## BOOK THE SECOND

### I. LURKING MISCHIEF.

1. From Ozias Midwinter to Mr. Brock.

"Thorpe Ambrose, June 15, 1851.

"DEAR MR. BROCK--Only an hour since we reached this house, just as the servants were locking up for the night. Allan has gone to bed, worn out by our long day's journey, and has left me in the room they call the library, to tell you the story of our journey to Norfolk. Being better seasoned than he is to fatigues of all kinds, my eyes are quite wakeful enough for writing a letter, though the clock on the chimney-piece points to midnight, and we have been traveling since ten in the morning.

"The last news you had of us was news sent by Allan from the Isle of Man. If I am not mistaken, he wrote to tell you of the night we passed on board the wrecked ship. Forgive me, dear Mr. Brock, if I say nothing on that subject until time has helped me to think of it with a quieter mind. The hard fight against myself must all be fought over again; but I will win it yet, please God; I will, indeed.

"There is no need to trouble you with any account of our journeyings about the northern and western districts of the island, or of the short cruises we took when the repairs of the yacht were at last complete. It will be better if I get on at once to the morning of yesterday, the fourteenth. We had come in with the night-tide to Douglas Harbor, and, as soon as the post-office was open; Allan, by my advice, sent on shore for letters. The messenger returned with one letter only, and the writer of it proved to be the former mistress of Thorpe Ambrose--Mrs. Blanchard.

"You ought to be informed, I think, of the contents of this letter, for it has seriously influenced Allan's plans. He loses everything, sooner or later, as you know, and he has lost the letter already. So I must give you the substance of what Mrs. Blanchard wrote to him, as plainly as I can.

"The first page announced the departure of the ladies from Thorpe Ambrose.

They left on the day before yesterday, the thirteenth, having, after much hesitation, finally decided on going abroad, to visit some old friends settled in Italy, in the neighborhood of Florence. It appears to be quite possible that Mrs. Blanchard and her niece may settle there, too, if they can find a suitable house and grounds to let. They both like the Italian country and the Italian people, and they are well enough off to please themselves. The elder lady has her jointure, and the younger is in possession of all her father's fortune.

"The next page of the letter was, in Allan's opinion, far from a pleasant page to read.

"After referring, in the most grateful terms, to the kindness which had left her niece and herself free to leave their old home at their own time, Mrs. Blanchard added that Allan's considerate conduct had produced such a strongly favorable impression among the friends and dependents of the family that they were desirous of giving him a public reception on his arrival among them. A preliminary meeting of the tenants on the estate and the principal persons in the neighboring town had already been held to discuss the arrangements, and a letter might be expected shortly from the clergyman inquiring when it would suit Mr. Armadale's convenience to take possession personally and publicly of his estates in Norfolk.

"You will now be able to guess the cause of our sudden departure from the Isle of Man. The first and foremost idea in your old pupil's mind, as soon as he had read Mrs. Blanchard's account of the proceedings at the meeting, was the idea of escaping the public reception, and the one certain way he could see of avoiding it was to start for Thorpe Ambrose before the clergyman's letter could reach him.

"I tried hard to make him think a little before he acted on his first impulse in this matter; but he only went on packing his portmanteau in his own impenetrably good-humored way. In ten minutes his luggage was ready, and in five minutes more he had given the crew their directions for taking the yacht back to Somersetshire. The steamer to Liverpool was alongside of us in the harbor, and I had really no choice but to go on board with him or to let him go by himself. I spare you the account of our stormy voyage, of our detention at Liverpool, and of the trains we missed on our journey across the country. You know that we have got here safely, and that is enough. What the servants think of the new squire's sudden appearance among them, without a word of warning, is of no great consequence. What the committee for arranging the public reception may think of it when the news flies abroad to-morrow is, I am afraid, a more serious matter.

"Having already mentioned the servants, I may proceed to tell you that the latter part of Mrs. Blanchard's letter was entirely devoted to instructing Allan on the subject of the domestic establishment which she has left behind her. It seems that all the servants, indoors and out (with three exceptions), are waiting here, on the chance that Allan will continue them in their places. Two of these exceptions are readily accounted for: Mrs. Blanchard's maid and Miss Blanchard's maid go abroad with their mistresses. The third exceptional case is the case of the upper housemaid; and here there is a little hitch. In plain words, the housemaid has been sent away at a moment's notice, for what Mrs. Blanchard rather mysteriously describes as 'levity of conduct with a stranger.'

"I am afraid you will laugh at me, but I must confess the truth. I have been made so distrustful (after what happened to us in the Isle of Man) of even the most trifling misadventures which connect themselves in any way with Allan's introduction to his new life and prospects, that I have already questioned one of the men-servants here about this apparently unimportant matter of the housemaid's going away in disgrace.

"All I can learn is that a strange man had been noticed hanging suspiciously about the grounds; that the housemaid was so ugly a woman as to render it next to a certainty that he had some underhand purpose to serve in making himself agreeable to her; and that he has not as yet been seen again in the neighborhood since the day of her dismissal. So much for the one servant who has been turned out at Thorpe Ambrose. I can only hope there is no trouble for Allan brewing in that quarter. As for the other servants who remain, Mrs. Blanchard describes them, both men and women, as perfectly trustworthy, and they will all, no doubt, continue to occupy their present places.

"Having now done with Mrs. Blanchard's letter, my next duty is to beg you, in Allan's name and with Allan's love, to come here and stay with him at the earliest moment when you can leave Somersetshire. Although I cannot presume to think that my own wishes will have any special influence in determining you to accept this invitation, I must nevertheless acknowledge that I have a reason of my own for earnestly desiring to see you here. Allan has innocently caused me a new anxiety about my future relations with him, and I sorely need your advice to show me the right way of setting that anxiety at rest.

"The difficulty which now perplexes me relates to the steward's place at Thorpe Ambrose. Before to-day I only knew that Allan had hit on some plan

of his own for dealing with this matter, rather strangely involving, among other results, the letting of the cottage which was the old steward's place of abode, in consequence of the new steward's contemplated residence in the great house. A chance word in our conversation on the journey here led Allan into speaking out more plainly than he had spoken yet, and I heard to my unutterable astonishment that the person who was at the bottom of the whole arrangement about the steward was no other than myself!

"It is needless to tell you how I felt this new instance of Allan's kindness. The first pleasure of hearing from his own lips that I had deserved the strongest proof he could give of his confidence in me was soon dashed by the pain which mixes itself with all pleasure--at least, with all that I have ever known. Never has my past life seemed so dreary to look back on as it seems now, when I feel how entirely it has unfitted me to take the place of all others that I should have liked to occupy in my friend's service. I mustered courage to tell him that I had none of the business knowledge and business experience which his steward ought to possess. He generously met the objection by telling me that I could learn; and he has promised to send to London for the person who has already been employed for the time being in the steward's office, and who will, therefore, be perfectly competent to teach me.

"Do you, too, think I can learn? If you do, I will work day and night to instruct myself. But if (as I am afraid) the steward's duties are of far too serious a kind to be learned off-hand by a man so young and so inexperienced as I am, then pray hasten your journey to Thorpe Ambrose, and exert your influence over Allan personally. Nothing less will induce him to pass me over, and to employ a steward who is really fit to take the place. Pray, pray act in this matter as you think best for Allan's interests. Whatever disappointment I may feel, he shall not see it.

"Believe me, dear Mr. Brock,

"Gratefuly yours,

"OZIAS MIDWINTER.

"P.S.--I open the envelope again to add one word more. If you have heard or seen anything since your return to Somersetshire of the woman in the black dress and the red shawl, I hope you will not forget, when you write, to let me know it.

"O. M."

2. From Mrs. Oldershaw to Miss Gwilt.

"Ladies' Toilet Repository, Diana Street, Pimlico,

"Wednesday.

"MY DEAR LYDIA--To save the post, I write to you, after a long day's worry at my place of business, on the business letter-paper, having news since we last met which it seems advisable to send you at the earliest opportunity.

"To begin at the beginning. After carefully considering the thing, I am quite sure you will do wisely with young Armadale if you hold your tongue about Madeira and all that happened there. Your position was, no doubt, a very strong one with his mother. You had privately helped her in playing a trick on her own father; you had been ungratefully dismissed, at a pitiably tender age, as soon as you had served her purpose; and, when you came upon her suddenly, after a separation of more than twenty years, you found her in failing health, with a grown-up son, whom she had kept in total ignorance of the true story of her marriage.

"Have you any such advantages as these with the young gentleman who has survived her? If he is not a born idiot he will decline to believe your shocking aspersions on the memory of his mother; and--seeing that you have no proofs at this distance of time to meet him with--there is an end of your money-grubbing in the golden Armadale diggings. Mind, I don't dispute that the old lady's heavy debt of obligation, after what you did for her in Madeira, is not paid yet; and that the son is the next person to settle with you, now the mother has slipped through your fingers. Only squeeze him the right way, my dear, that's what I venture to suggest--squeeze him the right way.

"And which is the right way? That question brings me to my news.

"Have you thought again of that other notion of yours of trying your hand on this lucky young gentleman, with nothing but your own good looks and your own quick wits to help you? The idea hung on my mind so strangely after you were gone that it ended in my sending a little note to my lawyer, to have the will under which young Armadale has got his fortune examined at Doctor's Commons. The result turns out to be something infinitely more encouraging than either you or I could possibly have hoped for. After the lawyer's report to me, there cannot be a moment's doubt of what you ought

to do. In two words, Lydia, take the bull by the horns--and marry him!

"I am quite serious. He is much better worth the venture than you suppose. Only persuade him to make you Mrs. Armadale, and you may set all after-discoveries at flat defiance. As long as he lives, you can make your own terms with him; and, if he dies, the will entitles you, in spite of anything he can say or do--with children or without them--to an income chargeable on his estate of twelve hundred a year for life. There is no doubt about this; the lawyer himself has looked at the will. Of course, Mr. Blanchard had his son and his son's widow in his eye when he made the provision. But, as it is not limited to any one heir by name, and not revoked anywhere, it now holds as good with young Armadale as it would have held under other circumstances with Mr. Blanchard's son. What a chance for you, after all the miseries and the dangers you have gone through, to be mistress of Thorpe Ambrose, if he lives; to have an income for life, if he dies! Hook him, my poor dear; hook him at any sacrifice.

"I dare say you will make the same objection when you read this which you made when we were talking about it the other day; I mean the objection of your age.

"Now, my good creature, just listen to me. The question is--not whether you were five-and-thirty last birthday; we will own the dreadful truth, and say you were--but whether you do look, or don't look, your real age. My opinion on this matter ought to be, and is, one of the best opinions in London. I have had twenty years experience among our charming sex in making up battered old faces and wornout old figures to look like new, and I say positively you don't look a day over thirty, if as much. If you will follow my advice about dressing, and use one or two of my applications privately, I guarantee to put you back three years more. I will forfeit all the money I shall have to advance for you in this matter, if, when I have ground you young again in my wonderful mill, you look more than seven-and-twenty in any man's eyes living--except, of course, when you wake anxious in the small hours of the morning; and then, my dear, you will be old and ugly in the retirement of your own room, and it won't matter.

"'But,' you may say, 'supposing all this, here I am, even with your art to help me, looking a good six years older than he is; and that is against me at starting.' Is it? Just think again. Surely, your own experience must have shown you that the commonest of all common weaknesses, in young fellows of this Armadale's age, is to fall in love with women older than themselves. Who are the men who really appreciate us in the bloom of our youth (I'm sure I have cause to speak well of the bloom of youth; I made fifty guineas

to-day by putting it on the spotted shoulders of a woman old enough to be your mother)--who are the men, I say, who are ready to worship us when we are mere babies of seventeen? The gay young gentlemen in the bloom of their own youth? No! The cunning old wretches who are on the wrong side of forty.

"And what is the moral of this, as the story-books say?

"The moral is that the chances, with such a head as you have got on your shoulders, are all in your favor. If you feel your present forlorn position, as I believe you do; if you know what a charming woman (in the men's eyes) you can still be when you please; and if all your resolution has really come back, after that shocking outbreak of desperation on board the steamer (natural enough, I own, under the dreadful provocation laid on you), you will want no further persuasion from me to try this experiment. Only to think of how things turn out! If the other young booby had not jumped into the river after you, this young booby would never have had the estate. It really looks as if fate had determined that you were to be Mrs. Armadale, of Thorpe Ambrose; and who can control his fate, as the poet says?

"Send me one line to say Yes or No; and believe me your attached old friend,

"MARIA OLDERSHAW."

3. From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw.

Richmond, Thursday.

'YOU OLD WRETCH--I won't say Yes or No till I have had a long, long look at my glass first. If you had any real regard for anybody but your wicked old self, you would know that the bare idea of marrying again (after what I have gone through) is an idea that makes my flesh creep.

"But there can be no harm in your sending me a little more information while I am making up my mind. You have got twenty pounds of mine still left out of those things you sold for me; send ten pounds here for my expenses, in a post-office order, and use the other ten for making private inquiries at Thorpe Ambrose. I want to know when the two Blanchard women go away, and when young Armadale stirs up the dead ashes in the family fire-place. Are you quite sure he will turn out as easy to manage as you think? If he takes after his hypocrite of a mother, I can tell you this: Judas Iscariot has come to life again.

"I am very comfortable in this lodging. There are lovely flowers in the garden, and the birds wake me in the morning delightfully. I have hired a reasonably good piano. The only man I care two straws about--don't be alarmed; he was laid in his grave many a long year ago, under the name of BEETHOVEN--keeps me company, in my lonely hours. The landlady would keep me company, too, if I would only let her. I hate women. The new curate paid a visit to the other lodger yesterday, and passed me on the lawn as he came out. My eyes have lost nothing yet, at any rate, though I am five-and-thirty; the poor man actually blushed when I looked at him! What sort of color do you think he would have turned, if one of the little birds in the garden had whispered in his ear, and told him the true story of the charming Miss Gwilt?

"Good-by, Mother Oldershaw. I rather doubt whether I am yours, or anybody's, affectionately; but we all tell lies at the bottoms of our letters, don't we? If you are my attached old friend, I must, of course, be yours affectionately.

"LYDIA GWILT.

"P.S.--Keep your odious powders and paints and washes for the spotted shoulders of your customers; not one of them shall touch my skin, I promise you. If you really want to be useful, try and find out some quieting draught to keep me from grinding my teeth in my sleep. I shall break them one of these nights; and then what will become of my beauty, I wonder?"

4. From Mrs. Oldershaw to Miss Gwilt.

"Ladies' Toilet Repository, Tuesday.

"MY DEAR LYDIA--It is a thousand pities your letter was not addressed to Mr. Armadale; your graceful audacity would have charmed him. It doesn't affect me; I am so well used to audacity in my way of life, you know. Why waste your sparkling wit, my love, on your own impenetrable Oldershaw? It only splutters and goes out. Will you try and be serious this next time? I have news for you from Thorpe Ambrose, which is beyond a joke, and which must not be trifled with.

"An hour after I got your letter I set the inquiries on foot. Not knowing what consequences they might lead to, I thought it safest to begin in the dark. Instead of employing any of the people whom I have at my own disposal (who know you and know me), I went to the Private Inquiry Office in Shadyside Place, and put the matter in the inspector's hands, in the

character of a perfect stranger, and without mentioning you at all. This was not the cheapest way of going to work, I own; but it was the safest way, which is of much greater consequence.

"The inspector and I understood each other in ten minutes; and the right person for the purpose--the most harmless looking young man you ever saw in your life--was produced immediately. He left for Thorpe Ambrose an hour after I saw him. I arranged to call at the office on the afternoons of Saturday, Monday, and to-day for news. There was no news till to-day; and there I found our confidential agent just returned to town, and waiting to favor me with a full account of his trip to Norfolk.

"First of all, let me quiet your mind about those two questions of yours; I have got answers to both the one and the other. The Blanchard women go away to foreign parts on the thirteenth, and young Armadale is at this moment cruising somewhere at sea in his yacht. There is talk at Thorpe Ambrose of giving him a public reception, and of calling a meeting of the local grandees to settle it all. The speechifying and fuss on these occasions generally wastes plenty of time, and the public reception is not thought likely to meet the new squire much before the end of the month.

"If our messenger had done no more for us than this, I think he would have earned his money. But the harmless young man is a regular Jesuit at a private inquiry, with this great advantage over all the Popish priests I have ever seen, that he has not got his slyness written in his face.

"Having to get his information through the female servants in the usual way, he addressed himself, with admirable discretion, to the ugliest woman in the house. 'When they are nice-looking, and can pick and choose,' as he neatly expressed it to me, 'they waste a great deal of valuable time in deciding on a sweetheart. When they are ugly, and haven't got the ghost of a chance of choosing, they snap at a sweetheart, if he comes their way, like a starved dog at a bone.' Acting on these excellent principles, our confidential agent succeeded, after certain unavoidable delays, in addressing himself to the upper housemaid at Thorpe Ambrose, and took full possession of her confidence at the first interview. Bearing his instructions carefully in mind, he encouraged the woman to chatter, and was favored, of course, with all the gossip of the servants' hall. The greater part of it (as repeated to me) was of no earthly importance. But I listened patiently, and was rewarded by a valuable discovery at last. Here it is.

"It seems there is an ornamental cottage in the grounds at Thorpe Ambrose. For some reason unknown, young Armadale has chosen to let it, and a

tenant has come in already. He is a poor half-pay major in the army, named Milroy, a meek sort of man, by all accounts, with a turn for occupying himself in mechanical pursuits, and with a domestic incumbrance in the shape of a bedridden wife, who has not been seen by anybody. Well, and what of all this? you will ask, with that sparkling impatience which becomes you so well. My dear Lydia, don't sparkle! The man's family affairs seriously concern us both, for, as ill luck will have it, the man has got a daughter!

"You may imagine how I questioned our agent, and how our agent ransacked his memory, when I stumbled, in due course, on such a discovery as this. If Heaven is responsible for women's chattering tongues, Heaven be praised! From Miss Blanchard to Miss Blanchard's maid; from Miss Blanchard's maid to Miss Blanchard's aunt's maid; from Miss Blanchard's aunt's maid, to the ugly housemaid; from the ugly housemaid to the harmless-looking young man--so the stream of gossip trickled into the right reservoir at last, and thirsty Mother Oldershaw has drunk it all up.

"In plain English, my dear, this is how it stands. The major's daughter is a minx just turned sixteen; lively and nice-looking (hateful little wretch!), dowdy in her dress (thank Heaven!) and deficient in her manners (thank Heaven again!). She has been brought up at home. The governess who last had charge of her left before her father moved to Thorpe Ambrose. Her education stands woefully in want of a finishing touch, and the major doesn't quite know what to do next. None of his friends can recommend him a new governess and he doesn't like the notion of sending the girl to school. So matters rest at present, on the major's own showing; for so the major expressed himself at a morning call which the father and daughter paid to the ladies at the great house.

"You have now got my promised news, and you will have little difficulty, I think, in agreeing with me that the Armadale business must be settled at once, one way or the other. If, with your hopeless prospects, and with what I may call your family claim on this young fellow, you decide on giving him up, I shall have the pleasure of sending you the balance of your account with me (seven-and-twenty shillings), and shall then be free to devote myself entirely to my own proper business. If, on the contrary, you decide to try your luck at Thorpe Ambrose, then (there being no kind of doubt that the major's minx will set her cap at the young squire) I should be glad to hear how you mean to meet the double difficulty of inflaming Mr. Armadale and extinguishing Miss Milroy.

"Affectionately yours,

"MARIA OLDERSHAW.

5. From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw.

(First Answer.)

"Richmond, Wednesday Morning.

"MRS. OLDERSHAW--Send me my seven-and-twenty shillings, and devote yourself to your own proper business. Yours, L. G."

6. From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw.

(Second Answer.)

"Richmond, Wednesday Night.

"DEAR OLD LOVE--Keep the seven-and-twenty shillings, and burn my other letter. I have changed my mind.

"I wrote the first time after a horrible night. I write this time after a ride on horseback, a tumbler of claret, and the breast of a chicken. Is that explanation enough? Please say Yes, for I want to go back to my piano.

"No; I can't go back yet; I must answer your question first. But are you really so very simple as to suppose that I don't see straight through you and your letter? You know that the major's difficulty is our opportunity as well as I do; but you want me to take the responsibility of making the first proposal, don't you? Suppose I take it in your own roundabout way? Suppose I say, 'Pray don't ask me how I propose inflaming Mr. Armadale and extinguishing Miss Milroy; the question is so shockingly abrupt I really can't answer it. Ask me, instead, if it is the modest ambition of my life to become Miss Milroy's governess?' Yes, if you please, Mrs. Oldershaw, and if you will assist me by becoming my reference.

"There it is for you! If some serious disaster happens (which is quite possible), what a comfort it will be to remember that it was all my fault!

"Now I have done this for you, will you do something for me. I want to dream away the little time I am likely to have left here in my own way. Be a merciful Mother Oldershaw, and spare me the worry of looking at the Ins

and Outs, and adding up the chances For and Against, in this new venture of mine. Think for me, in short, until I am obliged to think for myself.

"I had better not write any more, or I shall say something savage that you won't like. I am in one of my tempers to-night. I want a husband to vex, or a child to beat, or something of that sort. Do you ever like to see the summer insects kill themselves in the candle? I do, sometimes. Good-night, Mrs. Jezebel. The longer you can leave me here the better. The air agrees with me, and I am looking charmingly.

"L. G."

7. From Mrs. Oldershaw to Miss Gwilt.

"Thursday.

"MY DEAR LYDIA--Some persons in my situation might be a little offended at the tone of your last letter. But I am so fondly attached to you! And when I love a person, it is so very hard, my dear, for that person to offend me! Don't ride quite so far, and only drink half a tumblerful of claret next time. I say no more.

"Shall we leave off our fencing-match and come to serious matters now? How curiously hard it always seems to be for women to understand each other, especially when they have got their pens in their hands! But suppose we try.

"Well, then, to begin with: I gather from your letter that you have wisely decided to try the Thorpe Ambrose experiment, and to secure, if you can, an excellent position at starting by becoming a member of Major Milroy's household. If the circumstances turn against you, and some other woman gets the governess's place (about which I shall have something more to say presently), you will then have no choice but to make Mr. Armadale's acquaintance in some other character. In any case, you will want my assistance; and the first question, therefore, to set at rest between us is the question of what I am willing to do, and what I can do, to help you.

"A woman, my dear Lydia, with your appearance, your manners, your abilities, and your education, can make almost any excursions into society that she pleases if she only has money in her pocket and a respectable reference to appeal to in cases of emergency. As to the money, in the first place. I will engage to find it, on condition of your remembering my assistance with adequate pecuniary gratitude if you win the Armadale prize.

Your promise so to remember me, embodying the terms in plain figures, shall be drawn out on paper by my own lawyer, so that we can sign and settle at once when I see you in London.

"Next, as to the reference.

"Here, again, my services are at your disposal, on another condition. It is this: that you present yourself at Thorpe Ambrose, under the name to which you have returned ever since that dreadful business of your marriage; I mean your own maiden name of Gwilt. I have only one motive in insisting on this; I wish to run no needless risks. My experience, as confidential adviser of my customers, in various romantic cases of private embarrassment, has shown me that an assumed name is, nine times out of ten, a very unnecessary and a very dangerous form of deception. Nothing could justify your assuming a name but the fear of young Armadale's detecting you--a fear from which we are fortunately relieved by his mother's own conduct in keeping your early connection with her a profound secret from her son and from everybody.

"The next, and last, perplexity to settle relates, my dear, to the chances for and against your finding your way, in the capacity of governess, into Major Milroy's house. Once inside the door, with your knowledge of music and languages, if you can keep your temper, you may be sure of keeping the place. The only doubt, as things are now, is whether you can get it.

"In the major's present difficulty about his daughter's education, the chances are, I think, in favor of his advertising for a governess. Say he does advertise, what address will he give for applicants to write to?

"If he gives an address in London, good-by to all chances in your favor at once; for this plain reason, that we shall not be able to pick out his advertisement from the advertisements of other people who want governesses, and who will give them addresses in London as well. If, on the other hand, our luck helps us, and he refers his correspondents to a shop, post-office, or what not at Thorpe Ambrose, there we have our advertiser as plainly picked out for us as we can wish. In this last case, I have little or no doubt--with me for your reference--of your finding your way into the major's family circle. We have one great advantage over the other women who will answer the advertisement. Thanks to my inquiries on the spot, I know Major Milroy to be a poor man; and we will fix the salary you ask at a figure that is sure to tempt him. As for the style of the letter, if you and I together can't write a modest and interesting application for the vacant place, I should like to know who can?

"All this, however, is still in the future. For the present my advice is, stay where you are, and dream to your heart's content, till you hear from me again. I take in The Times regularly, and you may trust my wary eye not to miss the right advertisement. We can luckily give the major time, without doing any injury to our own interests; for there is no fear just yet of the girl's getting the start of you. The public reception, as we know, won't be ready till near the end of the month; and we may safely trust young Armadale's vanity to keep him out of his new house until his flatterers are all assembled to welcome him.

"It's odd, isn't it, to think how much depends on this half-pay officer's decision? For my part, I shall wake every morning now with the same question in my mind: If the major's advertisment appears, which will the major say--Thorpe Ambrose, or London?

"Ever, my dear Lydia, affectionately yours,

"MARIA OLDERSHAW."

## II. ALLAN AS A LANDED GENTLEMAN.

Early on the morning after his first night's rest at Thorpe Ambrose, Allan rose and surveyed the prospect from his bedroom window, lost in the dense mental bewilderment of feeling himself to be a stranger in his own house.

The bedroom looked out over the great front door, with its portico, its terrace and flight of steps beyond, and, further still, the broad sweep of the well-timbered park to close the view. The morning mist nestled lightly about the distant trees; and the cows were feeding sociably, close to the iron fence which railed off the park from the drive in front of the house. "All mine!" thought Allan, staring in blank amazement at the prospect of his own possessions. "Hang me if I can beat it into my head yet. All mine!"

He dressed, left his room, and walked along the corridor which led to the staircase and hall, opening the doors in succession as he passed them.

The rooms in this part of the house were bedrooms and dressing-rooms, light, spacious, perfectly furnished; and all empty, except the one bed-chamber next to Allan's, which had been appropriated to Midwinter. He was still sleeping when his friend looked in on him, having sat late into the night writing his letter to Mr. Brock. Allan went on to the end of the first corridor, turned at right angles into a second, and, that passed, gained the head of the great staircase. "No romance here," he said to himself, looking down the handsomely carpeted stone stairs into the bright modern hall. "Nothing to startle Midwinter's fidgety nerves in this house." There was nothing, indeed; Allan's essentially superficial observation had not misled him for once. The mansion of Thorpe Ambrose (built after the pulling down of the dilapidated old manor-house) was barely fifty years old. Nothing picturesque, nothing in the slightest degree suggestive of mystery and romance, appeared in any part of it. It was a purely conventional country house--the product of the classical idea filtered judiciously through the commercial English mind. Viewed on the outer side, it presented the spectacle of a modern manufactory trying to look like an ancient temple. Viewed on the inner side, it was a marvel of luxurious comfort in every part of it, from basement to roof. "And quite right, too," thought Allan, sauntering contentedly down the broad, gently graduated stairs. "Deuce take all mystery and romance! Let's be clean and comfortable, that's what I say."

Arrived in the hall, the new master of Thorpe Ambrose hesitated, and looked about him, uncertain which way to turn next.

The four reception-rooms on the ground-floor opened into the hall, two on

either side. Allan tried the nearest door on his right hand at a venture, and found himself in the drawing-room. Here the first sign of life appeared, under life's most attractive form. A young girl was in solitary possession of the drawing-room. The duster in her hand appeared to associate her with the domestic duties of the house; but at that particular moment she was occupied in asserting the rights of nature over the obligations of service. In other words, she was attentively contemplating her own face in the glass over the mantelpiece.

"There! there! don't let me frighten you," said Allan, as the girl started away from the glass, and stared at him in unutterable confusion. "I quite agree with you, my dear; your face is well worth looking at. Who are you? Oh, the housemaid. And what's your name? Susan, eh? Come! I like your name, to begin with. Do you know who I am, Susan? I'm your master, though you may not think it. Your character? Oh, yes! Mrs. Blanchard gave you a capital character. You shall stop here; don't be afraid. And you'll be a good girl, Susan, and wear smart little caps and aprons and bright ribbons, and you'll look nice and pretty, and dust the furniture, won't you?" With this summary of a housemaid's duties, Allan sauntered back into the hall, and found more signs of life in that quarter. A man-servant appeared on this occasion, and bowed, as became a vassal in a linen jacket, before his liege lord in a wide-awake hat.

"And who may you be?" asked Allan. "Not the man who let us in last night? Ah, I thought not. The second footman, eh? Character? Oh, yes; capital character. Stop here, of course. You can valet me, can you? Bother valeting me! I like to put on my own clothes, and brush them, too, when they are on; and, if I only knew how to black my own boots, by George, I should like to do it! What room's this? Morning-room, eh? And here's the dining-room, of course. Good heavens, what a table! it's as long as my yacht, and longer. I say, by-the-by, what's your name? Richard, is it? Well, Richard, the vessel I sail in is a vessel of my own building! What do you think of that? You look to me just the right sort of man to be my steward on board. If you're not sick at sea--oh, you are sick at sea? Well, then, we'll say nothing more about it. And what room is this? Ah, yes; the library, of course--more in Mr. Midwinter's way than mine. Mr. Midwinter is the gentleman who came here with me last night; and mind this, Richard, you're all to show him as much attention as you show me. Where are we now? What's this door at the back? Billiard-room and smoking-room, eh? Jolly. Another door! and more stairs! Where do they go to? and who's this coming up? Take your time, ma'am; you're not quite so young as you were once--take your time."

The object of Allan's humane caution was a corpulent elderly woman of the

type called "motherly." Fourteen stairs were all that separated her from the master of the house; she ascended them with fourteen stoppages and fourteen sighs. Nature, various in all things, is infinitely various in the female sex. There are some women whose personal qualities reveal the Loves and the Graces; and there are other women whose personal qualities suggest the Perquisites and the Grease Pot. This was one of the other women.

"Glad to see you looking so well, ma'am," said Allan, when the cook, in the majesty of her office, stood proclaimed before him. "Your name is Gripper, is it? I consider you, Mrs. Gripper, the most valuable person in the house. For this reason, that nobody in the house eats a heartier dinner every day than I do. Directions? Oh, no; I've no directions to give. I leave all that to you. Lots of strong soup, and joints done with the gravy in them--there's my notion of good feeding, in two words. Steady! Here's somebody else. Oh, to be sure--the butler! Another valuable person. We'll go right through all the wine in the cellar, Mr. Butler; and if I can't give you a sound opinion after that, we'll persevere boldly, and go right through it again. Talking of wine--halloo! here are more of them coming up stairs. There! there! don't trouble yourselves. You've all got capital characters, and you shall all stop here along with me. What was I saying just now? Something about wine; so it was. I'll tell you what, Mr. Butler, it isn't every day that a new master comes to Thorpe Ambrose; and it's my wish that we should all start together on the best possible terms. Let the servants have a grand jollification downstairs to celebrate my arrival, and give them what they like to drink my health in. It's a poor heart, Mrs. Gripper, that never rejoices, isn't it? No; I won't look at the cellar now: I want to go out, and get a breath of fresh air before breakfast. Where's Richard? I say, have I got a garden here? Which side of the house is it! That side, eh? You needn't show me round. I'll go alone, Richard, and lose myself, if I can, in my own property."

With those words Allan descended the terrace steps in front of the house, whistling cheerfully. He had met the serious responsibility of settling his domestic establishment to his own entire satisfaction. "People talk of the difficulty of managing their servants," thought Allan. "What on earth do they mean? I don't see any difficulty at all." He opened an ornamental gate leading out of the drive at the side of the house, and, following the footman's directions, entered the shrubbery that sheltered the Thorpe Ambrose gardens. "Nice shady sort of place for a cigar," said Allan, as he sauntered along with his hands in his pockets "I wish I could beat it into my head that it really belongs to me."

The shrubbery opened on the broad expanse of a flower garden, flooded

bright in its summer glory by the light of the morning sun.

On one side, an archway, broken through, a wall, led into the fruit garden. On the other, a terrace of turf led to ground on a lower level, laid out as an Italian garden. Wandering past the fountains and statues, Allan reached another shrubbery, winding its way apparently to some remote part of the grounds. Thus far, not a human creature had been visible or audible anywhere; but, as he approached the end of the second shrubbery, it struck him that he heard something on the other side of the foliage. He stopped and listened. There were two voices speaking distinctly--an old voice that sounded very obstinate, and a young voice that sounded very angry.

"It's no use, miss," said the old voice. "I mustn't allow it, and I won't allow it. What would Mr. Armadale say?"

"If Mr. Armadale is the gentleman I take him for, you old brute!" replied the young voice, "he would say, 'Come into my garden, Miss Milroy, as often as you like, and take as many nosegays as you please.'" Allan's bright blue eyes twinkled mischievously. Inspired by a sudden idea, he stole softly to the end of the shrubbery, darted round the corner of it, and, vaulting over a low ring fence, found himself in a trim little paddock, crossed by a gravel walk. At a short distance down the wall stood a young lady, with her back toward him, trying to force her way past an impenetrable old man, with a rake in his hand, who stood obstinately in front of her, shaking his head.

"Come into my garden, Miss Milroy, as often as you like, and take as many nosegays as you please," cried Allan, remorselessly repeating her own words.

The young lady turned round, with a scream; her muslin dress, which she was holding up in front, dropped from her hand, and a prodigious lapful of flowers rolled out on the gravel walk.

Before another word could be said, the impenetrable old man stepped forward, with the utmost composure, and entered on the question of his own personal interests, as if nothing whatever had happened, and nobody was present but his new master and himself.

"I bid you humbly welcome to Thorpe Ambrose, sir," said this ancient of the gardens. "My name is Abraham Sage. I've been employed in the grounds for more than forty years; and I hope you'll be pleased to continue me in my place."

So, with vision inexorably limited to the horizon of his own prospects, spoke

the gardener, and spoke in vain. Allan was down on his knees on the gravel walk, collecting the fallen flowers, and forming his first impressions of Miss Milroy from the feet upward.

She was pretty; she was not pretty; she charmed, she disappointed, she charmed again. Tried by recognized line and rule, she was too short and too well developed for her age. And yet few men's eyes would have wished her figure other than it was. Her hands were so prettily plump and dimpled that it was hard to see how red they were with the blessed exuberance of youth and health. Her feet apologized gracefully for her old and ill fitting shoes; and her shoulders made ample amends for the misdemeanor in muslin which covered them in the shape of a dress. Her dark-gray eyes were lovely in their clear softness of color, in their spirit, tenderness, and sweet good humor of expression; and her hair (where a shabby old garden hat allowed it to be seen) was of just that lighter shade of brown which gave value by contrast to the darker beauty of her eyes. But these attractions passed, the little attendant blemishes and imperfections of this self-contradictory girl began again. Her nose was too short, her mouth was too large, her face was too round and too rosy. The dreadful justice of photography would have had no mercy on her; and the sculptors of classical Greece would have bowed her regretfully out of their studios. Admitting all this, and more, the girdle round Miss Milroy's waist was the girdle of Venus nevertheless; and the passkey that opens the general heart was the key she carried, if ever a girl possessed it yet. Before Allan had picked up his second handful of flowers, Allan was in love with her.

"Don't! pray don't, Mr. Armadale!" she said, receiving the flowers under protest, as Allan vigorously showered them back into the lap of her dress. "I am so ashamed! I didn't mean to invite myself in that bold way into your garden; my tongue ran away with me--it did, indeed! What can I say to excuse myself? Oh, Mr. Armadale, what must you think of me?"

Allan suddenly saw his way to a compliment, and tossed it up to her forthwith, with the third handful of flowers.

"I'll tell you what I think, Miss Milroy," he said, in his blunt, boyish way. "I think the luckiest walk I ever took in my life was the walk this morning that brought me here."

