was of vital importance to the purpose which he had in view, to confine himself strictly to this one perversion of the truth. There could be plainly no depending on the lawyer's opinion, unless that opinion was given on the facts exactly as they had occurred at the inn. To the facts he had, thus far, carefully adhered; and to the facts (with the one inevitable departure from them which had been just forced on him) he determined to adhere to the end.

"Did no letters pass between the lady and gentleman?" pursued Sir Patrick.

"None that I know of," answered Geoffrey, steadily returning to the truth.

"I have done, Mr. Delamayn."

"Well? and what's your opinion?"

"Before I give my opinion I am bound to preface it by a personal statement which you are not to take, if you please, as a statement of the law. You ask me to decide--on the facts with which you have supplied me--whether your friend is, according to the law of Scotland, married or not?"

Geoffrey nodded. "That's it!" he said, eagerly.

"My experience, Mr. Delamayn, is that any single man, in Scotland, may marry any single woman, at any time, and under any circumstances. In short, after thirty years' practice as a lawyer, I don't know what is not a marriage in Scotland."

"In plain English," said Geoffrey, "you mean she's his wife?"

In spite of his cunning; in spite of his self-command, his eyes brightened as

he said those words. And the tone in which he spoke--though too carefully guarded to be a tone of triumph--was, to a fine ear, unmistakably a tone of relief.

Neither the look nor the tone was lost on Sir Patrick.

His first suspicion, when he sat down to the conference, had been the obvious suspicion that, in speaking of "his friend," Geoffrey was speaking of himself. But, like all lawyers, he habitually distrusted first impressions, his own included. His object, thus far, had been to solve the problem of Geoffrey's true position and Geoffrey's real motive. He had set the snare accordingly, and had caught his bird.

It was now plain to his mind--first, that this man who was consulting him, was, in all probability, really speaking of the case of another person: secondly, that he had an interest (of what nature it was impossible yet to say) in satisfying his own mind that "his friend" was, by the law of Scotland, indisputably a married man. Having penetrated to that extent the secret which Geoffrey was concealing from him, he abandoned the hope of making any further advance at that present sitting. The next question to clear up in the investigation, was the question of who the anonymous "lady" might be. And the next discovery to make was, whether "the lady" could, or could not, be identified with Anne Silvester. Pending the inevitable delay in reaching that result, the straight course was (in Sir Patrick's present state of uncertainty) the only course to follow in laying down the law. He at once took the question of the marriage in hand--with no concealment whatever, as to the legal bearings of it, from the client who was consulting him.

"Don't rush to conclusions, Mr. Delamayn," he said. "I have only told you what my general experience is thus far. My professional opinion on the special case of your friend has not been given yet."

Geoffrey's face clouded again. Sir Patrick carefully noted the new change in it.

"The law of Scotland," he went on, "so far as it relates to Irregular Marriages, is an outrage on common decency and common-sense. If you think my language in thus describing it too strong--I can refer you to the language of a judicial authority. Lord Deas delivered a recent judgment of marriage in Scotland, from the bench, in these words: 'Consent makes marriage. No form or ceremony, civil or religious; no notice before, or publication after; no cohabitation, no writing, no witnesses even, are essential to the constitution of this, the most important contract which two persons can enter into.'--

There is a Scotch judge's own statement of the law that he administers! Observe, at the same time, if you please, that we make full legal provision in Scotland for contracts affecting the sale of houses and lands, horses and dogs. The only contract which we leave without safeguards or precautions of any sort is the contract that unites a man and a woman for life. As for the authority of parents, and the innocence of children, our law recognizes no claim on it either in the one case or in the other. A girl of twelve and a boy of fourteen have nothing to do but to cross the Border, and to be married--without the interposition of the slightest delay or restraint, and without the slightest attempt to inform their parents on the part of the Scotch law. As to the marriages of men and women, even the mere interchange of consent which, as you have just heard, makes them man and wife, is not required to be directly proved: it may be proved by inference. And, more even than that, whatever the law for its consistency may presume, men and women are, in point of fact, held to be married in Scotland where consent has never been interchanged, and where the parties do not even know that they are legally held to be married persons. Are you sufficiently confused about the law of Irregular Marriages in Scotland by this time, Mr. Delamayn? And have I said enough to justify the strong language I used when I undertook to describe it to you?"

"Who's that 'authority' you talked of just now?" inquired Geoffrey. "Couldn't I ask him?"

"You might find him flatly contradicted, if you did ask him by another authority equally learned and equally eminent," answered Sir Patrick. "I am not joking--I am only stating facts. Have you heard of the Queen's Commission?"

"No."

"Then listen to this. In March, 'sixty-five, the Queen appointed a Commission to inquire into the Marriage-Laws of the United Kingdom. The Report of that Commission is published in London; and is accessible to any body who chooses to pay the price of two or three shillings for it. One of the results of the inquiry was, the discovery that high authorities were of entirely contrary opinions on one of the vital questions of Scottish marriage-law. And the Commissioners, in announcing that fact, add that the question of which opinion is right is still disputed, and has never been made the subject of legal decision. Authorities are every where at variance throughout the Report. A haze of doubt and uncertainty hangs in Scotland over the most important contract of civilized life. If no other reason existed for reforming the Scotch marriage-law, there would be reason enough afforded

by that one fact. An uncertain marriage-law is a national calamity."

"You can tell me what you think yourself about my friend's case--can't you?" said Geoffrey, still holding obstinately to the end that he had in view.

"Certainly. Now that I have given you due warning of the danger of implicitly relying on any individual opinion, I may give my opinion with a clear conscience. I say that there has not been a positive marriage in this case. There has been evidence in favor of possibly establishing a marriage--nothing more."

The distinction here was far too fine to be appreciated by Geoffrey's mind. He frowned heavily, in bewilderment and disgust.

"Not married!" he exclaimed, "when they said they were man and wife, before witnesses?"

"That is a common popular error," said Sir Patrick. "As I have already told you, witnesses are not legally necessary to make a marriage in Scotland. They are only valuable--as in this case--to help, at some future time, in proving a marriage that is in dispute."

Geoffrey caught at the last words.

"The landlady and the waiter might make it out to be a marriage, then?" he said.

"Yes. And, remember, if you choose to apply to one of my professional colleagues, he might possibly tell you they were married already. A state of the law which allows the interchange of matrimonial consent to be proved by inference leaves a wide door open to conjecture. Your friend refers to a certain lady, in so many words, as his wife. The lady refers to your friend, in so many words, as her husband. In the rooms which they have taken, as man and wife, they remain, as man and wife, till the next morning. Your friend goes away, without undeceiving any body. The lady stays at the inn, for some days after, in the character of his wife. And all these circumstances take place in the presence of competent witnesses. Logically--if not legally--there is apparently an inference of the interchange of matrimonial consent here. I stick to my own opinion, nevertheless. Evidence in proof of a marriage (I say)--nothing more."

While Sir Patrick had been speaking, Geoffrey had been considering with himself. By dint of hard thinking he had found his way to a decisive

question on his side.

"Look here!" he said, dropping his heavy hand down on the table. "I want to bring you to book, Sir! Suppose my friend had another lady in his eye?"

"Yes?"

"As things are now--would you advise him to marry her?"

"As things are now--certainly not!"

Geoffrey got briskly on his legs, and closed the interview.

"That will do," he said, "for him and for me."

With those words he walked back, without ceremony, into the main thoroughfare of the room.

"I don't know who your friend is," thought Sir Patrick, looking after him.

"But if your interest in the question of his marriage is an honest and a harmless interest, I know no more of human nature than the babe unborn!"

Immediately on leaving Sir Patrick, Geoffrey was encountered by one of the servants in search of him.

"I beg your pardon, Sir," began the man. "The groom from the Honorable Mr. Delamayn's--"

"Yes? The fellow who brought me a note from my brother this morning?"

"He's expected back, Sir--he's afraid he mustn't wait any longer."

"Come here, and I'll give you the answer for him."

He led the way to the writing-table, and referred to Julius's letter again. He ran his eye carelessly over it, until he reached the final lines: "Come to-morrow, and help us to receive Mrs. Glenarm." For a while he paused, with his eye fixed on that sentence; and with the happiness of three people--of Anne, who had loved him; of Arnold, who had served him; of Blanche, guiltless of injuring him--resting on the decision that guided his movements for the next day. After what had passed that morning between Arnold and Blanche, if he remained at Lady Lundie's, he had no alternative but to perform his promise to Anne. If he returned to his brother's house, he had

no alternative but to desert Anne, on the infamous pretext that she was Arnold's wife.

He suddenly tossed the letter away from him on the table, and snatched a sheet of note-paper out of the writing-case. "Here goes for Mrs. Glenarm!" he said to himself; and wrote back to his brother, in one line: "Dear Julius, Expect me to-morrow. G. D." The impassible man-servant stood by while he wrote, looking at his magnificent breadth of chest, and thinking what a glorious "staying-power" was there for the last terrible mile of the coming race.

"There you are!" he said, and handed his note to the man.

"All right, Geoffrey?" asked a friendly voice behind him.

He turned--and saw Arnold, anxious for news of the consultation with Sir Patrick.

"Yes," he said. "All right."

----- NOTE.--There are certain readers who feel a disposition to doubt Facts, when they meet with them in a work of fiction. Persons of this way of thinking may be profitably referred to the book which first suggested to me the idea of writing the present Novel. The book is the Report of the Royal Commissioners on The Laws of Marriage. Published by the Queen's Printers For her Majesty's Stationery Office. (London, 1868.) What Sir Patrick says professionally of Scotch Marriages in this chapter is taken from this high authority. What the lawyer (in the Prologue) says professionally of Irish Marriages is also derived from the same source. It is needless to encumber these pages with quotations. But as a means of satisfying my readers that they may depend on me, I subjoin an extract from my list of references to the Report of the Marriage Commission, which any persons who may be so inclined can verify for themselves.

Irish Marriages (In the Prologue).--See Report, pages XII., XIII., XXIV.

Irregular Marriages in Scotland.--Statement of the law by Lord Deas. Report, page XVI.--Marriages of children of tender years. Examination of Mr. Muirhead by Lord Chelmsford (Question 689).--Interchange of consent, established by inference. Examination of Mr. Muirhead by the Lord Justice Clerk (Question 654).--Marriage where consent has never been interchanged. Observations of Lord Deas. Report, page XIX.--

Contradiction of opinions between authorities. Report, pages XIX., XX.--
Legal provision for the sale of horses and dogs. No legal provision for
the marriage of men and women. Mr. Seeton's Remarks. Report, page
XXX.--Conclusion of the Commissioners. In spite of the arguments
advanced before them in favor of not interfering with Irregular Marriages
in Scotland, the Commissioners declare their opinion that "Such
marriages ought not to continue." (Report, page XXXIV.)

In reference to the arguments (alluded to above) in favor of allowing
the present disgraceful state of things to continue, I find them resting
mainly on these grounds: That Scotland doesn't like being interfered with
by England (!). That Irregular Marriages cost nothing (!!). That they are
diminishing in number, and may therefore be trusted, in course of time,
to exhaust themselves (!!!). That they act, on certain occasions, in the
capacity of a moral trap to catch a profligate man (!!!!). Such is the
elevated point of view from which the Institution of Marriage is regarded
by some of the most pious and learned men in Scotland. A legal
enactment providing for the sale of your wife, when you have done with
her, or of your husband; when you "really can't put up with him any
longer," appears to be all that is wanting to render this North British
estimate of the "Estate of Matrimony" practically complete. It is only fair
to add that, of the witnesses giving evidence--oral and written--before the
Commissioners, fully one-half regard the Irregular Marriages of Scotland
from the Christian and the civilized point of view, and entirely agree with
the authoritative conclusion already cited--that such marriages ought to
be abolished.

W. C.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST. - DONE!

ARNOLD was a little surprised by the curt manner in which Geoffrey answered him.

"Has Sir Patrick said any thing unpleasant?" he asked.

"Sir Patrick has said just what I wanted him to say."

"No difficulty about the marriage?"

"None."

"No fear of Blanche--"

"She won't ask you to go to Craig Fernie--I'll answer for that!" He said the words with a strong emphasis on them, took his brother's letter from the table, snatched up his hat, and went out.

His friends, idling on the lawn, hailed him. He passed by them quickly without answering, without so much as a glance at them over his shoulder. Arriving at the rose-garden, he stopped and took out his pipe; then suddenly changed his mind, and turned back again by another path. There was no certainty, at that hour of the day, of his being left alone in the rose-garden. He had a fierce and hungry longing to be by himself; he felt as if he could have been the death of any body who came and spoke to him at that moment. With his head down and his brows knit heavily, he followed the path to see what it ended in. It ended in a wicket-gate which led into a kitchen-garden. Here he was well out of the way of interruption: there was nothing to attract visitors in the kitchen-garden. He went on to a walnut-tree planted in the middle of the inclosure, with a wooden bench and a broad strip of turf running round it. After first looking about him, he seated himself and lit his pipe.

"I wish it was done!" he said.

He sat, with his elbows on his knees, smoking and thinking. Before long the restlessness that had got possession of him forced him to his feet again. He rose, and paced round and round the strip of greensward under the walnut-tree, like a wild beast in a cage.

What was the meaning of this disturbance in the inner man? Now that he had committed himself to the betrayal of the friend who had trusted and served him, was he torn by remorse?

He was no more torn by remorse than you are while your eye is passing over this sentence. He was simply in a raging fever of impatience to see himself safely landed at the end which he had in view.

Why should he feel remorse? All remorse springs, more or less directly, from the action of two sentiments, which are neither of them inbred in the natural man. The first of these sentiments is the product of the respect which we learn to feel for ourselves. The second is the product of the respect which we learn to feel for others. In their highest manifestations, these two feelings exalt themselves, until the first he comes the love of God, and the second the love of Man. I have injured you, and I repent of it when it is done. Why should I repent of it if I have gained something by it for my own self and if you can't make me feel it by injuring Me? I repent of it because there has been a sense put into me which tells me that I have sinned against Myself, and sinned against You. No such sense as that exists among the instincts of the natural man. And no such feelings as these troubled Geoffrey Delamayn; for Geoffrey Delamayn was the natural man.

When the idea of his scheme had sprung to life in his mind, the novelty of it had startled him--the enormous daring of it, suddenly self-revealed, had daunted him. The signs of emotion which he had betrayed at the writing-table in the library were the signs of mere mental perturbation, and of nothing more.

That first vivid impression past, the idea had made itself familiar to him. He had become composed enough to see such difficulties as it involved, and such consequences as it implied. These had fretted him with a passing trouble; for these he plainly discerned. As for the cruelty and the treachery of the thing he meditated doing--that consideration never crossed the limits of his mental view. His position toward the man whose life he had preserved was the position of a dog. The "noble animal" who has saved you or me from drowning will fly at your throat or mine, under certain conditions, ten minutes afterward. Add to the dog's unreasoning instinct the calculating cunning of a man; suppose yourself to be in a position to say of some trifling thing, "Curious! at such and such a time I happened to pick up such and such an object; and now it turns out to be of some use to me!"--and there you have an index to the state of Geoffrey's feeling toward his friend when he recalled the past or when he contemplated the future. When Arnold had spoken to him at the critical moment, Arnold had violently irritated him; and

that was all.

The same impenetrable insensibility, the same primitively natural condition of the moral being, prevented him from being troubled by the slightest sense of pity for Anne. "She's out of my way!" was his first thought. "She's provided for, without any trouble to Me!" was his second. He was not in the least uneasy about her. Not the slightest doubt crossed his mind that, when once she had realized her own situation, when once she saw herself placed between the two alternatives of facing her own ruin or of claiming Arnold as a last resource, she would claim Arnold. She would do it as a matter of course; because he would have done it in her place.

But he wanted it over. He was wild, as he paced round and round the walnut-tree, to hurry on the crisis and be done with it. Give me my freedom to go to the other woman, and to train for the foot-race--that's what I want. They injured? Confusion to them both! It's I who am injured by them. They are the worst enemies I have! They stand in my way.

How to be rid of them? There was the difficulty. He had made up his mind to be rid of them that day. How was he to begin?

There was no picking a quarrel with Arnold, and so beginning with him. This course of proceeding, in Arnold's position toward Blanche, would lead to a scandal at the outset--a scandal which would stand in the way of his making the right impression on Mrs. Glenarm. The woman--lonely and friendless, with her sex and her position both against her if she tried to make a scandal of it--the woman was the one to begin with. Settle it at once and forever with Anne; and leave Arnold to hear of it and deal with it, sooner or later, no matter which.

How was he to break it to her before the day was out?

By going to the inn and openly addressing her to her face as Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth? No! He had had enough, at Windygates, of meeting her face to face. The easy way was to write to her, and send the letter, by the first messenger he could find, to the inn. She might appear afterward at Windygates; she might follow him to his brother's; she might appeal to his father. It didn't matter; he had got the whip-hand of her now. "You are a married woman." There was the one sufficient answer, which was strong enough to back him in denying any thing!

He made out the letter in his own mind. "Something like this would do," he thought, as he went round and round the walnut-tree: "You may be

surprised not to have seen me. You have only yourself to thank for it. I know what took place between you and him at the inn. I have had a lawyer's advice. You are Arnold Brinkworth's wife. I wish you joy, and good-by forever." Address those lines: "To Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth;" instruct the messenger to leave the letter late that night, without waiting for an answer; start the first thing the next morning for his brother's house; and behold, it was done!

But even here there was an obstacle--one last exasperating obstacle--still in the way.

If she was known at the inn by any name at all, it was by the name of Mrs. Silvester. A letter addressed to "Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth" would probably not be taken in at the door; or if it was admitted and if it was actually offered to her, she might decline to receive it, as a letter not addressed to herself. A man of readier mental resources would have seen that the name on the outside of the letter mattered little or nothing, so long as the contents were read by the person to whom they were addressed. But Geoffrey's was the order of mind which expresses disturbance by attaching importance to trifles. He attached an absurd importance to preserving absolute consistency in his letter, outside and in. If he declared her to be Arnold Brinkworth's wife, he must direct to her as Arnold Brinkworth's wife; or who could tell what the law might say, or what scrape he might not get himself into by a mere scratch of the pen! The more he thought of it, the more persuaded he felt of his own cleverness here, and the hotter and the angrier he grew.

There is a way out of every thing. And there was surely a way out of this, if he could only see it.

He failed to see it. After dealing with all the great difficulties, the small difficulty proved too much for him. It struck him that he might have been thinking too long about it--considering that he was not accustomed to thinking long about any thing. Besides, his head was getting giddy, with going mechanically round and round the tree. He irritably turned his back on the tree and struck into another path: resolved to think of something else, and then to return to his difficulty, and see it with a new eye.

Leaving his thoughts free to wander where they liked, his thoughts naturally busied themselves with the next subject that was uppermost in his mind, the subject of the Foot-Race. In a week's time his arrangements ought to be made. Now, as to the training, first.