He looked eager and handsome. He was not addressing a woman worn out with admiration, but a girl just beginning a woman's life; and it did him no harm, at any rate, to speak in the character of master of Thorpe Ambrose. The penitential expression on Miss Milroy's face gently melted away; she

looked down, demure and smiling, at the flowers in her lap.

"I deserve a good scolding," she said. "I don't deserve compliments, Mr. Armadale--least of all from you."

"Oh, yes, you do!" cried the headlong Allan, getting briskly on his legs. "Besides, it isn't a compliment; it's true. You are the prettiest--I beg your pardon, Miss Milroy! my tongue ran away with me that time."

Among the heavy burdens that are laid on female human nature, perhaps the heaviest, at the age of sixteen, is the burden of gravity. Miss Milroy struggled, tittered, struggled again, and composed herself for the time being.

The gardener, who still stood where he had stood from the first, immovably waiting for his next opportunity, saw it now, and gently pushed his personal interests into the first gap of silence that had opened within his reach since Allan's appearance on the scene.

"I humbly bid you welcome to Thorpe Ambrose, sir," said Abraham Sage, beginning obstinately with his little introductory speech for the second time. "My name--"

Before he could deliver himself of his name, Miss Milroy looked accidentally in the horticulturist's pertinacious face, and instantly lost her hold on her gravity beyond recall. Allan, never backward in following a boisterous example of any sort, joined in her laughter with right goodwill. The wise man of the gardens showed no surprise, and took no offense. He waited for another gap of silence, and walked in again gently with his personal interests the moment the two young people stopped to take breath.

"I have been employed in the grounds," proceeded Abraham Sage, irrepressibly, "for more than forty years--"

"You shall be employed in the grounds for forty more, if you'll only hold your tongue and take yourself off!" cried Allan, as soon as he could speak.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said the gardener, with the utmost politeness, but with no present signs either of holding his tongue or of taking himself off.

"Well?" said Allan.

Abraham Sage carefully cleared his throat, and shifted his rake from one hand to the other. He looked down the length of his own invaluable

implement, with a grave interest and attention, seeing, apparently, not the long handle of a rake, but the long perspective of a vista, with a supplementary personal interest established at the end of it. "When more convenient, sir," resumed this immovable man, "I should wish respectfully to speak to you about my son. Perhaps it may be more convenient in the course of the day? My humble duty, sir, and my best thanks. My son is strictly sober. He is accustomed to the stables, and he belongs to the Church of England--without incumbrances." Having thus planted his offspring provisionally in his master's estimation, Abraham Sage shouldered his invaluable rake, and hobbled slowly out of view.

"If that's a specimen of a trustworthy old servant," said Allan, "I think I'd rather take my chance of being cheated by a new one. You shall not be troubled with him again, Miss Milroy, at any rate. All the flower-beds in the garden are at your disposal, and all the fruit in the fruit season, if you'll only come here and eat it."

"Oh, Mr. Armadale, how very, very kind you are. How can I thank you?"

Allan saw his way to another compliment--an elaborate compliment, in the shape of a trap, this time.

"You can do me the greatest possible favor," he said. "You can assist me in forming an agreeable impression of my own grounds."

"Dear me! how?" asked Miss Milroy, innocently.

Allan judiciously closed the trap on the spot in these words: "By taking me with you, Miss Milroy, on your morning walk." He spoke, smiled, and offered his arm.

She saw the way, on her side, to a little flirtation. She rested her hand on his arm, blushed, hesitated, and suddenly took it away again.

"I don't think it's quite right, Mr. Armadale," she said, devoting herself with the deepest attention to her collection of flowers. "Oughtn't we to have some old lady here? Isn't it improper to take your arm until I know you a little better than I do now? I am obliged to ask; I have had so little instruction; I have seen so little of society, and one of papa's friends once said my manners were too bold for my age. What do you think?"

"I think it's a very good thing your papa's friend is not here now," answered the outspoken Allan; "I should quarrel with him to a dead certainty. As for

society, Miss Milroy, nobody knows less about it than I do; but if we had an old lady here, I must say myself I think she would be uncommonly in the way. Won't you?" concluded Allan, imploringly offering his arm for the second time. "Do!"

Miss Milroy looked up at him sidelong from her flowers "You are as bad as the gardener, Mr. Armadale!" She looked down again in a flutter of indecision. "I'm sure it's wrong," she said, and took his arm the instant afterward without the slightest hesitation.

They moved away together over the daisied turf of the paddock, young and bright and happy, with the sunlight of the summer morning shining cloudless over their flowery path.

"And where are we going to, now?" asked Allan. "Into another garden?"

She laughed gayly. "How very odd of you, Mr. Armadale, not to know, when it all belongs to you! Are you really seeing Thorpe Ambrose this morning for the first time? How indescribably strange it must feel! No, no; don't say any more complimentary things to me just yet. You may turn my head if you do. We haven't got the old lady with us; and I really must take care of myself. Let me be useful; let me tell you all about your own grounds. We are going out at that little gate, across one of the drives in the park, and then over the rustic bridge, and then round the corner of the plantation--where do you think? To where I live, Mr. Armadale; to the lovely little cottage that you have let to papa. Oh, if you only knew how lucky we thought ourselves to get it!"

She paused, looked up at her companion, and stopped another compliment on the incorrigible Allan's lips.

"I'll drop your arm," she said coquettishly, "if you do! We were lucky to get the cottage, Mr. Armadale. Papa said he felt under an obligation to you for letting it, the day we got in. And I said I felt under an obligation, no longer ago than last week."

"You, Miss Milroy!" exclaimed Allan.

"Yes. It may surprise you to hear it; but if you hadn't let the cottage to papa, I believe I should have suffered the indignity and misery of being sent to school."

Allan's memory reverted to the half-crown that he had spun on the cabin-

table of the yacht, at Castletown. "If she only knew that I had tossed up for it!" he thought, guiltily.

"I dare say you don't understand why I should feel such a horror of going to school," pursued Miss Milroy, misinterpreting the momentary silence on her companion's side. "If I had gone to school in early life--I mean at the age when other girls go--I shouldn't have minded it now. But I had no such chance at the time. It was the time of mamma's illness and of papa's unfortunate speculation; and as papa had nobody to comfort him but me, of course I stayed at home. You needn't laugh; I was of some use, I can tell you. I helped papa over his trouble, by sitting on his knee after dinner, and asking him to tell me stories of all the remarkable people he had known when he was about in the great world, at home and abroad. Without me to amuse him in the evening, and his clock to occupy him in the daytime--"

"His clock?" repeated Allan.

"Oh, yes! I ought to have told you. Papa is an extraordinary mechanical genius. You will say so, too, when you see his clock. It's nothing like so large, of course, but it's on the model of the famous clock at Strasbourg. Only think, he began it when I was eight years old; and (though I was sixteen last birthday) it isn't finished yet! Some of our friends were quite surprised he should take to such a thing when his troubles began. But papa himself set that right in no time; he reminded them that Louis the Sixteenth took to lock-making when his troubles began, and then everybody was perfectly satisfied." She stopped, and changed color confusedly. "Oh, Mr. Armadale," she said, in genuine embarrassment this time, "here is my unlucky tongue running away with me again! I am talking to you already as if I had known you for years! This is what papa's friend meant when he said my manners were too bold. It's quite true; I have a dreadful way of getting familiar with people, if--" She checked herself suddenly, on the brink of ending the sentence by saying, "if I like them."

"No, no; do go on!" pleaded Allan. "It's a fault of mine to be familiar, too. Besides, we must be familiar; we are such near neighbors. I'm rather an uncultivated sort of fellow, and I don't know quite how to say it; but I want your cottage to be jolly and friendly with my house, and my house to be jolly and friendly with your cottage. There's my meaning, all in the wrong words. Do go on, Miss Milroy; pray go on!"

She smiled and hesitated. "I don't exactly remember where I was," she replied, "I only remember I had something I wanted to tell you. This comes, Mr. Armadale, of my taking your arm. I should get on so much better, if you

would only consent to walk separately. You won't? Well, then, will you tell me what it was I wanted to say? Where was I before I went wandering off to papa's troubles and papa's clock?"

"At school!" replied Allan, with a prodigious effort of memory.

"Not at school, you mean," said Miss Milroy; "and all through you. Now I can go on again, which is a great comfort. I am quite serious, Mr. Armadale, in saying that I should have been sent to school, if you had said No when papa proposed for the cottage. This is how it happened. When we began moving in, Mrs. Blanchard sent us a most kind message from the great house to say that her servants were at our disposal, if we wanted any assistance. The least papa and I could do, after that, was to call and thank her. We saw Mrs. Blanchard and Miss Blanchard. Mistress was charming, and miss looked perfectly lovely in her mourning. I'm sure you admire her? She's tall and pale and graceful--quite your idea of beauty, I should think?"

"Nothing like it," began Allan. "My idea of beauty at the present moment--"

Miss Milroy felt it coming, and instantly took her hand off his arm.

"I mean I have never seen either Mrs. Blanchard or her niece," added Allan, precipitately correcting himself.

Miss Milroy tempered justice with mercy, and put her hand back again.

"How extraordinary that you should never have seen them!" she went on. "Why, you are a perfect stranger to everything and everybody at Thorpe Ambrose! Well, after Miss Blanchard and I had sat and talked a little while, I heard my name on Mrs. Blanchard's lips and instantly held my breath. She was asking papa if I had finished my education. Out came papa's great grievance directly. My old governess, you must know, left us to be married just before we came here, and none of our friends could produce a new one whose terms were reasonable. 'I'm told, Mrs. Blanchard, by people who understand it better than I do,' says papa, 'that advertising is a risk. It all falls on me, in Mrs. Milroy's state of health, and I suppose I must end in sending my little girl to school. Do you happen to know of a school within the means of a poor man?' Mrs. Blanchard shook her head; I could have kissed her on the spot for doing it. 'All my experience, Major Milroy,' says this perfect angel of a woman, 'is in favor of advertising. My niece's governess was originally obtained by an advertisement, and you may imagine her value to us when I tell you she lived in our family for more than ten years.' I could have gone down on both my knees and worshipped Mrs.

Blanchard then and there; and I only wonder I didn't! Papa was struck at the time--I could see that--and he referred to it again on the way home. 'Though I have been long out of the world, my dear,' says papa, 'I know a highly-bred woman and a sensible woman when I see her. Mrs. Blanchard's experience puts advertising in a new light; I must think about it.' He has thought about it, and (though he hasn't openly confessed it to me) I know that he decided to advertise, no later than last night. So, if papa thanks you for letting the cottage, Mr. Armadale, I thank you, too. But for you, we should never have known darling Mrs. Blanchard; and but for darling Mrs. Blanchard, I should have been sent to school."

Before Allan could reply, they turned the corner of the plantation, and came in sight of the cottage. Description of it is needless; the civilized universe knows it already. It was the typical cottage of the drawing-master's early lessons in neat shading and the broad pencil touch--with the trim thatch, the luxuriant creepers, the modest lattice-windows, the rustic porch, and the wicker bird-cage, all complete.

"Isn't it lovely?" said Miss Milroy. "Do come in!"

"May I?" asked Allan. "Won't the major think it too early?"

"Early or late, I am sure papa will be only too glad to see you."

She led the way briskly up the garden path, and opened the parlor door. As Allan followed her into the little room, he saw, at the further end of it, a gentleman sitting alone at an old-fashioned writing-table, with his back turned to his visitor.

"Papa! a surprise for you!" said Miss Milroy, rousing him from his occupation. "Mr. Armadale has come to Thorpe Ambrose; and I have brought him here to see you."

The major started; rose, bewildered for the moment; recovered himself immediately, and advanced to welcome his young landlord, with hospitable, outstretched hand.

A man with a larger experience of the world and a finer observation of humanity than Allan possessed would have seen the story of Major Milroy's life written in Major Milroy's face. The home troubles that had struck him were plainly betrayed in his stooping figure and his wan, deeply wrinkled cheeks, when he first showed himself on rising from his chair. The changeless influence of one monotonous pursuit and one monotonous habit

of thought was next expressed in the dull, dreamy self-absorption of his manner and his look while his daughter was speaking to him. The moment after, when he had roused himself to welcome his guest, was the moment which made the self-revelation complete. Then there flickered in the major's weary eyes a faint reflection of the spirit of his happier youth. Then there passed over the major's dull and dreamy manner a change which told unmistakably of social graces and accomplishments, learned at some past time in no ignoble social school; a man who had long since taken his patient refuge from trouble in his own mechanical pursuit; a man only roused at intervals to know himself again for what he once had been. So revealed to all eyes that could read him aright, Major Milroy now stood before Allan, on the first morning of an acquaintance which was destined to be an event in Allan's life.

"I am heartily glad to see you, Mr. Armadale," he said, speaking in the changeless quiet, subdued tone peculiar to most men whose occupations are of the solitary and monotonous kind. "You have done me one favor already by taking me as your tenant, and you now do me another by paying this friendly visit. If you have not breakfasted already, let me waive all ceremony on my side, and ask you to take your place at our little table."

"With the greatest pleasure, Major Milroy, if I am not in the way," replied Allan, delighted at his reception. "I was sorry to hear from Miss Milroy that Mrs. Milroy is an invalid. Perhaps my being here unexpectedly; perhaps the sight of a strange face--"

"I understand your hesitation, Mr. Armadale," said the major; "but it is quite unnecessary. Mrs. Milroy's illness keeps her entirely confined to her own room. Have we got everything we want on the table, my love?" he went on, changing the subject so abruptly that a closer observer than Allan might have suspected it was distasteful to him. "Will you come and make tea?"

Miss Milroy's attention appeared to be already pre-engaged; she made no reply. While her father and Allan had been exchanging civilities, she had been putting the writing-table in order, and examining the various objects scattered on it with the unrestrained curiosity of a spoiled child. The moment after the major had spoken to her, she discovered a morsel of paper hidden between the leaves of the blotting-book, snatched it up, looked at it, and turned round instantly, with an exclamation of surprise.

"Do my eyes deceive me, papa?" she asked. "Or were you really and truly writing the advertisement when I came in?"

"I had just finished it," replied her father. "But, my dear, Mr. Armadale is here--we are waiting for breakfast."

"Mr. Armadale knows all about it," rejoined Miss Milroy. "I told him in the garden."

"Oh, yes!" said Allan. "Pray, don't make a stranger of me, major! If it's about the governess, I've got something (in an indirect sort of way) to do with it too."

Major Milroy smiled. Before he could answer, his daughter, who had been reading the advertisement, appealed to him eagerly, for the second time.

"Oh, papa," she said, "there's one thing here I don't like at all! Why do you put grandmamma's initials at the end? Why do you tell them to write to grandmamma's house in London?"

"My dear! your mother can do nothing in this matter, as you know. And as for me (even if I went to London), questioning strange ladies about their characters and accomplishments is the last thing in the world that I am fit to do. Your grandmamma is on the spot; and your grandmamma is the proper person to receive the letters, and to make all the necessary inquires."

"But I want to see the letters myself," persisted the spoiled child. "Some of them are sure to be amusing--"

"I don't apologize for this very unceremonious reception of you, Mr. Armadale," said the major, turning to Allan, with a quaint and quiet humor. "It may be useful as a warning, if you ever chance to marry and have a daughter, not to begin, as I have done, by letting her have her own way."

Allan laughed, and Miss Milroy persisted.

"Besides," she went on, "I should like to help in choosing which letters we answer, and which we don't. I think I ought to have some voice in the selection of my own governess. Why not tell them, papa, to send their letters down here--to the post-office or the stationer's, or anywhere you like? When you and I have read them, we can send up the letters we prefer to grandmamma; and she can ask all the questions, and pick out the best governess, just as you have arranged already, without leaving ME entirely in the dark, which I consider (don't you, Mr. Armadale?) to be quite inhuman. Let me alter the address, papa; do, there's a darling!"

"We shall get no breakfast, Mr. Armadale, if I don't say Yes," said the major good-humoredly. "Do as you like, my dear," he added, turning to his daughter. "As long as it ends in your grandmamma's managing the matter for us, the rest is of very little consequence."

Miss Milroy took up her father's pen, drew it through the last line of the advertisement, and wrote the altered address with her own hand as follows:

"Apply, by letter, to M., Post-office, Thorpe Ambrose, Norfolk."

"There!" she said, bustling to her place at the breakfast-table. "The advertisement may go to London now; and, if a governess does come of it, oh, papa, who in the name of wonder will she be? Tea or coffee, Mr. Armadale? I'm really ashamed of having kept you waiting. But it is such a comfort," she added, saucily, "to get all one's business off one's mind before breakfast!"

Father, daughter, and guest sat down together sociably at the little round table, the best of good neighbors and good friends already.

Three days later, one of the London newsboys got his business off his mind before breakfast. His district was Diana Street, Pimlico; and the last of the morning's newspapers which he disposed of was the newspaper he left at Mrs. Oldershaw's door.

## III. THE CLAIMS OF SOCIETY.

More than an hour after Allan had set forth on his exploring expedition through his own grounds, Midwinter rose, and enjoyed, in his turn, a full view by daylight of the magnificence of the new house.

Refreshed by his long night's rest, he descended the great staircase as cheerfully as Allan himself. One after another, he, too, looked into the spacious rooms on the ground floor in breathless astonishment at the beauty and the luxury which surrounded him. "The house where I lived in service when I was a boy, was a fine one," he thought, gayly; "but it was nothing to this! I wonder if Allan is as surprised and delighted as I am?" The beauty of the summer morning drew him out through the open hall door, as it had drawn his friend out before him. He ran briskly down the steps, humming the burden of one of the old vagabond tunes which he had danced to long since in the old vagabond time. Even the memories of his wretched childhood took their color, on that happy morning, from the bright medium through which he looked back at them. "If I was not out of practice," he thought to himself, as he leaned on the fence and looked over at the park, "I could try some of my old tumbling tricks on that delicious grass." He turned, noticed two of the servants talking together near the shrubbery, and asked for news of the master of the house.

The men pointed with a smile in the direction of the gardens; Mr. Armadale had gone that way more than an hour since, and had met (as had been reported) with Miss Milroy in the grounds. Midwinter followed the path through the shrubbery, but, on reaching the flower garden, stopped, considered a little, and retraced his steps. "If Allan has met with the young lady," he said to himself, "Allan doesn't want me." He laughed as he drew that inevitable inference, and turned considerately to explore the beauties of Thorpe Ambrose on the other side of the house.

Passing the angle of the front wall of the building, he descended some steps, advanced along a paved walk, turned another angle, and found himself in a strip of garden ground at the back of the house.

Behind him was a row of small rooms situated on the level of the servants' offices. In front of him, on the further side of the little garden, rose a wall, screened by a laurel hedge, and having a door at one end of it, leading past the stables to a gate that opened on the high-road. Perceiving that he had only discovered thus far the shorter way to the house, used by the servants and trades-people, Midwinter turned back again, and looked in at the window of one of the rooms on the basement story as he passed it. Were

these the servants' offices? No; the offices were apparently in some other part of the ground-floor; the window he had looked in at was the window of a lumber-room. The next two rooms in the row were both empty. The fourth window, when he approached it, presented a little variety. It served also as a door; and it stood open to the garden at that moment.

Attracted by the book-shelves which he noticed on one of the walls, Midwinter stepped into the room.

The books, few in number, did not detain him long; a glance at their backs was enough without taking them down. The Waverley Novels, Tales by Miss Edgeworth, and by Miss Edgeworth's many followers, the Poems of Mrs. Hemans, with a few odd volumes of the illustrated gift-books of the period, composed the bulk of the little library. Midwinter turned to leave the room, when an object on one side of the window, which he had not previously noticed, caught his attention and stopped him. It was a statuette standing on a bracket--a reduced copy of the famous Niobe of the Florence Museum. He glanced from the statuette to the window, with a sudden doubt which set his heart throbbing fast. It was a French window. He looked out with a suspicion which he had not felt yet. The view before him was the view of a lawn and garden. For a moment his mind struggled blindly to escape the conclusion which had seized it, and struggled in vain. Here, close round him and close before him--here, forcing him mercilessly back from the happy present to the horrible past, was the room that Allan had seen in the Second Vision of the Dream.

He waited, thinking and looking round him while he thought. There was wonderfully little disturbance in his face and manner; he looked steadily from one to the other of the few objects in the room, as if the discovery of it had saddened rather than surprised him. Matting of some foreign sort covered the floor. Two cane chairs and a plain table comprised the whole of the furniture. The walls were plainly papered, and bare--broken to the eye in one place by a door leading into the interior of the house; in another, by a small stove; in a third, by the book-shelves which Midwinter had already noticed. He returned to the books, and this time he took some of them down from the shelves.

The first that he opened contained lines in a woman's handwriting, traced in ink that had faded with time. He read the inscription--"Jane Armadale, from her beloved father. Thorpe Ambrose, October, 1828." In the second, third, and fourth volumes that he opened, the same inscription re-appeared. His previous knowledge of dates and persons helped him to draw the true inference from what he saw. The books must have belonged to Allan's

mother; and she must have inscribed them with her name, in the interval of time between her return to Thorpe Ambrose from Madeira and the birth of her son. Midwinter passed on to a volume on another shelf--one of a series containing the writings of Mrs. Hemans. In this case, the blank leaf at the beginning of the book was filled on both sides with a copy of verses, the writing being still in Mrs. Armadale's hand. The verses were headed "Farewell to Thorpe Ambrose," and were dated "March, 1829"--two months only after Allan had been born.

Entirely without merit in itself, the only interest of the little poem was in the domestic story that it told.

The very room in which Midwinter then stood was described--with the view on the garden, the window made to open on it, the bookshelves, the Niobe, and other more perishable ornaments which Time had destroyed. Here, at variance with her brothers, shrinking from her friends, the widow of the murdered man had, on her own acknowledgment, secluded herself, without other comfort than the love and forgiveness of her father, until her child was born. The father's mercy and the father's recent death filled many verses, happily too vague in their commonplace expression of penitence and despair to give any hint of the marriage story in Madeira to any reader who looked at them ignorant of the truth. A passing reference to the writer's estrangement from her surviving relatives, and to her approaching departure from Thorpe Ambrose, followed. Last came the assertion of the mother's resolution to separate herself from all her old associations; to leave behind her every possession, even to the most trifling thing she had, that could remind her of the miserable past; and to date her new life in the future from the birthday of the child who had been spared to console her--who was now the one earthly object that could still speak to her of love and hope. So the old story of passionate feeling that finds comfort in phrases rather than not find comfort at all was told once again. So the poem in the faded ink faded away to its end.

Midwinter put the book back with a heavy sigh, and opened no other volume on the shelves. "Here in the country house, or there on board the wreck," he said, bitterly, "the traces of my father's crime follow me, go where I may." He advanced toward the window, stopped, and looked back into the lonely, neglected little room. "Is this chance?" he asked himself. "The place where his mother suffered is the place he sees in the Dream; and the first morning in the new house is the morning that reveals it, not to him, but to me. Oh, Allan! Allan! how will it end?"

The thought had barely passed through his mind before he heard Allan's

voice, from the paved walk at the side of the house, calling to him by his name. He hastily stepped out into the garden. At the same moment Allan came running round the corner, full of voluble apologies for having forgotten, in the society of his new neighbors, what was due to the laws of hospitality and the claims of his friend.

"I really haven't missed you," said Midwinter; "and I am very, very glad to hear that the new neighbors have produced such a pleasant impression on you already."

He tried, as he spoke, to lead the way back by the outside of the house; but Allan's flighty attention had been caught by the open window and the lonely little room. He stepped in immediately. Midwinter followed, and watched him in breathless anxiety as he looked round. Not the slightest recollection of the Dream troubled Allan's easy mind. Not the slightest reference to it fell from the silent lips of his friend.

"Exactly the sort of place I should have expected you to hit on!" exclaimed Allan, gayly. "Small and snug and unpretending. I know you, Master Midwinter! You'll be slipping off here when the county families come visiting, and I rather think on those dreadful occasions you won't find me far behind you. What's the matter? You look ill and out of spirits. Hungry? Of course you are! unpardonable of me to have kept you waiting. This door leads somewhere, I suppose; let's try a short cut into the house. Don't be afraid of my not keeping you company at breakfast. I didn't eat much at the cottage; I feasted my eyes on Miss Milroy, as the poets say. Oh, the darling! the darling! she turns you topsy-turvy the moment you look at her. As for her father, wait till you see his wonderful clock! It's twice the size of the famous clock at Strasbourg, and the most tremendous striker ever heard yet in the memory of man!"

Singing the praises of his new friends in this strain at the top of his voice, Allan hurried Midwinter along the stone passages on the basement floor, which led, as he had rightly guessed, to a staircase communicating with the hall. They passed the servants' offices on the way. At the sight of the cook and the roaring fire, disclosed through the open kitchen door, Allan's mind went off at a tangent, and Allan's dignity scattered itself to the four winds of heaven, as usual.

"Aha, Mrs. Gripper, there you are with your pots and pans, and your burning fiery furnace! One had need be Shadrach, Meshach, and the other fellow to stand over that. Breakfast as soon as ever you like. Eggs, sausages, bacon, kidneys, marmalade, water-cresses, coffee, and so forth. My friend

and I belong to the select few whom it's a perfect privilege to cook for. Voluptuaries, Mrs. Gripper, voluptuaries, both of us. You'll see," continued Allan, as they went on toward the stairs, "I shall make that worthy creature young again; I'm better than a doctor for Mrs. Gripper. When she laughs, she shakes her fat sides, and when she shakes her fat sides, she exerts her muscular system; and when she exerts her muscular system--Ha! here's Susan again. Don't squeeze yourself flat against the banisters, my dear; if you don't mind hustling me on the stairs, I rather like hustling you. She looks like a full-blown rose when she blushes, doesn't she? Stop, Susan! I've orders to give. Be very particular with Mr. Midwinter's room: shake up his bed like mad, and dust his furniture till those nice round arms of yours ache again. Nonsense, my dear fellow! I'm not too familiar with them; I'm only keeping them up to their work. Now, then, Richard! where do we breakfast? Oh, here. Between ourselves, Midwinter, these splendid rooms of mine are a size too large for me; I don't feel as if I should ever be on intimate terms with my own furniture. My views in life are of the snug and slovenly sort--a kitchen chair, you know, and a low ceiling. Man wants but little here below, and wants that little long. That's not exactly the right quotation; but it expresses my meaning, and we'll let alone correcting it till the next opportunity."

"I beg your pardon," interposed Midwinter, "here is something waiting for you which you have not noticed yet."

As he spoke, he pointed a little impatiently to a letter lying on the breakfast-table. He could conceal the ominous discovery which he had made that morning, from Allan's knowledge; but he could not conquer the latent distrust of circumstances which was now raised again in his superstitious nature--the instinctive suspicion of everything that happened, no matter how common or how trifling the event, on the first memorable day when the new life began in the new house.

Allan ran his eye over the letter, and tossed it across the table to his friend. "I can't make head or tail of it," he said, "can you?"

Midwinter read the letter, slowly, aloud. "Sir--I trust you will pardon the liberty I take in sending these few lines to wait your arrival at Thorpe Ambrose. In the event of circumstances not disposing you to place your law business in the hands of Mr. Darch--" He suddenly stopped at that point, and considered a little.

"Darch is our friend the lawyer," said Allan, supposing Midwinter had forgotten the name. "Don't you remember our spinning the half-crown on

the cabin table, when I got the two offers for the cottage? Heads, the major; tails, the lawyer. This is the lawyer."

Without making any reply, Midwinter resumed reading the letter. "In the event of circumstances not disposing you to place your law business in the hands of Mr. Darch, I beg to say that I shall be happy to take charge of your interests, if you feel willing to honor me with your confidence. Inclosing a reference (should you desire it) to my agents in London, and again apologizing for this intrusion, I beg to remain, sir, respectfully yours, A. PEDGIFT, Sen."

"Circumstances?" repeated Midwinter, as he laid the letter down. "What circumstances can possibly indispose you to give your law business to Mr. Darch?"

"Nothing can indispose me," said Allan. "Besides being the family lawyer here, Darch was the first to write me word at Paris of my coming in for my fortune; and, if I have got any business to give, of course he ought to have it."

Midwinter still looked distrustfully at the open letter on the table. "I am sadly afraid, Allan, there is something wrong already," he said. "This man would never have ventured on the application he has made to you, unless he had some good reason for believing he would succeed. If you wish to put yourself right at starting, you will send to Mr. Darch this morning to tell him you are here, and you will take no notice for the present of Mr. Pedgift's letter."

Before more could be said on either side, the footman made his appearance with the breakfast tray. He was followed, after an interval, by the butler, a man of the essentially confidential kind, with a modulated voice, a courtly manner, and a bulbous nose. Anybody but Allan would have seen in his face that he had come into the room having a special communication to make to his master. Allan, who saw nothing under the surface, and whose head was running on the lawyer's letter, stopped him bluntly with the point-blank question: "Who's Mr. Pedgift?"

The butler's sources of local knowledge opened confidentially on the instant. Mr. Pedgift was the second of the two lawyers in the town. Not so long established, not so wealthy, not so universally looked up to as old Mr. Darch. Not doing the business of the highest people in the county, and not mixing freely with the best society, like old Mr. Darch. A very sufficient man, in his way, nevertheless. Known as a perfectly competent and respectable

practitioner all round the neighborhood. In short, professionally next best to Mr. Darch; and personally superior to him (if the expression might be permitted) in this respect--that Darch was a Crusty One, and Pedgift wasn't.

Having imparted this information, the butler, taking a wise advantage of his position, glided, without a moment's stoppage, from Mr. Pedgift's character to the business that had brought him into the breakfast-room. The Midsummer Audit was near at hand; and the tenants were accustomed to have a week's notice of the rent-day dinner. With this necessity pressing, and with no orders given as yet, and no steward in office at Thorpe Ambrose, it appeared desirable that some confidential person should bring the matter forward. The butler was that confidential person; and he now ventured accordingly to trouble his master on the subject.

At this point Allan opened his lips to interrupt, and was himself interrupted before he could utter a word.

"Wait!" interposed Midwinter, seeing in Allan's face that he was in danger of being publicly announced in the capacity of steward. "Wait!" he repeated, eagerly, "till I can speak to you first."

The butler's courtly manner remained alike unruffled by Midwinter's sudden interference and by his own dismissal from the scene. Nothing but the mounting color in his bulbous nose betrayed the sense of injury that animated him as he withdrew. Mr. Armadale's chance of regaling his friend and himself that day with the best wine in the cellar trembled in the balance, as the butler took his way back to the basement story.

"This is beyond a joke, Allan," said Midwinter, when they were alone. "Somebody must meet your tenants on the rent-day who is really fit to take the steward's place. With the best will in the world to learn, it is impossible for me to master the business at a week's notice. Don't, pray don't let your anxiety for my welfare put you in a false position with other people! I should never forgive myself if I was the unlucky cause--"

"Gently gently!" cried Allan, amazed at his friend's extraordinary earnestness. "If I write to London by to-night's post for the man who came down here before, will that satisfy you?"

Midwinter shook his head. "Our time is short," he said; "and the man may not be at liberty. Why not try in the neighborhood first? You were going to write to Mr. Darch. Send at once, and see if he can't help us between this and post-time."

Allan withdrew to a side-table on which writing materials were placed. "You shall breakfast in peace, you old fidget," he replied, and addressed himself forthwith to Mr. Darch, with his usual Spartan brevity of epistolary expression. "Dear Sir--Here I am, bag and baggage. Will you kindly oblige me by being my lawyer? I ask this, because I want to consult you at once. Please look in in the course of the day, and stop to dinner if you possibly can. Yours truly. ALLAN ARMADALE." Having read this composition aloud with unconcealed admiration of his own rapidity of literary execution, Allan addressed the letter to Mr. Darch, and rang the bell. "Here, Richard, take this at once, and wait for an answer. And, I say, if there's any news stirring in the town, pick it up and bring it back with you. See how I manage my servants!" continued Allan, joining his friend at the breakfast-table. "See how I adapt myself to my new duties! I haven't been down here one clear day yet, and I'm taking an interest in the neighborhood already."

Breakfast over, the two friends went out to idle away the morning under the shade of a tree in the park. Noon came, and Richard never appeared. One o'clock struck, and still there were no signs of an answer from Mr. Darch. Midwinter's patience was not proof against the delay. He left Allan dozing on the grass, and went to the house to make inquiries. The town was described as little more than two miles distant; but the day of the week happened to be market day, and Richard was being detained no doubt by some of the many acquaintances whom he would be sure to meet with on that occasion.

Half an hour later the truant messenger returned, and was sent out to report himself to his master under the tree in the park.

"Any answer from Mr. Darch?" asked Midwinter, seeing that Allan was too lazy to put the question for himself.

"Mr. Darch was engaged, sir. I was desired to say that he would send an answer."

"Any news in the town?" inquired Allan, drowsily, without troubling himself to open his eyes.

"No, sir; nothing in particular."

Observing the man suspiciously as he made that reply, Midwinter detected in his face that he was not speaking the truth. He was plainly embarrassed, and plainly relieved when his master's silence allowed him to withdraw. After a little consideration, Midwinter followed, and overtook the retreating

servant on the drive before the house.

"Richard," he said, quietly, "if I was to guess that there is some news in the town, and that you don't like telling it to your master, should I be guessing the truth?"

The man started and changed color. "I don't know how you have found it out," he said; "but I can't deny you have guessed right."

"If you let me hear what the news is, I will take the responsibility on myself of telling Mr. Armadale."

After some little hesitation, and some distrustful consideration, on his side, of Midwinter's face, Richard at last prevailed on himself to repeat what he had heard that day in the town.

The news of Allan's sudden appearance at Thorpe Ambrose had preceded the servant's arrival at his destination by some hours. Wherever he went, he found his master the subject of public discussion. The opinion of Allan's conduct among the leading townspeople, the resident gentry of the neighborhood, and the principal tenants on the estate was unanimously unfavorable. Only the day before, the committee for managing the public reception of the new squire had sketched the progress of the procession; had settled the serious question of the triumphal arches; and had appointed a competent person to solicit subscriptions for the flags, the flowers, the feasting, the fireworks, and the band. In less than a week more the money could have been collected, and the rector would have written to Mr. Armadale to fix the day. And now, by Allan's own act, the public welcome waiting to honor him had been cast back contemptuously in the public teeth! Everybody took for granted (what was unfortunately true) that he had received private information of the contemplated proceedings. Everybody declared that he had purposely stolen into his own house like a thief in the night (so the phrase ran) to escape accepting the offered civilities of his neighbors. In brief, the sensitive self-importance of the little town was wounded to the quick, and of Allan's once enviable position in the estimation of the neighborhood not a vestige remained.

For a moment, Midwinter faced the messenger of evil tidings in silent distress. That moment past, the sense of Allan's critical position roused him, now the evil was known, to seek the remedy.

"Has the little you have seen of your master, Richard, inclined you to like him?" he asked.

This time the man answered without hesitation, "A pleasanter and kinder gentleman than Mr. Armadale no one could wish to serve."

"If you think that," pursued Midwinter, "you won't object to give me some information which will help your master to set himself right with his neighbors. Come into the house."

He led the way into the library, and, after asking the necessary questions, took down in writing a list of the names and addresses of the most influential persons living in the town and its neighborhood. This done, he rang the bell for the head footman, having previously sent Richard with a message to the stables directing an open carriage to be ready in an hour's time.

"When the late Mr. Blanchard went out to make calls in the neighborhood, it was your place to go with him, was it not?" he asked, when the upper servant appeared. "Very well. Be ready in an hour's time, if you please, to go out with Mr. Armadale." Having given that order, he left the house again on his way back to Allan, with the visiting list in his hand. He smiled a little sadly as he descended the steps. "Who would have imagined," he thought, "that my foot-boy's experience of the ways of gentlefolks would be worth looking back at one day for Allan's sake?"

The object of the popular odium lay innocently slumbering on the grass, with his garden hat over his nose, his waistcoat unbuttoned, and his trousers wrinkled half way up his outstretched legs. Midwinter roused him without hesitation, and remorselessly repeated the servant's news.

Allan accepted the disclosure thus forced on him without the slightest disturbance of temper. "Oh, hang 'em!" was all he said. "Let's have another cigar." Midwinter took the cigar out of his hand, and, insisting on his treating the matter seriously, told him in plain words that he must set himself right with his offended neighbors by calling on them personally to make his apologies. Allan sat up on the grass in astonishment; his eyes opened wide in incredulous dismay. Did Midwinter positively meditate forcing him into a "chimney-pot hat," a nicely brushed frock-coat, and a clean pair of gloves? Was it actually in contemplation to shut him up in a carriage, with his footman on the box and his card-case in his hand, and send him round from house to house, to tell a pack of fools that he begged their pardon for not letting them make a public show of him? If anything so outrageously absurd as this was really to be done, it could not be done that day, at any rate. He had promised to go back to the charming Milroy at the

cottage and to take Midwinter with him. What earthly need had he of the good opinion of the resident gentry? The only friends he wanted were the friends he had got already. Let the whole neighborhood turn its back on him if it liked; back or face, the Squire of Thorpe Ambrose didn't care two straws about it.

After allowing him to run on in this way until his whole stock of objections was exhausted, Midwinter wisely tried his personal influence next. He took Allan affectionately by the hand. "I am going to ask a great favor," he said. "If you won't call on these people for your own sake, will you call on them to please me?"

Allan delivered himself of a groan of despair, stared in mute surprise at the anxious face of his friend, and good-humoredly gave way. As Midwinter took his arm, and led him back to the house, he looked round with rueful eyes at the cattle hard by, placidly whisking their tails in the pleasant shade. "Don't mention it in the neighborhood," he said; "I should like to change places with one of my own cows."

Midwinter left him to dress, engaging to return when the carriage was at the door. Allan's toilet did not promise to be a speedy one. He began it by reading his own visiting cards; and he advanced it a second stage by looking into his wardrobe, and devoting the resident gentry to the infernal regions. Before he could discover any third means of delaying his own proceedings, the necessary pretext was unexpectedly supplied by Richard's appearance with a note in his hand. The messenger had just called with Mr. Darch's answer. Allan briskly shut up the wardrobe, and gave his whole attention to the lawyer's letter. The lawyer's letter rewarded him by the following lines:

"SIR--I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your favor of to-day's date, honoring me with two proposals; namely, ONE inviting me to act as your legal adviser, and ONE inviting me to pay you a visit at your house. In reference to the first proposal, I beg permission to decline it with thanks. With regard to the second proposal, I have to inform you that circumstances have come to my knowledge relating to the letting of the cottage at Thorpe Ambrose which render it impossible for me (in justice to myself) to accept your invitation. I have ascertained, sir, that my offer reached you at the same time as Major Milroy's; and that, with both proposals thus before you, you gave the preference to a total stranger, who addressed you through a house agent, over a man who had faithfully served your relatives for two generations, and who had been the first person to inform you of the most important event in your life. After this specimen of your estimate of what is due to the claims of common courtesy and common justice, I cannot flatter

myself that I possess any of the qualities which would fit me to take my place on the list of your friends.

"I remain, sir, your obedient servant,

"JAMES DARCH."

"Stop the messenger!" cried Allan, leaping to his feet, his ruddy face aflame with indignation. "Give me pen, ink, and paper! By the Lord Harry, they're a nice set of people in these parts; the whole neighborhood is in a conspiracy to bully me!" He snatched up the pen in a fine frenzy of epistolary inspiration. "Sir--I despise you and your letter.--" At that point the pen made a blot, and the writer was seized with a momentary hesitation. "Too strong," he thought; "I'll give it to the lawyer in his own cool and cutting style." He began again on a clean sheet of paper. "Sir--You remind me of an Irish bull. I mean that story in 'Joe Miller' where Pat remarked, in the hearing of a wag hard by, that 'the reciprocity was all on one side.' Your reciprocity is all on one side. You take the privilege of refusing to be my lawyer, and then you complain of my taking the privilege of refusing to be your landlord." He paused fondly over those last words. "Neat!" he thought. "Argument and hard hitting both in one. I wonder where my knack of writing comes from?" He went on, and finished the letter in two more sentences. "As for your casting my invitation back in my teeth, I beg to inform you my teeth are none the worse for it. I am equally glad to have nothing to say to you, either in the capacity of a friend or a tenant.--ALLAN ARMADALE." He nodded exultantly at his own composition, as he addressed it and sent it down to the messenger. "Darch's hide must be a thick one," he said, "if he doesn't feel that!"

The sound of the wheels outside suddenly recalled him to the business of the day. There was the carriage waiting to take him on his round of visits; and there was Midwinter at his post, pacing to and fro on the drive.

"Read that," cried Allan, throwing out the lawyer's letter; "I've written him back a smasher."

He bustled away to the wardrobe to get his coat. There was a wonderful change in him; he felt little or no reluctance to pay the visits now. The pleasurable excitement of answering Mr. Darth had put him in a fine aggressive frame of mind for asserting himself in the neighborhood. "Whatever else they may say of me, they shan't say I was afraid to face them." Heated red-hot with that idea, he seized his hat and gloves, and hurrying out of the room, met Midwinter in the corridor with the lawyer's

letter in his hand.

"Keep up your spirits!" cried Allan, seeing the anxiety in his friend's face, and misinterpreting the motive of it immediately. "If Darch can't be counted on to send us a helping hand into the steward's office, Pedgift can."

"My dear Allan, I was not thinking of that; I was thinking of Mr. Darch's letter. I don't defend this sour-tempered man; but I am afraid we must admit he has some cause for complaint. Pray don't give him another chance of putting you in the wrong. Where is your answer to his letter?"

"Gone!" replied Allan. "I always strike while the iron's hot--a word and a blow, and the blow first, that's my way. Don't, there's a good fellow, don't fidget about the steward's books and the rent-day. Here! here's a bunch of keys they gave me last night: one of them opens the room where the steward's books are; go in and read them till I come back. I give you my sacred word of honor I'll settle it all with Pedgift before you see me again."

"One moment," interposed Midwinter, stopping him resolutely on his way out to the carriage. "I say nothing against Mr. Pedgift's fitness to possess your confidence, for I know nothing to justify me in distrusting him. But he has not introduced himself to your notice in a very delicate way; and he has not acknowledged (what is quite clear to my mind) that he knew of Mr. Darch's unfriendly feeling toward you when he wrote. Wait a little before you go to this stranger; wait till we can talk it over together to-night."

"Wait!" replied Allan. "Haven't I told you that I always strike while the iron's hot? Trust my eye for character, old boy, I'll look Pedgift through and through, and act accordingly. Don't keep me any longer, for Heaven's sake. I'm in a fine humor for tackling the resident gentry; and if I don't go at once, I'm afraid it may wear off."

With that excellent reason for being in a hurry, Allan boisterously broke away. Before it was possible to stop him again, he had jumped into the carriage and had left the house.

## IV. THE MARCH OF EVENTS.

Midwinter's face darkened when the last trace of the carriage had disappeared from view. "I have done my best," he said, as he turned back gloomily into the house "If Mr. Brock himself were here, Mr. Brock could do no more!"

He looked at the bunch of keys which Allan had thrust into his hand, and a sudden longing to put himself to the test over the steward's books took possession of his sensitive self-tormenting nature. Inquiring his way to the room in which the various movables of the steward's office had been provisionally placed after the letting of the cottage, he sat down at the desk, and tried how his own unaided capacity would guide him through the business records of the Thorpe Ambrose estate. The result exposed his own ignorance unanswerably before his own eyes. The ledgers bewildered him; the leases, the plans, and even the correspondence itself, might have been written, for all he could understand of them, in an unknown tongue. His memory reverted bitterly as he left the room again to his two years' solitary self-instruction in the Shrewsbury book-seller's shop. "If I could only have worked at a business!" he thought. "If I could only have known that the company of poets and philosophers was company too high for a vagabond like me!"

He sat down alone in the great hall; the silence of it fell heavier and heavier on his sinking spirits; the beauty of it exasperated him, like an insult from a purse-proud man. "Curse the place!" he said, snatching up his hat and stick. "I like the bleakest hillside I ever slept on better than I like this house!"

He impatiently descended the door-steps, and stopped on the drive, considering, by which direction he should leave the park for the country beyond. If he followed the road taken by the carriage, he might risk unsettling Allan by accidentally meeting him in the town. If he went out by the back gate, he knew his own nature well enough to doubt his ability to pass the room of the dream without entering it again. But one other way remained: the way which he had taken, and then abandoned again, in the morning. There was no fear of disturbing Allan and the major's daughter now. Without further hesitation, Midwinter set forth through the gardens to explore the open country on that side of the estate.

Thrown off its balance by the events of the day, his mind was full of that sourly savage resistance to the inevitable self-assertion of wealth, so amiably deplored by the prosperous and the rich; so bitterly familiar to the

unfortunate and the poor. "The heather-bell costs nothing!" he thought, looking contemptuously at the masses of rare and beautiful flowers that surrounded him; "and the buttercups and daisies are as bright as the best of you!" He followed the artfully contrived ovals and squares of the Italian garden with a vagabond indifference to the symmetry of their construction and the ingenuity of their design. "How many pounds a foot did you cost?" he said, looking back with scornful eyes at the last path as he left it. "Wind away over high and low like the sheep-walk on the mountain side, if you can!"

He entered the shrubbery which Allan had entered before him; crossed the paddock and the rustic bridge beyond; and reached the major's cottage. His ready mind seized the right conclusion at the first sight of it; and he stopped before the garden gate, to look at the trim little residence which would never have been empty, and would never have been let, but for Allan's ill-advised resolution to force the steward's situation on his friend.

The summer afternoon was warm; the summer air was faint and still. On the upper and the lower floor of the cottage the windows were all open. From one of them, on the upper story, the sound of voices was startlingly audible in the quiet of the park as Midwinter paused on the outer side of the garden inclosure. The voice of a woman, harsh, high, and angrily complaining--a voice with all the freshness and the melody gone, and with nothing but the hard power of it left--was the discordantly predominant sound. With it, from moment to moment, there mingled the deeper and quieter tones, soothing and compassionate, of the voice of a man. Although the distance was too great to allow Midwinter to distinguish the words that were spoken, he felt the impropriety of remaining within hearing of the voices, and at once stepped forward to continue his walk.

At the same moment, the face of a young girl (easily recognizable as the face of Miss Milroy, from Allan's description of her) appeared at the open window of the room. In spite of himself, Midwinter paused to look at her. The expression of the bright young face, which had smiled so prettily on Allan, was weary and disheartened. After looking out absently over the park, she suddenly turned her head back into the room, her attention having been apparently struck by something that had just been said in it. "Oh, mamma, mamma," she exclaimed, indignantly, "how can you say such things!" The words were spoken close to the window; they reached Midwinter's ears, and hurried him away before he heard more. But the self-disclosure of Major Milroy's domestic position had not reached its end yet. As Midwinter turned the corner of the garden fence, a tradesman's boy was handing a parcel in at the wicket gate to the woman servant. "Well," said the boy, with the

irrepressible impudence of his class, "how is the missus?" The woman lifted her hand to box his ears. "How is the missus?" she repeated, with an angry toss of her head, as the boy ran off. "If it would only please God to take the missus, it would be a blessing to everybody in the house."

No such ill-omened shadow as this had passed over the bright domestic picture of the inhabitants of the cottage, which Allan's enthusiasm had painted for the contemplation of his friend. It was plain that the secret of the tenants had been kept from the landlord so far. Five minutes more of walking brought Midwinter to the park gates. "Am I fated to see nothing and hear nothing to-day, which can give me heart and hope for the future?" he thought, as he angrily swung back the lodge gate. "Even the people Allan has let the cottage to are people whose lives are imbittered by a household misery which it is my misfortune to have found out!"

He took the first road that lay before him, and walked on, noticing little, immersed in his own thoughts.

More than an hour passed before the necessity of turning back entered his mind. As soon as the idea occurred to him, he consulted his watch, and determined to retrace his steps, so as to be at the house in good time to meet Allan on his return. Ten minutes of walking brought him back to a point at which three roads met, and one moment's observation of the place satisfied him that he had entirely failed to notice at the time by which of the three roads he had advanced. No sign-post was to be seen; the country on either side was lonely and flat, intersected by broad drains and ditches. Cattle were grazing here and there, and a windmill rose in the distance above the pollard willows that fringed the low horizon. But not a house was to be seen, and not a human creature appeared on the visible perspective of any one of the three roads. Midwinter glanced back in the only direction left to look at--the direction of the road along which he had just been walking. There, to his relief, was the figure of a man, rapidly advancing toward him, of whom he could ask his way.

The figure came on, clad from head to foot in dreary black--a moving blot on the brilliant white surface of the sun-brightened road. He was a lean, elderly, miserably respectable man. He wore a poor old black dress-coat, and a cheap brown wig, which made no pretense of being his own natural hair. Short black trousers clung like attached old servants round his wizen legs; and rusty black gaiters hid all they could of his knobbed, ungainly feet. Black crape added its mite to the decayed and dingy wretchedness of his old beaver hat; black mohair in the obsolete form of a stock drearily encircled his neck and rose as high as his haggard jaws. The one morsel of color he

carried about him was a lawyer's bag of blue serge, as lean and limp as himself. The one attractive feature in his clean-shaven, weary old face was a neat set of teeth--teeth (as honest as his wig) which said plainly to all inquiring eyes, "We pass our nights on his looking-glass, and our days in his mouth."

All the little blood in the man's body faintly reddened his fleshless cheeks as Midwinter advanced to meet him, and asked the way to Thorpe Ambrose. His weak, watery eyes looked hither and thither in a bewilderment painful to see. If he had met with a lion instead of a man, and if the few words addressed to him had been words expressing a threat instead of a question, he could hardly have looked more confused and alarmed than he looked now. For the first time in his life, Midwinter saw his own shy uneasiness in the presence of strangers reflected, with tenfold intensity of nervous suffering, in the face of another man--and that man old enough to be his father.

"Which do you please to mean, sir--the town or the house? I beg your pardon for asking, but they both go by the same name in these parts."

He spoke with a timid gentleness of tone, an ingratiatory smile, and an anxious courtesy of manner, all distressingly suggestive of his being accustomed to receive rough answers in exchange for his own politeness from the persons whom he habitually addressed.

"I was not aware that both the house and the town went by the same name," said Midwinter; "I meant the house." He instinctively conquered his own shyness as he answered in those words, speaking with a cordiality of manner which was very rare with him in his intercourse with strangers.

The man of miserable respectability seemed to feel the warm return of his own politeness gratefully; he brightened and took a little courage. His lean forefinger pointed eagerly to the right road. "That way, sir," he said, "and when you come to two roads next, please take the left one of the two. I am sorry I have business the other way, I mean in the town. I should have been happy to go with you and show you. Fine summer weather, sir, for walking? You can't miss your way if you keep to the left. Oh, don't mention it! I'm afraid I have detained you, sir. I wish you a pleasant walk back, and--good-morning."

By the time he had made an end of speaking (under an impression apparently that the more he talked the more polite he would be) he had lost his courage again. He darted away down his own road, as if Midwinter's

attempt to thank him involved a series of trials too terrible to confront. In two minutes more, his black retreating figure had lessened in the distance till it looked again, what it had once looked already, a moving blot on the brilliant white surface of the sun-brightened road.

The man ran strangely in Midwinter's thoughts while he took his way back to the house. He was at a loss to account for it. It never occurred to him that he might have been insensibly reminded of himself, when he saw the plain traces of past misfortune and present nervous suffering in the poor wretch's face. He blindly resented his own perverse interest in this chance foot passenger on the high-road, as he had resented all else that had happened to him since the beginning of the day. "Have I made another unlucky discovery?" he asked himself, impatiently. "Shall I see this man again, I wonder? Who can he be?"

Time was to answer both those questions before many days more had passed over the inquirer's head.

Allan had not returned when Midwinter reached the house. Nothing had happened but the arrival of a message of apology from the cottage. "Major Milroy's compliments, and he was sorry that Mrs. Milroy's illness would prevent his receiving Mr. Armadale that day." It was plain that Mrs. Milroy's occasional fits of suffering (or of ill temper) created no mere transitory disturbance of the tranquillity of the household. Drawing this natural inference, after what he had himself heard at the cottage nearly three hours since, Midwinter withdrew into the library to wait patiently among the books until his friend came back.

It was past six o'clock when the well-known hearty voice was heard again in the hall. Allan burst into the library, in a state of irrepressible excitement, and pushed Midwinter back unceremoniously into the chair from which he was just rising, before he could utter a word.

"Here's a riddle for you, old boy!" cried Allan. "Why am I like the resident manager of the Augean stable, before Hercules was called in to sweep the litter out? Because I have had my place to keep up, and I've gone and made an infernal mess of it! Why don't you laugh? By George, he doesn't see the point! Let's try again. Why am I like the resident manager--"

"For God's sake, Allan, be serious for a moment!" interposed Midwinter. "You don't know how anxious I am to hear if you have recovered the good opinion of your neighbors."

"That's just what the riddle was intended to tell you!" rejoined Allan. "But if you will have it in so many words, my own impression is that you would have done better not to disturb me under that tree in the park. I've been calculating it to a nicety, and I beg to inform you that I have sunk exactly three degrees lower in the estimation of the resident gentry since I had the pleasure of seeing you last."

"You will have your joke out," said Midwinter, bitterly. "Well, if I can't laugh, I can wait."

"My dear fellow, I'm not joking; I really mean what I say. You shall hear what happened; you shall have a report in full of my first visit. It will do, I can promise you, as a sample for all the rest. Mind this, in the first place, I've gone wrong with the best possible intentions. When I started for these visits, I own I was angry with that old brute of a lawyer, and I certainly had a notion of carrying things with a high hand. But it wore off somehow on the road; and the first family I called on, I went in, as I tell you, with the best possible intentions. Oh, dear, dear! there was the same spick-and-span reception-room for me to wait in, with the neat conservatory beyond, which I saw again and again and again at every other house I went to afterward. There was the same choice selection of books for me to look at--a religious book, a book about the Duke of Wellington, a book about sporting, and a book about nothing in particular, beautifully illustrated with pictures. Down came papa with his nice white hair, and mamma with her nice lace cap; down came young mister with the pink face and straw-colored whiskers, and young miss with the plump cheeks and the large petticoats. Don't suppose there was the least unfriendliness on my side; I always began with them in the same way--I insisted on shaking hands all round. That staggered them to begin with. When I came to the sore subject next--the subject of the public reception--I give you my word of honor I took the greatest possible pains with my apologies. It hadn't the slightest effect; they let my apologies in at one ear and out at the other, and then waited to hear more. Some men would have been disheartened: I tried another way with them; I addressed myself to the master of the house, and put it pleasantly next. 'The fact is,' I said, 'I wanted to escape the speechifying--my getting up, you know, and telling you to your face you're the best of men, and I beg to propose your health; and your getting up and telling me to my face I'm the best of men, and you beg to thank me; and so on, man after man, praising each other and pestering each other all round the table.' That's how I put it, in an easy, light-handed, convincing sort of way. Do you think any of them took it in the same friendly spirit? Not one! It's my belief they had got their speeches ready for the reception, with the flags and the flowers, and that they're secretly angry with me for stopping their open mouths just as they

were ready to begin. Anyway, whenever we came to the matter of the speechifying (whether they touched it first or I), down I fell in their estimation the first of those three steps I told you of just now. Don't suppose I made no efforts to get up again! I made desperate efforts. I found they were all anxious to know what sort of life I had led before I came in for the Thorpe Ambrose property, and I did my best to satisfy them. And what came of that, do you think? Hang me, if I didn't disappoint them for the second time! When they found out that I had actually never been to Eton or Harrow, or Oxford or Cambridge, they were quite dumb with astonishment. I fancy they thought me a sort of outlaw. At any rate, they all froze up again; and down I fell the second step in their estimation. Never mind! I wasn't to be beaten; I had promised you to do my best, and I did it. I tried cheerful small-talk about the neighborhood next. The women said nothing in particular; the men, to my unutterable astonishment, all began to condole with me. I shouldn't be able to find a pack of hounds, they said, within twenty miles of my house; and they thought it only right to prepare me for the disgracefully careless manner in which the Thorpe Ambrose covers had been preserved. I let them go on condoling with me, and then what do you think I did? I put my foot in it again. 'Oh, don't take that to heart!' I said; 'I don't care two straws about hunting or shooting, either. When I meet with a bird in my walk, I can't for the life of me feel eager to kill it; I rather like to see the bird flying about and enjoying itself.' You should have seen their faces! They had thought me a sort of outlaw before; now they evidently thought me mad. Dead silence fell upon them all; and down I tumbled the third step in the general estimation. It was just the same at the next house, and the next and the next. The devil possessed us all, I think. It would come out, now in one way, and now in another, that I couldn't make speeches--that I had been brought up without a university education--and that I could enjoy a ride on horseback without galloping after a wretched stinking fox or a poor distracted little hare. These three unlucky defects of mine are not excused, it seems, in a country gentleman (especially when he has dodged a public reception to begin with). I think I got on best, upon the whole, with the wives and daughters. The women and I always fell, sooner or later, on the subject of Mrs. Blanchard and her niece. We invariably agreed that they had done wisely in going to Florence; and the only reason we had to give for our opinion was that we thought their minds would be benefited after their sad bereavement, by the contemplation of the masterpieces of Italian art. Every one of the ladies--I solemnly declare it--at every house I went to, came sooner or later to Mrs. and Miss Blanchard's bereavement and the masterpieces of Italian art. What we should have done without that bright idea to help us, I really don't know. The one pleasant thing at any of the visits was when we all shook our heads together, and declared that the masterpieces would console them. As for the rest of it, there's only one thing

more to be said. What I might be in other places I don't know: I'm the wrong man in the wrong place here. Let me muddle on for the future in my own way, with my own few friends; and ask me anything else in the world, as long as you don't ask me to make any more calls on my neighbors."

With that characteristic request, Allan's report of his exploring expedition among the resident gentry came to a close. For a moment Midwinter remained silent. He had allowed Allan to run on from first to last without uttering a word on his side. The disastrous result of the visits--coming after what had happened earlier in the day; and threatening Allan, as it did, with exclusion from all local sympathies at the very outset of his local career--had broken down Midwinter's power of resisting the stealthily depressing influence of his own superstition. It was with an effort that he now looked up at Allan; it was with an effort that he roused himself to answer.

"It shall be as you wish," he said, quietly. "I am sorry for what has happened; but I am not the less obliged to you, Allan, for having done what I asked you."

His head sank on his breast, and the fatalist resignation which had once already quieted him on board the wreck now quieted him again. "What must be, will be," he thought once more. "What have I to do with the future, and what has he?"

"Cheer up!" said Allan. "Your affairs are in a thriving condition, at any rate. I paid one pleasant visit in the town, which I haven't told you of yet. I've seen Pedgift, and Pedgift's son, who helps him in the office. They're the two jolliest lawyers I ever met with in my life; and, what's more, they can produce the very man you want to teach you the steward's business."

Midwinter looked up quickly. Distrust of Allan's discovery was plainly written in his face already; but he said nothing.

"I thought of you," Allan proceeded, "as soon as the two Pedgifts and I had had a glass of wine all round to drink to our friendly connection. The finest sherry I ever tasted in my life; I've ordered some of the same--but that's not the question just now. In two words I told these worthy fellows your difficulty, and in two seconds old Pedgift understood all about it. 'I have got the man in my office,' he said, 'and before the audit-day comes, I'll place him with the greatest pleasure at your friend's disposal.'"

At this last announcement, Midwinter's distrust found its expression in words. He questioned Allan unsparingly.

The man's name, it appeared was Bashwood. He had been some time (how long, Allan could not remember) in Mr. Pedgift's service. He had been previously steward to a Norfolk gentleman (name forgotten) in the westward district of the county. He had lost the steward's place, through some domestic trouble, in connection with his son, the precise nature of which Allan was not able to specify. Pedgift vouched for him, and Pedgift would send him to Thorpe Ambrose two or three days before the rent-day dinner. He could not be spared, for office reasons, before that time. There was no need to fidget about it; Pedgift laughed at the idea of there being any difficulty with the tenants. Two or three day's work over the steward's books with a man to help Midwinter who practically understood that sort of thing would put him all right for the audit; and the other business would keep till afterward.

"Have you seen this Mr. Bashwood yourself, Allan?" asked Midwinter, still obstinately on his guard.

"No," replied Allan "he was out--out with the bag, as young Pedgift called it. They tell me he's a decent elderly man. A little broken by his troubles, and a little apt to be nervous and confused in his manner with strangers; but thoroughly competent and thoroughly to be depended on--those are Pedgift's own words."

Midwinter paused and considered a little, with a new interest in the subject. The strange man whom he had just heard described, and the strange man of whom he had asked his way where the three roads met, were remarkably like each other. Was this another link in the fast-lengthening chain of events? Midwinter grew doubly determined to be careful, as the bare doubt that it might be so passed through his mind.

"When Mr. Bashwood comes," he said, "will you let me see him, and speak to him, before anything definite is done?"

"Of course I will!" rejoined Allan. He stopped and looked at his watch. "And I'll tell you what I'll do for you, old boy, in the meantime," he added; "I'll introduce you to the prettiest girl in Norfolk! There's just time to run over to the cottage before dinner. Come along, and be introduced to Miss Milroy."

"You can't introduce me to Miss Milroy to-day," replied Midwinter; and he repeated the message of apology which had been brought from the major that afternoon. Allan was surprised and disappointed; but he was not to be foiled in his resolution to advance himself in the good graces of the

inhabitants of the cottage. After a little consideration he hit on a means of turning the present adverse circumstances to good account. "I'll show a proper anxiety for Mrs. Milroy's recovery," he said, gravely. "I'll send her a basket of strawberries, with my best respects, to-morrow morning."

Nothing more happened to mark the end of that first day in the new house.

The one noticeable event of the next day was another disclosure of Mrs. Milroy's infirmity of temper. Half an hour after Allan's basket of strawberries had been delivered at the cottage, it was returned to him intact (by the hands of the invalid lady's nurse), with a short and sharp message, shortly and sharply delivered. "Mrs. Milroy's compliments and thanks. Strawberries invariably disagreed with her." If this curiously petulant acknowledgment of an act of politeness was intended to irritate Allan, it failed entirely in accomplishing its object. Instead of being offended with the mother, he sympathized with the daughter. "Poor little thing," was all he said, "she must have a hard life of it with such a mother as that!"

He called at the cottage himself later in the day, but Miss Milroy was not to be seen; she was engaged upstairs. The major received his visitor in his working apron--far more deeply immersed in his wonderful clock, and far less readily accessible to outer influences, than Allan had seen him at their first interview. His manner was as kind as before; but not a word more could be extracted from him on the subject of his wife than that Mrs. Milroy "had not improved since yesterday."

The two next days passed quietly and uneventfully. Allan persisted in making his inquiries at the cottage; but all he saw of the major's daughter was a glimpse of her on one occasion at a window on the bedroom floor. Nothing more was heard from Mr. Pedgift; and Mr. Bashwood's appearance was still delayed. Midwinter declined to move in the matter until time enough had passed to allow of his first hearing from Mr. Brock, in answer to the letter which he had addressed to the rector on the night of his arrival at Thorpe Ambrose. He was unusually silent and quiet, and passed most of his hours in the library among the books. The time wore on wearily. The resident gentry acknowledged Allan's visit by formally leaving their cards. Nobody came near the house afterward; the weather was monotonously fine. Allan grew a little restless and dissatisfied. He began to resent Mrs. Milroy's illness; he began to think regretfully of his deserted yacht.

The next day--the twentieth--brought some news with it from the outer world. A message was delivered from Mr. Pedgift, announcing that his clerk, Mr. Bashwood, would personally present himself at Thorpe Ambrose on the

following day; and a letter in answer to Midwinter was received from Mr. Brock.

The letter was dated the 18th, and the news which it contained raised not Allan's spirits only, but Midwinter's as well.

On the day on which he wrote, Mr. Brock announced that he was about to journey to London; having been summoned thither on business connected with the interests of a sick relative, to whom he stood in the position of trustee. The business completed, he had good hope of finding one or other of his clerical friends in the metropolis who would be able and willing to do duty for him at the rectory; and, in that case, he trusted to travel on from London to Thorpe Ambrose in a week's time or less. Under these circumstances, he would leave the majority of the subjects on which Midwinter had written to him to be discussed when they met. But as time might be of importance, in relation to the stewardship of the Thorpe Ambrose estate, he would say at once that he saw no reason why Midwinter should not apply his mind to learning the steward's duties, and should not succeed in rendering himself invaluably serviceable in that way to the interests of his friend.

Leaving Midwinter reading and re-reading the rector's cheering letter, as if he was bent on getting every sentence in it by heart, Allan went out rather earlier than usual, to make his daily inquiry at the cottage--or, in plainer words, to make a fourth attempt at improving his acquaintance with Miss Milroy. The day had begun encouragingly, and encouragingly it seemed destined to go on. When Allan turned the corner of the second shrubbery, and entered the little paddock where he and the major's daughter had first met, there was Miss Milroy herself loitering to and fro on the grass, to all appearance on the watch for somebody.

She gave a little start when Allan appeared, and came forward without hesitation to meet him. She was not in her best looks. Her rosy complexion had suffered under confinement to the house, and a marked expression of embarrassment clouded her pretty face.

"I hardly know how to confess it, Mr. Armadale," she said, speaking eagerly, before Allan could utter a word, "but I certainly ventured here this morning in the hope of meeting with you. I have been very much distressed; I have only just heard, by accident, of the manner in which mamma received the present of fruit you so kindly sent to her. Will you try to excuse her? She has been miserably ill for years, and she is not always quite herself. After your being so very, very kind to me (and to papa), I really could not help

stealing out here in the hope of seeing you, and telling you how sorry I was. Pray forgive and forget, Mr. Armadale--pray do!" her voice faltered over the last words, and, in her eagerness to make her mother's peace with him, she laid her hand on his arm.

Allan was himself a little confused. Her earnestness took him by surprise, and her evident conviction that he had been offended honestly distressed him. Not knowing what else to do, he followed his instincts, and possessed himself of her hand to begin with.

"My dear Miss Milroy, if you say a word more you will distress me next," he rejoined, unconsciously pressing her hand closer and closer, in the embarrassment of the moment. "I never was in the least offended; I made allowances--upon my honor I did--for poor Mrs. Milroy's illness. Offended!" cried Allan, reverting energetically to the old complimentary strain. "I should like to have my basket of fruit sent back every day--if I could only be sure of its bringing you out into the paddock the first thing in the morning."

Some of Miss Milroy's missing color began to appear again in her cheeks. "Oh, Mr. Armadale, there is really no end to your kindness," she said; "you don't know how you relieve me!" She paused; her spirits rallied with as happy a readiness of recovery as if they had been the spirits of a child; and her native brightness of temper sparkled again in her eyes, as she looked up, shyly smiling in Allan's face. "Don't you think," she asked, demurely, "that it is almost time now to let go of my hand?"

Their eyes met. Allan followed his instincts for the second time. Instead of releasing her hand, he lifted it to his lips and kissed it. All the missing tints of the rosier sort returned to Miss Milroy's complexion on the instant. She snatched away her hand as if Allan had burned it.

"I'm sure that's wrong, Mr. Armadale," she said, and turned her head aside quickly, for she was smiling in spite of herself.

"I meant it as an apology for--for holding your hand too long," stammered Allan. "An apology can't be wrong--can it?"

There are occasions, though not many, when the female mind accurately appreciates an appeal to the force of pure reason. This was one of the occasions. An abstract proposition had been presented to Miss Milroy, and Miss Milroy was convinced. If it was meant as an apology, that, she admitted, made all the difference. "I only hope," said the little coquet, looking at him slyly, "you're not misleading me. Not that it matters much

now," she added, with a serious shake of her head. "If we have committed any improprieties, Mr. Armadale, we are not likely to have the opportunity of committing many more."

"You're not going away?" exclaimed Allan, in great alarm.

"Worse than that, Mr. Armadale. My new governess is coming."

"Coming?" repeated Allan. "Coming already?"

"As good as coming, I ought to have said--only I didn't know you wished me to be so very particular. We got the answers to the advertisements this morning. Papa and I opened them and read them together half an hour ago; and we both picked out the same letter from all the rest. I picked it out, because it was so prettily expressed; and papa picked it out because the terms were so reasonable. He is going to send the letter up to grandmamma in London by to-day's post, and, if she finds everything satisfactory on inquiry, the governess is to be engaged You don't know how dreadfully nervous I am getting about it already; a strange governess is such an awful prospect. But it is not quite so bad as going to school; and I have great hopes of this new lady, because she writes such a nice letter! As I said to papa, it almost reconciles me to her horrid, unromantic name."

"What is her name?" asked Allan. "Brown? Grubb? Scraggs? Anything of that sort?"

"Hush! hush! Nothing quite so horrible as that. Her name is Gwilt. Dreadfully unpoetical, isn't it? Her reference must be a respectable person, though; for she lives in the same part of London as grandmamma. Stop, Mr. Armadale! we are going the wrong way. No; I can't wait to look at those lovely flowers of yours this morning, and, many thanks, I can't accept your arm. I have stayed here too long already. Papa is waiting for his breakfast; and I must run back every step of the way. Thank you for making those kind allowances for mamma; thank you again and again, and good-by!"

"Won't you shake hands?" asked Allan.

She gave him her hand. "No more apologies, if you please, Mr. Armadale," she said, saucily. Once more their eyes met, and once more the plump, dimpled little hand found its way to Allan's lips. "It isn't an apology this time!" cried Allan, precipitately defending himself. "It's--it's a mark of respect."

She started back a few steps, and burst out laughing. "You won't find me in our grounds again, Mr. Armadale," she said, merrily, "till I have got Miss Gwilt to take care of me!" With that farewell, she gathered up her skirts, and ran back across the paddock at the top of her speed.

Allan stood watching her in speechless admiration till she was out of sight. His second interview with Miss Milroy had produced an extraordinary effect on him. For the first time since he had become the master of Thorpe Ambrose, he was absorbed in serious consideration of what he owed to his new position in life. "The question is," pondered Allan, "whether I hadn't better set myself right with my neighbors by becoming a married man? I'll take the day to consider; and if I keep in the same mind about it, I'll consult Midwinter to-morrow morning."

When the morning came, and when Allan descended to the breakfast-room, resolute to consult his friend on the obligations that he owed to his neighbors in general, and to Miss Milroy in particular, no Midwinter was to be seen. On making inquiry, it appeared that he had been observed in the hall; that he had taken from the table a letter which the morning's post had brought to him; and that he had gone back immediately to his own room. Allan at once ascended the stairs again, and knocked at his friend's door.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Not just now," was the answer.

"You have got a letter, haven't you?" persisted Allan. "Any bad news? Anything wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm not very well this morning. Don't wait breakfast for me; I'll come down as soon as I can."

No more was said on either side. Allan returned to the breakfast-room a little disappointed. He had set his heart on rushing headlong into his consultation with Midwinter, and here was the consultation indefinitely delayed. "What an odd fellow he is!" thought Allan. "What on earth can he be doing, locked in there by himself?"

He was doing nothing. He was sitting by the window, with the letter which had reached him that morning open in his hand. The handwriting was Mr. Brock's, and the words written were these:

"MY DEAR MIDWINTER--I have literally only two minutes before post time

to tell you that I have just met (in Kensington Gardens) with the woman whom we both only know, thus far, as the woman with the red Paisley shawl. I have traced her and her companion (a respectable-looking elderly lady) to their residence--after having distinctly heard Allan's name mentioned between them. Depend on my not losing sight of the woman until I am satisfied that she means no mischief at Thorpe Ambrose; and expect to hear from me again as soon as I know how this strange discovery is to end.

"Very truly yours, DECIMUS BROCK."

After reading the letter for the second time, Midwinter folded it up thoughtfully, and placed it in his pocket-book, side by side with the manuscript narrative of Allan's dream.

"Your discovery will not end with you, Mr. Brock," he said. "Do what you will with the woman, when the time comes the woman will be here."