He decided on employing two trainers this time. One to travel to Scotland, and begin with him at his brother's house. The other to take him up, with a fresh eye to him, on his return to London. He turned over in his mind the performances of the formidable rival against whom he was to be matched. That other man was the swiftest runner of the two. The betting in Geoffrey's favor was betting which calculated on the unparalleled length of the race, and on Geoffrey's prodigious powers of endurance. How long he should "wait on" the man? Whereabouts it would be safe to "pick the man up?" How near the end to calculate the man's exhaustion to a nicety, and "put on the spurt," and pass him? These were nice points to decide. The deliberations of a pedestrian-privy-council would be required to help him under this heavy responsibility. What men could he trust? He could trust A. and B.--both of them authorities: both of them stanch. Query about C.? As an authority, unexceptionable; as a man, doubtful. The problem relating to C. brought him to a standstill--and declined to be solved, even then. Never mind! he could always take the advice of A. and B. In the mean time devote C. to the infernal regions; and, thus dismissing him, try and think of something else. What else? Mrs. Glenarm? Oh, bother the women! one of them is the same as another. They all waddle when they run; and they all fill their stomachs before dinner with sloppy tea. That's the only difference between women and men--the rest is nothing but a weak imitation of Us. Devote the women to the infernal regions; and, so dismissing them, try and think of something else. Of what? Of something worth thinking of, this time--of filling another pipe.

He took out his tobacco-pouch; and suddenly suspended operations at the moment of opening it.

What was the object he saw, on the other side of a row of dwarf pear-trees, away to the right? A woman--evidently a servant by her dress--stooping down with her back to him, gathering something: herbs they looked like, as well as he could make them out at the distance.

What was that thing hanging by a string at the woman's side? A slate? Yes. What the deuce did she want with a slate at her side? He was in search of something to divert his mind--and here it was found. "Any thing will do for me," he thought. "Suppose I 'chaff' her a little about her slate?"

He called to the woman across the pear-trees. "Hullo!"

The woman raised herself, and advanced toward him slowly--looking at him, as she came on, with the sunken eyes, the sorrow-stricken face, the stony tranquillity of Hester Dethridge.

Geoffrey was staggered. He had not bargained for exchanging the dullest producible vulgarities of human speech (called in the language of slang, "Chaff") with such a woman as this.

"What's that slate for?" he asked, not knowing what else to say, to begin with.

The woman lifted her hand to her lips--touched them--and shook her head.

"Dumb?"

The woman bowed her head.

"Who are you?"

The woman wrote on her slate, and handed it to him over the pear-trees. He read:--"I am the cook."

"Well, cook, were you born dumb?"

The woman shook her head.

"What struck you dumb?"

The woman wrote on her slate:--"A blow."

"Who gave you the blow?"

She shook her head.

"Won't you tell me?"

She shook her head again.

Her eyes had rested on his face while he was questioning her; staring at him, cold, dull, and changeless as the eyes of a corpse. Firm as his nerves were--dense as he was, on all ordinary occasions, to any thing in the shape of an imaginative impression--the eyes of the dumb cook slowly penetrated him with a stealthy inner chill. Something crept at the marrow of his back, and shuddered under the roots of his hair. He felt a sudden impulse to get away from her. It was simple enough; he had only to say good-morning, and go on. He did say good-morning--but he never moved. He put his hand into

his pocket, and offered her some money, as a way of making her go. She stretched out her hand across the pear-trees to take it--and stopped abruptly, with her arm suspended in the air. A sinister change passed over the deathlike tranquillity of her face. Her closed lips slowly dropped apart. Her dull eyes slowly dilated; looked away, sideways, from his eyes; stopped again; and stared, rigid and glittering, over his shoulder--stared as if they saw a sight of horror behind him. "What the devil are you looking at?" he asked--and turned round quickly, with a start. There was neither person nor thing to be seen behind him. He turned back again to the woman. The woman had left him, under the influence of some sudden panic. She was hurrying away from him--running, old as she was--flying the sight of him, as if the sight of him was the pestilence.

"Mad!" he thought--and turned his back on the sight of her.

He found himself (hardly knowing how he had got there) under the walnut-tree once more. In a few minutes his hardy nerves had recovered themselves--he could laugh over the remembrance of the strange impression that had been produced on him. "Frightened for the first time in my life," he thought--"and that by an old woman! It's time I went into training again, when things have come to this!"

He looked at his watch. It was close on the luncheon hour up at the house; and he had not decided yet what to do about his letter to Anne. He resolved to decide, then and there.

The woman--the dumb woman, with the stony face and the horrid eyes--reappeared in his thoughts, and got in the way of his decision. Pooh! some crazed old servant, who might once have been cook; who was kept out of charity now. Nothing more important than that. No more of her! no more of her!

He laid himself down on the grass, and gave his mind to the serious question. How to address Anne as "Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth?" and how to make sure of her receiving the letter?

The dumb old woman got in his way again.

He closed his eyes impatiently, and tried to shut her out in a darkness of his own making.

The woman showed herself through the darkness. He saw her, as if he had just asked her a question, writing on her slate. What she wrote he failed to

make out. It was all over in an instant. He started up, with a feeling of astonishment at himself--and, at the same moment his brain cleared with the suddenness of a flash of light. He saw his way, without a conscious effort on his own part, through the difficulty that had troubled him. Two envelopes, of course: an inner one, unsealed, and addressed to "Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth;" an outer one, sealed, and addressed to "Mrs. Silvester:" and there was the problem solved! Surely the simplest problem that had ever puzzled a stupid head.

Why had he not seen it before? Impossible to say.

How came he to have seen it now?

The dumb old woman reappeared in his thoughts--as if the answer to the question lay in something connected with her.

He became alarmed about himself, for the first time in his life. Had this persistent impression, produced by nothing but a crazy old woman, any thing to do with the broken health which the surgeon had talked about? Was his head on the turn? Or had he smoked too much on an empty stomach, and gone too long (after traveling all night) without his customary drink of ale?

He left the garden to put that latter theory to the test forthwith. The betting would have gone dead against him if the public had seen him at that moment. He looked haggard and anxious--and with good reason too. His nervous system had suddenly forced itself on his notice, without the slightest previous introduction, and was saying (in an unknown tongue), Here I am!

Returning to the purely ornamental part of the grounds, Geoffrey encountered one of the footmen giving a message to one of the gardeners. He at once asked for the butler--as the only safe authority to consult in the present emergency.

Conducted to the butler's pantry, Geoffrey requested that functionary to produce a jug of his oldest ale, with appropriate solid nourishment in the shape of "a hunk of bread and cheese."

The butler stared. As a form of condescension among the upper classes this was quite new to him.

"Luncheon will be ready directly, Sir."

"What is there for lunch?"

The butler ran over an appetizing list of good dishes and rare wines.

"The devil take your kickshaws!" said Geoffrey. "Give me my old ale, and my hunk of bread and cheese."

"Where will you take them, Sir?"

"Here, to be sure! And the sooner the better."

The butler issued the necessary orders with all needful alacrity. He spread the simple refreshment demanded, before his distinguished guest, in a state of blank bewilderment. Here was a nobleman's son, and a public celebrity into the bargain, filling himself with bread and cheese and ale, in at once the most voracious and the most unpretending manner, at his table! The butler ventured on a little complimentary familiarity. He smiled, and touched the betting-book in his breast-pocket. "I've put six pound on you, Sir, for the Race." "All right, old boy! you shall win your money!" With those noble words the honorable gentleman clapped him on the back, and held out his tumbler for some more ale. The butler felt trebly an Englishman as he filled the foaming glass. Ah! foreign nations may have their revolutions! foreign aristocracies may tumble down! The British aristocracy lives in the hearts of the people, and lives forever!

"Another!" said Geoffrey, presenting his empty glass. "Here's luck!" He tossed off his liquor at a draught, and nodded to the butler, and went out.

Had the experiment succeeded? Had he proved his own theory about himself to be right? Not a doubt of it! An empty stomach, and a determination of tobacco to the head--these were the true causes of that strange state of mind into which he had fallen in the kitchen-garden. The dumb woman with the stony face vanished as if in a mist. He felt nothing now but a comfortable buzzing in his head, a genial warmth all over him, and an unlimited capacity for carrying any responsibility that could rest on mortal shoulders. Geoffrey was himself again.

He went round toward the library, to write his letter to Anne--and so have done with that, to begin with. The company had collected in the library waiting for the luncheon-bell. All were idly talking; and some would be certain, if he showed himself, to fasten on him. He turned back again, without showing himself. The only way of writing in peace and quietness

would be to wait until they were all at luncheon, and then return to the library. The same opportunity would serve also for finding a messenger to take the letter, without exciting attention, and for going away afterward, unseen, on a long walk by himself. An absence of two or three hours would cast the necessary dust in Arnold's eyes; for it would be certainly interpreted by him as meaning absence at an interview with Anne.

He strolled idly through the grounds, farther and farther away from the house.

The talk in the library--aimless and empty enough, for the most part--was talk to the purpose, in one corner of the room, in which Sir Patrick and Blanche were sitting together.

"Uncle! I have been watching you for the last minute or two."

"At my age, Blanche? that is paying me a very pretty compliment."

"Do you know what I have seen?"

"You have seen an old gentleman in want of his lunch."

"I have seen an old gentleman with something on his mind. What is it?"

"Suppressed gout, my dear."

"That won't do! I am not to be put off in that way. Uncle! I want to know--"

"Stop there, Blanche! A young lady who says she 'wants to know,' expresses very dangerous sentiments. Eve 'wanted to know'--and see what it led to. Faust 'wanted to know'--and got into bad company, as the necessary result."

"You are feeling anxious about something," persisted Blanche. "And, what is more, Sir Patrick, you behaved in a most unaccountable manner a little while since."

"When?"

"When you went and hid yourself with Mr. Delamayn in that snug corner there. I saw you lead the way in, while I was at work on Lady Lundie's odious dinner-invitations."

"Oh! you call that being at work, do you? I wonder whether there was ever a woman yet who could give the whole of her mind to any earthly thing that she had to do?"

"Never mind the women! What subject in common could you and Mr. Delamayn possibly have to talk about? And why do I see a wrinkle between your eyebrows, now you have done with him?--a wrinkle which certainly wasn't there before you had that private conference together?"

Before answering, Sir Patrick considered whether he should take Blanche into his confidence or not. The attempt to identify Geoffrey's unnamed "lady," which he was determined to make, would lead him to Craig Fernie, and would no doubt end in obliging him to address himself to Anne. Blanche's intimate knowledge of her friend might unquestionably be made useful to him under these circumstances; and Blanche's discretion was to be trusted in any matter in which Miss Silvester's interests were concerned. On the other hand, caution was imperatively necessary, in the present imperfect state of his information--and caution, in Sir Patrick's mind, carried the day. He decided to wait and see what came first of his investigation at the inn.

"Mr. Delamayn consulted me on a dry point of law, in which a friend of his was interested," said Sir Patrick. "You have wasted your curiosity, my dear, on a subject totally unworthy of a lady's notice."

Blanche's penetration was not to be deceived on such easy terms as these. "Why not say at once that you won't tell me?" she rejoined. "You shutting yourself up with Mr. Delamayn to talk law! You looking absent and anxious about it afterward! I am a very unhappy girl!" said Blanche, with a little, bitter sigh. "There is something in me that seems to repel the people I love. Not a word in confidence can I get from Anne. And not a word in confidence can I get from you. And I do so long to sympathize! It's very hard. I think I shall go to Arnold."

Sir Patrick took his niece's hand.

"Stop a minute, Blanche. About Miss Silvester? Have you heard from her to-day?"

"No. I am more unhappy about her than words can say."

"Suppose somebody went to Craig Fernie and tried to find out the cause of

Miss Silvester's silence? Would you believe that somebody sympathized with you then?"

Blanche's face flushed brightly with pleasure and surprise. She raised Sir Patrick's hand gratefully to her lips.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You don't mean that you would do that?"

"I am certainly the last person who ought to do it--seeing that you went to the inn in flat rebellion against my orders, and that I only forgave you, on your own promise of amendment, the other day. It is a miserably weak proceeding on the part of 'the head of the family' to be turning his back on his own principles, because his niece happens to be anxious and unhappy. Still (if you could lend me your little carriage), I might take a surly drive toward Craig Fernie, all by myself, and I might stumble against Miss Silvester--in case you have any thing to say."

"Any thing to say?" repeated Blanche. She put her arm round her uncle's neck, and whispered in his ear one of the most interminable messages that ever was sent from one human being to another. Sir Patrick listened, with a growing interest in the inquiry on which he was secretly bent. "The woman must have some noble qualities," he thought, "who can inspire such devotion as this."

While Blanche was whispering to her uncle, a second private conference--of the purely domestic sort--was taking place between Lady Lundie and the butler, in the hall outside the library door.

"I am sorry to say, my lady, Hester Dethridge has broken out again."

"What do you mean?"

"She was all right, my lady, when she went into the kitchen-garden, some time since. She's taken strange again, now she has come back. Wants the rest of the day to herself, your ladyship. Says she's overworked, with all the company in the house--and, I must say, does look like a person troubled and worn out in body and mind."

"Don't talk nonsense, Roberts! The woman is obstinate and idle and insolent. She is now in the house, as you know, under a month's notice to leave. If she doesn't choose to do her duty for that month I shall refuse to give her a character. Who is to cook the dinner to-day if I give Hester Dethridge leave to go out?"

"Any way, my lady, I am afraid the kitchen-maid will have to do her best to-day. Hester is very obstinate, when the fit takes her--as your ladyship says."

"If Hester Dethridge leaves the kitchen-maid to cook the dinner, Roberts, Hester Dethridge leaves my service to-day. I want no more words about it. If she persists in setting my orders at defiance, let her bring her account-book into the library, while we are at lunch, and lay it out my desk. I shall be back in the library after luncheon--and if I see the account-book I shall know what it means. In that case, you will receive my directions to settle with her and send her away. Ring the luncheon-bell."

The luncheon-bell rang. The guests all took the direction of the dining - room; Sir Patrick following, from the far end of the library, with Blanche on his arm. Arrived at the dining-room door, Blanche stopped, and asked her uncle to excuse her if she left him to go in by himself.

"I will be back directly," she said. "I have forgotten something up stairs."

Sir Patrick went in. The dining-room door closed; and Blanche returned alone to the library. Now on one pretense, and now on another, she had, for three days past, faithfully fulfilled the engagement she had made at Craig Fernie to wait ten minutes after luncheon-time in the library, on the chance of seeing Anne. On this, the fourth occasion, the faithful girl sat down alone in the great room, and waited with her eyes fixed on the lawn outside.

Five minutes passed, and nothing living appeared but the birds hopping about the grass.

In less than a minute more Blanche's quick ear caught the faint sound of a woman's dress brushing over the lawn. She ran to the nearest window, looked out, and clapped her hands with a cry of delight. There was the well-known figure, rapidly approaching her! Anne was true to their friendship--Anne had kept her engagement at last!

Blanche hurried out, and drew her into the library in triumph. "This makes amends, love for every thing! You answer my letter in the best of all ways--you bring me your own dear self."

She placed Anne in a chair, and, lifting her veil, saw her plainly in the brilliant mid-day light.

The change in the whole woman was nothing less than dreadful to the loving

eyes that rested on her. She looked years older than her real age. There was a dull calm in her face, a stagnant, stupefied submission to any thing, pitiable to see. Three days and nights of solitude and grief, three days and nights of unresting and unpartaken suspense, had crushed that sensitive nature, had frozen that warm heart. The animating spirit was gone--the mere shell of the woman lived and moved, a mockery of her former self.

"Oh, Anne! Anne! What can have happened to you? Are you frightened? There's not the least fear of any body disturbing us. They are all at luncheon, and the servants are at dinner. We have the room entirely to ourselves. My darling! you look so faint and strange! Let me get you something."

Anne drew Blanche's head down and kissed her. It was done in a dull, slow way--without a word, without a tear, without a sigh.

"You're tired--I'm sure you're tired. Have you walked here? You sha'n't go back on foot; I'll take care of that!"

Anne roused herself at those words. She spoke for the first time. The tone was lower than was natural to her; sadder than was natural to her--but the charm of her voice, the native gentleness and beauty of it, seemed to have survived the wreck of all besides.

"I don't go back, Blanche. I have left the inn."

"Left the inn? With your husband?"

She answered the first question--not the second.

"I can't go back," she said. "The inn is no place for me. A curse seems to follow me, Blanche, wherever I go. I am the cause of quarreling and wretchedness, without meaning it, God knows. The old man who is head-waiter at the inn has been kind to me, my dear, in his way, and he and the landlady had hard words together about it. A quarrel, a shocking, violent quarrel. He has lost his place in consequence. The woman, his mistress, lays all the blame of it to my door. She is a hard woman; and she has been harder than ever since Bishopriggs went away. I have missed a letter at the inn--I must have thrown it aside, I suppose, and forgotten it. I only know that I remembered about it, and couldn't find it last night. I told the landlady, and she fastened a quarrel on me almost before the words were out of my mouth. Asked me if I charged her with stealing my letter. Said things to me--I can't repeat them. I am not very well, and not able to deal

with people of that sort. I thought it best to leave Craig Fernie this morning. I hope and pray I shall never see Craig Fernie again."

She told her little story with a total absence of emotion of any sort, and laid her head back wearily on the chair when it was done.

Blanche's eyes filled with tears at the sight of her.

"I won't tease you with questions, Anne," she said, gently. "Come up stairs and rest in my room. You're not fit to travel, love. I'll take care that nobody comes near us."

The stable-clock at Windygates struck the quarter to two. Anne raised herself in the chair with a start.

"What time was that?" she asked.

Blanche told her.

"I can't stay," she said. "I have come here to find something out if I can. You won't ask me questions? Don't, Blanche, don't! for the sake of old times."

Blanche turned aside, heart-sick. "I will do nothing, dear, to annoy you," she said, and took Anne's hand, and hid the tears that were beginning to fall over her cheeks.

"I want to know something, Blanche. Will you tell me?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Who are the gentlemen staying in the house?"

Blanche looked round at her again, in sudden astonishment and alarm. A vague fear seized her that Anne's mind had given way under the heavy weight of trouble laid on it. Anne persisted in pressing her strange request.

"Run over their names, Blanche. I have a reason for wishing to know who the gentlemen are who are staying in the house."

Blanche repeated the names of Lady Lundie's guests, leaving to the last the guests who had arrived last.

"Two more came back this morning," she went on. "Arnold Brinkworth and

that hateful friend of his, Mr. Delamayn."

Anne's head sank back once more on the chair. She had found her way without exciting suspicion of the truth, to the one discovery which she had come to Windygates to make. He was in Scotland again, and he had only arrived from London that morning. There was barely time for him to have communicated with Craig Fernie before she left the inn--he, too, who hated letter-writing! The circumstances were all in his favor: there was no reason, there was really and truly no reason, so far, to believe that he had deserted her. The heart of the unhappy woman bounded in her bosom, under the first ray of hope that had warmed it for four days past. Under that sudden revulsion of feeling, her weakened frame shook from head to foot. Her face flushed deep for a moment--then turned deadly pale again. Blanche, anxiously watching her, saw the serious necessity for giving some restorative to her instantly.

"I am going to get you some wine--you will faint, Anne, if you don't take something. I shall be back in a moment; and I can manage it without any body being the wiser."

She pushed Anne's chair close to the nearest open window--a window at the upper end of the library--and ran out.