## V. MOTHER OLDERSHAW ON HER GUARD.

1. From Mrs. Oldershaw (Diana Street, Pimlico) to Miss Gwilt (West Place, Old Brompton).

"Ladies' Toilet Repository, June 20th,

"Eight in the Evening.

"MY DEAR LYDIA--About three hours have passed, as well as I can remember, since I pushed you unceremoniously inside my house in West Place, and, merely telling you to wait till you saw me again, banged the door to between us, and left you alone in the hall. I know your sensitive nature, my dear, and I am afraid you have made up your mind by this time that never yet was a guest treated so abominably by her hostess as I have treated you.

"The delay that has prevented me from explaining my strange conduct is, believe me, a delay for which I am not to blame. One of the many delicate little difficulties which beset so essentially confidential a business as mine occurred here (as I have since discovered) while we were taking the air this afternoon in Kensington Gardens. I see no chance of being able to get back to you for some hours to come, and I have a word of very urgent caution for your private ear, which has been too long delayed already. So I must use the spare minutes as they come, and write.

"Here is caution the first. On no account venture outside the door again this evening, and be very careful, while the daylight lasts, not to show yourself at any of the front windows. I have reason to fear that a certain charming person now staying with me may possibly be watched. Don't be alarmed, and don't be impatient; you shall know why.

"I can only explain myself by going back to our unlucky meeting in the Gardens with that reverend gentleman who was so obliging as to follow us both back to my house.

"It crossed my mind, just as we were close to the door, that there might be a motive for the parson's anxiety to trace us home, far less creditable to his taste, and far more dangerous to both of us, than the motive you supposed him to have. In plainer words, Lydia, I rather doubted whether you had met with another admirer; and I strongly suspected that you had encountered another enemy instead. There was no time to tell you this. There was only time to see you safe into the house, and to make sure of the parson (in case

my suspicions were right) by treating him as he had treated us; I mean, by following him in his turn.

"I kept some little distance behind him at first, to turn the thing over in my mind, and to be satisfied that my doubts were not misleading me. We have no concealments from each other; and you shall know what my doubts were.

"I was not surprised at your recognizing him; he is not at all a common-looking old man; and you had seen him twice in Somersetshire--once when you asked your way of him to Mrs. Armadale's house, and once when you saw him again on your way back to the railroad. But I was a little puzzled (considering that you had your veil down on both those occasions, and your veil down also when we were in the Gardens) at his recognizing you. I doubted his remembering your figure in a summer dress after he had only seen it in a winter dress; and though we were talking when he met us, and your voice is one among your many charms, I doubted his remembering your voice, either. And yet I felt persuaded that he knew you. 'How?' you will ask. My dear, as ill-luck would have it, we were speaking at the time of young Armadale. I firmly believe that the name was the first thing that struck him; and when he heard that, your voice certainly and your figure perhaps, came back to his memory. 'And what if it did?' you may say. Think again, Lydia, and tell me whether the parson of the place where Mrs. Armadale lived was not likely to be Mrs. Armadale's friend? If he was her friend, the very first person to whom she would apply for advice after the manner in which you frightened her, and after what you most injudiciously said on the subject of appealing to her son, would be the clergyman of the parish--and the magistrate, too, as the landlord at the inn himself told you.

"You will now understand why I left you in that extremely uncivil manner, and I may go on to what happened next.

"I followed the old gentleman till he turned into a quiet street, and then accosted him, with respect for the Church written (I flatter myself) in every line of my face.

"'Will you excuse me,' I said, 'if I venture to inquire, sir, whether you recognized the lady who was walking with me when you happened to pass us in the Gardens?'

"'Will you excuse my asking, ma'am, why you put that question?' was all the answer I got.

"'I will endeavor to tell you, sir,' I said. 'If my friend is not an absolute stranger to you, I should wish to request your attention to a very delicate subject, connected with a lady deceased, and with her son who survives her.'

"He was staggered; I could see that. But he was sly enough at the same time to hold his tongue and wait till I said something more.

"'If I am wrong, sir, in thinking that you recognized my friend,' I went on, 'I beg to apologize. But I could hardly suppose it possible that a gentleman in your profession would follow a lady home who was a total stranger to him.'

"There I had him. He colored up (fancy that, at his age!), and owned the truth, in defense of his own precious character.

"'I have met with the lady once before, and I acknowledge that I recognized her in the Gardens,' he said. 'You will excuse me if I decline entering into the question of whether I did or did not purposely follow her home. If you wish to be assured that your friend is not an absolute stranger to me, you now have that assurance; and if you have anything particular to say to me, I leave you to decide whether the time has come to say it.'

"He waited, and looked about. I waited, and looked about. He said the street was hardly a fit place to speak of a delicate subject in. I said the street was hardly a fit place to speak of a delicate subject in. He didn't offer to take me to where he lived. I didn't offer to take him to where I lived. Have you ever seen two strange cats, my dear, nose to nose on the tiles? If you have, you have seen the parson and me done to the life.

"'Well, ma'am,' he said, at last, 'shall we go on with our conversation in spite of circumstances?'

"'Yes, sir,' I said; 'we are both of us, fortunately, of an age to set circumstances at defiance' (I had seen the old wretch looking at my gray hair, and satisfying himself that his character was safe if he was seen with me).

"After all this snapping and snarling, we came to the point at last. I began by telling him that I feared his interest in you was not of the friendly sort. He admitted that much--of course, in defense of his own character once more. I next repeated to him everything you had told me about your proceedings in Somersetshire, when we first found that he was following us home. Don't be alarmed my dear--I was acting on principle. If you want to make a dish of

lies digestible, always give it a garnish of truth. Well, having appealed to the reverend gentleman's confidence in this matter, I next declared that you had become an altered woman since he had seen you last. I revived that dead wretch, your husband (without mentioning names, of course), established him (the first place I thought of) in business at the Brazils, and described a letter which he had written, offering to forgive his erring wife, if she would repent and go back to him. I assured the parson that your husband's noble conduct had softened your obdurate nature; and then, thinking I had produced the right impression, I came boldly to close quarters with him. I said, 'At the very time when you met us, sir, my unhappy friend was speaking in terms of touching, self-reproach of her conduct to the late Mrs. Armadale. She confided to me her anxiety to make some atonement, if possible, to Mrs. Armadale's son; and it is at her entreaty (for she cannot prevail on herself to face you) that I now beg to inquire whether Mr. Armadale is still in Somersetshire, and whether he would consent to take back in small installments the sum of money which my friend acknowledges that she received by practicing on Mrs. Armadale's fears.' Those were my very words. A neater story (accounting so nicely for everything) was never told; it was a story to melt a stone. But this Somersetshire parson is harder than stone itself. I blush for him, my dear, when I assure you that he was evidently insensible enough to disbelieve every word I said about your reformed character, your husband in the Brazils, and your penitent anxiety to pay the money back. It is really a disgrace that such a man should be in the Church; such cunning as his is in the last degree unbecoming in a member of a sacred profession.

"'Does your friend propose to join her husband by the next steamer?' was all he condescended to say, when I had done.

"I acknowledge I was angry. I snapped at him. I said, 'Yes, she does.'

"'How am I to communicate with her?' he asked.

"I snapped at him again. 'By letter--through me.'

"'At what address, ma'am?'

"There, I had him once more. 'You have found my address out for yourself, sir,' I said. 'The directory will tell you my name, if you wish to find that out for yourself also; otherwise, you are welcome to my card.'

"'Many thanks, ma'am. If your friend wishes to communicate with Mr. Armadale, I will give you my card in return.'

"'Thank you, sir.'

"'Thank you, ma'am.'

"'Good-afternoon, sir.'

"'Good-afternoon, ma'am.'

"So we parted. I went my way to an appointment at my place of business, and he went his in a hurry; which is of itself suspicious. What I can't get over is his heartlessness. Heaven help the people who send for him to comfort them on their death-beds!

"The next consideration is, What are we to do? If we don't find out the right way to keep this old wretch in the dark, he may be the ruin of us at Thorpe Ambrose just as we are within easy reach of our end in view. Wait up till I come to you, with my mind free, I hope, from the other difficulty which is worrying me here. Was there ever such ill luck as ours? Only think of that man deserting his congregation, and coming to London just at the very time when we have answered Major Milroy's advertisement, and may expect the inquiries to be made next week! I have no patience with him; his bishop ought to interfere.

"Affectionately yours,

"MARIA OLDERSHAW."

2. From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw.

"West Place, June 20th.

"MY POOR OLD DEAR--How very little you know of my sensitive nature, as you call it! Instead of feeling offended when you left me, I went to your piano, and forgot all about you till your messenger came. Your letter is irresistible; I have been laughing over it till I am quite out of breath. Of all the absurd stories I ever read, the story you addressed to the Somersetshire clergyman is the most ridiculous. And as for your interview with him in the street, it is a perfect sin to keep it to ourselves. The public ought really to enjoy it in the form of a farce at one of the theaters.

"Luckily for both of us (to come to serious matters), your messenger is a prudent person. He sent upstairs to know if there was an answer. In the

midst of my merriment I had presence of mind enough to send downstairs and say 'Yes.'

"Some brute of a man says, in some book which I once read, that no woman can keep two separate trains of ideas in her mind at the same time. I declare you have almost satisfied me that the man is right. What! when you have escaped unnoticed to your place of business, and when you suspect this house to be watched, you propose to come back here, and to put it in the parson's power to recover the lost trace of you! What madness! Stop where you are; and when you have got over your difficulty at Pimlico (it is some woman's business, of course; what worries women are!), be so good as to read what I have got to say about our difficulty at Brompton.

"In the first place, the house (as you supposed) is watched.

"Half an hour after you left me, loud voices in the street interrupted me at the piano, and I went to the window. There was a cab at the house opposite, where they let lodgings; and an old man, who looked like a respectable servant, was wrangling with the driver about his fare. An elderly gentleman came out of the house, and stopped them. An elderly gentleman returned into the house, and appeared cautiously at the front drawing-room window. You know him, you worthy creature; he had the bad taste, some few hours since, to doubt whether you were telling him the truth. Don't be afraid, he didn't see me. When he looked up, after settling with the cab driver, I was behind the curtain. I have been behind the curtain once or twice since; and I have seen enough to satisfy me that he and his servant will relieve each other at the window, so as never to lose sight of your house here, night or day. That the parson suspects the real truth is of course impossible. But that he firmly believes I mean some mischief to young Armadale, and that you have entirely confirmed him in that conviction, is as plain as that two and two make four. And this has happened (as you helplessly remind me) just when we have answered the advertisement, and when we may expect the major's inquiries to be made in a few days' time.

"Surely, here is a terrible situation for two women to find themselves in? A fiddlestick's end for the situation! We have got an easy way out of it--thanks, Mother Oldershaw, to what I myself forced you to do, not three hours before the Somersetshire clergyman met with us.

"Has that venomous little quarrel of ours this morning--after we had pounced on the major's advertisement in the newspaper--quite slipped out of your memory? Have you forgotten how I persisted in my opinion that you were a great deal too well known in London to appear safely as my reference

in your own name, or to receive an inquiring lady or gentleman (as you were rash enough to propose) in your own house? Don't you remember what a passion you were in when I brought our dispute to an end by declining to stir a step in the matter, unless I could conclude my application to Major Milroy by referring him to an address at which you were totally unknown, and to a name which might be anything you pleased, as long as it was not yours? What a look you gave me when you found there was nothing for it but to drop the whole speculation or to let me have my own way! How you fumed over the lodging hunting on the other side of the Park! and how you groaned when you came back, possessed of furnished apartments in respectable Bayswater, over the useless expense I had put you to!

"What do you think of those furnished apartments now, you obstinate old woman? Here we are, with discovery threatening us at our very door, and with no hope of escape unless we can contrive to disappear from the parson in the dark. And there are the lodgings in Bayswater, to which no inquisitive strangers have traced either you or me, ready and waiting to swallow us up--the lodgings in which we can escape all further molestation, and answer the major's inquiries at our ease. Can you see, at last, a little further than your poor old nose? Is there anything in the world to prevent your safe disappearance from Pimlico to-night, and your safe establishment at the new lodgings, in the character of my respectable reference, half an hour afterward? Oh, fie, fie, Mother Oldershaw! Go down on your wicked old knees, and thank your stars that you had a she-devil like me to deal with this morning!

"Suppose we come now to the only difficulty worth mentioning--my difficulty. Watched as I am in this house, how am I to join you without bringing the parson or the parson's servant with me at my heels?

"Being to all intents and purposes a prisoner here, it seems to me that I have no choice but to try the old prison plan of escape: a change of clothes. I have been looking at your house-maid. Except that we are both light, her face and hair and my face and hair are as unlike each other as possible. But she is as nearly as can be my height and size; and (if she only knew how to dress herself, and had smaller feet) her figure is a very much better one than it ought to be for a person in her station in life.

"My idea is to dress her in the clothes I wore in the Gardens to-day; to send her out, with our reverend enemy in full pursuit of her; and, as soon as the coast is clear, to slip away myself and join you. The thing would be quite impossible, of course, if I had been seen with my veil up; but, as events have turned out, it is one advantage of the horrible exposure which followed my

marriage that I seldom show myself in public, and never, of course, in such a populous place as London, without wearing a thick veil and keeping that veil down. If the house-maid wears my dress, I don't really see why the house-maid may not be counted on to represent me to the life.

"The one question is, Can the woman be trusted? If she can, send me a line, telling her, on your authority, that she is to place herself at my disposal. I won't say a word till I have heard from you first.

"Let me have my answer to-night. As long as we were only talking about my getting the governess's place, I was careless enough how it ended. But now that we have actually answered Major Milroy's advertisement, I am in earnest at last. I mean to be Mrs. Armadale of Thorpe Ambrose; and woe to the man or woman who tries to stop me! Yours,

"LYDIA GWILT.

"P.S.--I open my letter again to say that you need have no fear of your messenger being followed on his return to Pimlico. He will drive to a public-house where he is known, will dismiss the cab at the door, and will go out again by a back way which is only used by the landlord and his friends.--L. G."

3. From Mrs. Oldershaw to Miss Gwilt.

"Diana Street, 10 o'clock.

"MY DEAR LYDIA--You have written me a heartless letter. If you had been in my trying position, harassed as I was when I wrote to you, I should have made allowances for my friend when I found my friend not so sharp as usual. But the vice of the present age is a want of consideration for persons in the decline of life. Morally speaking, you are in a sad state, my dear; and you stand much in need of a good example. You shall have a good example--I forgive you.

"Having now relieved my mind by the performance of a good action, suppose I show you next (though I protest against the vulgarity of the expression) that I can see a little further than my poor old nose?

"I will answer your question about the house-maid first. You may trust her implicitly. She has had her troubles, and has learned discretion. She also looks your age; though it is only her due to say that, in this particular, she has some years the advantage of you. I inclose the necessary directions

which will place her entirely at your disposal.

"And what comes next?

"Your plan for joining me at Bayswater comes next. It is very well as far as it goes; but it stands sadly in need of a little judicious improvement. There is a serious necessity (you shall know why presently) for deceiving the parson far more completely than you propose to deceive him. I want him to see the house-maid's face under circumstances which will persuade him that it is your face. And then, going a step further, I want him to see the house-maid leave London, under the impression that he has seen you start on the first stage of your journey to the Brazils. He didn't believe in that journey when I announced it to him this afternoon in the street. He may believe in it yet, if you follow the directions I am now going to give you.

"To-morrow is Saturday. Send the housemaid out in your walking dress of to-day, just as you propose; but don't stir out yourself, and don't go near the window. Desire the woman to keep her veil down, to take half an hour's walk (quite unconscious, of course, of the parson or his servant at her heels), and then to come back to you. As soon as she appears, send her instantly to the open window, instructing her to lift her veil carelessly and look out. Let her go away again after a minute or two, take off her bonnet and shawl, and then appear once more at the window, or, better still, in the balcony outside. She may show herself again occasionally (not too often) later in the day. And to-morrow--as we have a professional gentleman to deal with--by all means send her to church. If these proceedings don't persuade the parson that the house-maid's face is your face, and if they don't make him readier to believe in your reformed character than he was when I spoke to him, I have lived sixty years, my love, in this vale of tears to mighty little purpose.

"The next day is Monday. I have looked at the shipping advertisements, and I find that a steamer leaves Liverpool for the Brazils on Tuesday. Nothing could be more convenient; we will start you on your voyage under the parson's own eyes. You may manage it in this way:

"At one o'clock send out the man who cleans the knives and forks to get a cab; and when he has brought it up to the door, let him go back and get a second cab, which he is to wait in himself, round the corner, in the square. Let the house-maid (still in your dress) drive off, with the necessary boxes, in the first cab to the North-western Railway. When she is gone, slip out yourself to the cab waiting round the corner, and come to me at Bayswater. They may be prepared to follow the house-maid's cab, because they have seen it at the door; but they won't be prepared to follow your cab, because it

has been hidden round the corner. When the house-maid has got to the station, and has done her best to disappear in the crowd (I have chosen the mixed train at 2:10, so as to give her every chance), you will be safe with me; and whether they do or do not find out that she does not really start for Liverpool won't matter by that time. They will have lost all trace of you; and they may follow the house-maid half over London, if they like. She has my instructions (inclosed) to leave the empty boxes to find their way to the lost luggage office and to go to her friends in the City, and stay there till I write word that I want her again.

"And what is the object of all this?

"My dear Lydia, the object is your future security (and mine). We may succeed or we may fail, in persuading the parson that you have actually gone to the Brazils. If we succeed, we are relieved of all fear of him. If we fail, he will warn young Armadale to be careful of a woman like my house-maid, and not of a woman like you. This last gain is a very important one; for we don't know that Mrs. Armadale may not have told him your maiden name. In that event, the 'Miss Gwilt' whom he will describe as having slipped through his fingers here will be so entirely unlike the 'Miss Gwilt' established at Thorpe Ambrose, as to satisfy everybody that it is not a case of similarity of persons, but only a case of similarity of names.

"What do you say now to my improvement on your idea? Are my brains not quite so addled as you thought them when you wrote? Don't suppose I'm at all overboastful about my own ingenuity. Cleverer tricks than this trick of mine are played off on the public by swindlers, and are recorded in the newspapers every week. I only want to show you that my assistance is not less necessary to the success of the Armadale speculation now than it was when I made our first important discoveries, by means of the harmless-looking young man and the private inquiry office in Shadyside Place.

"There is nothing more to say that I know of, except that I am just going to start for the new lodging, with a box directed in my new name. The last expiring moments of Mother Oldershaw, of the Toilet Repository, are close at hand, and the birth of Miss Gwilt's respectable reference, Mrs. Mandeville, will take place in a cab in five minutes' time. I fancy I must be still young at heart, for I am quite in love already with my romantic name; it sounds almost as pretty as Mrs. Armadale of Thorpe Ambrose, doesn't it?

"Good-night, my dear, and pleasant dreams. If any accident happens between this and Monday, write to me instantly by post. If no accident happens you will be with me in excellent time for the earliest inquiries that

the major can possibly make. My last words are, don't go out, and don't venture near the front windows till Monday comes.

"Affectionately yours,

"M. O."

## VI. MIDWINTER IN DISGUISE.

Toward noon on the day of the twenty-first, Miss Milroy was loitering in the cottage garden--released from duty in the sick-room by an improvement in her mother's health--when her attention was attracted by the sound of voices in the park. One of the voices she instantly recognized as Allan's; the other was strange to her. She put aside the branches of a shrub near the garden palings, and, peeping through, saw Allan approaching the cottage gate, in company with a slim, dark, undersized man, who was talking and laughing excitably at the top of his voice. Miss Milroy ran indoors to warn her father of Mr. Armadale's arrival, and to add that he was bringing with him a noisy stranger, who was, in all probability, the friend generally reported to be staying with the squire at the great house.

Had the major's daughter guessed right? Was the squire's loud-talking, loud-laughing companion the shy, sensitive Midwinter of other times? It was even so. In Allan's presence, that morning, an extraordinary change had passed over the ordinarily quiet demeanor of Allan's friend.

When Midwinter had first appeared in the breakfast-room, after putting aside Mr. Brock's startling letter, Allan had been too much occupied to pay any special attention to him. The undecided difficulty of choosing the day for the audit dinner had pressed for a settlement once more, and had been fixed at last (under the butler's advice) for Saturday, the twenty-eighth of the month. It was only on turning round to remind Midwinter of the ample space of time which the new arrangement allowed for mastering the steward's books, that even Allan's flighty attention had been arrested by a marked change in the face that confronted him. He had openly noticed the change in his usual blunt manner, and had been instantly silenced by a fretful, almost an angry, reply. The two had sat down together to breakfast without the usual cordiality, and the meal had proceeded gloomily, till Midwinter himself broke the silence by bursting into the strange outbreak of gayety which had revealed in Allan's eyes a new side to the character of his friend.

As usual with most of Allan's judgments, here again the conclusion was wrong. It was no new side to Midwinter's character that now presented itself--it was only a new aspect of the one ever-recurring struggle of Midwinter's life.

Irritated by Allan's discovery of the change in him, and dreading the next questions that Allan's curiosity might put, Midwinter had roused himself to efface, by main force, the impression which his own altered appearance had

produced. It was one of those efforts which no men compass so resolutely as the men of his quick temper and his sensitive feminine organization. With his whole mind still possessed by the firm belief that the Fatality had taken one great step nearer to Allan and himself since the rector's adventure in Kensington Gardens--with his face still betraying what he had suffered, under the renewed conviction that his father's death-bed warning was now, in event after event, asserting its terrible claim to part him, at any sacrifice, from the one human creature whom he loved--with the fear still busy at his heart that the first mysterious vision of Allan's Dream might be a vision realized, before the new day that now saw the two Armadales together was a day that had passed over their heads--with these triple bonds, wrought by his own superstition, fettering him at that moment as they had never fettered him yet, he mercilessly spurred his resolution to the desperate effort of rivaling, in Allan's presence, the gayety and good spirits of Allan himself.

He talked and laughed, and heaped his plate indiscriminately from every dish on the breakfast-table. He made noisily merry with jests that had no humor, and stories that had no point. He first astonished Allan, then amused him, then won his easily encouraged confidence on the subject of Miss Milroy. He shouted with laughter over the sudden development of Allan's views on marriage, until the servants downstairs began to think that their master's strange friend had gone mad. Lastly, he had accepted Allan's proposal that he should be presented to the major's daughter, and judge of her for himself, as readily, nay, more readily than it would have been accepted by the least diffident man living. There the two now stood at the cottage gate--Midwinter's voice rising louder and louder over Allan's--Midwinter's natural manner disguised (how madly and miserably none but he knew!) in a coarse masquerade of boldness--the outrageous, the unendurable boldness of a shy man.

They were received in the parlor by the major's daughter, pending the arrival of the major himself.

Allan attempted to present his friend in the usual form. To his astonishment, Midwinter took the words flippantly out of his lips, and introduced himself to Miss Milroy with a confident look, a hard laugh, and a clumsy assumption of ease which presented him at his worst. His artificial spirits, lashed continuously into higher and higher effervescence since the morning, were now mounting hysterically beyond his own control. He looked and spoke with that terrible freedom of license which is the necessary consequence, when a diffident man has thrown off his reserve, of the very effort by which he has broken loose from his own restraints. He involved himself in a confused medley of apologies that were not wanted, and of

compliments that might have overflattered the vanity of a savage. He looked backward and forward from Miss Milroy to Allan, and declared jocosely that he understood now why his friend's morning walks were always taken in the same direction. He asked her questions about her mother, and cut short the answers she gave him by remarks on the weather. In one breath, he said she must feel the day insufferably hot, and in another he protested that he quite envied her in her cool muslin dress.

The major came in.

Before he could say two words, Midwinter overwhelmed him with the same frenzy of familiarity, and the same feverish fluency of speech. He expressed his interest in Mrs. Milroy's health in terms which would have been exaggerated on the lips of a friend of the family. He overflowed into a perfect flood of apologies for disturbing the major at his mechanical pursuits. He quoted Allan's extravagant account of the clock, and expressed his own anxiety to see it in terms more extravagant still. He paraded his superficial book knowledge of the great clock at Strasbourg, with far-fetched jests on the extraordinary automaton figures which that clock puts in motion--on the procession of the Twelve Apostles, which walks out under the dial at noon, and on the toy cock, which crows at St. Peter's appearance--and this before a man who had studied every wheel in that complex machinery, and who had passed whole years of his life in trying to imitate it. "I hear you have outnumbered the Strasbourg apostles, and outcrowed the Strasbourg cock," he exclaimed, with the tone and manner of a friend habitually privileged to waive all ceremony; "and I am dying, absolutely dying, major, to see your wonderful clock!"

Major Milroy had entered the room with his mind absorbed in his own mechanical contrivances as usual. But the sudden shock of Midwinter's familiarity was violent enough to recall him instantly to himself, and to make him master again, for the time, of his social resources as a man of the world.

"Excuse me for interrupting you," he said, stopping Midwinter for the moment, by a look of steady surprise. "I happen to have seen the clock at Strasbourg; and it sounds almost absurd in my ears (if you will pardon me for saying so) to put my little experiment in any light of comparison with that wonderful achievement. There is nothing else of the kind like it in the world!" He paused, to control his own mounting enthusiasm; the clock at Strasbourg was to Major Milroy what the name of Michael Angelo was to Sir Joshua Reynolds. "Mr. Armadale's kindness has led him to exaggerate a little," pursued the major, smiling at Allan, and passing over another

attempt of Midwinter's to seize on the talk, as if no such attempt had been made. "But as there does happen to be this one point of resemblance between the great clock abroad and the little clock at home, that they both show what they can do on the stroke of noon, and as it is close on twelve now, if you still wish to visit my workshop, Mr. Midwinter, the sooner I show you the way to it the better." He opened the door, and apologized to Midwinter, with marked ceremony, for preceding him out of the room.

"What do you think of my friend?" whispered Allan, as he and Miss Milroy followed.

"Must I tell you the truth, Mr. Armadale?" she whispered back.

"Of course!"

"Then I don't like him at all!"

"He's the best and dearest fellow in the world," rejoined the outspoken Allan. "You'll like him better when you know him better--I'm sure you will!"

Miss Milroy made a little grimace, implying supreme indifference to Midwinter, and saucy surprise at Allan's earnest advocacy of the merits of his friend. "Has he got nothing more interesting to say to me than that," she wondered, privately, "after kissing my hand twice yesterday morning?"

They were all in the major's workroom before Allan had the chance of trying a more attractive subject. There, on the top of a rough wooden case, which evidently contained the machinery, was the wonderful clock. The dial was crowned by a glass pedestal placed on rock-work in carved ebony; and on the top of the pedestal sat the inevitable figure of Time, with his everlasting scythe in his hand. Below the dial was a little platform, and at either end of it rose two miniature sentry-boxes, with closed doors. Externally, this was all that appeared, until the magic moment came when the clock struck twelve noon.

It wanted then about three minutes to twelve; and Major Milroy seized the opportunity of explaining what the exhibition was to be, before the exhibition began.

"At the first words, his mind fell back again into its old absorption over the one employment of his life. He turned to Midwinter (who had persisted in talking all the way from the parlor, and who was talking still) without a trace left in his manner of the cool and cutting composure with which he had

spoken but a few minutes before. The noisy, familiar man, who had been an ill-bred intruder in the parlor, became a privileged guest in the workshop, for there he possessed the all-atoning social advantage of being new to the performances of the wonderful clock.

"At the first stroke of twelve, Mr. Midwinter," said the major, quite eagerly, "keep your eye on the figure of Time: he will move his scythe, and point it downward to the glass pedestal. You will next see a little printed card appear behind the glass, which will tell you the day of the month and the day of the week. At the last stroke of the clock, Time will lift his scythe again into its former position, and the chimes will ring a peal. The peal will be succeeded by the playing of a tune--the favorite march of my old regiment--and then the final performance of the clock will follow. The sentry-boxes, which you may observe at each side, will both open at the same moment. In one of them you will see the sentinel appear; and from the other a corporal and two privates will march across the platform to relieve the guard, and will then disappear, leaving the new sentinel at his post. I must ask your kind allowances for this last part of the performance. The machinery is a little complicated, and there are defects in it which I am ashamed to say I have not yet succeeded in remedying as I could wish. Sometimes the figures go all wrong, and sometimes they go all right. I hope they may do their best on the occasion of your seeing them for the first time."

As the major, posted near his clock, said the last words, his little audience of three, assembled at the opposite end of the room, saw the hour-hand and the minute-hand on the dial point together to twelve. The first stroke sounded, and Time, true to the signal, moved his scythe. The day of the month and the day of the week announced themselves in print through the glass pedestal next; Midwinter applauding their appearance with a noisy exaggeration of surprise, which Miss Milroy mistook for coarse sarcasm directed at her father's pursuits, and which Allan (seeing that she was offended) attempted to moderate by touching the elbow of his friend. Meanwhile, the performances of the clock went on. At the last stroke of twelve, Time lifted his scythe again, the chimes rang, the march tune of the major's old regiment followed; and the crowning exhibition of the relief of the guard announced itself in a preliminary trembling of the sentry-boxes, and a sudden disappearance of the major at the back of the clock.

The performance began with the opening of the sentry-box on the right-hand side of the platform, as punctually as could be desired; the door on the other side, however, was less tractable--it remained obstinately closed. Unaware of this hitch in the proceedings, the corporal and his two privates appeared in their places in a state of perfect discipline, tottered out across the platform,

all three trembling in every limb, dashed themselves headlong against the closed door on the other side, and failed in producing the smallest impression on the immovable sentry presumed to be within. An intermittent clicking, as of the major's keys and tools at work, was heard in the machinery. The corporal and his two privates suddenly returned, backward, across the platform, and shut themselves up with a bang inside their own door. Exactly at the same moment, the other door opened for the first time, and the provoking sentry appeared with the utmost deliberation at his post, waiting to be relieved. He was allowed to wait. Nothing happened in the other box but an occasional knocking inside the door, as if the corporal and his privates were impatient to be let out. The clicking of the major's tools was heard again among the machinery; the corporal and his party, suddenly restored to liberty, appeared in a violent hurry, and spun furiously across the platform. Quick as they were, however, the hitherto deliberate sentry on the other side now perversely showed himself to be quicker still. He disappeared like lightning into his own premises, the door closed smartly after him, the corporal and his privates dashed themselves headlong against it for the second time, and the major, appearing again round the corner of the clock, asked his audience innocently "if they would be good enough to tell him whether anything had gone wrong?"

The fantastic absurdity of the exhibition, heightened by Major Milroy's grave inquiry at the end of it, was so irresistibly ludicrous that the visitors shouted with laughter; and even Miss Milroy, with all her consideration for her father's sensitive pride in his clock, could not restrain herself from joining in the merriment which the catastrophe of the puppets had provoked. But there are limits even to the license of laughter; and these limits were ere long so outrageously overstepped by one of the little party as to have the effect of almost instantly silencing the other two. The fever of Midwinter's false spirits flamed out into sheer delirium as the performance of the puppets came to an end. His paroxysms of laughter followed each other with such convulsive violence that Miss Milroy started back from him in alarm, and even the patient major turned on him with a look which said plainly, Leave the room! Allan, wisely impulsive for once in his life, seized Midwinter by the arm, and dragged him out by main force into the garden, and thence into the park beyond.

"Good heavens! what has come to you!" he exclaimed, shrinking back from the tortured face before him, as he stopped and looked close at it for the first time.

For the moment, Midwinter was incapable of answering. The hysterical paroxysm was passing from one extreme to the other. He leaned against a

tree, sobbing and gasping for breath, and stretched out his hand in mute entreaty to Allan to give him time.

"You had better not have nursed me through my fever," he said, faintly, as soon as he could speak. "I'm mad and miserable, Allan; I have never recovered it. Go back and ask them to forgive me; I am ashamed to go and ask them myself. I can't tell how it happened; I can only ask your pardon and theirs." He turned aside his head quickly so as to conceal his face. "Don't stop here," he said; "don't look at me; I shall soon get over it." Allan still hesitated, and begged hard to be allowed to take him back to the house. It was useless. "You break my heart with your kindness," he burst out, passionately. "For God's sake, leave me by my self!"

Allan went back to the cottage, and pleaded there for indulgence to Midwinter, with an earnestness and simplicity which raised him immensely in the major's estimation, but which totally failed to produce the same favorable impression on Miss Milroy. Little as she herself suspected it, she was fond enough of Allan already to be jealous of Allan's friend.

"How excessively absurd!" she thought, pettishly. "As if either papa or I considered such a person of the slightest consequence!"

"You will kindly suspend your opinion, won't you, Major Milroy?" said Allan, in his hearty way, at parting.

"With the greatest pleasure!" replied the major, cordially shaking hands.

"And you, too, Miss Milroy?" added Allan.

Miss Milroy made a mercilessly formal bow. "My opinion, Mr. Armadale, is not of the slightest consequence."

Allan left the cottage, sorely puzzled to account for Miss Milroy's sudden coolness toward him. His grand idea of conciliating the whole neighborhood by becoming a married man underwent some modification as he closed the garden gate behind him. The virtue called Prudence and the Squire of Thorpe Ambrose became personally acquainted with each other, on this occasion, for the first time; and Allan, entering headlong as usual on the high-road to moral improvement, actually decided on doing nothing in a hurry!

A man who is entering on a course of reformation ought, if virtue is its own reward, to be a man engaged in an essentially inspiriting pursuit. But virtue

is not always its own reward; and the way that leads to reformation is remarkably ill-lighted for so respectable a thoroughfare. Allan seemed to have caught the infection of his friend's despondency. As he walked home, he, too, began to doubt--in his widely different way, and for his widely different reasons--whether the life at Thorpe Ambrose was promising quite as fairly for the future as it had promised at first.

## VII. THE PLOT THICKENS.

Two messages were waiting for Allan when he returned to the house. One had been left by Midwinter. "He had gone out for a long walk, and Mr. Armadale was not to be alarmed if he did not get back till late in the day." The other message had been left by "a person from Mr. Pedgift's office," who had called, according to appointment, while the two gentlemen were away at the major's. "Mr. Bashwood's respects, and he would have the honor of waiting on Mr. Armadale again in the course of the evening."

Toward five o'clock, Midwinter returned, pale and silent. Allan hastened to assure him that his peace was made at the cottage; and then, to change the subject, mentioned Mr. Bashwood's message. Midwinter's mind was so preoccupied or so languid that he hardly seemed to remember the name. Allan was obliged to remind him that Bashwood was the elderly clerk, whom Mr. Pedgift had sent to be his instructor in the duties of the steward's office. He listened without making any remark, and withdrew to his room, to rest till dinner-time.

Left by himself, Allan went into the library, to try if he could while away the time over a book.

He took many volumes off the shelves, and put a few of them back again; and there he ended. Miss Milroy contrived in some mysterious manner to get, in this case, between the reader and the books. Her formal bow and her merciless parting speech dwelt, try how he might to forget them, on Allan's mind; he began to grow more and more anxious as the idle hour wore on, to recover his lost place in her favor. To call again that day at the cottage, and ask if he had been so unfortunate as to offend her, was impossible. To put the question in writing with the needful nicety of expression proved, on trying the experiment, to be a task beyond his literary reach. After a turn or two up and down the room, with his pen in his mouth, he decided on the more diplomatic course (which happened, in this case, to be the easiest course, too), of writing to Miss Milroy as cordially as if nothing had happened, and of testing his position in her good graces by the answer that she sent him back. An invitation of some kind (including her father, of course, but addressed directly to herself) was plainly the right thing to oblige her to send a written reply; but here the difficulty occurred of what the invitation was to be. A ball was not to be thought of, in his present position with the resident gentry. A dinner-party, with no indispensable elderly lady on the premises to receive Miss Milroy--except Mrs. Gripper, who could only receive her in the kitchen--was equally out of the question. What was the invitation to be? Never backward, when he wanted help, in asking for it right

and left in every available direction, Allan, feeling himself at the end of his own resources, coolly rang the bell, and astonished the servant who answered it by inquiring how the late family at Thorpe Ambrose used to amuse themselves, and what sort of invitations they were in the habit of sending to their friends.

"The family did what the rest of the gentry did, sir," said the man, staring at his master in utter bewilderment. "They gave dinner-parties and balls. And in fine summer weather, sir, like this, they sometimes had lawn-parties and picnics--"

"That'll do!" shouted Allan. "A picnic's just the thing to please her. Richard, you're an invaluable man; you may go downstairs again."

Richard retired wondering, and Richard's master seized his ready pen.

"DEAR MISS MILROY--Since I left you it has suddenly struck me that we might have a picnic. A little change and amusement (what I should call a good shaking-up, if I wasn't writing to a young lady) is just the thing for you, after being so long indoors lately in Mrs. Milroy's room. A picnic is a change, and (when the wine is good) amusement, too. Will you ask the major if he will consent to the picnic, and come? And if you have got any friends in the neighborhood who like a picnic, pray ask them too, for I have got none. It shall be your picnic, but I will provide everything and take everybody. You shall choose the day, and we will picnic where you like. I have set my heart on this picnic.

"Believe me, ever yours,

"ALLAN ARMADALE."

On reading over his composition before sealing it up, Allan frankly acknowledged to himself, this time, that it was not quite faultless. "'Picnic' comes in a little too often," he said. "Never mind; if she likes the idea, she won't quarrel with that." He sent off the letter on the spot, with strict instructions to the messenger to wait for a reply.

In half an hour the answer came back on scented paper, without an erasure anywhere, fragrant to smell, and beautiful to see.

The presentation of the naked truth is one of those exhibitions from which the native delicacy of the female mind seems instinctively to revolt. Never were the tables turned more completely than they were now turned on Allan

by his fair correspondent. Machiavelli himself would never have suspected, from Miss Milroy's letter, how heartily she had repented her petulance to the young squire as soon as his back was turned, and how extravagantly delighted she was when his invitation was placed in her hands. Her letter was the composition of a model young lady whose emotions are all kept under parental lock and key, and served out for her judiciously as occasion may require. "Papa," appeared quite as frequently in Miss Milroy's reply as "picnic" had appeared in Allan's invitation. "Papa" had been as considerately kind as Mr. Armadale in wishing to procure her a little change and amusement, and had offered to forego his usual quiet habits and join the picnic. With "papa's" sanction, therefore, she accepted, with much pleasure, Mr. Armadale's proposal; and, at "papa's" suggestion, she would presume on Mr. Armadale's kindness to add two friends of theirs recently settled at Thorpe Ambrose, to the picnic party--a widow lady and her son; the latter in holy orders and in delicate health. If Tuesday next would suit Mr. Armadale, Tuesday next would suit "papa"--being the first day he could spare from repairs which were required by his clock. The rest, by "papa's" advice, she would beg to leave entirely in Mr. Armadale's hands; and, in the meantime, she would remain, with "papa's" compliments, Mr. Armadale's truly--
ELEANOR MILROY.

Who would ever have supposed that the writer of that letter had jumped for joy when Allan's invitation arrived? Who would ever have suspected that there was an entry already in Miss Milroy's diary, under that day's date, to this effect: "The sweetest, dearest letter from I-know-who; I'll never behave unkindly to him again as long as I live?" As for Allan, he was charmed with the sweet success of his maneuver. Miss Milroy had accepted his invitation; consequently, Miss Milroy was not offended with him. It was on the tip of his tongue to mention the correspondence to his friend when they met at dinner. But there was something in Midwinter's face and manner (even plain enough for Allan to see) which warned him to wait a little before he said anything to revive the painful subject of their visit to the cottage. By common consent they both avoided all topics connected with Thorpe Ambrose, not even the visit from Mr. Bashwood, which was to come with the evening, being referred to by either of them. All through the dinner they drifted further and further back into the old endless talk of past times about ships and sailing. When the butler withdrew from his attendance at table, he came downstairs with a nautical problem on his mind, and asked his fellow-servants if they any of them knew the relative merits "on a wind" and "off a wind" of a schooner and a brig.

The two young men had sat longer at table than usual that day. When they went out into the garden with their cigars, the summer twilight fell gray and

dim on lawn and flower bed, and narrowed round them by slow degrees the softly fading circle of the distant view. The dew was heavy, and, after a few minutes in the garden, they agreed to go back to the drier ground on the drive in front of the house.

They were close to the turning which led into the shrubbery, when there suddenly glided out on them, from behind the foliage, a softly stepping black figure--a shadow, moving darkly through the dim evening light. Midwinter started back at the sight of it, and even the less finely strung nerves of his friend were shaken for the moment.

"Who the devil are you?" cried Allan.

The figure bared its head in the gray light, and came slowly a step nearer. Midwinter advanced a step on his side, and looked closer. It was the man of the timid manners and the mourning garments, of whom he had asked the way to Thorpe Ambrose where the three roads met.

"Who are you?" repeated Allan.

"I humbly beg your pardon, sir," faltered the stranger, stepping back again, confusedly. "The servants told me I should find Mr. Armadale--"

"What, are you Mr. Bashwood?"

"Yes, if you please, sir."

"I beg your pardon for speaking to you so roughly," said Allan; "but the fact is, you rather startled me. My name is Armadale (put on your hat, pray), and this is my friend, Mr. Midwinter, who wants your help in the steward's office."

"We hardly stand in need of an introduction," said Midwinter. "I met Mr. Bashwood out walking a few days since, and he was kind enough to direct me when I had lost my way."

"Put on your hat," reiterated Allan, as Mr. Bashwood, still bareheaded, stood bowing speechlessly, now to one of the young men, and now to the other. "My good sir, put on your hat, and let me show you the way back to the house. Excuse me for noticing it," added Allan, as the man, in sheer nervous helplessness, let his hat fall, instead of putting it back on his head; "but you seem a little out of sorts; a glass of good wine will do you no harm before you and my friend come to business. Whereabouts did you meet with Mr.

Bashwood, Midwinter, when you lost your way?"

"I am too ignorant of the neighborhood to know. I must refer you to Mr. Bashwood."

"Come, tell us where it was," said Allan, trying, a little too abruptly, to set the man at his ease, as they all three walked back to the house.

The measure of Mr. Bashwood's constitutional timidity seemed to be filled to the brim by the loudness of Allan's voice and the bluntness of Allan's request. He ran over in the same feeble flow of words with which he had deluged Midwinter on the occasion when they first met.

"It was on the road, sir," he began, addressing himself alternately to Allan, whom he called, "sir," and to Midwinter, whom he called by his name, "I mean, if you please, on the road to Little Gill Beck. A singular name, Mr. Midwinter, and a singular place; I don't mean the village; I mean the neighborhood--I mean the 'Broads' beyond the neighborhood. Perhaps you may have heard of the Norfolk Broads, sir? What they call lakes in other parts of England, they call Broads here. The Broads are quite numerous; I think they would repay a visit. You would have seen the first of them, Mr. Midwinter, if you had walked on a few miles from where I had the honor of meeting you. Remarkably numerous, the Broads, sir--situated between this and the sea. About three miles from the sea, Mr. Midwinter--about three miles. Mostly shallow, sir, with rivers running between them. Beautiful; solitary. Quite a watery country, Mr. Midwinter; quite separate, as it were, in itself. Parties sometimes visit them, sir--pleasure parties in boats. It's quite a little network of lakes, or, perhaps--yes, perhaps, more correctly, pools. There is good sport in the cold weather. The wild fowl are quite numerous. Yes; the Broads would repay a visit, Mr. Midwinter. The next time you are walking that way. The distance from here to Little Gill Beck, and then from Little Gill Beck to Girdler Broad, which is the first you come to, is altogether not more--" In sheer nervous inability to leave off, he would apparently have gone on talking of the Norfolk Broads for the rest of the evening, if one of his two listeners had not unceremoniously cut him short before he could find his way into a new sentence.

"Are the Broads within an easy day's drive there and back from this house?" asked Allan, feeling, if they were, that the place for the picnic was discovered already.

"Oh, yes, sir; a nice drive--quite a nice easy drive from this beautiful place!"

They were by this time ascending the portico steps, Allan leading the way up, and calling to Midwinter and Mr. Bashwood to follow him into the library, where there was a lighted lamp.

In the interval which elapsed before the wine made its appearance, Midwinter looked at his chance acquaintance of the high-road with strangely mingled feelings of compassion and distrust--of compassion that strengthened in spite of him; of distrust that persisted in diminishing, try as he might to encourage it to grow. There, perched comfortless on the edge of his chair, sat the poor broken-down, nervous wretch, in his worn black garments, with his watery eyes, his honest old outspoken wig, his miserable mohair stock, and his false teeth that were incapable of deceiving anybody--there he sat, politely ill at ease; now shrinking in the glare of the lamp, now wincing under the shock of Allan's sturdy voice; a man with the wrinkles of sixty years in his face, and the manners of a child in the presence of strangers; an object of pity surely, if ever there was a pitiable object yet!

"Whatever else you're afraid of, Mr. Bashwood," cried Allan, pouring out a glass of wine, "don't be afraid of that! There isn't a headache in a hogshead of it! Make yourself comfortable; I'll leave you and Mr. Midwinter to talk your business over by yourselves. It's all in Mr. Midwinter's hands; he acts for me, and settles everything at his own discretion."

He said those words with a cautious choice of expression very uncharacteristic of him, and, without further explanation, made abruptly for the door. Midwinter, sitting near it, noticed his face as he went out. Easy as the way was into Allan's favor, Mr. Bashwood, beyond all kind of doubt, had in some unaccountable manner failed to find it!

The two strangely assorted companions were left together--parted widely, as it seemed on the surface, from any possible interchange of sympathy; drawn invisibly one to the other, nevertheless, by those magnetic similarities of temperament which overleap all difference of age or station, and defy all apparent incongruities of mind and character. From the moment when Allan left the room, the hidden Influence that works in darkness began slowly to draw the two men together, across the great social desert which had lain between them up to this day.

Midwinter was the first to approach the subject of the interview.

"May I ask," he began, "if you have been made acquainted with my position here, and if you know why it is that I require your assistance?"

Mr. Bashwood--still hesitating and still timid, but manifestly relieved by Allan's departure--sat further back in his chair, and ventured on fortifying himself with a modest little sip of wine.

"Yes, sir," he replied; "Mr. Pedgift informed me of all--at least I think I may say so--of all the circumstances. I am to instruct, or perhaps, I ought to say to advise--"

"No, Mr. Bashwood; the first word was the best word of the two. I am quite ignorant of the duties which Mr. Armadale's kindness has induced him to intrust to me. If I understand right, there can be no question of your capacity to instruct me, for you once filled a steward's situation yourself. May I inquire where it was?"

"At Sir John Mellowship's, sir, in West Norfolk. Perhaps you would like--I have got it with me--to see my testimonial? Sir John might have dealt more kindly with me; but I have no complaint to make; it's all done and over now!" His watery eyes looked more watery still, and the trembling in his hands spread to his lips as he produced an old dingy letter from his pocket-book and laid it open on the table.

The testimonial was very briefly and very coldly expressed, but it was conclusive as far as it went. Sir John considered it only right to say that he had no complaint to make of any want of capacity or integrity in his steward. If Mr. Bashwood's domestic position had been compatible with the continued performance of his duties on the estate, Sir John would have been glad to keep him. As it was, embarrassments caused by the state of Mr. Bashwood's personal affairs had rendered it undesirable that he should continue in Sir John's service; and on that ground, and that only, his employer and he had parted. Such was Sir John's testimony to Mr. Bashwood's character. As Midwinter read the last lines, he thought of another testimonial, still in his own possession--of the written character which they had given him at the school, when they turned their sick usher adrift in the world. His superstition (distrusting all new events and all new faces at Thorpe Ambrose) still doubted the man before him as obstinately as ever. But when he now tried to put those doubts into words, his heart upbraided him, and he laid the letter on the table in silence.

The sudden pause in the conversation appeared to startle Mr. Bashwood. He comforted himself with another little sip of wine, and, leaving the letter untouched, burst irrepressibly into words, as if the silence was quite unendurable to him.

"I am ready to answer any question, sir," he began. "Mr. Pedgift told me that I must answer questions, because I was applying for a place of trust. Mr. Pedgift said neither you nor Mr. Armadale was likely to think the testimonial sufficient of itself. Sir John doesn't say--he might have put it more kindly, but I don't complain--Sir John doesn't say what the troubles were that lost me my place. Perhaps you might wish to know--" He stopped confusedly, looked at the testimonial, and said no more.

"If no interests but mine were concerned in the matter," rejoined Midwinter, "the testimonial would, I assure you, be quite enough to satisfy me. But while I am learning my new duties, the person who teaches me will be really and truly the steward of my friend's estate. I am very unwilling to ask you to speak on what may be a painful subject, and I am sadly inexperienced in putting such questions as I ought to put; but, perhaps, in Mr. Armadale's interests, I ought to know something more, either from yourself, or from Mr. Pedgift, if you prefer it--" He, too, stopped confusedly, looked at the testimonial, and said no more.

There was another moment of silence. The night was warm, and Mr. Bashwood, among his other misfortunes, had the deplorable infirmity of perspiring in the palms of the hands. He took out a miserable little cotton pocket-handkerchief, rolled it up into a ball, and softly dabbed it to and fro, from one hand to the other, with the regularity of a pendulum. Performed by other men, under other circumstances, the action might have been ridiculous. Performed by this man, at the crisis of the interview, the action was horrible.

"Mr. Pedgift's time is too valuable, sir, to be wasted on me," he said. "I will mention what ought to be mentioned myself--if you will please to allow me. I have been unfortunate in my family. It is very hard to bear, though it seems not much to tell. My wife--" One of his hands closed fast on the pocket-handkerchief; he moistened his dry lips, struggled with himself, and went on.

"My wife, sir," he resumed, "stood a little in my way; she did me (I am afraid I must confess) some injury with Sir John. Soon after I got the steward's situation, she contracted--she took--she fell into habits (I hardly know how to say it) of drinking. I couldn't break her of it, and I couldn't always conceal it from Sir John's knowledge. She broke out, and--and tried his patience once or twice, when he came to my office on business. Sir John excused it, not very kindly; but still he excused it. I don't complain of Sir John! I don't complain now of my wife." He pointed a trembling finger at his miserable crape-covered beaver hat on the floor. "I'm in mourning for her," he said,

faintly. "She died nearly a year ago, in the county asylum here."

His mouth began to work convulsively. He took up the glass of wine at his side, and, instead of sipping it this time, drained it to the bottom. "I'm not much used to wine, sir," he said, conscious, apparently, of the flush that flew into his face as he drank, and still observant of the obligations of politeness amid all the misery of the recollections that he was calling up.

"I beg, Mr. Bashwood, you will not distress yourself by telling me any more," said Midwinter, recoiling from any further sanction on his part of a disclosure which had already bared the sorrows of the unhappy man before him to the quick.

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," replied Mr. Bashwood. "But if I don't detain you too long, and if you will please to remember that Mr. Pedgift's directions to me were very particular--and, besides, I only mentioned my late wife because if she hadn't tried Sir John's patience to begin with, things might have turned out differently--" He paused, gave up the disjointed sentence in which he had involved himself, and tried another. "I had only two children, sir," he went on, advancing to a new point in his narrative, "a boy and a girl. The girl died when she was a baby. My son lived to grow up; and it was my son who lost me my place. I did my best for him; I got him into a respectable office in London. They wouldn't take him without security. I'm afraid it was imprudent; but I had no rich friends to help me, and I became security. My boy turned out badly, sir. He--perhaps you will kindly understand what I mean, if I say he behaved dishonestly. His employers consented, at my entreaty, to let him off without prosecuting. I begged very hard--I was fond of my son James--and I took him home, and did my best to reform him. He wouldn't stay with me; he went away again to London; he--I beg your pardon, sir! I'm afraid I'm confusing things; I'm afraid I'm wandering from the point."

"No, no," said Midwinter, kindly. "If you think it right to tell me this sad story, tell it in your own way. Have you seen your son since he left you to go to London?"

"No, sir. He's in London still, for all I know. When I last heard of him, he was getting his bread--not very creditably. He was employed, under the inspector, at the Private Inquiry Office in Shadyside Place."

He spoke those words--apparently (as events then stood) the most irrelevant to the matter in hand that had yet escaped him; actually (as events were soon to be) the most vitally important that he had uttered yet--he spoke

those words absently, looking about him in confusion, and trying vainly to recover the lost thread of his narrative.

Midwinter compassionately helped him. "You were telling me," he said, "that your son had been the cause of your losing your place. How did that happen?"

"In this way, sir," said Mr. Bashwood, getting back again excitedly into the right train of thought. "His employers consented to let him off; but they came down on his security; and I was the man. I suppose they were not to blame; the security covered their loss. I couldn't pay it all out of my savings; I had to borrow--on the word of a man, sir, I couldn't help it--I had to borrow. My creditor pressed me; it seemed cruel, but, if he wanted the money, I suppose it was only just. I was sold out of house and home. I dare say other gentlemen would have said what Sir John said; I dare say most people would have refused to keep a steward who had had the bailiffs after him, and his furniture sold in the neighborhood. That was how it ended, Mr. Midwinter. I needn't detain you any longer--here is Sir John's address, if you wish to apply to him." Midwinter generously refused to receive the address.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Mr. Bashwood, getting tremulously on his legs. "There is nothing more, I think, except--except that Mr. Pedgift will speak for me, if you wish to inquire into my conduct in his service. I'm very much indebted to Mr. Pedgift; he's a little rough with me sometimes, but, if he hadn't taken me into his office, I think I should have gone to the workhouse when I left Sir John, I was so broken down." He picked up his dingy old hat from the floor. "I won't intrude any longer, sir. I shall be happy to call again if you wish to have time to consider before you decide-"

"I want no time to consider after what you have told me," replied Midwinter, warmly, his memory busy, while he spoke, with the time when he had told his story to Mr. Brock, and was waiting for a generous word in return, as the man before him was waiting now. "To-day is Saturday," he went on. "Can you come and give me my first lesson on Monday morning? I beg your pardon," he added, interrupting Mr. Bashwood's profuse expressions of acknowledgment, and stopping him on his way out of the room; "there is one thing we ought to settle, ought we not? We haven't spoken yet about your own interest in this matter; I mean, about the terms." He referred, a little confusedly, to the pecuniary part of the subject. Mr. Bashwood (getting nearer and nearer to the door) answered him more confusedly still.

"Anything, sir--anything you think right. I won't intrude any longer; I'll leave it to you and Mr. Armadale."

"I will send for Mr. Armadale, if you like," said Midwinter, following him into the hall. "But I am afraid he has as little experience in matters of this kind as I have. Perhaps, if you see no objection, we might be guided by Mr. Pedgift?"

Mr. Bashwood caught eagerly at the last suggestion, pushing his retreat, while he spoke, as far as the front door. "Yes, sir--oh, yes, yes! nobody better than Mr. Pedgift. Don't--pray don't disturb Mr. Armadale!" His watery eyes looked quite wild with nervous alarm as he turned round for a moment in the light of the hall lamp to make that polite request. If sending for Allan had been equivalent to unchaining a ferocious watch-dog, Mr. Bashwood could hardly have been more anxious to stop the proceeding. "I wish you kindly good-evening, sir," he went on, getting out to the steps. "I'm much obliged to you. I will be scrupulously punctual on Monday morning--I hope--I think--I'm sure you will soon learn everything I can teach you. It's not difficult--oh dear, no--not difficult at all! I wish you kindly good-evening, sir. A beautiful night; yes, indeed, a beautiful night for a walk home."

With those words, all dropping out of his lips one on the top of the other, and without noticing, in his agony of embarrassment at effecting his departure, Midwinter's outstretched hand, he went noiselessly down the steps, and was lost in the darkness of the night.

As Midwinter turned to re-enter the house, the dining-room door opened and his friend met him in the hall.

"Has Mr. Bashwood gone?" asked Allan.

"He has gone," replied Midwinter, "after telling me a very sad story, and leaving me a little ashamed of myself for having doubted him without any just cause. I have arranged that he is to give me my first lesson in the steward's office on Monday morning."

"All right," said Allan. "You needn't be afraid, old boy, of my interrupting you over your studies. I dare say I'm wrong--but I don't like Mr. Bashwood."

"I dare say I'm wrong," retorted the other, a little petulantly. "I do."

The Sunday morning found Midwinter in the park, waiting to intercept the postman, on the chance of his bringing more news from Mr. Brock.

At the customary hour the man made his appearance, and placed the

expected letter in Midwinter's hands. He opened it, far away from all fear of observation this time, and read these lines:

"MY DEAR MIDWINTER--I write more for the purpose of quieting your anxiety than because I have anything definite to say. In my last hurried letter I had no time to tell you that the elder of the two women whom I met in the Gardens had followed me, and spoken to me in the street. I believe I may characterize what she said (without doing her any injustice) as a tissue of falsehoods from beginning to end. At any rate, she confirmed me in the suspicion that some underhand proceeding is on foot, of which Allan is destined to be the victim, and that the prime mover in the conspiracy is the vile woman who helped his mother's marriage and who hastened his mother's death.

"Feeling this conviction, I have not hesitated to do, for Allan's sake, what I would have done for no other creature in the world. I have left my hotel, and have installed myself (with my old servant Robert) in a house opposite the house to which I traced the two women. We are alternately on the watch (quite unsuspected, I am certain, by the people opposite) day and night. All my feelings, as a gentleman and a clergyman, revolt from such an occupation as I am now engaged in; but there is no other choice. I must either do this violence to my own self-respect, or I must leave Allan, with his easy nature, and in his assailable position, to defend himself against a wretch who is prepared, I firmly believe, to take the most unscrupulous advantage of his weakness and his youth. His mother's dying entreaty has never left my memory; and, God help me, I am now degrading myself in my own eyes in consequence.

"There has been some reward already for the sacrifice. This day (Saturday) I have gained an immense advantage--I have at last seen the woman's face. She went out with her veil down as before; and Robert kept her in view, having my instructions, if she returned to the house, not to follow her back to the door. She did return to the house; and the result of my precaution was, as I had expected, to throw her off her guard. I saw her face unveiled at the window, and afterward again in the balcony. If any occasion should arise for describing her particularly, you shall have the description. At present I need only say that she looks the full age (five-and-thirty) at which you estimated her, and that she is by no means so handsome a woman as I had (I hardly know why) expected to see.

"This is all I can now tell you. If nothing more happens by Monday or Tuesday next, I shall have no choice but to apply to my lawyers for assistance; though I am most unwilling to trust this delicate and dangerous

matter in other hands than mine. Setting my own feelings however, out of the question, the business which has been the cause of my journey to London is too important to be trifled with much longer as I am trifling with it now. In any and every case, depend on my keeping you informed of the progress of events, and believe me yours truly,

"DECIMUS BROCK."

Midwinter secured the letter as he had secured the letter that preceded it--side by side in his pocket-book with the narrative of Allan's Dream.

"How many days more?" he asked himself, as he went back to the house. "How many days more?"

Not many. The time he was waiting for was a time close at hand.

Monday came, and brought Mr. Bashwood, punctual to the appointed hour. Monday came, and found Allan immersed in his preparations for the picnic. He held a series of interviews, at home and abroad, all through the day. He transacted business with Mrs. Gripper, with the butler, and with the coachman, in their three several departments of eating, drinking, and driving. He went to the town to consult his professional advisers on the subject of the Broads, and to invite both the lawyers, father and son (in the absence of anybody else in the neighborhood whom he could ask), to join the picnic. Pedgift Senior (in his department) supplied general information, but begged to be excused from appearing at the picnic, on the score of business engagements. Pedgift Junior (in his department) added all the details; and, casting business engagements to the winds, accepted the invitation with the greatest pleasure. Returning from the lawyer's office, Allan's next proceeding was to go to the major's cottage and obtain Miss Milroy's approval of the proposed locality for the pleasure party. This object accomplished, he returned to his own house, to meet the last difficulty now left to encounter--the difficulty of persuading Midwinter to join the expedition to the Broads.

On first broaching the subject, Allan found his friend impenetrably resolute to remain at home. Midwinter's natural reluctance to meet the major and his daughter after what had happened at the cottage, might probably have been overcome. But Midwinter's determination not to allow Mr. Bashwood's course of instruction to be interrupted was proof against every effort that could be made to shake it. After exerting his influence to the utmost, Allan was obliged to remain contented with a compromise. Midwinter promised, not very willingly, to join the party toward evening, at the place appointed

for a gypsy tea-making, which was to close the proceedings of the day. To this extent he would consent to take the opportunity of placing himself on a friendly footing with the Milroys. More he could not concede, even to Allan's persuasion, and for more it would be useless to ask.

The day of the picnic came. The lovely morning, and the cheerful bustle of preparation for the expedition, failed entirely to tempt Midwinter into altering his resolution. At the regular hour he left the breakfast-table to join Mr. Bashwood in the steward's office. The two were quietly closeted over the books, at the back of the house, while the packing for the picnic went on in front. Young Pedgift (short in stature, smart in costume, and self-reliant in manner) arrived some little time before the hour for starting, to revise all the arrangements, and to make any final improvements which his local knowledge might suggest. Allan and he were still busy in consultation when the first hitch occurred in the proceedings. The woman-servant from the cottage was reported to be waiting below for an answer to a note from her young mistress, which was placed in Allan's hands.

On this occasion Miss Milroy's emotions had apparently got the better of her sense of propriety. The tone of the letter was feverish, and the handwriting wandered crookedly up and down in deplorable freedom from all proper restraint.

"Oh, Mr. Armadale" (wrote the major's daughter), "such a misfortune! What are we to do? Papa has got a letter from grandmamma this morning about the new governess. Her reference has answered all the questions, and she's ready to come at the shortest notice. Grandmamma thinks (how provoking!) the sooner the better; and she says we may expect her--I mean the governess--either to-day or to-morrow. Papa says (he will be so absurdly considerate to everybody!) that we can't allow Miss Gwilt to come here (if she comes to-day) and find nobody at home to receive her. What is to be done? I am ready to cry with vexation. I have got the worst possible impression (though grandmamma says she is a charming person) of Miss Gwilt. Can you suggest something, dear Mr. Armadale? I'm sure papa would give way if you could. Don't stop to write; send me a message back. I have got a new hat for the picnic; and oh, the agony of not knowing whether I am to keep it on or take it off. Yours truly, E. M."

"The devil take Miss Gwilt!" said Allan, staring at his legal adviser in a state of helpless consternation.

"With all my heart, sir--I don't wish to interfere," remarked Pedgift Junior. "May I ask what's the matter?"

Allan told him. Mr. Pedgift the younger might have his faults, but a want of quickness of resource was not among them.

"There's a way out of the difficulty, Mr. Armadale," he said. "If the governess comes to-day, let's have her at the picnic."

Allan's eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"All the horses and carriages in the Thorpe Ambrose stables are not wanted for this small party of ours," proceeded Pedgift Junior. "Of course not! Very good. If Miss Gwilt comes to-day, she can't possibly get here before five o'clock. Good again. You order an open carriage to be waiting at the major's door at that time, Mr. Armadale, and I'll give the man his directions where to drive to. When the governess comes to the cottage, let her find a nice little note of apology (along with the cold fowl, or whatever else they give her after her journey) begging her to join us at the picnic, and putting a carriage at her own sole disposal to take her there. Gad, sir!" said young Pedgift, gayly, "she must be a Touchy One if she thinks herself neglected after that!"

"Capital!" cried Allan. "She shall have every attention. I'll give her the pony-chaise and the white harness, and she shall drive herself, if she likes."

He scribbled a line to relieve Miss Milroy's apprehensions, and gave the necessary orders for the pony-chaise. Ten minutes later, the carriages for the pleasure party were at the door.

"Now we've taken all this trouble about her," said Allan, reverting to the governess as they left the house, "I wonder, if she does come to-day, whether we shall see her at the picnic!"

"Depends, entirely on her age, sir," remarked young Pedgift, pronouncing judgment with the happy confidence in himself which eminently distinguished him. "If she's an old one, she'll be knocked up with the journey, and she'll stick to the cold fowl and the cottage. If she's a young one, either I know nothing of women, or the pony in the white harness will bring her to the picnic."

They started for the major's cottage.

## VIII. THE NORFOLK BROADS.

The little group gathered together in Major Milroy's parlor to wait for the carriages from Thorpe Ambrose would hardly have conveyed the idea, to any previously uninstructed person introduced among them, of a party assembled in expectation of a picnic. They were almost dull enough, as far as outward appearances went, to have been a party assembled in expectation of a marriage.

Even Miss Milroy herself, though conscious, of looking her best in her bright muslin dress and her gayly feathered new hat, was at this inauspicious moment Miss Milroy under a cloud. Although Allan's note had assured her, in Allan's strongest language, that the one great object of reconciling the governess's arrival with the celebration of the picnic was an object achieved, the doubt still remained whether the plan proposed--whatever it might be--would meet with her father's approval. In a word, Miss Milroy declined to feel sure of her day's pleasure until the carriage made its appearance and took her from the door. The major, on his side, arrayed for the festive occasion in a tight blue frock-coat which he had not worn for years, and threatened with a whole long day of separation from his old friend and comrade the clock, was a man out of his element, if ever such a man existed yet. As for the friends who had been asked at Allan's request--the widow lady (otherwise Mrs. Pentecost) and her son (the Reverend Samuel) in delicate health--two people less capable, apparently of adding to the hilarity of the day could hardly have been discovered in the length and breadth of all England. A young man who plays his part in society by looking on in green spectacles, and listening with a sickly smile, may be a prodigy of intellect and a mine of virtue, but he is hardly, perhaps, the right sort of man to have at a picnic. An old lady afflicted with deafness, whose one inexhaustible subject of interest is the subject of her son, and who (on the happily rare occasions when that son opens his lips) asks everybody eagerly, "What does my boy say?" is a person to be pitied in respect of her infirmities, and a person to be admired in respect of her maternal devotedness, but not a person, if the thing could possibly be avoided, to take to a picnic. Such a man, nevertheless, was the Reverend Samuel Pentecost, and such a woman was the Reverend Samuel's mother; and in the dearth of any other producible guests, there they were, engaged to eat, drink, and be merry for the day at Mr. Armadale's pleasure party to the Norfolk Broads.

The arrival of Allan, with his faithful follower, Pedgift Junior, at his heels, roused the flagging spirits of the party at the cottage. The plan for enabling

the governess to join the picnic, if she arrived that day, satisfied even Major Milroy's anxiety to show all proper attention to the lady who was coming into his house. After writing the necessary note of apology and invitation, and addressing it in her very best handwriting to the new governess, Miss Milroy ran upstairs to say good-by to her mother, and returned with a smiling face and a side look of relief directed at her father, to announce that there was nothing now to keep any of them a moment longer indoors. The company at once directed their steps to the garden gate, and were there met face to face by the second great difficulty of the day. How were the six persons of the picnic to be divided between the two open carriages that were in waiting for them?

Here, again, Pedgift Junior exhibited his invaluable faculty of contrivance. This highly cultivated young man possessed in an eminent degree an accomplishment more or less peculiar to all the young men of the age we live in: he was perfectly capable of taking his pleasure without forgetting his business. Such a client as the Master of Thorpe Ambrose fell but seldom in his father's way, and to pay special but unobtrusive attention to Allan all through the day was the business of which young Pedgift, while proving himself to be the life and soul of the picnic, never once lost sight from the beginning of the merry-making to the end. He had detected the state of affairs between Miss Milroy and Allan at glance, and he at once provided for his client's inclinations in that quarter by offering, in virtue of his local knowledge, to lead the way in the first carriage, and by asking Major Milroy and the curate if they would do him the honor of accompanying him.

"We shall pass a very interesting place to a military man, sir," said young Pedgift, addressing the major, with his happy and unblushing confidence--"the remains of a Roman encampment. And my father, sir, who is a subscriber," proceeded this rising lawyer, turning to the curate, "wished me to ask your opinion of the new Infant School buildings at Little Gill Beck. Would you kindly give it me as we go along?" He opened the carriage door, and helped in the major and the curate before they could either of them start any difficulties. The necessary result followed. Allan and Miss Milroy rode together in the same carriage, with the extra convenience of a deaf old lady in attendance to keep the squire's compliments within the necessary limits.

Never yet had Allan enjoyed such an interview with Miss Milroy as the interview he now obtained on the road to the Broads.

The dear old lady, after a little anecdote or two on the subject of her son, did the one thing wanting to secure the perfect felicity of her two youthful

companions: she became considerately blind for the occasion, as well as deaf. A quarter of an hour after the carriage left the major's cottage, the poor old soul, reposing on snug cushions, and fanned by a fine summer air, fell peaceably asleep. Allan made love, and Miss Milroy sanctioned the manufacture of that occasionally precious article of human commerce, sublimely indifferent on both sides to a solemn bass accompaniment on two notes, played by the curate's mother's unsuspecting nose. The only interruption to the love-making (the snoring, being a thing more grave and permanent in its nature, was not interrupted at all) came at intervals from the carriage ahead. Not satisfied with having the major's Roman encampment and the curate's Infant Schools on his mind, Pedgift Junior rose erect from time to time in his place, and, respectfully hailing the hindmost vehicle, directed Allan's attention, in a shrill tenor voice, and with an excellent choice of language, to objects of interest on the road. The only way to quiet him was to answer, which Allan invariably did by shouting back, "Yes, beautiful," upon which young Pedgift disappeared again in the recesses of the leading carriage, and took up the Romans and the Infants where he had left them last.

The scene through which the picnic party was now passing merited far more attention than it received either from Allan or Allan's friends.

An hour's steady driving from the major's cottage had taken young Armadale and his guests beyond the limits of Midwinter's solitary walk, and was now bringing them nearer and nearer to one of the strangest and loveliest aspects of nature which the inland landscape, not of Norfolk only, but of all England, can show. Little by little the face of the country began to change as the carriages approached the remote and lonely district of the Broads. The wheat fields and turnip fields became perceptibly fewer, and the fat green grazing grounds on either side grew wider and wider in their smooth and sweeping range. Heaps of dry rushes and reeds, laid up for the basket-maker and the thatcher, began to appear at the road-side. The old gabled cottages of the early part of the drive dwindled and disappeared, and huts with mud walls rose in their place. With the ancient church towers and the wind and water mills, which had hitherto been the only lofty objects seen over the low marshy flat, there now rose all round the horizon, gliding slow and distant behind fringes of pollard willows, the sails of invisible boats moving on invisible waters. All the strange and startling anomalies presented by an inland agricultural district, isolated from other districts by its intricate surrounding network of pools and streams--holding its communications and carrying its produce by water instead of by land--began to present themselves in closer and closer succession. Nets appeared on cottage pailings; little flat-bottomed boats lay strangely at rest among the

flowers in cottage gardens; farmers' men passed to and fro clad in composite costume of the coast and the field, in sailors' hats, and fishermen's boots, and plowmen's smocks; and even yet the low-lying labyrinth of waters, embosomed in its mystery of solitude, was a hidden labyrinth still. A minute more, and the carriages took a sudden turn from the hard high-road into a little weedy lane. The wheels ran noiseless on the damp and spongy ground. A lonely outlying cottage appeared with its litter of nets and boats. A few yards further on, and the last morsel of firm earth suddenly ended in a tiny creek and quay. One turn more to the end of the quay--and there, spreading its great sheet of water, far and bright and smooth, on the right hand and the left--there, as pure in its spotless blue, as still in its heavenly peacefulness, as the summer sky above it, was the first of the Norfolk Broads.

The carriages stopped, the love-making broke off, and the venerable Mrs. Pentecost, recovering the use of her senses at a moment's notice, fixed her eyes sternly on Allan the instant she woke.

"I see in your face, Mr. Armadale," said the old lady, sharply, "that you think I have been asleep."

The consciousness of guilt acts differently on the two sexes. In nine cases out of ten, it is a much more manageable consciousness with a woman than with a man. All the confusion, on this occasion, was on the man's side. While Allan reddened and looked embarrassed, the quick-witted Miss Milroy instantly embraced the old lady with a burst of innocent laughter. "He is quite incapable, dear Mrs. Pentecost," said the little hypocrite, "of anything so ridiculous as thinking you have been asleep!"