Blanche had barely left the room, by the door that led into the hall, when Geoffrey entered it by one of the lower windows opening from the lawn.

With his mind absorbed in the letter that he was about to write, he slowly advanced up the room toward the nearest table. Anne, hearing the sound of footsteps, started, and looked round. Her failing strength rallied in an instant, under the sudden relief of seeing him again. She rose and advanced eagerly, with a faint tinge of color in her cheeks. He looked up. The two stood face to face together--alone.

"Geoffrey!"

He looked at her without answering--without advancing a step, on his side. There was an evil light in his eyes; his silence was the brute silence that threatens dumbly. He had made up his mind never to see her again, and she had entrapped him into an interview. He had made up his mind to write, and there she stood forcing him to speak. The sum of her offenses against him was now complete. If there had ever been the faintest hope of her raising even a passing pity in his heart, that hope would have been annihilated now.

She failed to understand the full meaning of his silence. She made her excuses, poor soul, for venturing back to Windygates--her excuses to the man whose purpose at that moment was to throw her helpless on the world.

"Pray forgive me for coming here," she said. "I have done nothing to compromise you, Geoffrey. Nobody but Blanche knows I am at Windygates. And I have contrived to make my inquiries about you without allowing her to suspect our secret." She stopped, and began to tremble. She saw something more in his face than she had read in it at first. "I got your letter," she went on, rallying her sinking courage. "I don't complain of its being so short: you don't like letter-writing, I know. But you promised I should hear from you again. And I have never heard. And oh, Geoffrey, it was so lonely at the inn!"

She stopped again, and supported herself by resting her hand on the table. The faintness was stealing back on her. She tried to go on again. It was useless--she could only look at him now.

"What do you want?" he asked, in the tone of a man who was putting an unimportant question to a total stranger.

A last gleam of her old energy flickered up in her face, like a dying flame.

"I am broken by what I have gone through," she said. "Don't insult me by making me remind you of your promise."

"What promise?"

"For shame, Geoffrey! for shame! Your promise to marry me."

"You claim my promise after what you have done at the inn?"

She steadied herself against the table with one hand, and put the other hand to her head. Her brain was giddy. The effort to think was too much for her. She said to herself, vacantly, "The inn? What did I do at the inn?"

"I have had a lawyer's advice, mind! I know what I am talking about."

She appeared not to have heard him. She repeated the words, "What did I do at the inn?" and gave it up in despair. Holding by the table, she came close to him and laid her hand on his arm.

"Do you refuse to marry me?" she asked.

He saw the vile opportunity, and said the vile words.

"You're married already to Arnold Brinkworth."

Without a cry to warn him, without an effort to save herself, she dropped senseless at his feet; as her mother had dropped at his father's feet in the by-gone time.

He disentangled himself from the folds of her dress. "Done!" he said, looking down at her as she lay on the floor.

As the word fell from his lips he was startled by a sound in the inner part of the house. One of the library doors had not been completely closed. Light footsteps were audible, advancing rapidly across the hall.

He turned and fled, leaving the library, as he had entered it, by the open window at the lower end of the room.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND. - GONE.

BLANCHE came in, with a glass of wine in her hand, and saw the swooning woman on the floor.

She was alarmed, but not surprised, as she knelt by Anne, and raised her head. Her own previous observation of her friend necessarily prevented her from being at any loss to account for the fainting fit. The inevitable delay in getting the wine was--naturally to her mind--alone to blame for the result which now met her view.

If she had been less ready in thus tracing the effect to the cause, she might have gone to the window to see if any thing had happened, out-of-doors, to frighten Anne--might have seen Geoffrey before he had time to turn the corner of the house--and, making that one discovery, might have altered the whole course of events, not in her coming life only, but in the coming lives of others. So do we shape our own destinies, blindfold. So do we hold our poor little tenure of happiness at the capricious mercy of Chance. It is surely a blessed delusion which persuades us that we are the highest product of the great scheme of creation, and sets us doubting whether other planets are inhabited, because other planets are not surrounded by an atmosphere which we can breathe!

After trying such simple remedies as were within her reach, and trying them without success, Blanche became seriously alarmed. Anne lay, to all outward appearance, dead in her arms. She was on the point of calling for help--come what might of the discovery which would ensue--when the door from the hall opened once more, and Hester Dethridge entered the room.

The cook had accepted the alternative which her mistress's message had placed before her, if she insisted on having her own time at her own sole disposal for the rest of that day. Exactly as Lady Lundie had desired, she intimated her resolution to carry her point by placing her account-book on the desk in the library. It was only when this had been done that Blanche received any answer to her entreaties for help. Slowly and deliberately Hester Dethridge walked up to the spot where the young girl knelt with Anne's head on her bosom, and looked at the two without a trace of human emotion in her stern and stony face.

"Don't you see what's happened?" cried Blanche. "Are you alive or dead? Oh, Hester, I can't bring her to! Look at her! look at her!"

Hester Dethridge looked at her, and shook her head. Looked again, thought for a while and wrote on her slate. Held out the slate over Anne's body, and showed what she had written:

"Who has done it?"

"You stupid creature!" said Blanche. "Nobody has done it."

The eyes of Hester Dethridge steadily read the worn white face, telling its own tale of sorrow mutely on Blanche's breast. The mind of Hester Dethridge steadily looked back at her own knowledge of her own miserable married life. She again returned to writing on her slate--again showed the written words to Blanche.

"Brought to it by a man. Let her be--and God will take her."

"You horrid unfeeling woman! how dare you write such an abominable thing!" With this natural outburst of indignation, Blanche looked back at Anne; and, daunted by the death-like persistency of the swoon, appealed again to the mercy of the immovable woman who was looking down at her. "Oh, Hester! for Heaven's sake help me!"

The cook dropped her slate at her side and bent her head gravely in sign that she submitted. She motioned to Blanche to loosen Anne's dress, and then--kneeling on one knee--took Anne to support her while it was being done.

The instant Hester Dethridge touched her, the swooning woman gave signs of life.

A faint shudder ran through her from head to foot--her eyelids trembled--half opened for a moment--and closed again. As they closed, a low sigh fluttered feebly from her lips.

Hester Dethridge put her back in Blanche's arms--considered a little with herself--returned to writing on her slate--and held out the written words once more:

"Shivered when I touched her. That means I have been walking over her grave."

Blanche turned from the sight of the slate, and from the sight of the woman,

in horror. "You frighten me!" she said. "You will frighten her if she sees you. I don't mean to offend you; but--leave us, please leave us."

Hester Dethridge accepted her dismissal, as she accepted every thing else. She bowed her head in sign that she understood--looked for the last time at Anne--dropped a stiff courtesy to her young mistress--and left the room.

An hour later the butler had paid her, and she had left the house.

Blanche breathed more freely when she found herself alone. She could feel the relief now of seeing Anne revive.

"Can you hear me, darling?" she whispered. "Can you let me leave you for a moment?"

Anne's eyes slowly opened and looked round her--in that torment and terror of reviving life which marks the awful protest of humanity against its recall to existence when mortal mercy has dared to wake it in the arms of Death.

Blanche rested Anne's head against the nearest chair, and ran to the table upon which she had placed the wine on entering the room.

After swallowing the first few drops Anne begun to feel the effect of the stimulant. Blanche persisted in making her empty the glass, and refrained from asking or answering questions until her recovery under the influence of the wine was complete.

"You have overexerted yourself this morning," she said, as soon as it seemed safe to speak. "Nobody has seen you, darling--nothing has happened. Do you feel like yourself again?"

Anne made an attempt to rise and leave the library; Blanche placed her gently in the chair, and went on:

"There is not the least need to stir. We have another quarter of an hour to ourselves before any body is at all likely to disturb us. I have something to say, Anne--a little proposal to make. Will you listen to me?"

Anne took Blanche's hand, and pressed it gratefully to her lips. She made no other reply. Blanche proceeded:

"I won't ask any questions, my dear--I won't attempt to keep you here against your will--I won't even remind you of my letter yesterday. But I can't

let you go, Anne, without having my mind made easy about you in some way. You will relieve all my anxiety, if you will do one thing--one easy thing for my sake."

"What is it, Blanche?"

She put that question with her mind far away from the subject before her. Blanche was too eager in pursuit of her object to notice the absent tone, the purely mechanical manner, in which Anne had spoken to her.

"I want you to consult my uncle," she answered. "Sir Patrick is interested in you; Sir Patrick proposed to me this very day to go and see you at the inn. He is the wisest, the kindest, the dearest old man living--and you can trust him as you could trust nobody else. Will you take my uncle into your confidence, and be guided by his advice?"

With her mind still far away from the subject, Anne looked out absently at the lawn, and made no answer.

"Come!" said Blanche. "One word isn't much to say. Is it Yes or No?"

Still looking out on the lawn--still thinking of something else--Anne yielded, and said "Yes."

Blanche was enchanted. "How well I must have managed it!" she thought. "This is what my uncle means, when my uncle talks of 'putting it strongly.'"

She bent down over Anne, and gayly patted her on the shoulder.

"That's the wisest 'Yes,' darling, you ever said in your life. Wait here--and I'll go in to luncheon, or they will be sending to know what has become of me. Sir Patrick has kept my place for me, next to himself. I shall contrive to tell him what I want; and he will contrive (oh, the blessing of having to do with a clever man; these are so few of them!)--he will contrive to leave the table before the rest, without exciting any body's suspicions. Go away with him at once to the summer-house (we have been at the summer-house all the morning; nobody will go back to it now), and I will follow you as soon as I have satisfied Lady Lundie by eating some lunch. Nobody will be any the wiser but our three selves. In five minutes or less you may expect Sir Patrick. Let me go! We haven't a moment to lose!"

Anne held her back. Anne's attention was concentrated on her now.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Are you going on happily with Arnold, Blanche?"

"Arnold is nicer than ever, my dear."

"Is the day fixed for your marriage?"

"The day will be ages hence. Not till we are back in town, at the end of the autumn. Let me go, Anne!"

"Give me a kiss, Blanche."

Blanche kissed her, and tried to release her hand. Anne held it as if she was drowning, as if her life depended on not letting it go.

"Will you always love me, Blanche, as you love me now?"

"How can you ask me!"

"I said Yes just now. You say Yes too."

Blanche said it. Anne's eyes fastened on her face, with one long, yearning look, and then Anne's hand suddenly dropped hers.

She ran out of the room, more agitated, more uneasy, than she liked to confess to herself. Never had she felt so certain of the urgent necessity of appealing to Sir Patrick's advice as she felt at that moment.

The guests were still safe at the luncheon-table when Blanche entered the dining-room.

Lady Lundie expressed the necessary surprise, in the properly graduated tone of reproof, at her step-daughter's want of punctuality. Blanche made her apologies with the most exemplary humility. She glided into her chair by her uncle's side, and took the first thing that was offered to her. Sir Patrick looked at his niece, and found himself in the company of a model young English Miss--and marveled inwardly what it might mean.

The talk, interrupted for the moment (topics, Politics and Sport--and then, when a change was wanted, Sport and Politics), was resumed again all

round the table. Under cover of the conversation, and in the intervals of receiving the attentions of the gentlemen, Blanche whispered to Sir Patrick, "Don't start, uncle. Anne is in the library." (Polite Mr. Smith offered some ham. Gratefully declined.) "Pray, pray, pray go to her; she is waiting to see you--she is in dreadful trouble." (Gallant Mr. Jones proposed fruit tart and cream. Accepted with thanks.) "Take her to the summer-house: I'll follow you when I get the chance. And manage it at once, uncle, if you love me, or you will be too late."

Before Sir Patrick could whisper back a word in reply, Lady Lundie, cutting a cake of the richest Scottish composition, at the other end of the table, publicly proclaimed it to be her "own cake," and, as such, offered her brother-in-law a slice. The slice exhibited an eruption of plums and sweetmeats, overlaid by a perspiration of butter. It has been said that Sir Patrick had reached the age of seventy--it is, therefore, needless to add that he politely declined to commit an unprovoked outrage on his own stomach.

"MY cake!" persisted Lady Lundie, elevating the horrible composition on a fork. "Won't that tempt you?"

Sir Patrick saw his way to slipping out of the room under cover of a compliment to his sister-in-law. He summoned his courtly smile, and laid his hand on his heart.

"A fallible mortal," he said, "is met by a temptation which he can not possibly resist. If he is a wise mortal, also, what does he do?"

"He eats some of My cake," said the prosaic Lady Lundie.

"No!" said Sir Patrick, with a look of unutterable devotion directed at his sister-in-law.

"He flies temptation, dear lady--as I do now." He bowed, and escaped, unsuspected, from the room.

Lady Lundie cast down her eyes, with an expression of virtuous indulgence for human frailty, and divided Sir Patrick's compliment modestly between herself and her cake.

Well aware that his own departure from the table would be followed in a few minutes by the rising of the lady of the house, Sir Patrick hurried to the

library as fast as his lame foot would let him. Now that he was alone, his manner became anxious, and his face looked grave. He entered the room.

Not a sign of Anne Silvester was to be seen any where. The library was a perfect solitude.

"Gone!" said Sir Patrick. "This looks bad."

After a moment's reflection he went back into the hall to get his hat. It was possible that she might have been afraid of discovery if she staid in the library, and that she might have gone on to the summer-house by herself.

If she was not to be found in the summer-house, the quieting of Blanche's mind and the clearing up of her uncle's suspicions alike depended on discovering the place in which Miss Silvester had taken refuge. In this case time would be of importance, and the capacity of making the most of it would be a precious capacity at starting. Arriving rapidly at these conclusions, Sir Patrick rang the bell in the hall which communicated with the servants' offices, and summoned his own valet--a person of tried discretion and fidelity, nearly as old as himself.

"Get your hat, Duncan," he said, when the valet appeared, "and come out with me."

Master and servant set forth together silently on their way through the grounds. Arrived within sight of the summer-house, Sir Patrick ordered Duncan to wait, and went on by himself.

There was not the least need for the precaution that he had taken. The summer-house was as empty as the library. He stepped out again and looked about him. Not a living creature was visible. Sir Patrick summoned his servant to join him.

"Go back to the stables, Duncan," he said, "and say that Miss Lundie lends me her pony-carriage to-day. Let it be got ready at once and kept in the stable-yard. I want to attract as little notice as possible. You are to go with me, and nobody else. Provide yourself with a railway time-table. Have you got any money?"

"Yes, Sir Patrick."

"Did you happen to see the governess (Miss Silvester) on the day when we came here--the day of the lawn-party?"

"I did, Sir Patrick."

"Should you know her again?"

"I thought her a very distinguished-looking person, Sir Patrick. I should certainly know her again."

"Have you any reason to think she noticed you?"

"She never even looked at me, Sir Patrick."

"Very good. Put a change of linen into your bag, Duncan--I may possibly want you to take a journey by railway. Wait for me in the stable-yard. This is a matter in which every thing is trusted to my discretion, and to yours."

"Thank you, Sir Patrick."

With that acknowledgment of the compliment which had been just paid to him, Duncan gravely went his way to the stables; and Duncan's master returned to the summer-house, to wait there until he was joined by Blanche.

Sir Patrick showed signs of failing patience during the interval of expectation through which he was now condemned to pass. He applied perpetually to the snuff-box in the knob of his cane. He fidgeted incessantly in and out of the summer-house. Anne's disappearance had placed a serious obstacle in the way of further discovery; and there was no attacking that obstacle, until precious time had been wasted in waiting to see Blanche.

At last she appeared in view, from the steps of the summer-house; breathless and eager, hasting to the place of meeting as fast as her feet would take her to it.

Sir Patrick considerably advanced, to spare her the shock of making the inevitable discovery. "Blanche," he said. "Try to prepare yourself, my dear, for a disappointment. I am alone."

"You don't mean that you have let her go?"

"My poor child! I have never seen her at all."

Blanche pushed by him, and ran into the summer-house. Sir Patrick followed her. She came out again to meet him, with a look of blank despair.

"Oh, uncle! I did so truly pity her! And see how little pity she has for me!"

Sir Patrick put his arm round his niece, and softly patted the fair young head that dropped on his shoulder.

"Don't let us judge her harshly, my dear: we don't know what serious necessity may not plead her excuse. It is plain that she can trust nobody--and that she only consented to see me to get you out of the room and spare you the pain of parting. Compose yourself, Blanche. I don't despair of discovering where she has gone, if you will help me."

Blanche lifted her head, and dried her tears bravely.

"My father himself wasn't kinder to me than you are," she said. "Only tell me, uncle, what I can do!"

"I want to hear exactly what happened in the library," said Sir Patrick. "Forget nothing, my dear child, no matter how trifling it may be. Trifles are precious to us, and minutes are precious to us, now."

Blanche followed her instructions to the letter, her uncle listening with the closest attention. When she had completed her narrative, Sir Patrick suggested leaving the summer-house. "I have ordered your chaise," he said; "and I can tell you what I propose doing on our way to the stable-yard."

"Let me drive you, uncle!"

"Forgive me, my dear, for saying No to that. Your step-mother's suspicions are very easily excited--and you had better not be seen with me if my inquiries take me to the Craig Fernie inn. I promise, if you will remain here, to tell you every thing when I come back. Join the others in any plan they have for the afternoon--and you will prevent my absence from exciting any thing more than a passing remark. You will do as I tell you? That's a good girl! Now you shall hear how I propose to search for this poor lady, and how your little story has helped me."

He paused, considering with himself whether he should begin by telling Blanche of his consultation with Geoffrey. Once more, he decided that question in the negative. Better to still defer taking her into his confidence until he had performed the errand of investigation on which he was now setting forth.

"What you have told me, Blanche, divides itself, in my mind, into two

heads," began Sir Patrick. "There is what happened in the library before your own eyes; and there is what Miss Silvester told you had happened at the inn. As to the event in the library (in the first place), it is too late now to inquire whether that fainting-fit was the result, as you say, of mere exhaustion--or whether it was the result of something that occurred while you were out of the room."

"What could have happened while I was out of the room?"

"I know no more than you do, my dear. It is simply one of the possibilities in the case, and, as such, I notice it. To get on to what practically concerns us; if Miss Silvester is in delicate health it is impossible that she could get, unassisted, to any great distance from Windygates. She may have taken refuge in one of the cottages in our immediate neighborhood. Or she may have met with some passing vehicle from one of the farms on its way to the station, and may have asked the person driving to give her a seat in it. Or she may have walked as far as she can, and may have stopped to rest in some sheltered place, among the lanes to the south of this house."

"I'll inquire at the cottages, uncle, while you are gone."

"My dear child, there must be a dozen cottages, at least, within a circle of one mile from Windygates! Your inquiries would probably occupy you for the whole afternoon. I won't ask what Lady Lundie would think of your being away all that time by yourself. I will only remind you of two things. You would be making a public matter of an investigation which it is essential to pursue as privately as possible; and, even if you happened to hit on the right cottage your inquiries would be completely baffled, and you would discover nothing."

"Why not?"

"I know the Scottish peasant better than you do, Blanche. In his intelligence and his sense of self-respect he is a very different being from the English peasant. He would receive you civilly, because you are a young lady; but he would let you see, at the same time, that he considered you had taken advantage of the difference between your position and his position to commit an intrusion. And if Miss Silvester had appealed, in confidence, to his hospitality, and if he had granted it, no power on earth would induce him to tell any person living that she was under his roof--without her express permission."

"But, uncle, if it's of no use making inquiries of any body, how are we to find

her?"

"I don't say that nobody will answer our inquiries, my dear--I only say the peasantry won't answer them, if your friend has trusted herself to their protection. The way to find her is to look on, beyond what Miss Silvester may be doing at the present moment, to what Miss Silvester contemplates doing--let us say, before the day is out. We may assume, I think (after what has happened), that, as soon as she can leave this neighborhood, she assuredly will leave it. Do you agree, so far?"

"Yes! yes! Go on."

"Very well. She is a woman, and she is (to say the least of it) not strong. She can only leave this neighborhood either by hiring a vehicle or by traveling on the railway. I propose going first to the station. At the rate at which your pony gets over the ground, there is a fair chance, in spite of the time we have lost, of my being there as soon as she is--assuming that she leaves by the first train, up or down, that passes."

"There is a train in half an hour, uncle. She can never get there in time for that."

"She may be less exhausted than we think; or she may get a lift; or she may not be alone. How do we know but somebody may have been waiting in the lane--her husband, if there is such a person--to help her? No! I shall assume she is now on her way to the station; and I shall get there as fast as possible--"

"And stop her, if you find her there?"

"What I do, Blanche, must be left to my discretion. If I find her there, I must act for the best. If I don't find her there, I shall leave Duncan (who goes with me) on the watch for the remaining trains, until the last to-night. He knows Miss Silvester by sight, and he is sure that she has never noticed him. Whether she goes north or south, early or late, Duncan will have my orders to follow her. He is thoroughly to be relied on. If she takes the railway, I answer for it we shall know where she goes."

"How clever of you to think of Duncan!"

"Not in the least, my dear. Duncan is my factotum; and the course I am taking is the obvious course which would have occurred to any body. Let us get to the really difficult part of it now. Suppose she hires a carriage?"

"There are none to be had, except at the station."

"There are farmers about here--and farmers have light carts, or chaises, or something of the sort. It is in the last degree unlikely that they would consent to let her have them. Still, women break through difficulties which stop men. And this is a clever woman, Blanche--a woman, you may depend on it, who is bent on preventing you from tracing her. I confess I wish we had somebody we could trust lounging about where those two roads branch off from the road that leads to the railway. I must go in another direction; I can't do it."

"Arnold can do it!"

Sir Patrick looked a little doubtful. "Arnold is an excellent fellow," he said. "But can we trust to his discretion?"

"He is, next to you, the most perfectly discreet person I know," rejoined Blanche, in a very positive manner; "and, what is more, I have told him every thing about Anne, except what has happened to-day. I am afraid I shall tell him that, when I feel lonely and miserable, after you have gone. There is something in Arnold--I don't know what it is--that comforts me. Besides, do you think he would betray a secret that I gave him to keep? You don't know how devoted he is to me!"

"My dear Blanche, I am not the cherished object of his devotion; of course I don't know! You are the only authority on that point. I stand corrected. Let us have Arnold, by all means. Caution him to be careful; and send him out by himself, where the roads meet. We have now only one other place left in which there is a chance of finding a trace of her. I undertake to make the necessary investigation at the Craig Fernie inn."

"The Craig Fernie inn? Uncle! you have forgotten what I told you."

"Wait a little, my dear. Miss Silvester herself has left the inn, I grant you. But (if we should unhappily fail in finding her by any other means) Miss Silvester has left a trace to guide us at Craig Fernie. That trace must be picked up at once, in case of accidents. You don't seem to follow me? I am getting over the ground as fast as the pony gets over it. I have arrived at the second of those two heads into which your story divides itself in my mind. What did Miss Silvester tell you had happened at the inn?"

"She lost a letter at the inn."

"Exactly. She lost a letter at the inn; that is one event. And Bishopriggs, the waiter, has quarreled with Mrs. Inchbare, and has left his situation; that is another event. As to the letter first. It is either really lost, or it has been stolen. In either case, if we can lay our hands on it, there is at least a chance of its helping us to discover something. As to Bishopriggs, next--"

"You're not going to talk about the waiter, surely?"

"I am! Bishopriggs possesses two important merits. He is a link in my chain of reasoning; and he is an old friend of mine."

"A friend of yours?"

"We live in days, my dear, when one workman talks of another workman as 'that gentleman.'--I march with the age, and feel bound to mention my clerk as my friend. A few years since Bishopriggs was employed in the clerks' room at my chambers. He is one of the most intelligent and most unscrupulous old vagabonds in Scotland; perfectly honest as to all average matters involving pounds, shillings, and pence; perfectly unprincipled in the pursuit of his own interests, where the violation of a trust lies on the boundary-line which marks the limit of the law. I made two unpleasant discoveries when I had him in my employment. I found that he had contrived to supply himself with a duplicate of my seal; and I had the strongest reason to suspect him of tampering with some papers belonging to two of my clients. He had done no actual mischief, so far; and I had no time to waste in making out the necessary case against him. He was dismissed from my service, as a man who was not to be trusted to respect any letters or papers that happened to pass through his hands."

"I see, uncle! I see!"

"Plain enough now--isn't it? If that missing letter of Miss Silvester's is a letter of no importance, I am inclined to believe that it is merely lost, and may be found again. If, on the other hand, there is any thing in it that could promise the most remote advantage to any person in possession of it, then, in the execrable slang of the day, I will lay any odds, Blanche, that Bishopriggs has got the letter!"

"And he has left the inn! How unfortunate!"

"Unfortunate as causing delay--nothing worse than that. Unless I am very much mistaken, Bishopriggs will come back to the inn. The old rascal (there

is no denying it) is a most amusing person. He left a terrible blank when he left my clerks' room. Old customers at Craig Fernie (especially the English), in missing Bishopriggs, will, you may rely on it, miss one of the attractions of the inn. Mrs. Inchbare is not a woman to let her dignity stand in the way of her business. She and Bishopriggs will come together again, sooner or later, and make it up. When I have put certain questions to her, which may possibly lead to very important results, I shall leave a letter for Bishopriggs in Mrs. Inchbare's hands. The letter will tell him I have something for him to do, and will contain an address at which he can write to me. I shall hear of him, Blanche and, if the letter is in his possession, I shall get it."

"Won't he be afraid--if he has stolen the letter--to tell you he has got it?"

"Very well put, my child. He might hesitate with other people. But I have my own way of dealing with him--and I know how to make him tell Me.--Enough of Bishopriggs till his time comes. There is one other point, in regard to Miss Silvester. I may have to describe her. How was she dressed when she came here? Remember, I am a man--and (if an Englishwoman's dress can be described in an Englishwoman's language) tell me, in English, what she had on."

"She wore a straw hat, with corn-flowers in it, and a white veil. Corn-flowers at one side uncle, which is less common than cornflowers in front. And she had on a light gray shawl. And a Pique;--"

"There you go with your French! Not a word more! A straw hat, with a white veil, and with corn-flowers at one side of the hat. And a light gray shawl. That's as much as the ordinary male mind can take in; and that will do. I have got my instructions, and saved precious time. So far so good. Here we are at the end of our conference--in other words, at the gate of the stable-yard. You understand what you have to do while I am away?"

"I have to send Arnold to the cross-roads. And I have to behave (if I can) as if nothing had happened."

"Good child! Well put again! you have got what I call grasp of mind, Blanche. An invaluable faculty! You will govern the future domestic kingdom. Arnold will be nothing but a constitutional husband. Those are the only husbands who are thoroughly happy. You shall hear every thing, my love, when I come lack. Got your bag, Duncan? Good. And the time-table? Good. You take the reins--I won't drive. I want to think. Driving is incompatible with intellectual exertion. A man puts his mind into his horse, and sinks to the level of that useful animal--as a necessary condition of getting to his destination without

being upset. God bless you, Blanche! To the station, Duncan! to the station!"

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD. - TRACED.

THE chaise rattled our through the gates. The dogs barked furiously. Sir Patrick looked round, and waved his hand as he turned the corner of the road. Blanche was left alone in the yard.

She lingered a little, absently patting the dogs. They had especial claims on her sympathy at that moment; they, too, evidently thought it hard to be left behind at the house. After a while she roused herself. Sir Patrick had left the responsibility of superintending the crossroads on her shoulders. There was something to be done yet before the arrangements for tracing Anne were complete. Blanche left the yard to do it.

On her way back to the house she met Arnold, dispatched by Lady Lundie in search of her.

The plan of occupation for the afternoon had been settled during Blanche's absence. Some demon had whispered to Lady Lundie to cultivate a taste for feudal antiquities, and to insist on spreading that taste among her guests. She had proposed an excursion to an old baronial castle among the hills--far to the westward (fortunately for Sir Patrick's chance of escaping discovery) of the hills at Craig Fernie. Some of the guests were to ride, and some to accompany their hostess in the open carriage. Looking right and left for proselytes, Lady Lundie had necessarily remarked the disappearance of certain members of her circle. Mr. Delamayn had vanished, nobody knew where. Sir Patrick and Blanche had followed his example. Her ladyship had observed, upon this, with some asperity, that if they were all to treat each other in that unceremonious manner, the sooner Windygates was turned into a Penitentiary, on the silent system, the fitter the house would be for the people who inhabited it. Under these circumstances, Arnold suggested that Blanche would do well to make her excuses as soon as possible at head-quarters, and accept the seat in the carriage which her step-mother wished her to take. "We are in for the feudal antiquities, Blanche; and we must help each other through as well as we can. If you will go in the carriage, I'll go too."

Blanche shook her head.

"There are serious reasons for my keeping up appearances," she said. "I shall go in the carriage. You mustn't go at all."

Arnold naturally looked a little surprised, and asked to be favored with an explanation.

Blanche took his arm and hugged it close. Now that Anne was lost, Arnold was more precious to her than ever. She literally hungered to hear at that moment, from his own lips, how fond he was of her. It mattered nothing that she was already perfectly satisfied on this point. It was so nice (after he had said it five hundred times already) to make him say it once more!

"Suppose I had no explanation to give?" she said. "Would you stay behind by yourself to please me?"

"I would do any thing to please you!"

"Do you really love me as much as that?"

They were still in the yard; and the only witnesses present were the dogs. Arnold answered in the language without words--which is nevertheless the most expressive language in use, between men and women, all over the world.

"This is not doing my duty," said Blanche, penitently. "But, oh Arnold, I am so anxious and so miserable! And it is such a consolation to know that you won't turn your back on me too!"

With that preface she told him what had happened in the library. Even Blanche's estimate of her lover's capacity for sympathizing with her was more than realized by the effect which her narrative produced on Arnold. He was not merely surprised and sorry for her. His face showed plainly that he felt genuine concern and distress. He had never stood higher in Blanche's opinion than he stood at that moment.

"What is to be done?" he asked. "How does Sir Patrick propose to find her?"

Blanche repeated Sir Patrick's instructions relating to the crossroads, and also to the serious necessity of pursuing the investigation in the strictest privacy. Arnold (relieved from all fear of being sent back to Craig Fernie) undertook to do every thing that was asked of him, and promised to keep the secret from every body.

They went back to the house, and met with an icy welcome from Lady Lundie. Her ladyship repeated her remark on the subject of turning Windygates into a Penitentiary for Blanche's benefit. She received Arnold's

petition to be excused from going to see the castle with the barest civility. "Oh, take your walk by all means! You may meet your friend, Mr. Delamayn--who appears to have such a passion for walking that he can't even wait till luncheon is over. As for Sir Patrick--Oh! Sir Patrick has borrowed the pony-carriage? and gone out driving by himself?--I'm sure I never meant to offend my brother-in-law when I offered him a slice of my poor little cake. Don't let me offend any body else. Dispose of your afternoon, Blanche, without the slightest reference to me. Nobody seems inclined to visit the ruins--the most interesting relic of feudal times in Perthshire, Mr. Brinkworth. It doesn't matter--oh, dear me, it doesn't matter! I can't force my guests to feel an intelligent curiosity on the subject of Scottish Antiquities. No! no! my dear Blanche!--it won't be the first time, or the last, that I have driven out alone. I don't at all object to being alone. 'My mind to me a kingdom is,' as the poet says." So Lady Lundie's outraged self-importance asserted its violated claims on human respect, until her distinguished medical guest came to the rescue and smoothed his hostess's ruffled plumes. The surgeon (he privately detested ruins) begged to go. Blanche begged to go. Smith and Jones (profoundly interested in feudal antiquities) said they would sit behind, in the "rumble"--rather than miss this unexpected treat. One, Two, and Three caught the infection, and volunteered to be the escort on horseback. Lady Lundie's celebrated "smile" (warranted to remain unaltered on her face for hours together) made its appearance once more. She issued her orders with the most charming amiability. "We'll take the guidebook," said her ladyship, with the eye to mean economy, which is only to be met with in very rich people, "and save a shilling to the man who shows the ruins." With that she went up stairs to array herself for the drive, and looked in the glass; and saw a perfectly virtuous, fascinating, and accomplished woman, facing her irresistibly in a new French bonnet!

At a private signal from Blanche, Arnold slipped out and repaired to his post, where the roads crossed the road that led to the railway.

There was a space of open heath on one side of him, and the stonewall and gates of a farmhouse inclosure on the other. Arnold sat down on the soft heather--and lit a cigar--and tried to see his way through the double mystery of Anne's appearance and Anne's flight.

He had interpreted his friend's absence exactly as his friend had anticipated: he could only assume that Geoffrey had gone to keep a private appointment with Anne. Miss Silvester's appearance at Windygates alone, and Miss Silvester's anxiety to hear the names of the gentlemen who were staying in the house, seemed, under these circumstances, to point to the plain conclusion that the two had, in some way, unfortunately missed each other.

But what could be the motive of her flight? Whether she knew of some other place in which she might meet Geoffrey? or whether she had gone back to the inn? or whether she had acted under some sudden impulse of despair?--were questions which Arnold was necessarily quite incompetent to solve. There was no choice but to wait until an opportunity offered of reporting what had happened to Geoffrey himself.

After the lapse of half an hour, the sound of some approaching vehicle--the first sound of the sort that he had heard--attracted Arnold's attention. He started up, and saw the pony-chaise approaching him along the road from the station. Sir Patrick, this time, was compelled to drive himself--Duncan was not with him. On discovering Arnold, he stopped the pony.

"So! so!" said the old gentleman. "You have heard all about it, I see? You understand that this is to be a secret from every body, till further notice? Very good, Has any thing happened since you have been here?"

"Nothing. Have you made any discoveries, Sir Patrick?"

"None. I got to the station before the train. No signs of Miss Silvester any where. I have left Duncan on the watch--with orders not to stir till the last train has passed to-night."

"I don't think she will turn up at the station," said Arnold. "I fancy she has gone back to Craig Fernie."

"Quite possible. I am now on my way to Craig Fernie, to make inquiries about her. I don't know how long I may be detained, or what it may lead to. If you see Blanche before I do tell her I have instructed the station-master to let me know (if Miss Silvester does take the railway) what place she books for. Thanks to that arrangement, we sha'n't have to wait for news till Duncan can telegraph that he has seen her to her journey's end. In the mean time, you understand what you are wanted to do here?"

"Blanche has explained every thing to me."

"Stick to your post, and make good use of your eyes. You were accustomed to that, you know, when you were at sea. It's no great hardship to pass a few hours in this delicious summer air. I see you have contracted the vile modern habit of smoking--that will be occupation enough to amuse you, no doubt! Keep the roads in view; and, if she does come your way, don't attempt to stop her--you can't do that. Speak to her (quite innocently, mind!), by way of getting time enough to notice the face of the man who is

driving her, and the name (if there is one) on his cart. Do that, and you will do enough. Pah! how that cigar poisons the air! What will have become of your stomach when you get to my age?"

"I sha'n't complain, Sir Patrick, if I can eat as good a dinner as you do."

"That reminds me! I met somebody I knew at the station. Hester Dethridge has left her place, and gone to London by the train. We may feed at Windygates--we have done with dining now. It has been a final quarrel this time between the mistress and the cook. I have given Hester my address in London, and told her to let me know before she decides on another place. A woman who can't talk, and a woman who can cook, is simply a woman who has arrived at absolute perfection. Such a treasure shall not go out of the family, if I can help it. Did you notice the Bechamel sauce at lunch? Pooh! a young man who smokes cigars doesn't know the difference between Bechamel sauce and melted butter. Good afternoon! good afternoon!"

He slackened the reins, and away he went to Craig Fernie. Counting by years, the pony was twenty, and the pony's driver was seventy. Counting by vivacity and spirit, two of the most youthful characters in Scotland had got together that afternoon in the same chaise.

An hour more wore itself slowly out; and nothing had passed Arnold on the cross-roads but a few stray foot-passengers, a heavy wagon, and a gig with an old woman in it. He rose again from the heather, weary of inaction, and resolved to walk backward and forward, within view of his post, for a change. At the second turn, when his face happened to be set toward the open heath, he noticed another foot-passenger--apparently a man--far away in the empty distance. Was the person coming toward him?

He advanced a little. The stranger was doubtless advancing too, so rapidly did his figure now reveal itself, beyond all doubt, as the figure of a man. A few minutes more and Arnold fancied he recognized it. Yet a little longer, and he was quite sure. There was no mistaking the lithe strength and grace of that man, and the smooth easy swiftness with which he covered his ground. It was the hero of the coming foot-race. It was Geoffrey on his way back to Windygates House.

Arnold hurried forward to meet him. Geoffrey stood still, poising himself on his stick, and let the other come up.

"Have you heard what has happened at the house?" asked Arnold.

He instinctively checked the next question as it rose to his lips. There was a settled defiance in the expression of Geoffrey's face, which Arnold was quite at a loss to understand. He looked like a man who had made up his mind to confront any thing that could happen, and to contradict any body who spoke to him.

"Something seems to have annoyed you?" said Arnold.

"What's up at the house?" returned Geoffrey, with his loudest voice and his hardest look.

"Miss Silvester has been at the house."

"Who saw her?"

"Nobody but Blanche."

"Well?"

"Well, she was miserably weak and ill, so ill that she fainted, poor thing, in the library. Blanche brought her to."

"And what then?"

"We were all at lunch at the time. Blanche left the library, to speak privately to her uncle. When she went back Miss Silvester was gone, and nothing has been seen of her since."

"A row at the house?"

"Nobody knows of it at the house, except Blanche--"

"And you? And how many besides?"

"And Sir Patrick. Nobody else."

"Nobody else? Any thing more?"

Arnold remembered his promise to keep the investigation then on foot a secret from every body. Geoffrey's manner made him--unconsciously to himself--readier than he might otherwise have been to consider Geoffrey as included in the general prohibition.

"Nothing more," he answered.

Geoffrey dug the point of his stick deep into the soft, sandy ground. He looked at the stick, then suddenly pulled it out of the ground and looked at Arnold. "Good-afternoon!" he said, and went on his way again by himself.

Arnold followed, and stopped him. For a moment the two men looked at each other without a word passing on either side. Arnold spoke first.