"All I wish Mr. Armadale to know," pursued the old lady, still suspicious of Allan, "is, that my head being giddy, I am obliged to close my eyes in a carriage. Closing the eyes, Mr. Armadale, is one thing, and going to sleep is another. Where is my son?"

The Reverend Samuel appeared silently at the carriage door, and assisted his mother to get out ("Did you enjoy the drive, Sammy?" asked the old lady. "Beautiful scenery, my dear, wasn't it?") Young Pedgift, on whom the arrangements for exploring the Broads devolved, hustled about, giving his orders to the boatman. Major Milroy, placid and patient, sat apart on an overturned punt, and privately looked at his watch. Was it past noon already? More than an hour past. For the first time, for many a long year, the famous clock at home had struck in an empty workshop. Time had lifted his wonderful scythe, and the corporal and his men had relieved guard, with

no master's eye to watch their performances, with no master's hand to encourage them to do their best. The major sighed as he put his watch back in his pocket. "I'm afraid I'm too old for this sort of thing," thought the good man, looking about him dreamily. "I don't find I enjoy it as much as I thought I should. When are we going on the water, I wonder? Where's Neelie?"

Neelie--more properly Miss Milroy--was behind one of the carriages with the promoter of the picnic. They were immersed in the interesting subject of their own Christian names, and Allan was as near a pointblank proposal of marriage as it is well possible for a thoughtless young gentleman of two-and-twenty to be.

"Tell me the truth," said Miss Milroy, with her eyes modestly riveted on the ground. "When you first knew what my name was, you didn't like it, did you?"

"I like everything that belongs to you," rejoined Allan, vigorously. "I think Eleanor is a beautiful name; and yet, I don't know why, I think the major made an improvement when he changed it to Neelie."

"I can tell you why, Mr. Armadale," said the major's daughter, with great gravity. "There are some unfortunate people in this world whose names are--how can I express it?--whose names are misfits. Mine is a misfit. I don't blame my parents, for of course it was impossible to know when I was a baby how I should grow up. But as things are, I and my name don't fit each other. When you hear a young lady called Eleanor, you think of a tall, beautiful, interesting creature directly--the very opposite of me! With my personal appearance, Eleanor sounds ridiculous; and Neelie, as you yourself remarked, is just the thing. No! no! don't say any more; I'm tired of the subject. I've got another name in my head, if we must speak of names, which is much better worth talking about than mine."

She stole a glance at her companion which said plainly enough, "The name is yours." Allan advanced a step nearer to her, and lowered his voice, without the slightest necessity, to a mysterious whisper. Miss Milroy instantly resumed her investigation of the ground. She looked at it with such extraordinary interest that a geologist might have suspected her of scientific flirtation with the superficial strata.

"What name are you thinking of?" asked Allan.

Miss Milroy addressed her answer, in the form of a remark, to the superficial

strata--and let them do what they liked with it, in their capacity of conductors of sound. "If I had been a man," she said, "I should so like to have been called Allan!"

She felt his eyes on her as she spoke, and, turning her head aside, became absorbed in the graining of the panel at the back of the carriage. "How beautiful it is!" she exclaimed, with a sudden outburst of interest in the vast subject of varnish. "I wonder how they do it?"

Man persists, and woman yields. Allan declined to shift the ground from love-making to coach-making. Miss Milroy dropped the subject.

"Call me by my name, if you really like it," he whispered, persuasively. "Call me 'Allan' for once; just to try."

She hesitated with a heightened color and a charming smile, and shook her head. "I couldn't just yet," she answered, softly.

"May I call you Neelie? Is it too soon?"

She looked at him again, with a sudden disturbance about the bosom of her dress, and a sudden flash of tenderness in her dark-gray eyes.

"You know best," she said, faintly, in a whisper.

The inevitable answer was on the tip of Allan's tongue. At the very instant, however, when he opened his lips, the abhorrent high tenor of Pedgift Junior, shouting for "Mr. Armadale," rang cheerfully through the quiet air. At the same moment, from the other side of the carriage, the lurid spectacles of the Reverend Samuel showed themselves officiously on the search; and the voice of the Reverend Samuel's mother (who had, with great dexterity, put the two ideas of the presence of water and a sudden movement among the company together) inquired distractedly if anybody was drowned? Sentiment flies and Love shudders at all demonstrations of the noisy kind. Allan said: "Damn it," and rejoined young Pedgift. Miss Milroy sighed, and took refuge with her father.

"I've done it, Mr. Armadale!" cried young Pedgift, greeting his patron gayly. "We can all go on the water together; I've got the biggest boat on the Broads. The little skiffs," he added, in a lower tone, as he led the way to the quay steps, "besides being ticklish and easily upset, won't hold more than two, with the boatman; and the major told me he should feel it his duty to go with his daughter, if we all separated in different boats. I thought that would

hardly do, sir," pursued Pedgift Junior, with a respectfully sly emphasis on the words. "And, besides, if we had put the old lady into a skiff, with her weight (sixteen stone if she's a pound), we might have had her upside down in the water half her time, which would have occasioned delay, and thrown what you call a damp on the proceedings. Here's the boat, Mr. Armadale. What do you think of it?"

The boat added one more to the strangely anomalous objects which appeared at the Broads. It was nothing less than a stout old lifeboat, passing its last declining years on the smooth fresh water, after the stormy days of its youth time on the wild salt sea. A comfortable little cabin for the use of fowlers in the winter season had been built amidships, and a mast and sail adapted for inland navigation had been fitted forward. There was room enough and to spare for the guests, the dinner, and the three men in charge. Allan clapped his faithful lieutenant approvingly on the shoulder; and even Mrs. Pentecost, when the whole party were comfortably established on board, took a comparatively cheerful view of the prospects of the picnic. "If anything happens," said the old lady, addressing the company generally, "there's one comfort for all of us. My son can swim."

The boat floated out from the creek into the placid waters of the Broad, and the full beauty of the scene opened on the view.

On the northward and westward, as the boat reached the middle of the lake, the shore lay clear and low in the sunshine, fringed darkly at certain points by rows of dwarf trees; and dotted here and there, in the opener spaces, with windmills and reed-thatched cottages, of puddled mud. Southward, the great sheet of water narrowed gradually to a little group of close-nestling islands which closed the prospect; while to the east a long, gently undulating line of reeds followed the windings of the Broad, and shut out all view of the watery wastes beyond. So clear and so light was the summer air that the one cloud in the eastern quarter of the heaven was the smoke cloud left by a passing steamer three miles distant and more on the invisible sea. When the voices of the pleasure party were still, not a sound rose, far or near, but the faint ripple at the bows, as the men, with slow, deliberate strokes of their long poles, pressed the boat forward softly over the shallow water. The world and the world's turmoil seemed left behind forever on the land; the silence was the silence of enchantment--the delicious interflow of the soft purity of the sky and the bright tranquillity of the lake.

Established in perfect comfort in the boat--the major and his daughter on one side, the curate and his mother on the other, and Allan and young Pedgift between the two--the water party floated smoothly toward the little

nest of islands at the end of the Broad. Miss Milroy was in raptures; Allan was delighted; and the major for once forgot his clock. Every one felt pleasurably, in their different ways, the quiet and beauty of the scene. Mrs. Pentecost, in her way, felt it like a clairvoyant--with closed eyes.

"Look behind you, Mr. Armadale," whispered young Pedgift. "I think the parson's beginning to enjoy himself."

An unwonted briskness--portentous apparently of coming speech--did certainly at that moment enliven the curate's manner. He jerked his head from side to side like a bird; he cleared his throat, and clasped his hands, and looked with a gentle interest at the company. Getting into spirits seemed, in the case of this excellent person, to be alarmingly like getting into the pulpit.

"Even in this scene of tranquillity," said the Reverend Samuel, coming out softly with his first contribution to the society in the shape of a remark, "the Christian mind--led, so to speak, from one extreme to another--is forcibly recalled to the unstable nature of all earthly enjoyments. How if this calm should not last? How if the winds rose and the waters became agitated?"

"You needn't alarm yourself about that, sir," said young Pedgift; "June's the fine season here--and you can swim."

Mrs. Pentecost (mesmerically affected, in all probability, by the near neighborhood of her son) opened her eyes suddenly and asked, with her customary eagerness. "What does my boy say?"

The Reverend Samuel repeated his words in the key that suited his mother's infirmity. The old lady nodded in high approval, and pursued her son's train of thought through the medium of a quotation.

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Pentecost, with infinite relish, "He rides the whirlwind, Sammy, and directs the storm!"

"Noble words!" said the Reverend Samuel. "Noble and consoling words!"

"I say," whispered Allan, "if he goes on much longer in that way, what's to be done?"

"I told you, papa, it was a risk to ask them," added Miss Milroy, in another whisper.

"My dear!" remonstrated the major. "We knew nobody else in the neighborhood, and, as Mr. Armadale kindly suggested our bringing our friends, what could we do?"

"We can't upset the boat," remarked young Pedgift, with sardonic gravity. "It's a lifeboat, unfortunately. May I venture to suggest putting something into the reverend gentleman's mouth, Mr. Armadale? It's close on three o'clock. What do you say to ringing the dinner-bell, sir?"

Never was the right man more entirely in the right place than Pedgift Junior at the picnic. In ten minutes more the boat was brought to a stand-still among the reeds; the Thorpe Ambrose hampers were unpacked on the roof of the cabin; and the current of the curate's eloquence was checked for the day.

How inestimably important in its moral results--and therefore how praiseworthy in itself--is the act of eating and drinking! The social virtues center in the stomach. A man who is not a better husband, father, and brother after dinner than before is, digestively speaking, an incurably vicious man. What hidden charms of character disclose themselves, what dormant amiabilities awaken, when our common humanity gathers together to pour out the gastric juice! At the opening of the hampers from Thorpe Ambrose, sweet Sociability (offspring of the happy union of Civilization and Mrs. Gripper) exhaled among the boating party, and melted in one friendly fusion the discordant elements of which that party had hitherto been composed. Now did the Reverend Samuel Pentecost, whose light had hitherto been hidden under a bushel, prove at last that he could do something by proving that he could eat. Now did Pedgift Junior shine brighter than ever he had shone yet in gems of caustic humor and exquisite fertilities of resource. Now did the squire, and the squire's charming guest, prove the triple connection between Champagne that sparkles, Love that grows bolder, and Eyes whose vocabulary is without the word No. Now did cheerful old times come back to the major's memory, and cheerful old stories not told for years find their way to the major's lips. And now did Mrs. Pentecost, coming out wakefully in the whole force of her estimable maternal character, seize on a supplementary fork, and ply that useful instrument incessantly between the choicest morsels in the whole round of dishes, and the few vacant places left available on the Reverend Samuel's plate. "Don't laugh at my son," cried the old lady, observing the merriment which her proceedings produced among the company. "It's my fault, poor dear--I make him eat!" And there are men in this world who, seeing virtues such as these developed at the table, as they are developed nowhere else, can, nevertheless, rank the glorious privilege of dining with the smallest of the

diurnal personal worries which necessity imposes on mankind--with buttoning your waistcoat, for example, or lacing your stays! Trust no such monster as this with your tender secrets, your loves and hatreds, your hopes and fears. His heart is uncorrected by his stomach, and the social virtues are not in him.

The last mellow hours of the day and the first cool breezes of the long summer evening had met before the dishes were all laid waste, and the bottles as empty as bottles should be. This point in the proceedings attained, the picnic party looked lazily at Pedgift Junior to know what was to be done next. That inexhaustible functionary was equal as ever to all the calls on him. He had a new amusement ready before the quickest of the company could so much as ask him what that amusement was to be.

"Fond of music on the water, Miss Milroy?" he asked, in his airiest and pleasantest manner.

Miss Milroy adored music, both on the water and the land--always excepting the one case when she was practicing the art herself on the piano at home.

"We'll get out of the reeds first," said young Pedgift. He gave his orders to the boatmen, dived briskly into the little cabin, and reappeared with a concertina in his hand. "Neat, Miss Milroy, isn't it?" he observed, pointing to his initials, inlaid on the instrument in mother-of-pearl. "My name's Augustus, like my father's. Some of my friends knock off the 'A,' and call me 'Gustus Junior.' A small joke goes a long way among friends, doesn't it, Mr. Armadale? I sing a little to my own accompaniment, ladies and gentlemen; and, if quite agreeable, I shall be proud and happy to do my best."

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Pentecost; "I dote on music."

With this formidable announcement, the old lady opened a prodigious leather bag, from which she never parted night or day, and took out an ear-trumpet of the old-fashioned kind--something between a key-bugle and a French horn. "I don't care to use the thing generally," explained Mrs. Pentecost, "because I'm afraid of its making me deafer than ever. But I can't and won't miss the music. I dote on music. If you'll hold the other end, Sammy, I'll stick it in my ear. Neelie, my dear, tell him to begin."

Young Pedgift was troubled with no nervous hesitation. He began at once, not with songs of the light and modern kind, such as might have been expected from an amateur of his age and character, but with declamatory and patriotic bursts of poetry, set to the bold and blatant music which the

people of England loved dearly at the earlier part of the present century, and which, whenever they can get it, they love dearly still. "The Death of Marmion," "The Battle of the Baltic," "The Bay of Biscay," "Nelson," under various vocal aspects, as exhibited by the late Braham--these were the songs in which the roaring concertina and strident tenor of Gustus Junior exulted together. "Tell me when you're tired, ladies and gentlemen," said the minstrel solicitor. "There's no conceit about me. Will you have a little sentiment by way of variety? Shall I wind up with 'The Mistletoe Bough' and 'Poor Mary Anne'?"

Having favored his audience with those two cheerful melodies, young Pedgift respectfully requested the rest of the company to follow his vocal example in turn, offering, in every case, to play "a running accompaniment" impromptu, if the singer would only be so obliging as to favor him with the key-note.

"Go on, somebody!" cried Mrs. Pentecost, eagerly. "I tell you again, I dote on music. We haven't had half enough yet, have we, Sammy?"

The Reverend Samuel made no reply. The unhappy man had reasons of his own--not exactly in his bosom, but a little lower--for remaining silent, in the midst of the general hilarity and the general applause. Alas for humanity! Even maternal love is alloyed with mortal fallibility. Owing much already to his excellent mother, the Reverend Samuel was now additionally indebted to her for a smart indigestion.

Nobody, however, noticed as yet the signs and tokens of internal revolution in the curate's face. Everybody was occupied in entreating everybody else to sing. Miss Milroy appealed to the founder of the feast. "Do sing something, Mr. Armadale," she said; "I should so like to hear you!"

"If you once begin, sir," added the cheerful Pedgift, "you'll find it get uncommonly easy as you go on. Music is a science which requires to be taken by the throat at starting."

"With all my heart," said Allan, in his good-humored way. "I know lots of tunes, but the worst of it is, the words escape me. I wonder if I can remember one of Moore's Melodies? My poor mother used to be fond of teaching me Moore's Melodies when I was a boy."

"Whose melodies?" asked Mrs. Pentecost. "Moore's? Aha! I know Tom Moore by heart."

"Perhaps in that case you will be good enough to help me, ma'am, if my

memory breaks down," rejoined Allan. "I'll take the easiest melody in the whole collection, if you'll allow me. Everybody knows it--'Eveleen's Bower.'"

"I'm familiar, in a general sort of way, with the national melodies of England, Scotland, and Ireland," said Pedgift Junior. "I'll accompany you, sir, with the greatest pleasure. This is the sort of thing, I think." He seated himself cross-legged on the roof of the cabin, and burst into a complicated musical improvisation wonderful to hear--a mixture of instrumental flourishes and groans; a jig corrected by a dirge, and a dirge enlivened by a jig. "That's the sort of thing," said young Pedgift, with his smile of supreme confidence. "Fire away, sir!"

Mrs. Pentecost elevated her trumpet, and Allan elevated his voice. "Oh, weep for the hour when to Eveleen's Bower--" He stopped; the accompaniment stopped; the audience waited. "It's a most extraordinary thing," said Allan; "I thought I had the next line on the tip of my tongue, and it seems to have escaped me. I'll begin again, if you have no objection. 'Oh, weep for the hour when to Eveleen's Bower--'"

"'The lord of the valley with false vows came,'" said Mrs. Pentecost.

"Thank you, ma'am," said Allan. "Now I shall get on smoothly. 'Oh, weep for the hour when to Eveleen's Bower, the lord of the valley with false vows came. The moon was shining bright--'"

"No!" said Mrs. Pentecost.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," remonstrated Allan. "'The moon was shining bright--'"

"The moon wasn't doing anything of the kind," said Mrs. Pentecost.

Pedgift Junior, foreseeing a dispute, persevered sotto voce with the accompaniment, in the interests of harmony.

"Moore's own words, ma'am," said Allan, "in my mother's copy of the Melodies."

"Your mother's copy was wrong," retorted Mrs. Pentecost. "Didn't I tell you just now that I knew Tom Moore by heart?"

Pedgift Junior's peace-making concertina still flourished and groaned in the minor key.

"Well, what did the moon do?" asked Allan, in despair.

"What the moon ought to have done, sir, or Tom Moore wouldn't have written it so," rejoined Mrs. Pentecost. "'The moon hid her light from the heaven that night, and wept behind her clouds o'er the maiden's shame!' I wish that young man would leave off playing," added Mrs. Pentecost, venting her rising irritation on Gustus Junior. "I've had enough of him--he tickles my ears."

"Proud, I'm sure, ma'am," said the unblushing Pedgift. "The whole science of music consists in tickling the ears."

"We seem to be drifting into a sort of argument," remarked Major Milroy, placidly. "Wouldn't it be better if Mr. Armadale went on with his song?"

"Do go on, Mr. Armadale!" added the major's daughter. "Do go on, Mr. Pedgift!"

"One of them doesn't know the words, and the other doesn't know the music," said Mrs. Pentecost. "Let them go on if they can!"

"Sorry to disappoint you, ma'am," said Pedgift Junior; "I'm ready to go on myself to any extent. Now, Mr. Armadale!"

Allan opened his lips to take up the unfinished melody where he had last left it. Before he could utter a note, the curate suddenly rose, with a ghastly face, and a hand pressed convulsively over the middle region of his waistcoat.

"What's the matter?" cried the whole boating party in chorus.

"I am exceedingly unwell," said the Reverend Samuel Pentecost. The boat was instantly in a state of confusion. "Eveleen's Bower" expired on Allan's lips, and even the irrepressible concertina of Pedgift was silenced at last. The alarm proved to be quite needless. Mrs. Pentecost's son possessed a mother, and that mother had a bag. In two seconds the art of medicine occupied the place left vacant in the attention of the company by the art of music.

"Rub it gently, Sammy," said Mrs. Pentecost. "I'll get out the bottles and give you a dose. It's his poor stomach, major. Hold my trumpet, somebody--and stop the boat. You take that bottle, Neelie, my dear; and you take this one,

Mr. Armadale; and give them to me as I want them. Ah, poor dear, I know what's the matter with him! Want of power here, major--cold, acid, and flabby. Ginger to warm him; soda to correct him; sal volatile to hold him up. There, Sammy! drink it before it settles; and then go and lie down, my dear, in that dog-kennel of a place they call the cabin. No more music!" added Mrs. Pentecost, shaking her forefinger at the proprietor of the concertina--"unless it's a hymn, and that I don't object to."

Nobody appearing to be in a fit frame of mind for singing a hymn, the all-accomplished Pedgift drew upon his stores of local knowledge, and produced a new idea. The course of the boat was immediately changed under his direction. In a few minutes more, the company found themselves in a little island creek, with a lonely cottage at the far end of it, and a perfect forest of reeds closing the view all round them. "What do you say, ladies and gentlemen, to stepping on shore and seeing what a reed-cutter's cottage looks like?" suggested young Pedgift.

"We say yes, to be sure," answered Allan. "I think our spirits have been a little dashed by Mr. Pentecost's illness and Mrs. Pentecost's bag," he added, in a whisper to Miss Milroy. "A change of this sort is the very thing we want to set us all going again."

He and young Pedgift handed Miss Milroy out of the boat. The major followed. Mrs. Pentecost sat immovable as the Egyptian Sphinx, with her bag on her knees, mounting guard over "Sammy" in the cabin.

"We must keep the fun going, sir," said Allan, as he helped the major over the side of the boat. "We haven't half done yet with the enjoyment of the day."

His voice seconded his hearty belief in his own prediction to such good purpose that even Mrs. Pentecost heard him, and ominously shook her head.

"Ah!" sighed the curate's mother, "if you were as old as I am, young gentleman, you wouldn't feel quite so sure of the enjoyment of the day!"

So, in rebuke of the rashness of youth, spoke the caution of age. The negative view is notoriously the safe view, all the world over, and the Pentecost philosophy is, as a necessary consequence, generally in the right.

## IX. FATE OR CHANCE?

It was close on six o'clock when Allan and his friends left the boat, and the evening influence was creeping already, in its mystery and its stillness, over the watery solitude of the Broads.

The shore in these wild regions was not like the shore elsewhere. Firm as it looked, the garden ground in front of the reed-cutter's cottage was floating ground, that rose and fell and oozed into puddles under the pressure of the foot. The boatmen who guided the visitors warned them to keep to the path, and pointed through gaps in the reeds and pollards to grassy places, on which strangers would have walked confidently, where the crust of earth was not strong enough to bear the weight of a child over the unfathomed depths of slime and water beneath. The solitary cottage, built of planks pitched black, stood on ground that had been steadied and strengthened by resting it on piles. A little wooden tower rose at one end of the roof, and served as a lookout post in the fowling season. From this elevation the eye ranged far and wide over a wilderness of winding water and lonesome marsh. If the reed-cutter had lost his boat, he would have been as completely isolated from all communication with town or village as if his place of abode had been a light-vessel instead of a cottage. Neither he nor his family complained of their solitude, or looked in any way the rougher or the worse for it. His wife received the visitors hospitably, in a snug little room, with a raftered ceiling, and windows which looked like windows in a cabin on board ship. His wife's father told stories of the famous days when the smugglers came up from the sea at night, rowing through the net-work of rivers with muffled oars till they gained the lonely Broads, and sank their spirit casks in the water, far from the coast-guard's reach. His wild little children played at hide-and-seek with the visitors; and the visitors ranged in and out of the cottage, and round and round the morsel of firm earth on which it stood, surprised and delighted by the novelty of all they saw. The one person who noticed the advance of the evening--the one person who thought of the flying time and the stationary Pentecosts in the boat--was young Pedgift. That experienced pilot of the Broads looked askance at his watch, and drew Allan aside at the first opportunity.

"I don't wish to hurry you, Mr. Armadale," said Pedgift Junior; "but the time is getting on, and there's a lady in the case."

"A lady?" repeated Allan.

"Yes, sir," rejoined young Pedgift. "A lady from London; connected (if you'll allow me to jog your memory) with a pony-chaise and white harness."

"Good heavens, the governess!" cried Allan. "Why, we have forgotten all about her!"

"Don't be alarmed, sir; there's plenty of time, if we only get into the boat again. This is how it stands, Mr. Armadale. We settled, if you remember, to have the gypsy tea-making at the next 'Broad' to this--Hurle Mere?"

"Certainly," said Allan. "Hurle Mere is the place where my friend Midwinter has promised to come and meet us."

"Hurle Mere is where the governess will be, sir, if your coachman follows my directions," pursued young Pedgift. "We have got nearly an hour's punting to do, along the twists and turns of the narrow waters (which they call The Sounds here) between this and Hurle Mere; and according to my calculations we must get on board again in five minutes, if we are to be in time to meet the governess and to meet your friend."

"We mustn't miss my friend on any account," said Allan; "or the governess, either, of course. I'll tell the major."

Major Milroy was at that moment preparing to mount the wooden watch-tower of the cottage to see the view. The ever useful Pedgift volunteered to go up with him, and rattle off all the necessary local explanations in half the time which the reed-cutter would occupy in describing his own neighborhood to a stranger.

Allan remained standing in front of the cottage, more quiet and more thoughtful than usual. His interview with young Pedgift had brought his absent friend to his memory for the first time since the picnic party had started. He was surprised that Midwinter, so much in his thoughts on all other occasions, should have been so long out of his thoughts now. Something troubled him, like a sense of self-reproach, as his mind reverted to the faithful friend at home, toiling hard over the steward's books, in his interests and for his sake. "Dear old fellow," thought Allan, "I shall be so glad to see him at the Mere; the day's pleasure won't be complete till he joins us!"

"Should I be right or wrong, Mr. Armadale, if I guessed that you were thinking of somebody?" asked a voice, softly, behind him.

Allan turned, and found the major's daughter at his side. Miss Milroy (not unmindful of a certain tender interview which had taken place behind a carriage) had noticed her admirer standing thoughtfully by himself, and had determined on giving him another opportunity, while her father and young Pedgift were at the top of the watch-tower.

"You know everything," said Allan, smiling. "I was thinking of somebody."

Miss Milroy stole a glance at him--a glance of gentle encouragement. There could be but one human creature in Mr. Armadale's mind after what had passed between them that morning! It would be only an act of mercy to take him back again at once to the interrupted conversation of a few hours since on the subject of names.

"I have been thinking of somebody, too," she said, half-inviting, half-repelling the coming avowal. "If I tell you the first letter of my Somebody's name, will you tell me the first letter of yours?"

"I will tell you anything you like," rejoined Allan, with the utmost enthusiasm.

She still shrank coquettishly from the very subject that she wanted to approach. "Tell me your letter first," she said, in low tones, looking away from him.

Allan laughed. "M," he said, "is my first letter."

She started a little. Strange that he should be thinking of her by her surname instead of her Christian name; but it mattered little as long as he was thinking of her.

"What is your letter?" asked Allan.

She blushed and smiled. "A--if you will have it!" she answered, in a reluctant little whisper. She stole another look at him, and luxuriously protracted her enjoyment of the coming avowal once more. "How many syllables is the name in?" she asked, drawing patterns shyly on the ground with the end of the parasol.

No man with the slightest knowledge of the sex would have been rash enough, in Allan's position, to tell her the truth. Allan, who knew nothing whatever of woman's natures, and who told the truth right and left in all mortal emergencies, answered as if he had been under examination in a

court of justice.

"It's a name in three syllables," he said.

Miss Milroy's downcast eyes flashed up at him like lightning. "Three!" she repeated in the blankest astonishment.

Allan was too inveterately straightforward to take the warning even now. "I'm not strong at my spelling, I know," he said, with his lighthearted laugh. "But I don't think I'm wrong, in calling Midwinter a name in three syllables. I was thinking of my friend; but never mind my thoughts. Tell me who A is--tell me whom you were thinking of?"

"Of the first letter of the alphabet, Mr. Armadale, and I beg positively to inform you of nothing more!"

With that annihilating answer the major's daughter put up her parasol and walked back by herself to the boat.

Allan stood petrified with amazement. If Miss Milroy had actually boxed his ears (and there is no denying that she had privately longed to devote her hand to that purpose), he could hardly have felt more bewildered than he felt now. "What on earth have I done?" he asked himself, helplessly, as the major and young Pedgift joined him, and the three walked down together to the water-side. "I wonder what she'll say to me next?"

She said absolutely nothing; she never so much as looked at Allan when he took his place in the boat. There she sat, with her eyes and her complexion both much brighter than usual, taking the deepest interest in the curate's progress toward recovery; in the state of Mrs. Pentecost's spirits; in Pedgift Junior (for whom she ostentatiously made room enough to let him sit beside her); in the scenery and the reed-cutter's cottage; in everybody and everything but Allan--whom she would have married with the greatest pleasure five minutes since. "I'll never forgive him," thought the major's daughter. "To be thinking of that ill-bred wretch when I was thinking of him; and to make me all but confess it before I found him out! Thank Heaven, Mr. Pedgift is in the boat!"

In this frame of mind Miss Neelie applied herself forthwith to the fascination of Pedgift and the discomfiture of Allan. "Oh, Mr. Pedgift, how extremely clever and kind of you to think of showing us that sweet cottage! Lonely, Mr. Armadale? I don't think it's lonely at all; I should like of all things to live there. What would this picnic have been without you, Mr. Pedgift; you can't

think how I have enjoyed it since we got into the boat. Cool, Mr. Armadale? What can you possibly mean by saying it's cool; it's the warmest evening we've had this summer. And the music, Mr. Pedgift; how nice it was of you to bring your concertina! I wonder if I could accompany you on the piano? I would so like to try. Oh, yes, Mr. Armadale, no doubt you meant to do something musical, too, and I dare say you sing very well when you know the words; but, to tell you the truth, I always did, and always shall, hate Moore's Melodies!"

Thus, with merciless dexterity of manipulation, did Miss Milroy work that sharpest female weapon of offense, the tongue; and thus she would have used it for some time longer, if Allan had only shown the necessary jealousy, or if Pedgift had only afforded the necessary encouragement. But adverse fortune had decreed that she should select for her victims two men essentially unassailable under existing circumstances. Allan was too innocent of all knowledge of female subtleties and susceptibilities to understand anything, except that the charming Neelie was unreasonably out of temper with him without the slightest cause. The wary Pedgift, as became one of the quick-witted youth of the present generation, submitted to female influence, with his eye fixed immovably all the time on his own interests. Many a young man of the past generation, who was no fool, has sacrificed everything for love. Not one young man in ten thousand of the present generation, except the fools, has sacrificed a half-penny. The daughters of Eve still inherit their mother's merits and commit their mother's faults. But the sons of Adam, in these latter days, are men who would have handed the famous apple back with a bow, and a "Thanks, no; it might get me into a scrape." When Allan--surprised and disappointed--moved away out of Miss Milroy's reach to the forward part of the boat, Pedgift Junior rose and followed him. "You're a very nice girl," thought this shrewdly sensible young man; "but a client's a client; and I am sorry to inform you, miss, it won't do." He set himself at once to rouse Allan's spirits by diverting his attention to a new subject. There was to be a regatta that autumn on one of the Broads, and his client's opinion as a yachtsman might be valuable to the committee. "Something new, I should think, to you, sir, in a sailing match on fresh water?" he said, in his most ingratiatory manner. And Allan, instantly interested, answered, "Quite new. Do tell me about it!"

As for the rest of the party at the other end of the boat, they were in a fair way to confirm Mrs. Pentecost's doubts whether the hilarity of the picnic would last the day out. Poor Neelie's natural feeling of irritation under the disappointment which Allan's awkwardness had inflicted on her was now exasperated into silent and settled resentment by her own keen sense of humiliation and defeat. The major had relapsed into his habitually dreamy,

absent manner; his mind was turning monotonously with the wheels of his clock. The curate still secluded his indigestion from public view in the innermost recesses of the cabin; and the curate's mother, with a second dose ready at a moment's notice, sat on guard at the door. Women of Mrs. Pentecost's age and character generally enjoy their own bad spirits. "This," sighed the old lady, wagging her head with a smile of sour satisfaction "is what you call a day's pleasure, is it? Ah, what fools we all were to leave our comfortable homes!"

Meanwhile the boat floated smoothly along the windings of the watery labyrinth which lay between the two Broads. The view on either side was now limited to nothing but interminable rows of reeds. Not a sound was heard, far or near; not so much as a glimpse of cultivated or inhabited land appeared anywhere. "A trifle dreary hereabouts, Mr. Armadale," said the ever-cheerful Pedgift. "But we are just out of it now. Look ahead, sir! Here we are at Hurle Mere."

The reeds opened back on the right hand and the left, and the boat glided suddenly into the wide circle of a pool. Round the nearer half of the circle, the eternal reeds still fringed the margin of the water. Round the further half, the land appeared again, here rolling back from the pool in desolate sand-hills, there rising above it in a sweep of grassy shore. At one point the ground was occupied by a plantation, and at another by the out-buildings of a lonely old red brick house, with a strip of by-road near, that skirted the garden wall and ended at the pool. The sun was sinking in the clear heaven, and the water, where the sun's reflection failed to tinge it, was beginning to look black and cold. The solitude that had been soothing, the silence that had felt like an enchantment, on the other Broad, in the day's vigorous prime, was a solitude that saddened here--a silence that struck cold, in the stillness and melancholy of the day's decline.

The course of the boat was directed across the Mere to a creek in the grassy shore. One or two of the little flat-bottomed punts peculiar to the Broads lay in the creek; and the reed cutters to whom the punts belonged, surprised at the appearance of strangers, came out, staring silently, from behind an angle of the old garden wall. Not another sign of life was visible anywhere. No pony-chaise had been seen by the reed cutters; no stranger, either man or woman, had approached the shores of Hurle Mere that day.

Young Pedgift took another look at his watch, and addressed himself to Miss Milroy. "You may, or may not, see the governess when you get back to Thorpe Ambrose," he said; "but, as the time stands now, you won't see her here. You know best, Mr. Armadale," he added, turning to Allan, "whether

your friend is to be depended on to keep his appointment?"

"I am certain he is to be depended on," replied Allan, looking about him--in unconcealed disappointment at Midwinter's absence.

"Very good," pursued Pedgift Junior. "If we light the fire for our gypsy tea-making on the open ground there, your friend may find us out, sir, by the smoke. That's the Indian dodge for picking up a lost man on the prairie, Miss Milroy and it's pretty nearly wild enough (isn't it?) to be a prairie here!"

There are some temptations--principally those of the smaller kind--which it is not in the defensive capacity of female human nature to resist. The temptation to direct the whole force of her influence, as the one young lady of the party, toward the instant overthrow of Allan's arrangement for meeting his friend, was too much for the major's daughter. She turned on the smiling Pedgift with a look which ought to have overwhelmed him. But who ever overwhelmed a solicitor?

"I think it's the most lonely, dreary, hideous place I ever saw in my life!" said Miss Neelie. "If you insist on making tea here, Mr. Pedgift, don't make any for me. No! I shall stop in the boat; and, though I am absolutely dying with thirst, I shall touch nothing till we get back again to the other Broad!"

The major opened his lips to remonstrate. To his daughter's infinite delight, Mrs. Pentecost rose from her seat before he could say a word, and, after surveying the whole landward prospect, and seeing nothing in the shape of a vehicle anywhere, asked indignantly whether they were going all the way back again to the place where they had left the carriages in the middle of the day. On ascertaining that this was, in fact, the arrangement proposed, and that, from the nature of the country, the carriages could not have been ordered round to Hurle Mere without, in the first instance, sending them the whole of the way back to Thorpe Ambrose, Mrs. Pentecost (speaking in her son's interests) instantly declared that no earthly power should induce her to be out on the water after dark. "Call me a boat!" cried the old lady, in great agitation. "Wherever there's water, there's a night mist, and wherever there's a night mist, my son Samuel catches cold. Don't talk to me about your moonlight and your tea-making--you're all mad! Hi! you two men there!" cried Mrs. Pentecost, hailing the silent reed cutters on shore. "Sixpence apiece for you, if you'll take me and my son back in your boat!"

Before young Pedgift could interfere, Allan himself settled the difficulty this time, with perfect patience and good temper.

"I can't think, Mrs. Pentecost, of your going back in any boat but the boat you have come out in," he said. "There is not the least need (as you and Miss Milroy don't like the place) for anybody to go on shore here but me. I must go on shore. My friend Midwinter never broke his promise to me yet; and I can't consent to leave Hurle Mere as long as there is a chance of his keeping his appointment. But there's not the least reason in the world why I should stand in the way on that account. You have the major and Mr. Pedgift to take care of you; and you can get back to the carriages before dark, if you go at once. I will wait here, and give my friend half an hour more, and then I can follow you in one of the reed-cutters' boats."

"That's the most sensible thing, Mr. Armadale, you've said to-day," remarked Mrs. Pentecost, seating herself again in a violent hurry

"Tell them to be quick!" cried the old lady, shaking her fist at the boatmen. "Tell them to be quick!"

Allan gave the necessary directions, and stepped on shore. The wary Pedgift (sticking fast to his client) tried to follow.

"We can't leave you here alone, sir," he said, protesting eagerly in a whisper. "Let the major take care of the ladies, and let me keep you company at the Mere."

"No, no!" said Allan, pressing him back. "They're all in low spirits on board. If you want to be of service to me, stop like a good fellow where you are, and do your best to keep the thing going."