"You're out of humor, Geoffrey. What has upset you in this way? Have you and Miss Silvester missed each other?"

Geoffrey was silent.

"Have you seen her since she left Windygates?"

No reply.

"Do you know where Miss Silvester is now?"

Still no reply. Still the same mutely-insolent defiance of look and manner. Arnold's dark color began to deepen.

"Why don't you answer me?" he said.

"Because I have had enough of it."

"Enough of what?"

"Enough of being worried about Miss Silvester. Miss Silvester's my business--not yours."

"Gently, Geoffrey! Don't forget that I have been mixed up in that business--without seeking it myself."

"There's no fear of my forgetting. You have cast it in my teeth often enough."

"Cast it in your teeth?"

"Yes! Am I never to hear the last of my obligation to you? The devil take the obligation! I'm sick of the sound of it."

There was a spirit in Arnold--not easily brought to the surface, through the

overlying simplicity and good-humor of his ordinary character--which, once roused, was a spirit not readily quelled. Geoffrey had roused it at last.

"When you come to your senses," he said, "I'll remember old times--and receive your apology. Till you do come to your senses, go your way by yourself. I have no more to say to you."

Geoffrey set his teeth, and came one step nearer. Arnold's eyes met his, with a look which steadily and firmly challenged him--though he was the stronger man of the two--to force the quarrel a step further, if he dared. The one human virtue which Geoffrey respected and understood was the virtue of courage. And there it was before him--the undeniable courage of the weaker man. The callous scoundrel was touched on the one tender place in his whole being. He turned, and went on his way in silence.

Left by himself, Arnold's head dropped on his breast. The friend who had saved his life--the one friend he possessed, who was associated with his earliest and happiest remembrances of old days--had grossly insulted him: and had left him deliberately, without the slightest expression of regret. Arnold's affectionate nature--simple, loyal, clinging where it once fastened--was wounded to the quick. Geoffrey's fast-retreating figure, in the open view before him, became blurred and indistinct. He put his hand over his eyes, and hid, with a boyish shame, the hot tears that told of the heartache, and that honored the man who shed them.

He was still struggling with the emotion which had overpowered him, when something happened at the place where the roads met.

The four roads pointed as nearly as might be toward the four points of the compass. Arnold was now on the road to the eastward, having advanced in that direction to meet Geoffrey, between two and three hundred yards from the farm-house inclosure before which he had kept his watch. The road to the westward, curving away behind the farm, led to the nearest market-town. The road to the south was the way to the station. And the road to the north led back to Windygates House.

While Geoffrey was still fifty yards from the turning which would take him back to Windygates--while the tears were still standing thickly in Arnold's eyes--the gate of the farm inclosure opened. A light four-wheel chaise came out with a man driving, and a woman sitting by his side. The woman was Anne Silvester, and the man was the owner of the farm.

Instead of taking the way which led to the station, the chaise pursued the

westward road to the market-town. Proceeding in this direction, the backs of the persons in the vehicle were necessarily turned on Geoffrey, advancing behind them from the eastward. He just carelessly noticed the shabby little chaise, and then turned off north on his way to Windygates.

By the time Arnold was composed enough to look round him, the chaise had taken the curve in the road which wound behind the farmhouse. He returned--faithful to the engagement which he had undertaken--to his post before the inclosure. The chaise was then a speck in the distance. In a minute more it was a speck out of sight.

So (to use Sir Patrick's phrase) had the woman broken through difficulties which would have stopped a man. So, in her sore need, had Anne Silvester won the sympathy which had given her a place, by the farmer's side, in the vehicle that took him on his own business to the market-town. And so, by a hair's-breadth, did she escape the treble risk of discovery which threatened her--from Geoffrey, on his way back; from Arnold, at his post; and from the valet, on the watch for her appearance at the station.

The afternoon wore on. The servants at Windygates, airing themselves in the grounds--in the absence of their mistress and her guests--were disturbed, for the moment, by the unexpected return of one of "the gentlefolks." Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn reappeared at the house alone; went straight to the smoking-room; and calling for another supply of the old ale, settled himself in an arm-chair with the newspaper, and began to smoke.

He soon tired of reading, and fell into thinking of what had happened during the latter part of his walk.

The prospect before him had more than realized the most sanguine anticipations that he could have formed of it. He had braced himself--after what had happened in the library--to face the outbreak of a serious scandal, on his return to the house. And here--when he came back--was nothing to face! Here were three people (Sir Patrick, Arnold, and Blanche) who must at least know that Anne was in some serious trouble keeping the secret as carefully as if they felt that his interests were at stake! And, more wonderful still, here was Anne herself--so far from raising a hue and cry after him--actually taking flight without saying a word that could compromise him with any living soul!

What in the name of wonder did it mean? He did his best to find his way to

an explanation of some sort; and he actually contrived to account for the silence of Blanche and her uncle, and Arnold. It was pretty clear that they must have all three combined to keep Lady Lundie in ignorance of her runaway governess's return to the house.

But the secret of Anne's silence completely baffled him.

He was simply incapable of conceiving that the horror of seeing herself set up as an obstacle to Blanche's marriage might have been vivid enough to overpower all sense of her own wrongs, and to hurry her away, resolute, in her ignorance of what else to do, never to return again, and never to let living eyes rest on her in the character of Arnold's wife. "It's clean beyond my making out," was the final conclusion at which Geoffrey arrived. "If it's her interest to hold her tongue, it's my interest to hold mine, and there's an end of it for the present!"

He put up his feet on a chair, and rested his magnificent muscles after his walk, and filled another pipe, in thorough contentment with himself. No interference to dread from Anne, no more awkward questions (on the terms they were on now) to come from Arnold. He looked back at the quarrel on the heath with a certain complacency--he did his friend justice; though they had disagreed. "Who would have thought the fellow had so much pluck in him!" he said to himself as he struck the match and lit his second pipe.

An hour more wore on; and Sir Patrick was the next person who returned.

He was thoughtful, but in no sense depressed. Judging by appearances, his errand to Craig Fernie had certainly not ended in disappointment. The old gentleman hummed his favorite little Scotch air--rather absently, perhaps--and took his pinch of snuff from the knob of his ivory cane much as usual. He went to the library bell and summoned a servant.

"Any body been here for me?"--"No, Sir Patrick."--"No letters?"--"No, Sir Patrick."--"Very well. Come up stairs to my room, and help me on with my dressing-gown." The man helped him to his dressing-gown and slippers "Is Miss Lundie at home?"--"No, Sir Patrick. They're all away with my lady on an excursion."--"Very good. Get me a cup of coffee; and wake me half an hour before dinner, in case I take a nap." The servant went out. Sir Patrick stretched himself on the sofa. "Ay! ay! a little aching in the back, and a certain stiffness in the legs. I dare say the pony feels just as I do. Age, I suppose, in both cases? Well! well! well! let's try and be young at heart. 'The rest' (as Pope says) 'is leather and prunella.'" He returned resignedly to his little Scotch air. The servant came in with the coffee. And then the room was

quiet, except for the low humming of insects and the gentle rustling of the creepers at the window. For five minutes or so Sir Patrick sipped his coffee, and meditated--by no means in the character of a man who was depressed by any recent disappointment. In five minutes more he was asleep.

A little later, and the party returned from the ruins.

With the one exception of their lady-leader, the whole expedition was depressed--Smith and Jones, in particular, being quite speechless. Lady Lundie alone still met feudal antiquities with a cheerful front. She had cheated the man who showed the ruins of his shilling, and she was thoroughly well satisfied with herself. Her voice was flute-like in its melody, and the celebrated "smile" had never been in better order. "Deeply interesting!" said her ladyship, descending from the carriage with ponderous grace, and addressing herself to Geoffrey, lounging under the portico of the house. "You have had a loss, Mr. Delamayn. The next time you go out for a walk, give your hostess a word of warning, and you won't repent it." Blanche (looking very weary and anxious) questioned the servant, the moment she got in, about Arnold and her uncle. Sir Patrick was invisible up stairs. Mr. Brinkworth had not come back. It wanted only twenty minutes of dinner-time; and full evening-dress was insisted on at Windygates. Blanche, nevertheless, still lingered in the hall in the hope of seeing Arnold before she went up stairs. The hope was realized. As the clock struck the quarter he came in. And he, too, was out of spirits like the rest!

"Have you seen her?" asked Blanche.

"No," said Arnold, in the most perfect good faith. "The way she has escaped by is not the way by the cross-roads--I answer for that."

They separated to dress. When the party assembled again, in the library, before dinner, Blanche found her way, the moment he entered the room, to Sir Patrick's side.

"News, uncle! I'm dying for news."

"Good news, my dear--so far."

"You have found Anne?"

"Not exactly that."

"You have heard of her at Craig Fernie?"

"I have made some important discoveries at Craig Fernie, Blanche. Hush! here's your step-mother. Wait till after dinner, and you may hear more than I can tell you now. There may be news from the station between this and then."

The dinner was a wearisome ordeal to at least two other persons present besides Blanche. Arnold, sitting opposite to Geoffrey, without exchanging a word with him, felt the altered relations between his former friend and himself very painfully. Sir Patrick, missing the skilled hand of Hester Dethridge in every dish that was offered to him, marked the dinner among the wasted opportunities of his life, and resented his sister-in-law's flow of spirits as something simply inhuman under present circumstances. Blanche followed Lady Lundie into the drawing-room in a state of burning impatience for the rising of the gentlemen from their wine. Her step-mother--mapping out a new antiquarian excursion for the next day, and finding Blanche's ears closed to her occasional remarks on baronial Scotland five hundred years since--lamented, with satirical emphasis, the absence of an intelligent companion of her own sex; and stretched her majestic figure on the sofa to wait until an audience worthy of her flowed in from the dining-room. Before very long--so soothing is the influence of an after-dinner view of feudal antiquities, taken through the medium of an approving conscience--Lady Lundie's eyes closed; and from Lady Lundie's nose there poured, at intervals, a sound, deep like her ladyship's learning; regular, like her ladyship's habits--a sound associated with nightcaps and bedrooms, evoked alike by Nature, the leveler, from high and low--the sound (oh, Truth what enormities find publicity in thy name!)--the sound of a Snore.

Free to do as she pleased, Blanche left the echoes of the drawing-room in undisturbed enjoyment of Lady Lundie's audible repose.

She went into the library, and turned over the novels. Went out again, and looked across the hall at the dining-room door. Would the men never have done talking their politics and drinking their wine? She went up to her own room, and changed her ear-rings, and scolded her maid. Descended once more--and made an alarming discovery in a dark corner of the hall.

Two men were standing there, hat in hand whispering to the butler. The butler, leaving them, went into the dining-room--came out again with Sir Patrick--and said to the two men, "Step this way, please." The two men came out into the light. Murdoch, the station-master; and Duncan, the valet! News of Anne!

"Oh, uncle, let me stay!" pleaded Blanche.

Sir Patrick hesitated. It was impossible to say--as matters stood at that moment--what distressing intelligence the two men might not have brought of the missing woman. Duncan's return, accompanied by the station-master, looked serious. Blanche instantly penetrated the secret of her uncle's hesitation. She turned pale, and caught him by the arm. "Don't send me away," she whispered. "I can bear any thing but suspense."

"Out with it!" said Sir Patrick, holding his niece's hand. "Is she found or not?"

"She's gone by the up-train," said the station-master. "And we know where."

Sir Patrick breathed freely; Blanche's color came back. In different ways, the relief to both of them was equally great.

"You had my orders to follow her," said Sir Patrick to Duncan. "Why have you come back?"

"Your man is not to blame, Sir," interposed the station-master. "The lady took the train at Kirkandrew."

Sir Patrick started and looked at the station-master. "Ay? ay? The next station--the market-town. Inexcusably stupid of me. I never thought of that."

"I took the liberty of telegraphing your description of the lady to Kirkandrew, Sir Patrick, in case of accidents."

"I stand corrected, Mr. Murdoch. Your head, in this matter, has been the sharper head of the two. Well?"

"There's the answer, Sir."

Sir Patrick and Blanche read the telegram together.

"Kirkandrew. Up train. 7.40 P.M. Lady as described. No luggage. Bag in her hand. Traveling alone. Ticket--second-class. Place--Edinburgh."

"Edinburgh!" repeated Blanche. "Oh, uncle! we shall lose her in a great place like that!"

"We shall find her, my dear; and you shall see how. Duncan, get me pen,

ink, and paper. Mr. Murdoch, you are going back to the station, I suppose?"

"Yes, Sir Patrick."

"I will give you a telegram, to be sent at once to Edinburgh."

He wrote a carefully-worded telegraphic message, and addressed it to The Sheriff of Mid-Lothian.

"The Sheriff is an old friend of mine," he explained to his niece. "And he is now in Edinburgh. Long before the train gets to the terminus he will receive this personal description of Miss Silvester, with my request to have all her movements carefully watched till further notice. The police are entirely at his disposal; and the best men will be selected for the purpose. I have asked for an answer by telegraph. Keep a special messenger ready for it at the station, Mr. Murdoch. Thank you; good-evening. Duncan, get your supper, and make yourself comfortable. Blanche, my dear, go back to the drawing-room, and expect us in to tea immediately. You will know where your friend is before you go to bed to-night."

With those comforting words he returned to the gentlemen. In ten minutes more they all appeared in the drawing-room; and Lady Lundie (firmly persuaded that she had never closed her eyes) was back again in baronial Scotland five hundred years since.

Blanche, watching her opportunity, caught her uncle alone.

"Now for your promise," she said. "You have made some important discoveries at Craig Fernie. What are they?"

Sir Patrick's eye turned toward Geoffrey, dozing in an arm-chair in a corner of the room. He showed a certain disposition to trifle with the curiosity of his niece.

"After the discovery we have already made," he said, "can't you wait, my dear, till we get the telegram from Edinburgh?"

"That is just what it's impossible for me to do! The telegram won't come for hours yet. I want something to go on with in the mean time."

She seated herself on a sofa in the corner opposite Geoffrey, and pointed to the vacant place by her side.

Sir Patrick had promised--Sir Patrick had no choice but to keep his word. After another look at Geoffrey, he took the vacant place by his niece.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH. - BACKWARD.

"WELL?" whispered Blanche, taking her uncle confidentially by the arm.

"Well," said Sir Patrick, with a spark of his satirical humor flashing out at his niece, "I am going to do a very rash thing. I am going to place a serious trust in the hands of a girl of eighteen."

"The girl's hands will keep it, uncle--though she is only eighteen."

"I must run the risk, my dear; your intimate knowledge of Miss Silvester may be of the greatest assistance to me in the next step I take. You shall know all that I can tell you, but I must warn you first. I can only admit you into my confidence by startling you with a great surprise. Do you follow me, so far?"

"Yes! yes!"

"If you fail to control yourself, you place an obstacle in the way of my being of some future use to Miss Silvester. Remember that, and now prepare for the surprise. What did I tell you before dinner?"

"You said you had made discoveries at Craig Fernie. What have you found out?"

"I have found out that there is a certain person who is in full possession of the information which Miss Silvester has concealed from you and from me. The person is within our reach. The person is in this neighborhood. The person is in this room!"

He caught up Blanche's hand, resting on his arm, and pressed it significantly. She looked at him with the cry of surprise suspended on her lips--waited a little with her eyes fixed on Sir Patrick's face--struggled resolutely, and composed herself.

"Point the person out." She said the words with a self-possession which won her uncle's hearty approval. Blanche had done wonders for a girl in her teens.

"Look!" said Sir Patrick; "and tell me what you see."

"I see Lady Lundie, at the other end of the room, with the map of Perthshire and the Baronial Antiquities of Scotland on the table. And I see every body but you and me obliged to listen to her."

"Every body?"

Blanche looked carefully round the room, and noticed Geoffrey in the opposite corner; fast asleep by this time in his arm-chair.

"Uncle! you don't mean--?"

"There is the man."

"Mr. Delamayn--!"

"Mr. Delamayn knows every thing."

Blanche held mechanically by her uncle's arm, and looked at the sleeping man as if her eyes could never see enough of him.

"You saw me in the library in private consultation with Mr. Delamayn," resumed Sir Patrick. "I have to acknowledge, my dear, that you were quite right in thinking this a suspicious circumstance, And I am now to justify myself for having purposely kept you in the dark up to the present time."

With those introductory words, he briefly reverted to the earlier occurrences of the day, and then added, by way of commentary, a statement of the conclusions which events had suggested to his own mind.

The events, it may be remembered, were three in number. First, Geoffrey's private conference with Sir Patrick on the subject of Irregular Marriages in Scotland. Secondly, Anne Silvester's appearance at Windygates. Thirdly, Anne's flight.

The conclusions which had thereupon suggested themselves to Sir Patrick's mind were six in number.

First, that a connection of some sort might possibly exist between Geoffrey's acknowledged difficulty about his friend, and Miss Silvester's presumed difficulty about herself. Secondly, that Geoffrey had really put to Sir Patrick--not his own case--but the case of a friend. Thirdly, that Geoffrey had some interest (of no harmless kind) in establishing the fact of his friend's marriage. Fourthly, that Anne's anxiety (as described by Blanche) to hear

the names of the gentlemen who were staying at Windygates, pointed, in all probability, to Geoffrey. Fifthly, that this last inference disturbed the second conclusion, and reopened the doubt whether Geoffrey had not been stating his own case, after all, under pretense of stating the case of a friend. Sixthly, that the one way of obtaining any enlightenment on this point, and on all the other points involved in mystery, was to go to Craig Fernie, and consult Mrs. Inchbare's experience during the period of Anne's residence at the inn. Sir Patrick's apology for keeping all this a secret from his niece followed. He had shrunk from agitating her on the subject until he could be sure of proving his conclusions to be true. The proof had been obtained; and he was now, therefore, ready to open his mind to Blanche without reserve.

"So much, my dear," proceeded Sir Patrick, "for those necessary explanations which are also the necessary nuisances of human intercourse. You now know as much as I did when I arrived at Craig Fernie--and you are, therefore, in a position to appreciate the value of my discoveries at the inn. Do you understand every thing, so far?"

"Perfectly!"

"Very good. I drove up to the inn; and--behold me closeted with Mrs. Inchbare in her own private parlor! (My reputation may or may not suffer, but Mrs. Inchbare's bones are above suspicion!) It was a long business, Blanche. A more sour-tempered, cunning, and distrustful witness I never examined in all my experience at the Bar. She would have upset the temper of any mortal man but a lawyer. We have such wonderful tempers in our profession; and we can be so aggravating when we like! In short, my dear, Mrs. Inchbare was a she-cat, and I was a he-cat--and I clawed the truth out of her at last. The result was well worth arriving at, as you shall see. Mr. Delamayn had described to me certain remarkable circumstances as taking place between a lady and a gentleman at an inn: the object of the parties being to pass themselves off at the time as man and wife. Every one of those circumstances, Blanche, occurred at Craig Fernie, between a lady and a gentleman, on the day when Miss Silvester disappeared from this house And--wait!--being pressed for her name, after the gentleman had left her behind him at the inn, the name the lady gave was, 'Mrs. Silvester.' What do you think of that?"

"Think! I'm bewildered--I can't realize it."

"It's a startling discovery, my dear child--there is no denying that. Shall I wait a little, and let you recover yourself?"

"No! no! Go on! The gentleman, uncle? The gentleman who was with Anne? Who is he? Not Mr. Delamayn?"

"Not Mr. Delamayn," said Sir Patrick. "If I have proved nothing else, I have proved that."

"What need was there to prove it? Mr. Delamayn went to London on the day of the lawn-party. And Arnold--"

"And Arnold went with him as far as the second station from this. Quite true! But how was I to know what Mr. Delamayn might have done after Arnold had left him? I could only make sure that he had not gone back privately to the inn, by getting the proof from Mrs. Inchbare."

"How did you get it?"

"I asked her to describe the gentleman who was with Miss Silvester. Mrs. Inchbare's description (vague as you will presently find it to be) completely exonerates that man," said Sir Patrick, pointing to Geoffrey still asleep in his chair. "He is not the person who passed Miss Silvester off as his wife at Craig Fernie. He spoke the truth when he described the case to me as the case of a friend."

"But who is the friend?" persisted Blanche. "That's what I want to know."

"That's what I want to know, too."

"Tell me exactly, uncle, what Mrs. Inchbare said. I have lived with Anne all my life. I must have seen the man somewhere."

"If you can identify him by Mrs. Inchbare's description," returned Sir Patrick, "you will be a great deal cleverer than I am. Here is the picture of the man, as painted by the landlady: Young; middle-sized; dark hair, eyes, and complexion; nice temper, pleasant way of speaking. Leave out 'young,' and the rest is the exact contrary of Mr. Delamayn. So far, Mrs. Inchbare guides us plainly enough. But how are we to apply her description to the right person? There must be, at the lowest computation, five hundred thousand men in England who are young, middle-sized, dark, nice-tempered, and pleasant spoken. One of the footmen here answers that description in every particular."

"And Arnold answers it," said Blanche--as a still stronger instance of the provoking vagueness of the description.

"And Arnold answers it," repeated Sir Patrick, quite agreeing with her.

They had barely said those words when Arnold himself appeared, approaching Sir Patrick with a pack of cards in his hand.

There--at the very moment when they had both guessed the truth, without feeling the slightest suspicion of it in their own minds--there stood Discovery, presenting itself unconsciously to eyes incapable of seeing it, in the person of the man who had passed Anne Silvester off as his wife at the Craig Fernie inn! The terrible caprice of Chance, the merciless irony of Circumstance, could go no further than this. The three had their feet on the brink of the precipice at that moment. And two of them were smiling at an odd coincidence; and one of them was shuffling a pack of cards!

"We have done with the Antiquities at last!" said Arnold; "and we are going to play at Whist. Sir Patrick, will you choose a card?"

"Too soon after dinner, my good fellow, for me. Play the first rubber, and then give me another chance. By-the-way," he added "Miss Silvester has been traced to Kirkandrew. How is it that you never saw her go by?"

"She can't have gone my way, Sir Patrick, or I must have seen her."

Having justified himself in those terms, he was recalled to the other end of the room by the whist-party, impatient for the cards which he had in his hand.

"What were we talking of when he interrupted us?" said Sir Patrick to Blanche.

"Of the man, uncle, who was with Miss Silvester at the inn."

"It's useless to pursue that inquiry, my dear, with nothing better than Mrs. Inchbare's description to help us."

Blanche looked round at the sleeping Geoffrey.

"And he knows!" she said. "It's maddening, uncle, to look at the brute snoring in his chair!"

Sir Patrick held up a warning hand. Before a word more could be said between them they were silenced again by another interruption.

The whist-party comprised Lady Lundie and the surgeon, playing as partners against Smith and Jones. Arnold sat behind the surgeon, taking a lesson in the game. One, Two, and Three, thus left to their own devices, naturally thought of the billiard-table; and, detecting Geoffrey asleep in his corner, advanced to disturb his slumbers, under the all-sufficing apology of "Pool." Geoffrey roused himself, and rubbed his eyes, and said, drowsily, "All right." As he rose, he looked at the opposite corner in which Sir Patrick and his niece were sitting. Blanche's self-possession, resolutely as she struggled to preserve it, was not strong enough to keep her eyes from turning toward Geoffrey with an expression which betrayed the reluctant interest that she now felt in him. He stopped, noticing something entirely new in the look with which the young lady was regarding him.

"Beg your pardon," said Geoffrey. "Do you wish to speak to me?"

Blanche's face flushed all over. Her uncle came to the rescue.

"Miss Lundie and I hope you have slept well Mr. Delamayn," said Sir Patrick, jocosely. "That's all."

"Oh? That's all?" said Geoffrey still looking at Blanche. "Beg your pardon again. Deuced long walk, and deuced heavy dinner. Natural consequence--a nap."

Sir Patrick eyed him closely. It was plain that he had been honestly puzzled at finding himself an object of special attention on Blanche's part. "See you in the billiard-room?" he said, carelessly, and followed his companions out of the room--as usual, without waiting for an answer.

"Mind what you are about," said Sir Patrick to his niece. "That man is quicker than he looks. We commit a serious mistake if we put him on his guard at starting."

"It sha'n't happen again, uncle," said Blanche. "But think of his being in Anne's confidence, and of my being shut out of it!"

"In his friend's confidence, you mean, my dear; and (if we only avoid awakening his suspicion) there is no knowing how soon he may say or do something which may show us who his friend is."

"But he is going back to his brother's to-morrow--he said so at dinner-time."

"So much the better. He will be out of the way of seeing strange things in a certain young lady's face. His brother's house is within easy reach of this; and I am his legal adviser. My experience tells me that he has not done consulting me yet--and that he will let out something more next time. So much for our chance of seeing the light through Mr. Delamayn--if we can't see it in any other way. And that is not our only chance, remember. I have something to tell you about Bishopriggs and the lost letter."

"Is it found?"

"No. I satisfied myself about that--I had it searched for, under my own eye. The letter is stolen, Blanche; and Bishopriggs has got it. I have left a line for him, in Mrs. Inchbare's care. The old rascal is missed already by the visitors at the inn, just as I told you he would be. His mistress is feeling the penalty of having been fool enough to vent her ill temper on her head-waiter. She lays the whole blame of the quarrel on Miss Silvester, of course. Bishopriggs neglected every body at the inn to wait on Miss Silvester. Bishopriggs was insolent on being remonstrated with, and Miss Silvester encouraged him--and so on. The result will be--now Miss Silvester has gone--that Bishopriggs will return to Craig Fernie before the autumn is over. We are sailing with wind and tide, my dear. Come, and learn to play whist."

He rose to join the card-players. Blanche detained him.

"You haven't told me one thing yet," she said. "Whoever the man may be, is Anne married to him?"

"Whoever the man may be," returned Sir Patrick, "he had better not attempt to marry any body else."

So the niece unconsciously put the question, and so the uncle unconsciously gave the answer on which depended the whole happiness of Blanche's life to come, The "man!" How lightly they both talked of the "man!" Would nothing happen to rouse the faintest suspicion--in their minds or in Arnold's mind--that Arnold was the "man" himself?

"You mean that she is married?" said Blanche.

"I don't go as far as that."

"You mean that she is not married?"

"I don't go so far as that."

"Oh! the law!"

"Provoking, isn't it, my dear? I can tell you, professionally, that (in my opinion) she has grounds to go on if she claims to be the man's wife. That is what I meant by my answer; and, until we know more, that is all I can say."

"When shall we know more? When shall we get the telegram?"

"Not for some hours yet. Come, and learn to play whist."

"I think I would rather talk to Arnold, uncle, if you don't mind."

"By all means! But don't talk to him about what I have been telling you to-night. He and Mr. Delamayn are old associates, remember; and he might blunder into telling his friend what his friend had better not know. Sad (isn't it?) for me to be instilling these lessons of duplicity into the youthful mind. A wise person once said, 'The older a man gets the worse he gets.' That wise person, my dear, had me in his eye, and was perfectly right."

He mitigated the pain of that confession with a pinch of snuff, and went to the whist table to wait until the end of the rubber gave him a place at the game.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH. - FORWARD.

BLANCHE found her lover as attentive as usual to her slightest wish, but not in his customary good spirits. He pleaded fatigue, after his long watch at the cross-roads, as an excuse for his depression. As long as there was any hope of a reconciliation with Geoffrey, he was unwilling to tell Blanche what had happened that afternoon. The hope grew fainter and fainter as the evening advanced. Arnold purposely suggested a visit to the billiard-room, and joined the game, with Blanche, to give Geoffrey an opportunity of saying the few gracious words which would have made them friends again. Geoffrey never spoke the words; he obstinately ignored Arnold's presence in the room.

At the card-table the whist went on interminably. Lady Lundie, Sir Patrick, and the surgeon, were all inveterate players, evenly matched. Smith and Jones (joining the game alternately) were aids to whist, exactly as they were aids to conversation. The same safe and modest mediocrity of style distinguished the proceedings of these two gentlemen in all the affairs of life.

The time wore on to midnight. They went to bed late and they rose late at Windygates House. Under that hospitable roof, no intrusive hints, in the shape of flat candlesticks exhibiting themselves with ostentatious virtue on side-tables, hurried the guest to his room; no vile bell rang him ruthlessly out of bed the next morning, and insisted on his breakfasting at a given hour. Life has surely hardships enough that are inevitable without gratuitously adding the hardship of absolute government, administered by a clock?

It was a quarter past twelve when Lady Lundie rose blandly from the whist-table, and said that she supposed somebody must set the example of going to bed. Sir Patrick and Smith, the surgeon and Jones, agreed on a last rubber. Blanche vanished while her stepmother's eye was on her; and appeared again in the drawing-room, when Lady Lundie was safe in the hands of her maid. Nobody followed the example of the mistress of the house but Arnold. He left the billiard-room with the certainty that it was all over now between Geoffrey and himself. Not even the attraction of Blanche proved strong enough to detain him that night. He went his way to bed.

It was past one o'clock. The final rubber was at an end, the accounts were settled at the card-table; the surgeon had strolled into the billiard-room, and Smith and Jones had followed him, when Duncan came in, at last, with the

telegram in his hand.

Blanche turned from the broad, calm autumn moonlight which had drawn her to the window, and looked over her uncle's shoulder while he opened the telegram.

She read the first line--and that was enough. The whole scaffolding of hope built round that morsel of paper fell to the ground in an instant. The train from Kirkcaldy had reached Edinburgh at the usual time. Every passenger in it had passed under the eyes of the police, and nothing had been seen of any person who answered the description given of Anne!

Sir Patrick pointed to the two last sentences in the telegram: "Inquiries telegraphed to Falkirk. If with any result, you shall know."

"We must hope for the best, Blanche. They evidently suspect her of having got out at the junction of the two railways for the purpose of giving the telegraph the slip. There is no help for it. Go to bed, child--go to bed."

Blanche kissed her uncle in silence and went away. The bright young face was sad with the first hopeless sorrow which the old man had yet seen in it. His niece's parting look dwelt painfully on his mind when he was up in his room, with the faithful Duncan getting him ready for his bed.

"This is a bad business, Duncan. I don't like to say so to Miss Lundie; but I greatly fear the governess has baffled us."

"It seems likely, Sir Patrick. The poor young lady looks quite heart-broken about it."

"You noticed that too, did you? She has lived all her life, you see, with Miss Silvester; and there is a very strong attachment between them. I am uneasy about my niece, Duncan. I am afraid this disappointment will have a serious effect on her."

"She's young, Sir Patrick."

"Yes, my friend, she's young; but the young (when they are good for any thing) have warm hearts. Winter hasn't stolen on them, Duncan! And they feel keenly."

"I think there's reason to hope, Sir, that Miss Lundie may get over it more easily than you suppose."

"What reason, pray?"

"A person in my position can hardly venture to speak freely, Sir, on a delicate matter of this kind."

Sir Patrick's temper flashed out, half-seriously, half-whimsically, as usual.

"Is that a snap at Me, you old dog? If I am not your friend, as well as your master, who is? Am I in the habit of keeping any of my harmless fellow-creatures at a distance? I despise the cant of modern Liberalism; but it's not the less true that I have, all my life, protested against the inhuman separation of classes in England. We are, in that respect, brag as we may of our national virtue, the most unchristian people in the civilized world."

"I beg your pardon, Sir Patrick--"

"God help me! I'm talking politics at this time of night! It's your fault, Duncan. What do you mean by casting my station in my teeth, because I can't put my night-cap on comfortably till you have brushed my hair? I have a good mind to get up and brush yours. There! there! I'm uneasy about my niece--nervous irritability, my good fellow, that's all. Let's hear what you have to say about Miss Lundie. And go on with my hair. And don't be a humbug."

"I was about to remind you, Sir Patrick, that Miss Lundie has another interest in her life to turn to. If this matter of Miss Silvester ends badly--and I own it begins to look as if it would--I should hurry my niece's marriage, Sir, and see if that wouldn't console her."

Sir Patrick started under the gentle discipline of the hair-brush in Duncan's hand.

"That's very sensibly put," said the old gentleman. "Duncan! you are, what I call, a clear-minded man. Well worth thinking of, old Truepenny! If the worst comes to the worst, well worth thinking of!"

It was not the first time that Duncan's steady good sense had struck light, under the form of a new thought, in his master's mind. But never yet had he wrought such mischief as the mischief which he had innocently done now. He had sent Sir Patrick to bed with the fatal idea of hastening the marriage of Arnold and Blanche.

The situation of affairs at Windygates--now that Anne had apparently obliterated all trace of herself--was becoming serious. The one chance on which the discovery of Arnold's position depended, was the chance that accident might reveal the truth in the lapse of time. In this posture of circumstances, Sir Patrick now resolved--if nothing happened to relieve Blanche's anxiety in the course of the week--to advance the celebration of the marriage from the end of the autumn (as originally contemplated) to the first fortnight of the ensuing month. As dates then stood, the change led (so far as free scope for the development of accident was concerned) to this serious result. It abridged a lapse of three months into an interval of three weeks.

The next morning came; and Blanche marked it as a memorable morning, by committing an act of imprudence, which struck away one more of the chances of discovery that had existed, before the arrival of the Edinburgh telegram on the previous day.

She had passed a sleepless night; fevered in mind and body; thinking, hour after hour, of nothing but Anne. At sunrise she could endure it no longer. Her power to control herself was completely exhausted; her own impulses led her as they pleased. She got up, determined not to let Geoffrey leave the house without risking an effort to make him reveal what he knew about Anne. It was nothing less than downright treason to Sir Patrick to act on her own responsibility in this way. She knew it was wrong; she was heartily ashamed of herself for doing it. But the demon that possesses women with a recklessness all their own, at the critical moments of their lives, had got her--and she did it.

Geoffrey had arranged overnight, to breakfast early, by himself, and to walk the ten miles to his brother's house; sending a servant to fetch his luggage later in the day.

He had got on his hat; he was standing in the hall, searching his pocket for his second self, the pipe--when Blanche suddenly appeared from the morning-room, and placed herself between him and the house door.

"Up early--eh?" said Geoffrey. "I'm off to my brother's."

She made no reply. He looked at her closer. The girl's eyes were trying to read his face, with an utter carelessness of concealment, which forbade (even to his mind) all unworthy interpretation of her motive for stopping him

on his way out.

"Any commands for me?" he inquired

This time she answered him. "I have something to ask you," she said.

He smiled graciously, and opened his tobacco-pouch. He was fresh and strong after his night's sleep--healthy and handsome and good-humored. The house-maids had had a peep at him that morning, and had wished--like Desdemona, with a difference--that "Heaven had made all three of them such a man."

"Well," he said, "what is it?"

She put her question, without a single word of preface--purposely to surprise him.

"Mr. Delamayn," she said, "do you know where Anne Silvester is this morning?"

He was filling his pipe as she spoke, and he dropped some of the tobacco on the floor. Instead of answering before he picked up the tobacco he answered after--in surly self-possession, and in one word--"No."

"Do you know nothing about her?"

He devoted himself doggedly to the filling of his pipe. "Nothing."

"On your word of honor, as a gentleman?"

"On my word of honor, as a gentleman."

He put back his tobacco-pouch in his pocket. His handsome face was as hard as stone. His clear blue eyes defied all the girls in England put together to see into his mind. "Have you done, Miss Lundie?" he asked, suddenly changing to a bantering politeness of tone and manner.

Blanche saw that it was hopeless--saw that she had compromised her own interests by her own headlong act. Sir Patrick's warning words came back reproachfully to her now when it was too late. "We commit a serious mistake if we put him on his guard at starting."

There was but one course to take now. "Yes," she said. "I have done."

"My turn now," rejoined Geoffrey. "You want to know where Miss Silvester is. Why do you ask Me?"

Blanche did all that could be done toward repairing the error that she had committed. She kept Geoffrey as far away as Geoffrey had kept her from the truth.

"I happen to know," she replied "that Miss Silvester left the place at which she had been staying about the time when you went out walking yesterday. And I thought you might have seen her."

"Oh? That's the reason--is it?" said Geoffrey, with a smile.

The smile stung Blanche's sensitive temper to the quick. She made a final effort to control herself, before her indignation got the better of her.

"I have no more to say, Mr. Delamayn." With that reply she turned her back on him, and closed the door of the morning-room between them.

Geoffrey descended the house steps and lit his pipe. He was not at the slightest loss, on this occasion, to account for what had happened. He assumed at once that Arnold had taken a mean revenge on him after his conduct of the day before, and had told the whole secret of his errand at Craig Fernie to Blanche. The thing would get next, no doubt, to Sir Patrick's ears; and Sir Patrick would thereupon be probably the first person who revealed to Arnold the position in which he had placed himself with Anne. All right! Sir Patrick would be an excellent witness to appeal to, when the scandal broke out, and when the time came for repudiating Anne's claim on him as the barefaced imposture of a woman who was married already to another man. He puffed away unconcernedly at his pipe, and started, at his swinging, steady pace, for his brother's house.

Blanche remained alone in the morning-room. The prospect of getting at the truth, by means of what Geoffrey might say on the next occasion when he consulted Sir Patrick, was a prospect that she herself had closed from that moment. She sat down in despair by the window. It commanded a view of the little side-terrace which had been Anne's favorite walk at Windygates. With weary eyes and aching heart the poor child looked at the familiar place; and asked herself, with the bitter repentance that comes too late, if she had destroyed the last chance of finding Anne!

She sat passively at the window, while the hours of the morning wore on,

until the postman came. Before the servant could take the letter bag she was in the hall to receive it. Was it possible to hope that the bag had brought tidings of Anne? She sorted the letters; and lighted suddenly on a letter to herself. It bore the Kirkandrew postmark, and it was addressed to her in Anne's handwriting.

She tore the letter open, and read these lines:

"I have left you forever, Blanche. God bless and reward you! God make you a happy woman in all your life to come! Cruel as you will think me, love, I have never been so truly your sister as I am now. I can only tell you this--I can never tell you more. Forgive me, and forget me, our lives are parted lives from this day."

Going down to breakfast about his usual hour, Sir Patrick missed Blanche, whom he was accustomed to see waiting for him at the table at that time. The room was empty; the other members of the household having all finished their morning meal. Sir Patrick disliked breakfasting alone. He sent Duncan with a message, to be given to Blanche's maid.