He waved his hand, and the men pushed the boat off from the shore. The others all waved their hands in return except the major's daughter, who sat apart from the rest, with her face hidden under her parasol. The tears stood thick in Neelie's eyes. Her last angry feeling against Allan died out, and her heart went back to him penitently the moment he left the boat. "How good he is to us all!" she thought, "and what a wretch I am!" She got up with every generous impulse in her nature urging her to make atonement to him. She got up, reckless of appearances and looked after him with eager eyes and flushed checks, as he stood alone on the shore. "Don't be long, Mr. Armadale!" she said, with a desperate disregard of what the rest of the company thought of her.

The boat was already far out in the water, and with all Neelie's resolution the words were spoken in a faint little voice, which failed to reach Allan's ears. The one sound he heard, as the boat gained the opposite extremity of

the Mere, and disappeared slowly among the reeds, was the sound of the concertina. The indefatigable Pedgift was keeping things going--evidently under the auspices of Mrs. Pentecost--by performing a sacred melody.

Left by himself, Allan lit a cigar, and took a turn backward and forward on the shore. "She might have said a word to me at parting!" he thought. "I've done everything for the best; I've as good as told her how fond of her I am, and this is the way she treats me!" He stopped, and stood looking absently at the sinking sun, and the fast-darkening waters of the Mere. Some inscrutable influence in the scene forced its way stealthily into his mind, and diverted his thoughts from Miss Milroy to his absent friend. He started, and looked about him.

The reed-cutters had gone back to their retreat behind the angle of the wall, not a living creature was visible, not a sound rose anywhere along the dreary shore. Even Allan's spirits began to get depressed. It was nearly an hour after the time when Midwinter had promised to be at Hurle Mere. He had himself arranged to walk to the pool (with a stable-boy from Thorpe Ambrose as his guide), by lanes and footpaths which shortened the distance by the road. The boy knew the country well, and Midwinter was habitually punctual at all his appointments. Had anything gone wrong at Thorpe Ambrose? Had some accident happened on the way? Determined to remain no longer doubting and idling by himself, Allan made up his mind to walk inland from the Mere, on the chance of meeting his friend. He went round at once to the angle in the wall, and asked one of the reedcutters to show him the footpath to Thorpe Ambrose.

The man led him away from the road, and pointed to a barely perceptible break in the outer trees of the plantation. After pausing for one more useless look around him, Allan turned his back on the Mere and made for the trees.

For a few paces, the path ran straight through the plantation. Thence it took a sudden turn; and the water and the open country became both lost to view. Allan steadily followed the grassy track before him, seeing nothing and hearing nothing, until he came to another winding of the path. Turning in the new direction, he saw dimly a human figure sitting alone at the foot of one of the trees. Two steps nearer were enough to make the figure familiar to him. "Midwinter!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "This is not the place where I was to meet you! What are you waiting for here?"

Midwinter rose, without answering. The evening dimness among the trees, which obscured his face, made his silence doubly perplexing.

Allan went on eagerly questioning him. "Did you come here by yourself?" he asked. "I thought the boy was to guide you?"

This time Midwinter answered. "When we got as far as these trees," he said, "I sent the boy back. He told me I was close to the place, and couldn't miss it."

"What made you stop here when he left you?" reiterated Allan. "Why didn't you walk on?"

"Don't despise me," answered the other. "I hadn't the courage!"

"Not the courage?" repeated Allan. He paused a moment. "Oh, I know!" he resumed, putting his hand gayly on Midwinter's shoulder. "You're still shy of the Milroys. What nonsense, when I told you myself that your peace was made at the cottage!"

"I wasn't thinking, Allan, of your friends at the cottage. The truth is, I'm hardly myself to-day. I am ill and unnerved; trifles startle me." He stopped, and shrank away, under the anxious scrutiny of Allan's eyes. "If you will have it," he burst out, abruptly, "the horror of that night on board the Wreck has got me again; there's a dreadful oppression on my head; there's a dreadful sinking at my heart. I am afraid of something happening to us, if we don't part before the day is out. I can't break my promise to you; for God's sake, release me from it, and let me go back!"

Remonstrance, to any one who knew Midwinter, was plainly useless at that moment. Allan humored him. "Come out of this dark, airless place," he said, "and we will talk about it. The water and the open sky are within a stone's throw of us. I hate a wood in the evening; it even gives me the horrors. You have been working too hard over the steward's books. Come and breathe freely in the blessed open air."

Midwinter stopped, considered for a moment, and suddenly submitted.

"You're right," he said, "and I'm wrong, as usual. I'm wasting time and distressing you to no purpose. What folly to ask you to let me go back! Suppose you had said yes?"

"Well?" asked Allan.

"Well," repeated Midwinter, "something would have happened at the first step to stop me, that's all. Come on."

They walked together in silence on the way to the Mere.

At the last turn in the path Allan's cigar went out. While he stopped to light it again, Midwinter walked on before him, and was the first to come in sight of the open ground.

Allan had just kindled the match, when, to his surprise, his friend came back to him round the turn in the path. There was light enough to show objects more clearly in this part of the plantation. The match, as Midwinter faced him, dropped on the instant from Allan's hand.

"Good God!" he cried, starting back, "you look as you looked on board the Wreck!"

Midwinter held up his band for silence. He spoke with his wild eyes riveted on Allan's face, with his white lips close at Allan's ear.

"You remember how I looked," he answered, in a whisper. "Do you remember what I said when you and the doctor were talking of the Dream?"

"I have forgotten the Dream," said Allan.

As he made that answer, Midwinter took his hand, and led him round the last turn in the path.

"Do you remember it now?" he asked, and pointed to the Mere.

The sun was sinking in the cloudless westward heaven. The waters of the Mere lay beneath, tinged red by the dying light. The open country stretched away, darkening drearily already on the right hand and the left. And on the near margin of the pool, where all had been solitude before, there now stood, fronting the sunset, the figure of a woman.

The two Armadales stood together in silence, and looked at the lonely figure and the dreary view.

Midwinter was the first to speak.

"Your own eyes have seen it," he said. "Now look at our own words."

He opened the narrative of the Dream, and held it under Allan's eyes. His finger pointed to the lines which recorded the first Vision; his voice, sinking

lower and lower, repeated the words:

"The sense came to me of being left alone in the darkness.

"I waited.

"The darkness opened, and showed me the vision--as in a picture--of a broad, lonely pool, surrounded by open ground. Above the further margin of the pool I saw the cloudless western sky, red with the light of sunset.

"On the near margin of the pool there stood the Shadow of a Woman."

He ceased, and let the hand which held the manuscript drop to his side. The other hand pointed to the lonely figure, standing with its back turned on them, fronting the setting sun.

"There," he said, "stands the living Woman, in the Shadow's place! There speaks the first of the dream warnings to you and to me! Let the future time find us still together, and the second figure that stands in the Shadow's place will be Mine."

Even Allan was silenced by the terrible certainty of conviction with which he spoke.

In the pause that followed, the figure at the pool moved, and walked slowly away round the margin of the shore. Allan stepped out beyond the last of the trees, and gained a wider view of the open ground. The first object that met his eyes was the pony-chaise from Thorpe Ambrose.

He turned back to Midwinter with a laugh of relief. "What nonsense have you been talking!" he said. "And what nonsense have I been listening to! It's the governess at last."

Midwinter made no reply. Allan took him by the arm, and tried to lead him on. He released himself suddenly, and seized Allan with both hands, holding him back from the figure at the pool, as he had held him back from the cabin door on the deck of the timber ship. Once again the effort was in vain. Once again Allan broke away as easily as he had broken away in the past time.

"One of us must speak to her," he said. "And if you won't, I will."

He had only advanced a few steps toward the Mere, when he heard, or

thought he heard, a voice faintly calling after him, once and once only, the word Farewell. He stopped, with a feeling of uneasy surprise, and looked round.

"Was that you, Midwinter?" he asked.

There was no answer. After hesitating a moment more, Allan returned to the plantation. Midwinter was gone.

He looked back at the pool, doubtful in the new emergency what to do next. The lonely figure had altered its course in the interval; it had turned, and was advancing toward the trees. Allan had been evidently either heard or seen. It was impossible to leave a woman unbefriended, in that helpless position and in that solitary place. For the second time Allan went out from the trees to meet her.

As he came within sight of her face, he stopped in ungovernable astonishment. The sudden revelation of her beauty, as she smiled and looked at him inquiringly, suspended the movement in his limbs and the words on his lips. A vague doubt beset him whether it was the governess, after all.

He roused himself, and, advancing a few paces, mentioned his name. "May I ask," he added, "if I have the pleasure--?"

The lady met him easily and gracefully half-way. "Major Milroy's governess," she said. "Miss Gwilt."

## X. THE HOUSE-MAID'S FACE.

All was quiet at Thorpe Ambrose. The hall was solitary, the rooms were dark. The servants, waiting for the supper hour in the garden at the back of the house, looked up at the clear heaven and the rising moon, and agreed that there was little prospect of the return of the picnic party until later in the night. The general opinion, led by the high authority of the cook, predicted that they might all sit down to supper without the least fear of being disturbed by the bell. Having arrived at this conclusion, the servants assembled round the table, and exactly at the moment when they sat down the bell rang.

The footman, wondering, went up stairs to open the door, and found to his astonishment Midwinter waiting alone on the threshold, and looking (in the servant's opinion) miserably ill. He asked for a light, and, saying he wanted nothing else, withdrew at once to his room. The footman went back to his fellow-servants, and reported that something had certainly happened to his master's friend.

On entering his room, Midwinter closed the door, and hurriedly filled a bag with the necessaries for traveling. This done, he took from a locked drawer, and placed in the breast pocket of his coat, some little presents which Allan had given him--a cigar case, a purse, and a set of studs in plain gold. Having possessed himself of these memorials, he snatched up the bag and laid his hand on the door. There, for the first time, he paused. There, the headlong haste of all his actions thus far suddenly ceased, and the hard despair in his face began to soften: he waited, with the door in his hand.

Up to that moment he had been conscious of but one motive that animated him, but one purpose that he was resolute to achieve. "For Allan's sake!" he had said to himself, when he looked back toward the fatal landscape and saw his friend leaving him to meet the woman at the pool. "For Allan's sake!" he had said again, when he crossed the open country beyond the wood, and saw afar, in the gray twilight, the long line of embankment and the distant glimmer of the railway lamps beckoning him away already to the iron road.

It was only when he now paused before he closed the door behind him--it was only when his own impetuous rapidity of action came for the first time to a check, that the nobler nature of the man rose in protest against the superstitious despair which was hurrying him from all that he held dear. His conviction of the terrible necessity of leaving Allan for Allan's good had

not been shaken for an instant since he had seen the first Vision of the Dream realized on the shores of the Mere. But now, for the first time, his own heart rose against him in unanswerable rebuke. "Go, if you must and will! but remember the time when you were ill, and he sat by your bedside; friendless, and he opened his heart to you--and write, if you fear to speak; write and ask him to forgive you, before you leave him forever!"

The half-opened door closed again softly. Midwinter sat down at the writing-table and took up the pen.

He tried again and again, and yet again, to write the farewell words; he tried, till the floor all round him was littered with torn sheets of paper. Turn from them which way he would, the old times still came back and faced him reproachfully. The spacious bed-chamber in which he sat, narrowed, in spite of him, to the sick usher's garret at the west-country inn. The kind hand that had once patted him on the shoulder touched him again; the kind voice that had cheered him spoke unchangeably in the old friendly tones. He flung his arms on the table and dropped his head on them in tearless despair. The parting words that his tongue was powerless to utter his pen was powerless to write. Mercilessly in earnest, his superstition pointed to him to go while the time was his own. Mercilessly in earnest, his love for Allan held him back till the farewell plea for pardon and pity was written.

He rose with a sudden resolution, and rang for the servant, "When Mr. Armadale returns," he said, "ask him to excuse my coming downstairs, and say that I am trying to get to sleep." He locked the door and put out the light, and sat down alone in the darkness. "The night will keep us apart," he said; "and time may help me to write. I may go in the early morning; I may go while--" The thought died in him uncompleted; and the sharp agony of the struggle forced to his lips the first cry of suffering that had escaped him yet.

He waited in the darkness.

As the time stole on, his senses remained mechanically awake, but his mind began to sink slowly under the heavy strain that had now been laid on it for some hours past. A dull vacancy possessed him; he made no attempt to kindle the light and write once more. He never started; he never moved to the open window, when the first sound of approaching wheels broke in on the silence of the night. He heard the carriages draw up at the door; he heard the horses champing their bits; he heard the voices of Allan and young Pedgift on the steps; and still he sat quiet in the darkness, and still no interest was aroused in him by the sounds that reached his ear from

outside.

The voices remained audible after the carriages had been driven away; the two young men were evidently lingering on the steps before they took leave of each other. Every word they said reached Midwinter through the open window. Their one subject of conversation was the new governess. Allan's voice was loud in her praise. He had never passed such an hour of delight in his life as the hour he had spent with Miss Gwilt in the boat, on the way from Hurle Mere to the picnic party waiting at the other Broad. Agreeing, on his side, with all that his client said in praise of the charming stranger, young Pedgift appeared to treat the subject, when it fell into his hands, from a different point of view. Miss Gwilt's attractions had not so entirely absorbed his attention as to prevent him from noticing the impression which the new governess had produced on her employer and her pupil.

"There's a screw loose somewhere, sir, in Major Milroy's family," said the voice of young Pedgift. "Did you notice how the major and his daughter looked when Miss Gwilt made her excuses for being late at the Mere? You don't remember? Do you remember what Miss Gwilt said?"

"Something about Mrs. Milroy, wasn't it?" Allan rejoined.

Young Pedgift's voice dropped mysteriously a note lower.

"Miss Gwilt reached the cottage this afternoon, sir, at the time when I told you she would reach it, and she would have joined us at the time I told you she would come, but for Mrs. Milroy. Mrs. Milroy sent for her upstairs as soon as she entered the house, and kept her upstairs a good half-hour and more. That was Miss Gwilt's excuse, Mr. Armadale, for being late at the Mere."

"Well, and what then?"

"You seem to forget, sir, what the whole neighborhood has heard about Mrs. Milroy ever since the major first settled among us. We have all been told, on the doctor's own authority, that she is too great a sufferer to see strangers. Isn't it a little odd that she should have suddenly turned out well enough to see Miss Gwilt (in her husband's absence) the moment Miss Gwilt entered the house?"

"Not a bit of it! Of course she was anxious to make acquaintance with her daughter's governess."

"Likely enough, Mr. Armadale. But the major and Miss Neelie don't see it in that light, at any rate. I had my eye on them both when the governess told them that Mrs. Milroy had sent for her. If ever I saw a girl look thoroughly frightened, Miss Milroy was that girl; and (if I may be allowed, in the strictest confidence, to libel a gallant soldier) I should say that the major himself was much in the same condition. Take my word for it, sir, there's something wrong upstairs in that pretty cottage of yours; and Miss Gwilt is mixed up in it already!"

There was a minute of silence. When the voices were next heard by Midwinter, they were further away from the house--Allan was probably accompanying young Pedgift a few steps on his way back.

After a while, Allan's voice was audible once more under the portico, making inquiries after his friend; answered by the servant's voice giving Midwinter's message. This brief interruption over, the silence was not broken again till the time came for shutting up the house. The servants' footsteps passing to and fro, the clang of closing doors, the barking of a disturbed dog in the stable-yard--these sounds warned Midwinter it was getting late. He rose mechanically to kindle a light. But his head was giddy, his hand trembled; he laid aside the match-box, and returned to his chair. The conversation between Allan and young Pedgift had ceased to occupy his attention the instant he ceased to hear it; and now again, the sense that the precious time was failing him became a lost sense as soon as the house noises which had awakened it had passed away. His energies of body and mind were both alike worn out; he waited with a stolid resignation for the trouble that was to come to him with the coming day.

An interval passed, and the silence was once more disturbed by voices outside; the voices of a man and a woman this time. The first few words exchanged between them indicated plainly enough a meeting of the clandestine kind; and revealed the man as one of the servants at Thorpe Ambrose, and the woman as one of the servants at the cottage.

Here again, after the first greetings were over, the subject of the new governess became the all-absorbing subject of conversation.

The major's servant was brimful of forebodings (inspired solely by Miss Gwilt's good looks) which she poured out irrepressibly on her "sweetheart," try as he might to divert her to other topics. Sooner or later, let him mark her words, there would be an awful "upset" at the cottage. Her master, it might be mentioned in confidence, led a dreadful life with her mistress. The major was the best of men; he hadn't a thought in his heart beyond his

daughter and his everlasting clock. But only let a nice-looking woman come near the place, and Mrs. Milroy was jealous of her--raging jealous, like a woman possessed, on that miserable sick-bed of hers. If Miss Gwilt (who was certainly good-looking, in spite of her hideous hair) didn't blow the fire into a flame before many days more were over their heads, the mistress was the mistress no longer, but somebody else. Whatever happened, the fault, this time, would lie at the door of the major's mother. The old lady and the mistress had had a dreadful quarrel two years since; and the old lady had gone away in a fury, telling her son, before all the servants, that, if he had a spark of spirit in him, he would never submit to his wife's temper as he did. It would be too much, perhaps, to accuse the major's mother of purposely picking out a handsome governess to spite the major's wife. But it might be safely said that the old lady was the last person in the world to humor the mistress's jealousy, by declining to engage a capable and respectable governess for her granddaughter because that governess happened to be blessed with good looks. How it was all to end (except that it was certain to end badly) no human creature could say. Things were looking as black already as things well could. Miss Neelie was crying, after the day's pleasure (which was one bad sign); the mistress had found fault with nobody (which was another); the master had wished her good-night through the door (which was a third); and the governess had locked herself up in her room (which was the worst sign of all, for it looked as if she distrusted the servants). Thus the stream of the woman's gossip ran on, and thus it reached Midwinter's ears through the window, till the clock in the stable-yard struck, and stopped the talking. When the last vibrations of the bell had died away, the voices were not audible again, and the silence was broken no more.

Another interval passed, and Midwinter made a new effort to rouse himself. This time he kindled the light without hesitation, and took the pen in hand.

He wrote at the first trial with a sudden facility of expression, which, surprising him as he went on, ended in rousing in him some vague suspicion of himself. He left the table, and bathed his head and face in water, and came back to read what he had written. The language was barely intelligible; sentences were left unfinished; words were misplaced one for the other. Every line recorded the protest of the weary brain against the merciless will that had forced it into action. Midwinter tore up the sheet of paper as he had torn up the other sheets before it, and, sinking under the struggle at last, laid his weary head on the pillow. Almost on the instant, exhaustion overcame him, and before he could put the light out he fell asleep.

He was roused by a noise at the door. The sunlight was pouring into the room, the candle had burned down into the socket, and the servant was waiting outside with a letter which had come for him by the morning's post.

"I ventured to disturb you, sir," said the man, when Midwinter opened the door, "because the letter is marked 'Immediate,' and I didn't know but it might be of some consequence."

Midwinter thanked him, and looked at the letter. It was of some consequence--the handwriting was Mr. Brock's.

He paused to collect his faculties. The torn sheets of paper on the floor recalled to him in a moment the position in which he stood. He locked the door again, in the fear that Allan might rise earlier than usual and come in to make inquiries. Then--feeling strangely little interest in anything that the rector could write to him now--he opened Mr. Brock's letter, and read these lines:

"Tuesday.

"MY DEAR MIDWINTER--It is sometimes best to tell bad news plainly, in few words. Let me tell mine at once, in one sentence. My precautions have all been defeated: the woman has escaped me.

"This misfortune--for it is nothing less--happened yesterday (Monday). Between eleven and twelve in the forenoon of that day, the business which originally brought me to London obliged me to go to Doctors' Commons, and to leave my servant Robert to watch the house opposite our lodging until my return. About an hour and a half after my departure he observed an empty cab drawn up at the door of the house. Boxes and bags made their appearance first; they were followed by the woman herself, in the dress I had first seen her in. Having previously secured a cab, Robert traced her to the terminus of the North-Western Railway, saw her pass through the ticket office, kept her in view till she reached the platform, and there, in the crowd and confusion caused by the starting of a large mixed train, lost her. I must do him the justice to say that he at once took the right course in this emergency. Instead of wasting time in searching for her on the platform, he looked along the line of carriages; and he positively declares that he failed to see her in any one of them. He admits, at the same time, that his search (conducted between two o'clock, when he lost sight of her, and ten minutes past, when the train started) was, in the confusion of the moment, necessarily an imperfect one. But this latter circumstance, in my opinion, matters little. I as firmly disbelieve in the woman's actual departure by that

train as if I had searched every one of the carriages myself; and you, I have no doubt, will entirely agree with me.

"You now know how the disaster happened. Let us not waste time and words in lamenting it. The evil is done, and you and I together must find the way to remedy it.

"What I have accomplished already, on my side, may be told in two words. Any hesitation I might have previously felt at trusting this delicate business in strangers' hands was at an end the moment I heard Robert's news. I went back at once to the city, and placed the whole matter confidentially before my lawyers. The conference was a long one, and when I left the office it was past the post hour, or I should have written to you on Monday instead of writing to-day. My interview with the lawyers was not very encouraging. They warn me plainly that serious difficulties stand in the way of our recovering the lost trace. But they have promised to do their best, and we have decided on the course to be taken, excepting one point on which we totally differ. I must tell you what this difference is; for, while business keeps me away from Thorpe Ambrose, you are the only person whom I can trust to put my convictions to the test.

"The lawyers are of opinion, then, that the woman has been aware from the first that I was watching her; that there is, consequently, no present hope of her being rash enough to appear personally at Thorpe Ambrose; that any mischief she may have it in contemplation to do will be done in the first instance by deputy; and that the only wise course for Allan's friends and guardians to take is to wait passively till events enlighten them. My own idea is diametrically opposed to this. After what has happened at the railway, I cannot deny that the woman must have discovered that I was watching her. But she has no reason to suppose that she has not succeeded in deceiving me; and I firmly believe she is bold enough to take us by surprise, and to win or force her way into Allan's confidence before we are prepared to prevent her.

"You and you only (while I am detained in London) can decide whether I am right or wrong--and you can do it in this way. Ascertain at once whether any woman who is a stranger in the neighborhood has appeared since Monday last at or near Thorpe Ambrose. If any such person has been observed (and nobody escapes observation in the country), take the first opportunity you can get of seeing her, and ask yourself if her face does or does not answer certain plain questions which I am now about to write down for you. You may depend on my accuracy. I saw the woman unveiled on more than one occasion, and the last time through an excellent glass.

"1. Is her hair light brown, and (apparently) not very plentiful? 2. Is her forehead high, narrow, and sloping backward from the brow? 3. Are her eyebrows very faintly marked, and are her eyes small, and nearer dark than light--either gray or hazel (I have not seen her close enough to be certain which)? 4. Is her nose aquiline? 5 Are her lips thin, and is the upper lip long? 6. Does her complexion look like an originally fair complexion, which has deteriorated into a dull, sickly paleness? 7 (and lastly). Has she a retreating chin, and is there on the left side of it a mark of some kind--a mole or a scar, I can't say which?

"I add nothing about her expression, for you may see her under circumstances which may partially alter it as seen by me. Test her by her features, which no circumstances can change. If there is a stranger in the neighborhood, and if her face answers my seven questions, you have found the woman! Go instantly, in that case, to the nearest lawyer, and pledge my name and credit for whatever expenses may be incurred in keeping her under inspection night and day. Having done this, take the speediest means of communicating with me; and whether my business is finished or not, I will start for Norfolk by the first train.

"Always your friend, DECIMUS BROCK."

Hardened by the fatalist conviction that now possessed him, Midwinter read the rector's confession of defeat, from the first line to the last, without the slightest betrayal either of interest or surprise. The one part of the letter at which he looked back was the closing part of it. "I owe much to Mr. Brock's kindness," he thought; "and I shall never see Mr. Brock again. It is useless and hopeless; but he asks me to do it, and it shall be done. A moment's look at her will be enough--a moment's look at her with his letter in my hand--and a line to tell him that the woman is here!"

Again he stood hesitating at the half-opened door; again the cruel necessity of writing his farewell to Allan stopped him, and stared him in the face.

He looked aside doubtingly at the rector's letter. "I will write the two together," he said. "One may help the other." His face flushed deep as the words escaped him. He was conscious of doing what he had not done yet--of voluntarily putting off the evil hour; of making Mr. Brock the pretext for gaining the last respite left, the respite of time.

The only sound that reached him through the open door was the sound of Allan stirring noisily in the next room. He stepped at once into the empty

corridor, and meeting no one on the stairs, made his way out of the house. The dread that his resolution to leave Allan might fail him if he saw Allan again was as vividly present to his mind in the morning as it had been all through the night. He drew a deep breath of relief as he descended the house steps--relief at having escaped the friendly greeting of the morning, from the one human creature whom he loved!

He entered the shrubbery with Mr. Brock's letter in his hand, and took the nearest way that led to the major's cottage. Not the slightest recollection was in his mind of the talk which had found its way to his ears during the night. His one reason for determining to see the woman was the reason which the rector had put in his mind. The one remembrance that now guided him to the place in which she lived was the remembrance of Allan's exclamation when he first identified the governess with the figure at the pool.

Arrived at the gate of the cottage, he stopped. The thought struck him that he might defeat his own object if he looked at the rector's questions in the woman's presence. Her suspicions would be probably roused, in the first instance, by his asking to see her (as he had determined to ask, with or without an excuse), and the appearance of the letter in his hand might confirm them.

She might defeat him by instantly leaving the room. Determined to fix the description in his mind first, and then to confront her, he opened the letter; and, turning away slowly by the side of the house, read the seven questions which he felt absolutely assured beforehand the woman's face would answer.

In the morning quiet of the park slight noises traveled far. A slight noise disturbed Midwinter over the letter.

He looked up and found himself on the brink of a broad grassy trench, having the park on one side and the high laurel hedge of an inclosure on the other. The inclosure evidently surrounded the back garden of the cottage, and the trench was intended to protect it from being damaged by the cattle grazing in the park.

Listening carefully as the slight sound which had disturbed him grew fainter, he recognized in it the rustling of women's dresses. A few paces ahead, the trench was crossed by a bridge (closed by a wicket gate) which connected the garden with the park. He passed through the gate, crossed the bridge, and, opening a door at the other end, found himself in a summer-house thickly covered with creepers, and commanding a full view of

the garden from end to end.

He looked, and saw the figures of two ladies walking slowly away from him toward the cottage. The shorter of the two failed to occupy his attention for an instant; he never stopped to think whether she was or was not the major's daughter. His eyes were riveted on the other figure--the figure that moved over the garden walk with the long, lightly falling dress and the easy, seductive grace. There, presented exactly as he had seen her once already--there, with her back again turned on him, was the Woman at the pool!

There was a chance that they might take another turn in the garden--a turn back toward the summer-house. On that chance Midwinter waited. No consciousness of the intrusion that he was committing had stopped him at the door of the summer-house, and no consciousness of it troubled him even now. Every finer sensibility in his nature, sinking under the cruel laceration of the past night, had ceased to feel. The dogged resolution to do what he had come to do was the one animating influence left alive in him. He acted, he even looked, as the most stolid man living might have acted and looked in his place. He was self-possessed enough, in the interval of expectation before governess and pupil reached the end of the walk, to open Mr. Brock's letter, and to fortify his memory by a last look at the paragraph which described her face.

He was still absorbed over the description when he heard the smooth rustle of the dresses traveling toward him again. Standing in the shadow of the summer-house, he waited while she lessened the distance between them. With her written portrait vividly impressed on his mind, and with the clear light of the morning to help him, his eyes questioned her as she came on; and these were the answers that her face gave him back.

The hair in the rector's description was light brown and not plentiful. This woman's hair, superbly luxuriant in its growth, was of the one unpardonably remarkable shade of color which the prejudice of the Northern nations never entirely forgives--it was red! The forehead in the rector's description was high, narrow, and sloping backward from the brow; the eyebrows were faintly marked; and the eyes small, and in color either gray or hazel. This woman's forehead was low, upright, and broad toward the temples; her eyebrows, at once strongly and delicately marked, were a shade darker than her hair; her eyes, large, bright, and well opened, were of that purely blue color, without a tinge in it of gray or green, so often presented to our admiration in pictures and books, so rarely met with in the living face. The nose in the rector's description was aquiline. The line of this woman's nose bent neither outward nor inward: it was the straight,

delicately molded nose (with the short upper lip beneath) of the ancient statues and busts. The lips in the rector's description were thin and the upper lip long; the complexion was of a dull, sickly paleness; the chin retreating and the mark of a mole or a scar on the left side of it. This woman's lips were full, rich, and sensual. Her complexion was the lovely complexion which accompanies such hair as hers--so delicately bright in its rosier tints, so warmly and softly white in its gentler gradations of color on the forehead and the neck. Her chin, round and dimpled, was pure of the slightest blemish in every part of it, and perfectly in line with her forehead to the end. Nearer and nearer, and fairer and fairer she came, in the glow of the morning light--the most startling, the most unanswerable contradiction that eye could see or mind conceive to the description in the rector's letter.

Both governess and pupil were close to the summer-house before they looked that way, and noticed Midwinter standing inside. The governess saw him first.

"A friend of yours, Miss Milroy?" she asked, quietly, without starting or betraying any sign of surprise.

Neelie recognized him instantly. Prejudiced against Midwinter by his conduct when his friend had introduced him at the cottage, she now fairly detested him as the unlucky first cause of her misunderstanding with Allan at the picnic. Her face flushed and she drew back from the summerhouse with an expression of merciless surprise.

"He is a friend of Mr. Armadale's," she replied sharply. "I don't know what he wants, or why he is here."

"A friend of Mr. Armadale's!" The governess's face lighted up with a suddenly roused interest as she repeated the words. She returned Midwinter's look, still steadily fixed on her, with equal steadiness on her side.

"For my part," pursued Neelie, resenting Midwinter's insensibility to her presence on the scene, "I think it a great liberty to treat papa's garden as if it were the open park!"

The governess turned round, and gently interposed.

"My dear Miss Milroy," she remonstrated, "there are certain distinctions to be observed. This gentleman is a friend of Mr. Armadale's. You could hardly express yourself more strongly if he was a perfect stranger."

"I express my opinion," retorted Neelie, chafing under the satirically indulgent tone in which the governess addressed her. "It's a matter of taste, Miss Gwilt; and tastes differ." She turned away petulantly, and walked back by herself to the cottage.

"She is very young," said Miss Gwilt, appealing with a smile to Midwinter's forbearance; "and, as you must see for yourself, sir, she is a spoiled child." She paused--showed, for an instant only, her surprise at Midwinter's strange silence and strange persistency in keeping his eyes still fixed on her--then set herself, with a charming grace and readiness, to help him out of the false position in which he stood. "As you have extended your walk thus far," she resumed, "perhaps you will kindly favor me, on your return, by taking a message to your friend? Mr. Armadale has been so good as to invite me to see the Thorpe Ambrose gardens this morning. Will you say that Major Milroy permits me to accept the invitation (in company with Miss Milroy) between ten and eleven o'clock?" For a moment her eyes rested, with a renewed look of interest, on Midwinter's face. She waited, still in vain, for an answering word from him--smiled, as if his extraordinary silence amused rather than angered her--and followed her pupil back to the cottage.

It was only when the last trace of her had disappeared that Midwinter roused himself, and attempted to realize the position in which he stood. The revelation of her beauty was in no respect answerable for the breathless astonishment which had held him spell-bound up to this moment. The one clear impression she had produced on him thus far began and ended with his discovery of the astounding contradiction that her face offered, in one feature after another, to the description in Mr. Brock's letter. All beyond this was vague and misty--a dim consciousness of a tall, elegant woman, and of kind words, modestly and gracefully spoken to him, and nothing more.

He advanced a few steps into the garden without knowing why--stopped, glancing hither and thither like a man lost--recognized the summer-house by an effort, as if years had elapsed since he had seen it--and made his way out again, at last, into the park. Even here, he wandered first in one direction, then in another. His mind was still reeling under the shock that had fallen on it; his perceptions were all confused. Something kept him mechanically in action, walking eagerly without a motive, walking he knew not where.

A far less sensitively organized man might have been overwhelmed, as he was overwhelmed now, by the immense, the instantaneous revulsion of feeling which the event of the last few minutes had wrought in his mind.

At the memorable instant when he had opened the door of the summer-house, no confusing influence troubled his faculties. In all that related to his position toward his friend, he had reached an absolutely definite conclusion by an absolutely definite process of thought. The whole strength of the motive which had driven him into the resolution to part from Allan rooted itself in the belief that he had seen at Hurle Mere the fatal fulfillment of the first Vision of the Dream. And this belief, in its turn, rested, necessarily, on the conviction that the woman who was the one survivor of the tragedy in Madeira must be also inevitably the woman whom he had seen standing in the Shadow's place at the pool. Firm in that persuasion, he had himself compared the object of his distrust and of the rector's distrust with the description written by the rector himself--a description, carefully minute, by a man entirely trustworthy--and his own eyes had informed him that the woman whom he had seen at the Mere, and the woman whom Mr. Brock had identified in London, were not one, but Two. In the place of the Dream Shadow, there had stood, on the evidence of the rector's letter, not the instrument of the Fatality--but a stranger!

No such doubts as might have troubled a less superstitious man, were started in his mind by the discovery that had now opened on him.

It never occurred to him to ask himself whether a stranger might not be the appointed instrument of the Fatality, now when the letter had persuaded him that a stranger had been revealed as the figure in the dream landscape. No such idea entered or could enter his mind. The one woman whom his superstition dreaded was the woman who had entwined herself with the lives of the two Armadales in the first generation, and with the fortunes of the two Armadales in the second--who was at once the marked object of his father's death-bed warning, and the first cause of the family calamities which had opened Allan's way to the Thorpe Ambrose estate--the woman, in a word, whom he would have known instinctively, but for Mr. Brock's letter, to be the woman whom he had now actually seen.

Looking at events as they had just happened, under the influence of the misapprehension into which the rector had innocently misled him, his mind saw and seized its new conclusion instantaneously, acting precisely as it had acted in the past time of his interview with Mr. Brock at the Isle of Man.

Exactly as he had once declared it to be an all-sufficient refutation of the idea of the Fatality, that he had never met with the timber-ship in any of his voyages at sea, so he now seized on the similarly derived conclusion, that the whole claim of the Dream to a supernatural origin stood self-refuted by the disclosure of a stranger in the Shadow's place. Once started from this

point--once encouraged to let his love for Allan influence him undividedly again, his mind hurried along the whole resulting chain of thought at lightning speed. If the Dream was proved to be no longer a warning from the other world, it followed inevitably that accident and not fate had led the way to the night on the Wreck, and that all the events which had happened since Allan and he had parted from Mr. Brock were events in themselves harmless, which his superstition had distorted from their proper shape. In less than a moment his mobile imagination had taken him back to the morning at Castletown when he had revealed to the rector the secret of his name; when he had declared to the rector, with his father's letter before his eyes, the better faith that was in him. Now once more he felt his heart holding firmly by the bond of brotherhood between Allan and himself; now once more he could say with the eager sincerity of the old time, "If the thought of leaving him breaks my heart, the thought of leaving him is wrong!" As that nobler conviction possessed itself again of his mind--quieting the tumult, clearing the confusion within him--the house at Thorpe Ambrose, with Allan on the steps, waiting, looking for him, opened on his eyes through the trees. A sense of illimitable relief lifted his eager spirit high above the cares, and doubts, and fears that had oppressed it so long, and showed him once more the better and brighter future of his early dreams. His eyes filled with tears, and he pressed the rector's letter, in his wild, passionate way, to his lips, as he looked at Allan through the vista of the trees. "But for this morsel of paper," he thought, "my life might have been one long sorrow to me, and my father's crime might have parted us forever!"

Such was the result of the stratagem which had shown the housemaid's face to Mr. Brock as the face of Miss Gwilt. And so--by shaking Midwinter's trust in his own superstition, in the one case in which that superstition pointed to the truth--did Mother Oldershaw's cunning triumph over difficulties and dangers which had never been contemplated by Mother Oldershaw herself.