The maid appeared in due time. Miss Lundie was unable to leave her room. She sent a letter to her uncle, with her love--and begged he would read it.

Sir Patrick opened the letter and saw what Anne had written to Blanche.

He waited a little, reflecting, with evident pain and anxiety, on what he had read--then opened his own letters, and hurriedly looked at the signatures. There was nothing for him from his friend, the sheriff, at Edinburgh, and no communication from the railway, in the shape of a telegram. He had decided, overnight, on waiting till the end of the week before he interfered in the matter of Blanche's marriage. The events of the morning determined him on not waiting another day. Duncan returned to the breakfast-room to pour out his master's coffee. Sir Patrick sent him away again with a second message,

"Do you know where Lady Lundie is, Duncan?"

"Yes, Sir Patrick."

"My compliments to her ladyship. If she is not otherwise engaged, I shall be glad to speak to her privately in an hour's time."

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH. - DROPPED.

SIR PATRICK made a bad breakfast. Blanche's absence fretted him, and Anne Silvester's letter puzzled him.

He read it, short as it was, a second time, and a third. If it meant any thing, it meant that the motive at the bottom of Anne's flight was to accomplish the sacrifice of herself to the happiness of Blanche. She had parted for life from his niece for his niece's sake! What did this mean? And how was it to be reconciled with Anne's position--as described to him by Mrs. Inchbare during his visit to Craig Fernie?

All Sir Patrick's ingenuity, and all Sir Patrick's experience, failed to find so much as the shadow of an answer to that question.

While he was still pondering over the letter, Arnold and the surgeon entered the breakfast-room together.

"Have you heard about Blanche?" asked Arnold, excitedly. "She is in no danger, Sir Patrick--the worst of it is over now."

The surgeon interposed before Sir Patrick could appeal to him.

"Mr. Brinkworth's interest in the young lady a little exaggerates the state of the case," he said. "I have seen her, at Lady Lundie's request; and I can assure you that there is not the slightest reason for any present alarm. Miss Lundie has had a nervous attack, which has yielded to the simplest domestic remedies. The only anxiety you need feel is connected with the management of her in the future. She is suffering from some mental distress, which it is not for me, but for her friends, to alleviate and remove. If you can turn her thoughts from the painful subject--whatever it may be--on which they are dwelling now, you will do all that needs to be done." He took up a newspaper from the table, and strolled out into the garden, leaving Sir Patrick and Arnold together.

"You heard that?" said Sir Patrick.

"Is he right, do you think?" asked Arnold.

"Right? Do you suppose a man gets his reputation by making mistakes? You're one of the new generation, Master Arnold. You can all of you stare at

a famous man; but you haven't an atom of respect for his fame. If Shakspeare came to life again, and talked of playwriting, the first pretentious nobody who sat opposite at dinner would differ with him as composedly as he might differ with you and me. Veneration is dead among us; the present age has buried it, without a stone to mark the place. So much for that! Let's get back to Blanche. I suppose you can guess what the painful subject is that's dwelling on her mind? Miss Silvester has baffled me, and baffled the Edinburgh police. Blanche discovered that we had failed last night and Blanche received that letter this morning."

He pushed Anne's letter across the breakfast-table.

Arnold read it, and handed it back without a word. Viewed by the new light in which he saw Geoffrey's character after the quarrel on the heath, the letter conveyed but one conclusion to his mind. Geoffrey had deserted her.

"Well?" said Sir Patrick. "Do you understand what it means?"

"I understand Blanche's wretchedness when she read it."

He said no more than that. It was plain that no information which he could afford--even if he had considered himself at liberty to give it--would be of the slightest use in assisting Sir Patrick to trace Miss Silvester, under present circumstances. There was--unhappily--no temptation to induce him to break the honorable silence which he had maintained thus far. And--more unfortunately still--assuming the temptation to present itself, Arnold's capacity to resist it had never been so strong a capacity as it was now.

To the two powerful motives which had hitherto tied his tongue--respect for Anne's reputation, and reluctance to reveal to Blanche the deception which he had been compelled to practice on her at the inn--to these two motives there was now added a third. The meanness of betraying the confidence which Geoffrey had reposed in him would be doubled meanness if he proved false to his trust after Geoffrey had personally insulted him. The paltry revenge which that false friend had unhesitatingly suspected him of taking was a revenge of which Arnold's nature was simply incapable. Never had his lips been more effectually sealed than at this moment--when his whole future depended on Sir Patrick's discovering the part that he had played in past events at Craig Fernie.

"Yes! yes!" resumed Sir Patrick, impatiently. "Blanche's distress is intelligible enough. But here is my niece apparently answerable for this unhappy woman's disappearance. Can you explain what my niece has got to do with

it?"

"I! Blanche herself is completely mystified. How should I know?"

Answering in those terms, he spoke with perfect sincerity. Anne's vague distrust of the position in which they had innocently placed themselves at the inn had produced no corresponding effect on Arnold at the time. He had not regarded it; he had not even understood it. As a necessary result, not the faintest suspicion of the motive under which Anne was acting existed in his mind now.

Sir Patrick put the letter into his pocket-book, and abandoned all further attempt at interpreting the meaning of it in despair.

"Enough, and more than enough, of groping in the dark," he said. "One point is clear to me after what has happened up stairs this morning. We must accept the position in which Miss Silvester has placed us. I shall give up all further effort to trace her from this moment."

"Surely that will be a dreadful disappointment to Blanche, Sir Patrick?"

"I don't deny it. We must face that result."

"If you are sure there is nothing else to be done, I suppose we must."

"I am not sure of anything of the sort, Master Arnold! There are two chances still left of throwing light on this matter, which are both of them independent of any thing that Miss Silvester can do to keep it in the dark."

"Then why not try them, Sir? It seems hard to drop Miss Silvester when she is in trouble."

"We can't help her against her own will," rejoined Sir Patrick. "And we can't run the risk, after that nervous attack this morning, of subjecting Blanche to any further suspense. I have thought of my niece's interests throughout this business; and if I now change my mind, and decline to agitate her by more experiments, ending (quite possibly) in more failures, it is because I am thinking of her interests still. I have no other motive. However numerous my weaknesses may be, ambition to distinguish myself as a detective policeman is not one of them. The case, from the police point of view, is by no means a lost case. I drop it, nevertheless, for Blanche's sake. Instead of encouraging her thoughts to dwell on this melancholy business, we must apply the remedy suggested by our medical friend."

"How is that to be done?" asked Arnold.

The sly twist of humor began to show itself in Sir Patrick's face.

"Has she nothing to think of in the future, which is a pleasanter subject of reflection than the loss of her friend?" he asked. "You are interested, my young gentleman, in the remedy that is to cure Blanche. You are one of the drugs in the moral prescription. Can you guess what it is?"

Arnold started to his feet, and brightened into a new being.

"Perhaps you object to be hurried?" said Sir Patrick.

"Object! If Blanche will only consent, I'll take her to church as soon as she comes down stairs!"

"Thank you!" said Sir Patrick, dryly. "Mr. Arnold Brinkworth, may you always be as ready to take Time by the forelock as you are now! Sit down again; and don't talk nonsense. It is just possible--if Blanche consents (as you say), and if we can hurry the lawyers--that you may be married in three weeks' or a month's time."

"What have the lawyers got to do with it?"

"My good fellow, this is not a marriage in a novel! This is the most unromantic affair of the sort that ever happened. Here are a young gentleman and a young lady, both rich people; both well matched in birth and character; one of age, and the other marrying with the full consent and approval of her guardian. What is the consequence of this purely prosaic state of things? Lawyers and settlements, of course!"

"Come into the library, Sir Patrick; and I'll soon settle the settlements! A bit of paper, and a dip of ink. 'I hereby give every blessed farthing I have got in the world to my dear Blanche.' Sign that; stick a wafer on at the side; clap your finger on the wafer; 'I deliver this as my act and deed;' and there it is--done!"

"Is it, really? You are a born legislator. You create and codify your own system all in a breath. Moses-Justinian-Mahomet, give me your arm! There is one atom of sense in what you have just said. 'Come into the library'--is a suggestion worth attending to. Do you happen, among your other superfluities, to have such a thing as a lawyer about you?"

"I have got two. One in London, and one in Edinburgh."

"We will take the nearest of the two, because we are in a hurry. Who is the Edinburgh lawyer? Pringle of Pitt Street? Couldn't be a better man. Come and write to him. You have given me your abstract of a marriage settlement with the brevity of an ancient Roman. I scorn to be outdone by an amateur lawyer. Here is my abstract: You are just and generous to Blanche; Blanche is just and generous to you; and you both combine to be just and generous together to your children. There is a model settlement! and there are your instructions to Pringle of Pitt Street! Can you do it by yourself? No; of course you can't. Now don't be slovenly-minded! See the points in their order as they come. You are going to be married; you state to whom, you add that I am the lady's guardian; you give the name and address of my lawyer in Edinburgh; you write your instructions plainly in the fewest words, and leave details to your legal adviser; you refer the lawyers to each other; you request that the draft settlements be prepared as speedily as possible, and you give your address at this house. There are the heads. Can't you do it now? Oh, the rising generation! Oh, the progress we are making in these enlightened modern times! There! there! you can marry Blanche, and make her happy, and increase the population--and all without knowing how to write the English language. One can only say with the learned Bevorskius, looking out of his window at the illimitable loves of the sparrows, 'How merciful is Heaven to its creatures!' Take up the pen. I'll dictate! I'll dictate!"

Sir Patrick read the letter over, approved of it, and saw it safe in the box for the post. This done, he peremptorily forbade Arnold to speak to his niece on the subject of the marriage without his express permission. "There's somebody else's consent to be got," he said, "besides Blanche's consent and mine."

"Lady Lundie?"

"Lady Lundie. Strictly speaking, I am the only authority. But my sister-in-law is Blanche's step-mother, and she is appointed guardian in the event of my death. She has a right to be consulted--in courtesy, if not in law. Would you like to do it?"

Arnold's face fell. He looked at Sir Patrick in silent dismay.

"What! you can't even speak to such a perfectly pliable person as Lady Lundie? You may have been a very useful fellow at sea. A more helpless young man I never met with on shore. Get out with you into the garden

among the other sparrows! Somebody must confront her ladyship. And if you won't--I must."

He pushed Arnold out of the library, and applied meditatively to the knob of his cane. His gayety disappeared, now that he was alone. His experience of Lady Lundie's character told him that, in attempting to win her approval to any scheme for hurrying Blanche's marriage, he was undertaking no easy task. "I suppose," mused Sir Patrick, thinking of his late brother--"I suppose poor Tom had some way of managing her. How did he do it, I wonder? If she had been the wife of a bricklayer, she is the sort of woman who would have been kept in perfect order by a vigorous and regular application of her husband's fist. But Tom wasn't a bricklayer. I wonder how Tom did it?" After a little hard thinking on this point Sir Patrick gave up the problem as beyond human solution. "It must be done," he concluded. "And my own mother-wit must help me to do it."

In that resigned frame of mind he knocked at the door of Lady Lundie's boudoir.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH. - OUTWITTED.

SIR PATRICK found his sister-in-law immersed in domestic business. Her ladyship's correspondence and visiting list, her ladyship's household bills and ledgers; her ladyship's Diary and Memorandum-book (bound in scarlet morocco); her ladyship's desk, envelope-case, match-box, and taper candlestick (all in ebony and silver); her ladyship herself, presiding over her responsibilities, and wielding her materials, equal to any calls of emergency, beautifully dressed in correct morning costume, blessed with perfect health both of the secretions and the principles; absolutely void of vice, and formidably full of virtue, presented, to every properly-constituted mind, the most imposing spectacle known to humanity--the British Matron on her throne, asking the world in general, When will you produce the like of Me?

"I am afraid I disturb you," said Sir Patrick. "I am a perfectly idle person. Shall I look in a little later?"

Lady Lundie put her hand to her head, and smiled faintly.

"A little pressure here, Sir Patrick. Pray sit down. Duty finds me earnest; Duty finds me cheerful; Duty finds me accessible. From a poor, weak woman, Duty must expect no more. Now what is it?" (Her ladyship consulted her scarlet memorandum-book.) "I have got it here, under its proper head, distinguished by initial letters. P.--the poor. No. H.M.--heathen missions. No. V.T.A.--Visitors to arrive. No. P. I. P.--Here it is: private interview with Patrick. Will you forgive me the little harmless familiarity of omitting your title? Thank you! You are always so good. I am quite at your service when you like to begin. If it's any thing painful, pray don't hesitate. I am quite prepared."

With that intimation her ladyship threw herself back in her chair, with her elbows on the arms, and her fingers joined at the tips, as if she was receiving a deputation. "Yes?" she said, interrogatively. Sir Patrick paid a private tribute of pity to his late brother's memory, and entered on his business.

"We won't call it a painful matter," he began. "Let us say it's a matter of domestic anxiety. Blanche--"

Lady Lundie emitted a faint scream, and put her hand over her eyes.

"Must you?" cried her ladyship, in a tone of touching remonstrance. "Oh, Sir Patrick, must you?"

"Yes. I must."

Lady Lundie's magnificent eyes looked up at that hidden court of human appeal which is lodged in the ceiling. The hidden court looked down at Lady Lundie, and saw--Duty advertising itself in the largest capital letters.

"Go on, Sir Patrick. The motto of woman is Self-sacrifice. You sha'n't see how you distress me. Go on."

Sir Patrick went on impenetrably--without betraying the slightest expression of sympathy or surprise.

"I was about to refer to the nervous attack from which Blanche has suffered this morning," he said. "May I ask whether you have been informed of the cause to which the attack is attributable?"

"There!" exclaimed Lady Lundie with a sudden bound in her chair, and a sudden development of vocal power to correspond. "The one thing I shrank from speaking of! the cruel, cruel, cruel behavior I was prepared to pass over! And Sir Patrick hints on it! Innocently--don't let me do an injustice--innocently hints on it!"

"Hints on what, my dear Madam?"

"Blanche's conduct to me this morning. Blanche's heartless secrecy. Blanche's undutiful silence. I repeat the words: Heartless secrecy. Undutiful silence."

"Allow me for one moment, Lady Lundie--"

"Allow me, Sir Patrick! Heaven knows how unwilling I am to speak of it. Heaven knows that not a word of reference to it escaped my lips. But you leave me no choice now. As mistress of the household, as a Christian woman, as the widow of your dear brother, as a mother to this misguided girl, I must state the facts. I know you mean well; I know you wish to spare me. Quite useless! I must state the facts."

Sir Patrick bowed, and submitted. (If he had only been a bricklayer! and if Lady Lundie had not been, what her ladyship unquestionably was, the strongest person of the two!)

"Permit me to draw a veil, for your sake," said Lady Lundie, "over the horrors--I can not, with the best wish to spare you, conscientiously call them by any other name--the horrors that took place up stairs. The moment I heard that Blanche was ill I was at my post. Duty will always find me ready, Sir Patrick, to my dying day. Shocking as the whole thing was, I presided calmly over the screams and sobs of my step-daughter. I closed my ears to the profane violence of her language. I set the necessary example, as an English gentlewoman at the head of her household. It was only when I distinctly heard the name of a person, never to be mentioned again in my family circle, issue (if I may use the expression) from Blanche's lips that I began to be really alarmed. I said to my maid: 'Hopkins, this is not Hysteria. This is a possession of the devil. Fetch the chloroform.'"

Chloroform, applied in the capacity of an exorcism, was entirely new to Sir Patrick. He preserved his gravity with considerable difficulty. Lady Lundie went on:

"Hopkins is an excellent person--but Hopkins has a tongue. She met our distinguished medical guest in the corridor, and told him. He was so good as to come to the door. I was shocked to trouble him to act in his professional capacity while he was a visitor, an honored visitor, in my house. Besides, I considered it more a case for a clergyman than for a medical man. However, there was no help for it after Hopkins's tongue. I requested our eminent friend to favor us with--I think the exact scientific term is--a Prognosis. He took the purely material view which was only to be expected from a person in his profession. He prognosed--am I right? Did he prognose? or did he diagnose? A habit of speaking correctly is so important, Sir Patrick! and I should be so grieved to mislead you!"

"Never mind, Lady Lundie! I have heard the medical report. Don't trouble yourself to repeat it."

"Don't trouble myself to repeat it?" echoed Lady Lundie--with her dignity up in arms at the bare prospect of finding her remarks abridged. "Ah, Sir Patrick! that little constitutional impatience of yours!--Oh, dear me! how often you must have given way to it, and how often you must have regretted it, in your time!"

"My dear lady! if you wish to repeat the report, why not say so, in plain words? Don't let me hurry you. Let us have the prognosis, by all means."

Lady Lundie shook her head compassionately, and smiled with angelic

sadness. "Our little besetting sins!" she said. "What slaves we are to our little besetting sins! Take a turn in the room--do!"

Any ordinary man would have lost his temper. But the law (as Sir Patrick had told his niece) has a special temper of its own. Without exhibiting the smallest irritation, Sir Patrick dextrously applied his sister-in-law's blister to his sister-in-law herself.

"What an eye you have!" he said. "I was impatient. I am impatient. I am dying to know what Blanche said to you when she got better?"

The British Matron froze up into a matron of stone on the spot.

"Nothing!" answered her ladyship, with a vicious snap of her teeth, as if she had tried to bite the word before it escaped her.

"Nothing!" exclaimed Sir Patrick.

"Nothing," repeated Lady Lundie, with her most formidable emphasis of look and tone. "I applied all the remedies with my own hands; I cut her laces with my own scissors, I completely wetted her head through with cold water; I remained with her until she was quite exhausted--I took her in my arms, and folded her to my bosom; I sent every body out of the room; I said, 'Dear child, confide in me.' And how were my advances--my motherly advances--met? I have already told you. By heartless secrecy. By undutiful silence."

Sir Patrick pressed the blister a little closer to the skin. "She was probably afraid to speak," he said.

"Afraid? Oh!" cried Lady Lundie, distrusting the evidence of her own senses. "You can't have said that? I have evidently misapprehended you. You didn't really say, afraid?"

"I said she was probably afraid--"

"Stop! I can't be told to my face that I have failed to do my duty by Blanche. No, Sir Patrick! I can bear a great deal; but I can't bear that. After having been more than a mother to your dear brother's child; after having been an elder sister to Blanche; after having toiled--I say toiled, Sir Patrick!--to cultivate her intelligence (with the sweet lines of the poet ever present to my memory: 'Delightful task to rear the tender mind, and teach the young idea how to shoot!'); after having done all I have done--a place in the carriage only yesterday, and a visit to the most interesting relic of feudal times in

Perthshire--after having sacrificed all I have sacrificed, to be told that I have behaved in such a manner to Blanche as to frighten her when I ask her to confide in me, is a little too cruel. I have a sensitive--an unduly sensitive nature, dear Sir Patrick. Forgive me for wincing when I am wounded. Forgive me for feeling it when the wound is dealt me by a person whom I revere."

Her ladyship put her handkerchief to her eyes. Any other man would have taken off the blister. Sir Patrick pressed it harder than ever.

"You quite mistake me," he replied. "I meant that Blanche was afraid to tell you the true cause of her illness. The true cause is anxiety about Miss Silvester."

Lady Lundie emitted another scream--a loud scream this time--and closed her eyes in horror.

"I can run out of the house," cried her ladyship, wildly. "I can fly to the uttermost corners of the earth; but I can not hear that person's name mentioned! No, Sir Patrick! not in my presence! not in my room! not while I am mistress at Windygates House!"

"I am sorry to say any thing that is disagreeable to you, Lady Lundie. But the nature of my errand here obliges me to touch--as lightly as possible--on something which has happened in your house without your knowledge."

Lady Lundie suddenly opened her eyes, and became the picture of attention. A casual observer might have supposed her ladyship to be not wholly inaccessible to the vulgar emotion of curiosity.

"A visitor came to Windygates yesterday, while we were all at lunch," proceeded Sir Patrick. "She--"

Lady Lundie seized the scarlet memorandum-book, and stopped her brother-in-law, before he could get any further. Her ladyship's next words escaped her lips spasmodically, like words let at intervals out of a trap.

"I undertake--as a woman accustomed to self-restraint, Sir Patrick--I undertake to control myself, on one condition. I won't have the name mentioned. I won't have the sex mentioned. Say, 'The Person,' if you please. 'The Person,'" continued Lady Lundie, opening her memorandum-book and taking up her pen, "committed an audacious invasion of my premises yesterday?"

Sir Patrick bowed. Her ladyship made a note--a fiercely-penned note that scratched the paper viciously--and then proceeded to examine her brother-in-law, in the capacity of witness.

"What part of my house did 'The Person' invade? Be very careful, Sir Patrick! I propose to place myself under the protection of a justice of the peace; and this is a memorandum of my statement. The library--did I understand you to say? Just so--the library."

"Add," said Sir Patrick, with another pressure on the blister, "that The Person had an interview with Blanche in the library."

Lady Lundie's pen suddenly stuck in the paper, and scattered a little shower of ink-drops all round it. "The library," repeated her ladyship, in a voice suggestive of approaching suffocation. "I undertake to control myself, Sir Patrick! Any thing missing from the library?"

"Nothing missing, Lady Lundie, but The Person herself. She--"

"No, Sir Patrick! I won't have it! In the name of my own sex, I won't have it!"

"Pray pardon me--I forgot that 'she' was a prohibited pronoun on the present occasion. The Person has written a farewell letter to Blanche, and has gone nobody knows where. The distress produced by these events is alone answerable for what has happened to Blanche this morning. If you bear that in mind--and if you remember what your own opinion is of Miss Silvester--you will understand why Blanche hesitated to admit you into her confidence."

There he waited for a reply. Lady Lundie was too deeply absorbed in completing her memorandum to be conscious of his presence in the room.

"'Carriage to be at the door at two-thirty,'" said Lady Lundie, repeating the final words of the memorandum while she wrote them. "'Inquire for the nearest justice of the peace, and place the privacy of Windygates under the protection of the law.'--I beg your pardon!" exclaimed her ladyship, becoming conscious again of Sir Patrick's presence. "Have I missed any thing particularly painful? Pray mention it if I have!"

"You have missed nothing of the slightest importance," returned Sir Patrick. "I have placed you in possession of facts which you had a right to know; and we have now only to return to our medical friend's report on Blanche's health. You were about to favor me, I think, with the Prognosis?"

"Diagnosis!" said her ladyship, spitefully. "I had forgotten at the time--I remember now. Prognosis is entirely wrong."

"I sit corrected, Lady Lundie. Diagnosis."

"You have informed me, Sir Patrick, that you were already acquainted with the Diagnosis. It is quite needless for me to repeat it now."

"I was anxious to correct my own impression, my dear lady, by comparing it with yours."

"You are very good. You are a learned man. I am only a poor ignorant woman. Your impression can not possibly require correcting by mine."

"My impression, Lady Lundie, was that our so friend recommended moral, rather than medical, treatment for Blanche. If we can turn her thoughts from the painful subject on which they are now dwelling, we shall do all that is needful. Those were his own words, as I remember them. Do you confirm me?"

"Can I presume to dispute with you, Sir Patrick? You are a master of refined irony, I know. I am afraid it's all thrown away on poor me."

(The law kept its wonderful temper! The law met the most exasperating of living women with a counter-power of defensive aggravation all its own!)

"I take that as confirming me, Lady Lundie. Thank you. Now, as to the method of carrying out our friend's advice. The method seems plain. All we can do to divert Blanche's mind is to turn Blanche's attention to some other subject of reflection less painful than the subject which occupies her now. Do you agree, so far?"

"Why place the whole responsibility on my shoulders?" inquired Lady Lundie.

"Out of profound deference for your opinion," answered Sir Patrick. "Strictly speaking, no doubt, any serious responsibility rests with me. I am Blanche's guardian--"

"Thank God!" cried Lady Lundie, with a perfect explosion of pious fervor.

"I hear an outburst of devout thankfulness," remarked Sir Patrick. "Am I to

take it as expressing--let me say--some little doubt, on your part, as to the prospect of managing Blanche successfully, under present circumstances?"

Lady Lundie's temper began to give way again--exactly as her brother-in-law had anticipated.

"You are to take it," she said, "as expressing my conviction that I saddled myself with the charge of an incorrigibly heartless, obstinate and perverse girl, when I undertook the care of Blanche."

"Did you say 'incorrigibly?'"

"I said 'incorrigibly.'"

"If the case is as hopeless as that, my dear Madam--as Blanche's guardian, I ought to find means to relieve you of the charge of Blanche."

"Nobody shall relieve me of a duty that I have once undertaken!" retorted Lady Lundie. "Not if I die at my post!"

"Suppose it was consistent with your duty," pleaded Sir Patrick, "to be relieved at your post? Suppose it was in harmony with that 'self-sacrifice' which is 'the motto of women?'"

"I don't understand you, Sir Patrick. Be so good as to explain yourself."

Sir Patrick assumed a new character--the character of a hesitating man. He cast a look of respectful inquiry at his sister-in-law, sighed, and shook his head.

"No!" he said. "It would be asking too much. Even with your high standard of duty, it would be asking too much."

"Nothing which you can ask me in the name of duty is too much."

"No! no! Let me remind you. Human nature has its limits."

"A Christian gentlewoman's sense of duty knows no limits."

"Oh, surely yes!"

"Sir Patrick! after what I have just said your perseverance in doubting me amounts to something like an insult!"

"Don't say that! Let me put a case. Let's suppose the future interests of another person depend on your saying, Yes--when all your own most cherished ideas and opinions urge you to say, No. Do you really mean to tell me that you could trample your own convictions under foot, if it could be shown that the purely abstract consideration of duty was involved in the sacrifice?"

"Yes!" cried Lady Lundie, mounting the pedestal of her virtue on the spot. "Yes--without a moment's hesitation!"

"I sit corrected, Lady Lundie. You embolden me to proceed. Allow me to ask (after what I just heard)--whether it is not your duty to act on advice given for Blanche's benefit, by one the highest medical authorities in England?" Her ladyship admitted that it was her duty; pending a more favorable opportunity for contradicting her brother-in-law.

"Very good," pursued Sir Patrick. "Assuming that Blanche is like most other human beings, and has some prospect of happiness to contemplate, if she could only be made to see it--are we not bound to make her see it, by our moral obligation to act on the medical advice?" He cast a courteously-persuasive look at her ladyship, and paused in the most innocent manner for a reply.

If Lady Lundie had not been bent--thanks to the irritation fomented by her brother-in-law--on disputing the ground with him, inch by inch, she must have seen signs, by this time, of the snare that was being set for her. As it was, she saw nothing but the opportunity of disparaging Blanche and contradicting Sir Patrick.

"If my step-daughter had any such prospect as you describe," she answered, "I should of course say, Yes. But Blanche's is an ill-regulated mind. An ill-regulated mind has no prospect of happiness."

"Pardon me," said Sir Patrick. "Blanche has a prospect of happiness. In other words, Blanche has a prospect of being married. And what is more, Arnold Brinkworth is ready to marry her as soon as the settlements can be prepared."

Lady Lundie started in her chair--turned crimson with rage--and opened her lips to speak. Sir Patrick rose to his feet, and went on before she could utter a word.

"I beg to relieve you, Lady Lundie--by means which you have just acknowledged it to be your duty to accept--of all further charge of an incorrigible girl. As Blanche's guardian, I have the honor of proposing that her marriage be advanced to a day to be hereafter named in the first fortnight of the ensuing month."

In those words he closed the trap which he had set for his sister-in-law, and waited to see what came of it.

A thoroughly spiteful woman, thoroughly roused, is capable of subordinating every other consideration to the one imperative necessity of gratifying her spite. There was but one way now of turning the tables on Sir Patrick--and Lady Lundie took it. She hated him, at that moment, so intensely, that not even the assertion of her own obstinate will promised her more than a tame satisfaction, by comparison with the priceless enjoyment of beating her brother-in-law with his own weapons.

"My dear Sir Patrick!" she said, with a little silvery laugh, "you have wasted much precious time and many eloquent words in trying to entrap me into giving my consent, when you might have had it for the asking. I think the idea of hastening Blanche's marriage an excellent one. I am charmed to transfer the charge of such a person as my step-daughter to the unfortunate young man who is willing to take her off my hands. The less he sees of Blanche's character the more satisfied I shall feel of his performing his engagement to marry her. Pray hurry the lawyers, Sir Patrick, and let it be a week sooner rather than a week later, if you wish to please Me."

Her ladyship rose in her grandest proportions, and made a courtesy which was nothing less than a triumph of polite satire in dumb show. Sir Patrick answered by a profound bow and a smile which said, eloquently, "I believe every word of that charming answer. Admirable woman--adieu!"

So the one person in the family circle, whose opposition might have forced Sir Patrick to submit to a timely delay, was silenced by adroit management of the vices of her own character. So, in despite of herself, Lady Lundie was won over to the project for hurrying the marriage of Arnold and Blanche.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH. - STIFLED.

IT is the nature of Truth to struggle to the light. In more than one direction, the truth strove to pierce the overlying darkness, and to reveal itself to view, during the interval between the date of Sir Patrick's victory and the date of the wedding-day.

Signs of perturbation under the surface, suggestive of some hidden influence at work, were not wanting, as the time passed on. The one thing missing was the prophetic faculty that could read those signs aright at Windygates House.

On the very day when Sir Patrick's dextrous treatment of his sister-in-law had smoothed the way to the hastening of the marriage, an obstacle was raised to the new arrangement by no less a person than Blanche herself. She had sufficiently recovered, toward noon, to be able to receive Arnold in her own little sitting-room. It proved to be a very brief interview. A quarter of an hour later, Arnold appeared before Sir Patrick--while the old gentleman was sunning himself in the garden--with a face of blank despair. Blanche had indignantly declined even to think of such a thing as her marriage, at a time when she was heart-broken by the discovery that Anne had left her forever.

"You gave me leave to mention it, Sir Patrick--didn't you?" said Arnold.

Sir Patrick shifted round a little, so as to get the sun on his back, and admitted that he had given leave.

"If I had only known, I would rather have cut my tongue out than have said a word about it. What do you think she did? She burst out crying, and ordered me to leave the room."

It was a lovely morning--a cool breeze tempered the heat of the sun; the birds were singing; the garden wore its brightest look. Sir Patrick was supremely comfortable. The little wearisome vexations of this mortal life had retired to a respectful distance from him. He positively declined to invite them to come any nearer.

"Here is a world," said the old gentleman, getting the sun a little more broadly on his back, "which a merciful Creator has filled with lovely sights, harmonious sounds, delicious scents; and here are creatures with faculties expressly made for enjoyment of those sights, sounds, and scents--to say nothing of Love, Dinner, and Sleep, all thrown into the bargain. And these

same creatures hate, starve, toss sleepless on their pillows, see nothing pleasant, hear nothing pleasant, smell nothing pleasant--cry bitter tears, say hard words, contract painful illnesses; wither, sink, age, die! What does it mean, Arnold? And how much longer is it all to go on?"

The fine connecting link between the blindness of Blanche to the advantage of being married, and the blindness of humanity to the advantage of being in existence, though sufficiently perceptible no doubt to venerable Philosophy ripening in the sun, was absolutely invisible to Arnold. He deliberately dropped the vast question opened by Sir Patrick; and, reverting to Blanche, asked what was to be done.

"What do you do with a fire, when you can't extinguish it?" said Sir Patrick. "You let it blaze till it goes out. What do you do with a woman when you can't pacify her? Let her blaze till she goes out."

Arnold failed to see the wisdom embodied in that excellent advice. "I thought you would have helped me to put things right with Blanche," he said.

"I am helping you. Let Blanche alone. Don't speak of the marriage again, the next time you see her. If she mentions it, beg her pardon, and tell her you won't press the question any more. I shall see her in an hour or two, and I shall take exactly the same tone myself. You have put the idea into her mind--leave it there to ripen. Give her distress about Miss Silvester nothing to feed on. Don't stimulate it by contradiction; don't rouse it to defend itself by disparagement of her lost friend. Leave Time to edge her gently nearer and nearer to the husband who is waiting for her--and take my word for it, Time will have her ready when the settlements are ready."

Toward the luncheon hour Sir Patrick saw Blanche, and put in practice the principle which he had laid down. She was perfectly tranquil before her uncle left her. A little later, Arnold was forgiven. A little later still, the old gentleman's sharp observation noted that his niece was unusually thoughtful, and that she looked at Arnold, from time to time, with an interest of a new kind--an interest which shyly hid itself from Arnold's view. Sir Patrick went up to dress for dinner, with a comfortable inner conviction that the difficulties which had beset him were settled at last. Sir Patrick had never been more mistaken in his life.

The business of the toilet was far advanced. Duncan had just placed the glass in a good light; and Duncan's master was at that turning point in his daily life which consisted in attaining, or not attaining, absolute perfection in the tying of his white cravat--when some outer barbarian, ignorant of the

first principles of dressing a gentleman's throat, presumed to knock at the bedroom door. Neither master nor servant moved or breathed until the integrity of the cravat was placed beyond the reach of accident. Then Sir Patrick cast the look of final criticism in the glass, and breathed again when he saw that it was done.

"A little labored in style, Duncan. But not bad, considering the interruption?"

"By no means, Sir Patrick."

"See who it is."

Duncan went to the door; and returned, to his master, with an excuse for the interruption, in the shape of a telegram!

Sir Patrick started at the sight of that unwelcome message. "Sign the receipt, Duncan," he said--and opened the envelope. Yes! Exactly as he had anticipated! News of Miss Silvester, on the very day when he had decided to abandon all further attempt at discovering her. The telegram ran thus:

"Message received from Falkirk this morning. Lady, as described, left the train at Falkirk last night. Went on, by the first train this morning, to Glasgow. Wait further instructions."

"Is the messenger to take any thing back, Sir Patrick?"

"No. I must consider what I am to do. If I find it necessary I will send to the station. Here is news of Miss Silvester, Duncan," continued Sir Patrick, when the messenger had gone. "She has been traced to Glasgow."

"Glasgow is a large place, Sir Patrick."

"Yes. Even if they have telegraphed on and had her watched (which doesn't appear), she may escape us again at Glasgow. I am the last man in the world, I hope, to shrink from accepting my fair share of any responsibility. But I own I would have given something to have kept this telegram out of the house. It raises the most awkward question I have had to decide on for many a long day past. Help me on with my coat. I must think of it! I must think of it!"

Sir Patrick went down to dinner in no agreeable frame of mind. The unexpected recovery of the lost trace of Miss Silvester--there is no disguising

it--seriously annoyed him.

The dinner-party that day, assembling punctually at the stroke of the bell, had to wait a quarter of an hour before the hostess came down stairs.

Lady Lundie's apology, when she entered the library, informed her guests that she had been detained by some neighbors who had called at an unusually late hour. Mr. and Mrs. Julius Delamayn, finding themselves near Windygates, had favored her with a visit, on their way home, and had left cards of invitation for a garden-party at their house.

Lady Lundie was charmed with her new acquaintances. They had included every body who was staying at Windygates in their invitation. They had been as pleasant and easy as old friends. Mrs. Delamayn had brought the kindest message from one of her guests--Mrs. Glenarm--to say that she remembered meeting Lady Lundie in London, in the time of the late Sir Thomas, and was anxious to improve the acquaintance. Mr. Julius Delamayn had given a most amusing account of his brother. Geoffrey had sent to London for a trainer; and the whole household was on the tip-toe of expectation to witness the magnificent spectacle of an athlete preparing himself for a foot-race. The ladies, with Mrs. Glenarm at their head, were hard at work, studying the profound and complicated question of human running--the muscles employed in it, the preparation required for it, the heroes eminent in it. The men had been all occupied that morning in assisting Geoffrey to measure a mile, for his exercising-ground, in a remote part of the park--where there was an empty cottage, which was to be fitted with all the necessary appliances for the reception of Geoffrey and his trainer. "You will see the last of my brother," Julius had said, "at the garden-party. After that he retires into athletic privacy, and has but one interest in life--the interest of watching the disappearance of his own superfluous flesh." Throughout the dinner Lady Lundie was in oppressively good spirits, singing the praises of her new friends. Sir Patrick, on the other hand, had never been so silent within the memory of mortal man. He talked with an effort; and he listened with a greater effort still. To answer or not to answer the telegram in his pocket? To persist or not to persist in his resolution to leave Miss Silvester to go her own way? Those were the questions which insisted on coming round to him as regularly as the dishes themselves came round in the orderly progression of the dinner.

Blanche---who had not felt equal to taking her place at the table--appeared in the drawing-room afterward.

Sir Patrick came in to tea, with the gentlemen, still uncertain as to the right

course to take in the matter of the telegram. One look at Blanche's sad face and Blanche's altered manner decided him. What would be the result if he roused new hopes by resuming the effort to trace Miss Silvester, and if he lost the trace a second time? He had only to look at his niece and to see. Could any consideration justify him in turning her mind back on the memory of the friend who had left her at the moment when it was just beginning to look forward for relief to the prospect of her marriage? Nothing could justify him; and nothing should induce him to do it.

Reasoning--soundly enough, from his own point of view--on that basis, Sir Patrick determined on sending no further instructions to his friend at Edinburgh. That night he warned Duncan to preserve the strictest silence as to the arrival of the telegram. He burned it, in case of accidents, with his own hand, in his own room.

Rising the next day and looking out of his window, Sir Patrick saw the two young people taking their morning walk at a moment when they happened to cross the open grassy space which separated the two shrubberies at Windygates. Arnold's arm was round Blanche's waist, and they were talking confidentially with their heads close together. "She is coming round already!" thought the old gentleman, as the two disappeared again in the second shrubbery from view. "Thank Heaven! things are running smoothly at last!"

Among the ornaments of Sir Patrick's bed room there was a view (taken from above) of one of the Highland waterfalls. If he had looked at the picture when he turned away from his window, he might have remarked that a river which is running with its utmost smoothness at one moment may be a river which plunges into its most violent agitation at another; and he might have remembered, with certain misgivings, that the progress of a stream of water has been long since likened, with the universal consent of humanity, to the progress of the stream of life.