## XI. MISS GWILT AMONG THE QUICKSANDS.

1. From the Rev. Decimus Brock to Ozias Midwinter.

"Thursday.

"MY DEAR MIDWINTER--No words can tell what a relief it was to me to get your letter this morning, and what a happiness I honestly feel in having been thus far proved to be in the wrong. The precautions you have taken in case the woman should still confirm my apprehensions by venturing herself at Thorpe Ambrose seem to me to be all that can be desired. You are no doubt sure to hear of her from one or other of the people in the lawyer's office, whom you have asked to inform you of the appearance of a stranger in the town.

"I am the more pleased at finding how entirely I can trust you in this matter; for I am likely to be obliged to leave Allan's interests longer than I supposed solely in your hands. My visit to Thorpe Ambrose must, I regret to say, be deferred for two months. The only one of my brother-clergymen in London who is able to take my duty for me cannot make it convenient to remove with his family to Somersetshire before that time. I have no alternative but to finish my business here, and be back at my rectory on Saturday next. If anything happens, you will, of course, instantly communicate with me; and, in that case, be the inconvenience what it may, I must leave home for Thorpe Ambrose. If, on the other hand, all goes more smoothly than my own obstinate apprehensions will allow me to suppose, then Allan (to whom I have written) must not expect to see me till this day two months.

"No result has, up to this time, rewarded our exertions to recover the trace lost at the railway. I will keep my letter open, however, until post time, in case the next few hours bring any news.

"Always truly yours,

"DECIMUS BROCK.

"P. S.--I have just heard from the lawyers. They have found out the name the woman passed by in London. If this discovery (not a very important one, I am afraid) suggests any new course of proceeding to you, pray act on it at once. The name is--Miss Gwilt."

2. From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw.

The Cottage, Thorpe Ambrose, Saturday, June 28.

"If you will promise not to be alarmed, Mamma Oldershaw, I will begin this letter in a very odd way, by copying a page of a letter written by somebody else. You have an excellent memory, and you may not have forgotten that I received a note from Major Milroy's mother (after she had engaged me as governess) on Monday last. It was dated and signed; and here it is, as far as the first page: 'June 23d, 1851. Dear Madam--Pray excuse my troubling you, before you go to Thorpe Ambrose, with a word more about the habits observed in my son's household. When I had the pleasure of seeing you at two o'clock to-day, in Kingsdown Crescent, I had another appointment in a distant part of London at three; and, in the hurry of the moment, one or two little matters escaped me which I think I ought to impress on your attention.' The rest of the letter is not of the slightest importance, but the lines that I have just copied are well worthy of all the attention you can bestow on them. They have saved me from discovery, my dear, before I have been a week in Major Milroy's service!

"It happened no later than yesterday evening, and it began and ended in this manner:

"There is a gentleman here, (of whom I shall have more to say presently) who is an intimate friend of young Armadale's, and who bears the strange name of Midwinter. He contrived yesterday to speak to me alone in the park. Almost as soon as he opened his lips, I found that my name had been discovered in London (no doubt by the Somersetshire clergyman); and that Mr. Midwinter had been chosen (evidently by the same person) to identify the Miss Gwilt who had vanished from Brompton with the Miss Gwilt who had appeared at Thorpe Ambrose. You foresaw this danger, I remember; but you could scarcely have imagined that the exposure would threaten me so soon.

"I spare you the details of our conversation to come to the end. Mr. Midwinter put the matter very delicately, declaring, to my great surprise, that he felt quite certain himself that I was not the Miss Gwilt of whom his friend was in search; and that he only acted as he did out of regard to the anxiety of a person whose wishes he was bound to respect. Would I assist him in setting that anxiety completely at rest, as far as I was concerned, by kindly answering one plain question--which he had no other right to ask me than the right my indulgence might give him? The lost 'Miss Gwilt' had been missed on Monday last, at two o'clock, in the crowd on the platform of the

North-western Railway, in Euston Square. Would I authorize him to say that on that day, and at that hour, the Miss Gwilt who was Major Milroy's governess had never been near the place?

"I need hardly tell you that I seized the fine opportunity he had given me of disarming all future suspicion. I took a high tone on the spot, and met him with the old lady's letter. He politely refused to look at it. I insisted on his looking at it. 'I don't choose to be mistaken,' I said, 'for a woman who may be a bad character, because she happens to bear, or to have assumed, the same name as mine. I insist on your reading the first part of this letter for my satisfaction, if not for your own.' He was obliged to comply; and there was the proof, in the old lady's handwriting, that, at two o'clock on Monday last, she and I were together in Kingsdown Crescent, which any directory would tell him is a 'crescent' in Bayswater! I leave you to imagine his apologies, and the perfect sweetness with which I received them.

"I might, of course, if I had not preserved the letter, have referred him to you, or to the major's mother, with similar results. As it is, the object has been gained without trouble or delay. I have been proved not to be myself; and one of the many dangers that threatened me at Thorpe Ambrose is a danger blown over from this moment. Your house-maid's face may not be a very handsome one; but there is no denying that it has done us excellent service.

"So much for the past; now for the future. You shall hear how I get on with the people about me; and you shall judge for yourself what the chances are for and against my becoming mistress of Thorpe Ambrose.

"Let me begin with young Armadale--because it is beginning with good news. I have produced the right impression on him already, and Heaven knows that is nothing to boast of! Any moderately good-looking woman who chose to take the trouble could make him fall in love with her. He is a rattle-pated young fool--one of those noisy, rosy, light-haired, good-tempered men whom I particularly detest. I had a whole hour alone with him in a boat, the first day I came here, and I have made good use of my time, I can tell you, from that day to this. The only difficulty with him is the difficulty of concealing my own feelings, especially when he turns my dislike of him into downright hatred by sometimes reminding me of his mother. I really never saw a man whom I could use so ill, if I had the opportunity. He will give me the opportunity, I believe, if no accident happens, sooner than we calculated on. I have just returned from a party at the great house, in celebration of the rent-day dinner, and the squire's attentions to me, and my modest reluctance to receive them, have already excited general remark.

"My pupil, Miss Milroy, comes next. She, too, is rosy and foolish; and, what is more, awkward and squat and freckled, and ill-tempered and ill-dressed. No fear of her, though she hates me like poison, which is a great comfort, for I get rid of her out of lesson time and walking time. It is perfectly easy to see that she has made the most of her opportunities with young Armadale (opportunities, by-the-by, which we never calculated on), and that she has been stupid enough to let him slip through her fingers. When I tell you that she is obliged, for the sake of appearances, to go with her father and me to the little entertainments at Thorpe Ambrose, and to see how young Armadale admires me, you will understand the kind of place I hold in her affections. She would try me past all endurance if I didn't see that I aggravate her by keeping my temper, so, of course, I keep it. If I do break out, it will be over our lessons--not over our French, our grammar, history, and globes--but over our music. No words can say how I feel for her poor piano. Half the musical girls in England ought to have their fingers chopped off in the interests of society, and, if I had my way, Miss Milroy's fingers should be executed first.

"As for the major, I can hardly stand higher in his estimation than I stand already. I am always ready to make his breakfast, and his daughter is not. I can always find things for him when he loses them, and his daughter can't. I never yawn when he proses, and his daughter does. I like the poor dear harmless old gentleman, so I won't say a word more about him.

"Well, here is a fair prospect for the future surely? My good Oldershaw, there never was a prospect yet without an ugly place in it. My prospect has two ugly places in it. The name of one of them is Mrs. Milroy, and the name of the other is Mr. Midwinter.

"Mrs. Milroy first. Before I had been five minutes in the cottage, on the day of my arrival, what do you think she did? She sent downstairs and asked to see me. The message startled me a little, after hearing from the old lady, in London, that her daughter-in-law was too great a sufferer to see anybody; but, of course, when I got her message, I had no choice but to go up stairs to the sick-room. I found her bedridden with an incurable spinal complaint, and a really horrible object to look at, but with all her wits about her; and, if I am not greatly mistaken, as deceitful a woman, with as vile a temper, as you could find anywhere in all your long experience. Her excessive politeness, and her keeping her own face in the shade of the bed-curtains while she contrived to keep mine in the light, put me on my guard the moment I entered the room. We were more than half an hour together, without my stepping into any one of the many clever little traps she laid for

me. The only mystery in her behavior, which I failed to see through at the time, was her perpetually asking me to bring her things (things she evidently did not want) from different parts of the room.

"Since then events have enlightened me. My first suspicions were raised by overhearing some of the servants' gossip; and I have been confirmed in my opinion by the conduct of Mrs. Milroy's nurse.

"On the few occasions when I have happened to be alone with the major, the nurse has also happened to want something of her master, and has invariably forgotten to announce her appearance by knocking, at the door. Do you understand now why Mrs. Milroy sent for me the moment I got into the house, and what she wanted when she kept me going backward and forward, first for one thing and then for another? There is hardly an attractive light in which my face and figure can be seen, in which that woman's jealous eyes have not studied them already. I am no longer puzzled to know why the father and daughter started, and looked at each other, when I was first presented to them; or why the servants still stare at me with a mischievous expectation in their eyes when I ring the bell and ask them to do anything. It is useless to disguise the truth, Mother Oldershaw, between you and me. When I went upstairs into that sickroom, I marched blindfold into the clutches of a jealous woman. If Mrs. Milroy can turn me out of the house, Mrs. Milroy will; and, morning and night, she has nothing else to do in that bed prison of hers but to find out the way.

"In this awkward position, my own cautious conduct is admirably seconded by the dear old major's perfect insensibility. His wife's jealousy of him is as monstrous a delusion as any that could be found in a mad-house; it is the growth of her own vile temper, under the aggravation of an incurable illness. The poor man hasn't a thought beyond his mechanical pursuits; and I don't believe he knows at this moment whether I am a handsome woman or not. With this chance to help me, I may hope to set the nurse's intrusions and the mistress's contrivances at defiance--for a time, at any rate. But you know what a jealous woman is, and I think I know what Mrs. Milroy is; and I own I shall breathe more freely on the day when young Armadale opens his foolish lips to some purpose, and sets the major advertising for a new governess.

"Armadale's name reminds me of Armadale's friend. There is more danger threatening in that quarter; and, what is worse, I don't feel half as well armed beforehand against Mr. Midwinter as I do against Mrs. Milroy.

"Everything about this man is more or less mysterious, which I don't like, to

begin with. How does he come to be in the confidence of the Somersetshire clergyman? How much has that clergyman told him? How is it that he was so firmly persuaded, when he spoke to me in the park, that I was not the Miss Gwilt of whom his friend was in search? I haven't the ghost of an answer to give to any of those three questions. I can't even discover who he is, or how he and young Armadale first became acquainted. I hate him. No, I don't; I only want to find out about him. He is very young, little and lean, and active and dark, with bright black eyes which say to me plainly, 'We belong to a man with brains in his head and a will of his own; a man who hasn't always been hanging about a country house, in attendance on a fool.' Yes; I am positively certain Mr. Midwinter has done something or suffered something in his past life, young as he is; and I would give I don't know what to get at it. Don't resent my taking up so much space in my writing about him. He has influence enough over young Armadale to be a very awkward obstacle in my way, unless I can secure his good opinion at starting.

"Well, you may ask, and what is to prevent your securing his good opinion? I am sadly afraid, Mother Oldershaw, I have got it on terms I never bargained for I am sadly afraid the man is in love with me already.

"Don't toss your head and say, 'Just like her vanity!' After the horrors I have gone through, I have no vanity left; and a man who admires me is a man who makes me shudder. There was a time, I own--Pooh! what am I writing? Sentiment, I declare! Sentiment to you! Laugh away, my dear. As for me, I neither laugh nor cry; I mend my pen, and get on with my--what do the men call it?--my report.

"The only thing worth inquiring is, whether I am right or wrong in my idea of the impression I have made on him.

"Let me see; I have been four times in his company. The first time was in the major's garden, where we met unexpectedly, face to face. He stood looking at me, like a man petrified, without speaking a word. The effect of my horrid red hair, perhaps? Quite likely; let us lay it on my hair. The second time was in going over the Thorpe Ambrose grounds, with young Armadale on one side of me, and my pupil (in the sulks) on the other. Out comes Mr. Midwinter to join us, though he had work to do in the steward's office, which he had never been known to neglect on any other occasion. Laziness, possibly? or an attachment to Miss Milroy? I can't say; we will lay it on Miss Milroy, if you like; I only know he did nothing but look at me. The third time was at the private interview in the park, which I have told you of already. I never saw a man so agitated at putting a delicate question to a woman in my

life. But that might have been only awkwardness; and his perpetually looking back after me when we had parted might have been only looking back at the view. Lay it on the view; by all means, lay it on the view! The fourth time was this very evening, at the little party. They made me play; and, as the piano was a good one, I did my best. All the company crowded round me, and paid me their compliments (my charming pupil paid hers, with a face like a cat's just before she spits), except Mr. Midwinter. He waited till it was time to go, and then he caught me alone for a moment in the hall. There was just time for him to take my hand, and say two words. Shall I tell you how he took my hand, and what his voice sounded like when he spoke? Quite needless! You have always told me that the late Mr. Oldershaw doted on you. Just recall the first time he took your hand, and whispered a word or two addressed to your private ear. To what did you attribute his behavior that occasion? I have no doubt, if you had been playing on the piano in the course of the evening, you would have attributed it entirely to the music!

"No! you may take my word for it, the harm is done. This man is no rattle-pated fool, who changes his fancies as readily as he changes his clothes. The fire that lights those big black eyes of his is not an easy fire, when a woman has once kindled it, for that woman to put out. I don't wish to discourage you; I don't say the changes are against us. But with Mrs. Milroy threatening me on one side, and Mr. Midwinter on the other, the worst of all risks to run is the risk of losing time. Young Armadale has hinted already, as well as such a lout can hint, at a private interview! Miss Milroy's eyes are sharp, and the nurse's eyes are sharper; and I shall lose my place if either of them find me out. No matter! I must take my chance, and give him the interview. Only let me get him alone, only let me escape the prying eyes of the women, and--if his friend doesn't come between us--I answer for the result!

"In the meantime, have I anything more to tell you? Are there any other people in our way at Thorpe Ambrose? Not another creature! None of the resident families call here, young Armadale being, most fortunately, in bad odor in the neighborhood. There are no handsome highly-bred women to come to the house, and no persons of consequence to protest against his attentions to a governess. The only guests he could collect at his party to-night were the lawyer and his family (a wife, a son, and two daughters), and a deaf old woman and her son--all perfectly unimportant people, and all obedient humble servants of the stupid young squire.

"Talking of obedient humble servants, there is one other person established here, who is employed in the steward's office--a miserable, shabby,

dilapidated old man, named Bashwood. He is a perfect stranger to me, and I am evidently a perfect stranger to him, for he has been asking the house-maid at the cottage who I am. It is paying no great compliment to myself to confess it, but it is not the less true that I produced the most extraordinary impression on this feeble old creature the first time he saw me. He turned all manner of colors, and stood trembling and staring at me, as if there was something perfectly frightful in my face. I felt quite startled for the moment, for, of all the ways in which men have looked at me, no man ever looked at me in that way before. Did you ever see the boa constrictor fed at the Zoological Gardens? They put a live rabbit into his cage, and there is a moment when the two creatures look at each other. I declare Mr. Bashwood reminded me of the rabbit.

"Why do I mention this? I don't know why. Perhaps I have been writing too long, and my head is beginning to fail me. Perhaps Mr. Bashwood's manner of admiring me strikes my fancy by its novelty. Absurd! I am exciting myself, and troubling you about nothing. Oh, what a weary, long letter I have written! and how brightly the stars look at me through the window, and how awfully quiet the night is! Send me some more of those sleeping drops, and write me one of your nice, wicked, amusing letters. You shall hear from me again as soon as I know a little better how it is all likely to end. Good-night, and keep a corner in your stony old heart for

"L. G."

3. From Mrs. Oldershaw to Miss Gwilt.

"Diana Street, Pimlico, Monday.

"MY DEAR LYDIA--I am in no state of mind to write you an amusing letter. Your news is very discouraging, and the recklessness of your tone quite alarms me. Consider the money I have already advanced, and the interests we both have at stake. Whatever else you are, don't be reckless, for Heaven's sake!

"What can I do? I ask myself, as a woman of business, what can I do to help you? I can't give you advice, for I am not on the spot, and I don't know how circumstances may alter from one day to another. Situated as we are now, I can only be useful in one way. I can discover a new obstacle that threatens you, and I think I can remove it.

"You say, with great truth, that there never was a prospect yet without an ugly place in it, and that there are two ugly places in your prospect. My

dear, there may be three ugly places, if I don't bestir myself to prevent it; and the name of the third place will be--Brock! Is it possible you can refer, as you have done, to the Somersetshire clergyman, and not see that the progress you make with young Armadale will be, sooner or later, reported to him by young Armadale's friend? Why, now I think of it, you are doubly at the parson's mercy! You are at the mercy of any fresh suspicion which may bring him into the neighborhood himself at a day's notice; and you are at the mercy of his interference the moment he hears that the squire is committing himself with a neighbor's governess. If I can do nothing else, I can keep this additional difficulty out of your way. And oh, Lydia, with what alacrity I shall exert myself, after the manner in which the old wretch insulted me when I told him that pitiable story in the street! I declare I tingle with pleasure at this new prospect of making a fool of Mr. Brock.

"And how is it to be done? Just as we have done it already, to be sure. He has lost 'Miss Gwilt' (otherwise my house-maid), hasn't he? Very well. He shall find her again, wherever he is now, suddenly settled within easy reach of him. As long as she stops in the place, he will stop in it; and as we know he is not at Thorpe Ambrose, there you are free of him! The old gentleman's suspicions have given us a great deal of trouble so far. Let us turn them to some profitable account at last; let us tie him, by his suspicions, to my house-maid's apron-string. Most refreshing. Quite a moral retribution, isn't it?

"The only help I need trouble you for is help you can easily give. Find out from Mr. Midwinter where the parson is now, and let me know by return of post. If he is in London, I will personally assist my housemaid in the necessary mystification of him. If he is anywhere else, I will send her after him, accompanied by a person on whose discretion I can implicitly rely.

"You shall have the sleeping drops to-morrow. In the meantime, I say at the end what I said at the beginning--no recklessness. Don't encourage poetical feelings by looking at the stars; and don't talk about the night being awfully quiet. There are people (in observatories) paid to look at the stars for you; leave it to them. And as for the night, do what Providence intended you to do with the night when Providence provided you with eyelids--go to sleep in it. Affectionately yours,

"MARIA OLDERSHAW."

4. From the Reverend Decimus Brock to Ozias Midwinter.

"Bascombe Rectory, West Somerset, Thursday, July 8.

"MY DEAR MIDWINTER--One line before the post goes out, to relieve you of all sense of responsibility at Thorpe Ambrose, and to make my apologies to the lady who lives as governess in Major Milroy's family.

"The Miss Gwilt--or perhaps I ought to say, the woman calling herself by that name--has, to my unspeakable astonishment, openly made her appearance here, in my own parish! She is staying at the inn, accompanied by a plausible-looking man, who passes as her brother. What this audacious proceeding really means--unless it marks a new step in the conspiracy against Allan, taken under new advice--is, of course, more than I can yet find out.

"My own idea is, that they have recognized the impossibility of getting at Allan, without finding me (or you) as an obstacle in their way; and that they are going to make a virtue of necessity by boldly trying to open their communications through me. The man looks capable of any stretch of audacity; and both he and the woman had the impudence to bow when I met them in the village half an hour since. They have been making inquiries already about Allan's mother here, where her exemplary life may set their closest scrutiny at defiance. If they will only attempt to extort money, as the price of the woman's silence on the subject of poor Mrs. Armadale's conduct in Madeira at the time of her marriage, they will find me well prepared for them beforehand. I have written by this post to my lawyers to send a competent man to assist me, and he will stay at the rectory, in any character which he thinks it safest to assume under present circumstances.

"You shall hear what happens in the next day or two.

"Always truly yours, DECIMUS BROCK."

## XII. THE CLOUDING OF THE SKY.

Nine days had passed, and the tenth day was nearly at an end, since Miss Gwilt and her pupil had taken their morning walk in the cottage garden.

The night was overcast. Since sunset, there had been signs in the sky from which the popular forecast had predicted rain. The reception-rooms at the great house were all empty and dark. Allan was away, passing the evening with the Milroys; and Midwinter was waiting his return--not where Midwinter usually waited, among the books in the library, but in the little back room which Allan's mother had inhabited in the last days of her residence at Thorpe Ambrose.

Nothing had been taken away, but much had been added to the room, since Midwinter had first seen it. The books which Mrs. Armadale had left behind her, the furniture, the old matting on the floor, the old paper on the walls, were all undisturbed. The statuette of Niobe still stood on its bracket, and the French window still opened on the garden. But now, to the relics left by the mother, were added the personal possessions belonging to the son. The wall, bare hitherto, was decorated with water-color drawings--with a portrait of Mrs. Armadale supported on one side by a view of the old house in Somersetshire, and on the other by a picture of the yacht. Among the books which bore in faded ink Mrs. Armadale's inscriptions, "From my father," were other books inscribed in the same handwriting, in brighter ink, "To my son." Hanging to the wall, ranged on the chimney-piece, scattered over the table, were a host of little objects, some associated with Allan's past life, others necessary to his daily pleasures and pursuits, and all plainly testifying that the room which he habitually occupied at Thorpe Ambrose was the very room which had once recalled to Midwinter the second vision of the dream. Here, strangely unmoved by the scene around him, so lately the object of his superstitious distrust, Allan's friend now waited composedly for Allan's return; and here, more strangely still, he looked on a change in the household arrangements, due in the first instance entirely to himself. His own lips had revealed the discovery which he had made on the first morning in the new house; his own voluntary act had induced the son to establish himself in the mother's room.

Under what motives had he spoken the words? Under no motives which were not the natural growth of the new interests and the new hopes that now animated him.

The entire change wrought in his convictions by the memorable event that had brought him face to face with Miss Gwilt was a change which it was not in his nature to hide from Allan's knowledge. He had spoken openly, and had spoken as it was in his character to speak. The merit of conquering his superstition was a merit which he shrank from claiming, until he had first unsparingly exposed that superstition in its worst and weakest aspects to view.

It was only after he had unreservedly acknowledged the impulse under which he had left Allan at the Mere, that he had taken credit to himself for the new point of view from which he could now look at the Dream. Then, and not till then, he had spoken of the fulfillment of the first Vision as the doctor at the Isle of Man might have spoken of it. He had asked, as the doctor might have asked, Where was the wonder of their seeing a pool at sunset, when they had a whole network of pools within a few hours' drive of them? and what was there extraordinary in discovering a woman at the Mere, when there were roads that led to it, and villages in its neighborhood, and boats employed on it, and pleasure parties visiting it? So again, he had waited to vindicate the firmer resolution with which he looked to the future, until he had first revealed all that he now saw himself of the errors of the past. The abandonment of his friend's interests, the unworthiness of the confidence that had given him the steward's place, the forgetfulness of the trust that Mr. Brock had reposed in him all implied in the one idea of leaving Allan--were all pointed out. The glaring self-contradictions betrayed in accepting the Dream as the revelation of a fatality, and in attempting to escape that fatality by an exertion of free-will--in toiling to store up knowledge of the steward's duties for the future, and in shrinking from letting the future find him in Allan's house--were, in their turn, unsparingly exposed. To every error, to every inconsistency, he resolutely confessed, before he ventured on the last simple appeal which closed all, "Will you trust me in the future? Will you forgive and forget the past?"

A man who could thus open his whole heart, without one lurking reserve inspired by consideration for himself, was not a man to forget any minor act of concealment of which his weakness might have led him to be guilty toward his friend. It lay heavy on Midwinter's conscience that he had kept secret from Allan a discovery which he ought in Allan's dearest interests to have revealed--the discovery of his mother's room.

But one doubt still closed his lips--the doubt whether Mrs. Armadale's conduct in Madeira had been kept secret on her return to England.

Careful inquiry, first among the servants, then among the tenantry, careful

consideration of the few reports current at the time, as repeated to him by the few persons left who remembered them, convinced him at last that the family secret had been successfully kept within the family limits. Once satisfied that whatever inquiries the son might make would lead to no disclosure which could shake his respect for his mother's memory, Midwinter had hesitated no longer. He had taken Allan into the room, and had shown him the books on the shelves, and all that the writing in the books disclosed. He had said plainly, "My one motive for not telling you this before sprang from my dread of interesting you in the room which I looked at with horror as the second of the scenes pointed at in the Dream. Forgive me this also, and you will have forgiven me all."

With Allan's love for his mother's memory, but one result could follow such an avowal as this. He had liked the little room from the first, as a pleasant contrast to the oppressive grandeur of the other rooms at Thorpe Ambrose, and, now that he knew what associations were connected with it, his resolution was at once taken to make it especially his own. The same day, all his personal possessions were collected and arranged in his mother's room--in Midwinter's presence, and with Midwinter's assistance given to the work.

Under those circumstances had the change now wrought in the household arrangements been produced; and in this way had Midwinter's victory over his own fatalism--by making Allan the daily occupant of a room which he might otherwise hardly ever have entered--actually favored the fulfillment of the Second Vision of the Dream.

The hour wore on quietly as Allan's friend sat waiting for Allan's return. Sometimes reading, sometimes thinking placidly, he whiled away the time. No vexing cares, no boding doubts, troubled him now. The rent-day, which he had once dreaded, had come and gone harmlessly. A friendlier understanding had been established between Allan and his tenants; Mr. Bashwood had proved himself to be worthy of the confidence reposed in him; the Pedgifts, father and son, had amply justified their client's good opinion of them. Wherever Midwinter looked, the prospect was bright, the future was without a cloud.

He trimmed the lamp on the table beside him and looked out at the night. The stable clock was chiming the half-hour past eleven as he walked to the window, and the first rain-drops were beginning to fall. He had his hand on the bell to summon the servant, and send him over to the cottage with an umbrella, when he was stopped by hearing the familiar footstep on the walk outside.

"How late you are!" said Midwinter, as Allan entered through the open French window. "Was there a party at the cottage?"

"No! only ourselves. The time slipped away somehow." He answered in lower tones than usual, and sighed as he took his chair.

"You seem to be out of spirits?" pursued Midwinter. "What's the matter?"

Allan hesitated. "I may as well tell you," he said, after a moment. "It's nothing to be ashamed of; I only wonder you haven't noticed it before! There's a woman in it, as usual--I'm in love."

Midwinter laughed. "Has Miss Milroy been more charming to-night than ever?" he asked, gayly.

"Miss Milroy!" repeated Allan. "What are you thinking of! I'm not in love with Miss Milroy."

"Who is it, then?"

"Who is it! What a question to ask! Who can it be but Miss Gwilt?"

There was a sudden silence. Allan sat listlessly, with his hands in his pockets, looking out through the open window at the falling rain. If he had turned toward his friend when he mentioned Miss Gwilt's name he might possibly have been a little startled by the change he would have seen in Midwinter's face.

"I suppose you don't approve of it?" he said, after waiting a little.

There was no answer.

"It's too late to make objections," proceeded Allan. "I really mean it when I tell you I'm in love with her."

"A fortnight since you were in love with Miss Milroy," said the other, in quiet, measured tones.

"Pooh! a mere flirtation. It's different this time. I'm in earnest about Miss Gwilt."

He looked round as he spoke. Midwinter turned his face aside on the

instant, and bent it over a book.

"I see you don't approve of the thing," Allan went on. "Do you object to her being only a governess? You can't do that, I'm sure. If you were in my place, her being only a governess wouldn't stand in the way with you?"

"No," said Midwinter; "I can't honestly say it would stand in the way with me." He gave the answer reluctantly, and pushed his chair back out of the light of the lamp.

"A governess is a lady who is not rich," said Allan, in an oracular manner; "and a duchess is a lady who is not poor. And that's all the difference I acknowledge between them. Miss Gwilt is older than I am--I don't deny that. What age do you guess her at, Midwinter? I say, seven or eight and twenty. What do you say?"

"Nothing. I agree with you."

"Do you think seven or eight and twenty is too old for me? If you were in love with a woman yourself, you wouldn't think seven or eight and twenty too old--would you?"

"I can't say I should think it too old, if--"

"If you were really fond of her?"

Once more there was no answer.

"Well," resumed Allan, "if there's no harm in her being only a governess, and no harm in her being a little older than I am, what's the objection to Miss Gwilt?"

"I have made no objection."

"I don't say you have. But you don't seem to like the notion of it, for all that."

There was another pause. Midwinter was the first to break the silence this time.

"Are you sure of yourself, Allan?" he asked, with his face bent once more over the book. "Are you really attached to this lady? Have you thought seriously already of asking her to be your wife?"

"I am thinking seriously of it at this moment," said Allan. "I can't be happy--I can't live without her. Upon my soul, I worship the very ground she treads on!"

"How long--" His voice faltered, and he stopped. "How long," he reiterated, "have you worshipped the very ground she treads on?"

"Longer than you think for. I know I can trust you with all my secrets--"

"Don't trust me!"

"Nonsense! I will trust you. There is a little difficulty in the way which I haven't mentioned yet. It's a matter of some delicacy, and I want to consult you about it. Between ourselves, I have had private opportunities with Miss Gwilt--"

Midwinter suddenly started to his feet, and opened the door.

"We'll talk of this to-morrow," he said. "Good-night."

Allan looked round in astonishment. The door was closed again, and he was alone in the room.

"He has never shaken hands with me!" exclaimed Allan, looking bewildered at the empty chair.

As the words passed his lips the door opened, and Midwinter appeared again.

"We haven't shaken hands," he said, abruptly. "God bless you, Allan! We'll talk of it to-morrow. Good-night."

Allan stood alone at the window, looking out at the pouring rain. He felt ill at ease, without knowing why. "Midwinter's ways get stranger and stranger," he thought. "What can he mean by putting me off till to-morrow, when I wanted to speak to him to-night?" He took up his bedroom candle a little impatiently, put it down again, and, walking back to the open window, stood looking out in the direction of the cottage. "I wonder if she's thinking of me?" he said to himself softly.

She was thinking of him. She had just opened her desk to write to Mrs. Oldershaw; and her pen had that moment traced the opening line: "Make your mind easy. I have got him!"

## XIII. EXIT.

It rained all through the night, and when the morning came it was raining still.

Contrary to his ordinary habit, Midwinter was waiting in the breakfast-room when Allan entered it. He looked worn and weary, but his smile was gentler and his manner more composed than usual. To Allan's surprise he approached the subject of the previous night's conversation of his own accord as soon as the servant was out of the room.

"I am afraid you thought me very impatient and very abrupt with you last night," he said. "I will try to make amends for it this morning. I will hear everything you wish to say to me on the subject of Miss Gwilt."

"I hardly like to worry you," said Allan. "You look as if you had had a bad night's rest."

"I have not slept well for some time past," replied Midwinter, quietly. "Something has been wrong with me. But I believe I have found out the way to put myself right again without troubling the doctors. Late in the morning I shall have something to say to you about this. Let us get back first to what you were talking of last night. You were speaking of some difficulty--" He hesitated, and finished the sentence in a tone so low that Allan failed to hear him. "Perhaps it would be better," he went on, "if, instead of speaking to me, you spoke to Mr. Brock?"

"I would rather speak to you," said Allan. "But tell me first, was I right or wrong last night in thinking you disapproved of my falling in love with Miss Gwilt?"

Midwinter's lean, nervous fingers began to crumble the bread in his plate. His eyes looked away from Allan for the first time.

"If you have any objection," persisted Allan, "I should like to hear it."

Midwinter suddenly looked up again, his cheeks turning ashy pale, and his glittering black eyes fixed full on Allan's face.

"You love her," he said. "Does she love you?"

"You won't think me vain?" returned Allan. "I told you yesterday I had had private opportunities with her--"

Midwinter's eyes dropped again to the crumbs on his plate. "I understand," he interposed, quickly. "You were wrong last night. I had no objections to make."

"Don't you congratulate me?" asked Allan, a little uneasily. "Such a beautiful woman! such a clever woman!"

Midwinter held out his hand. "I owe you more than mere congratulations," he said. "In anything which is for your happiness I owe you help." He took Allan's hand, and wrung it hard. "Can I help you?" he asked, growing paler and paler as he spoke.

"My dear fellow," exclaimed Allan, "what is the matter with you? Your hand is as cold as ice."

Midwinter smiled faintly. "I am always in extremes," he said; "my hand was as hot as fire the first time you took it at the old west-country inn. Come to that difficulty which you have not come to yet. You are young, rich, your own master--and she loves you. What difficulty can there be?"

Allan hesitated. "I hardly know how to put it," he replied. "As you said just now, I love her, and she loves me; and yet there is a sort of strangeness between us. One talks a good deal about one's self when one is in love, at least I do. I've told her all about myself and my mother, and how I came in for this place, and the rest of it. Well--though it doesn't strike me when we are together--it comes across me now and then, when I'm away from her, that she doesn't say much on her side. In fact, I know no more about her than you do."

"Do you mean that you know nothing about Miss Gwilt's family and friends?"

"That's it, exactly."

"Have you never asked her about them?"

"I said something of the sort the other day," returned Allan: "and I'm afraid, as usual, I said it in the wrong way. She looked--I can't quite tell you how; not exactly displeased, but--oh, what things words are! I'd give the world, Midwinter, if I could only find the right word when I want it as well as you

do."

"Did Miss Gwilt say anything to you in the way of a reply?"

"That's just what I was coming to. She said, 'I shall have a melancholy story to tell you one of these days, Mr. Armadale, about myself and my family; but you look so happy, and the circumstances are so distressing, that I have hardly the heart to speak of it now.' Ah, she can express herself--with the tears in her eyes, my dear fellow, with the tears in her eyes! Of course, I changed the subject directly. And now the difficulty is how to get back to it, delicately, without making her cry again. We must get back to it, you know. Not on my account; I am quite content to marry her first and hear of her family misfortunes, poor thing, afterward. But I know Mr. Brock. If I can't satisfy him about her family when I write to tell him of this (which, of course, I must do), he will be dead against the whole thing. I'm my own master, of course, and I can do as I like about it. But dear old Brock was such a good friend to my poor mother, and he has been such a good friend to me--you see what I mean, don't you?"

"Certainly, Allan; Mr. Brock has been your second father. Any disagreement between you about such a serious matter as this would be the saddest thing that could happen. You ought to satisfy him that Miss Gwilt is (what I am sure Miss Gwilt will prove to be) worthy, in every way worthy--" His voice sank in spite of him, and he left the sentence unfinished.

"Just my feeling in the matter!" Allan struck in, glibly. "Now we can come to what I particularly wanted to consult you about. If this was your case, Midwinter, you would be able to say the right words to her--you would put it delicately, even though you were putting it quite in the dark. I can't do that. I'm a blundering sort of fellow; and I'm horribly afraid, if I can't get some hint at the truth to help me at starting, of saying something to distress her. Family misfortunes are such tender subjects to touch on, especially with such a refined woman, such a tender-hearted woman, as Miss Gwilt. There may have been some dreadful death in the family--some relation who has disgraced himself--some infernal cruelty which has forced the poor thing out on the world as a governess. Well, turning it over in my mind, it struck me that the major might be able to put me on the right tack. It is quite possible that he might have been informed of Miss Gwilt's family circumstances before he engaged her, isn't it?"

"It is possible, Allan, certainly."

"Just my feeling again! My notion is to speak to the major. If I could only get

the story from him first, I should know so much better how to speak to Miss Gwilt about it afterward. You advise me to try the major, don't you?"

There was a pause before Midwinter replied. When he did answer, it was a little reluctantly.

"I hardly know how to advise you, Allan," he said. "This is a very delicate matter."

"I believe you would try the major, if you were in my place," returned Allan, reverting to his inveterately personal way of putting the question.

"Perhaps I might," said Midwinter, more and more unwillingly. "But if I did speak to the major, I should be very careful, in your place, not to put myself in a false position. I should be very careful to let no one suspect me of the meanness of prying into a woman's secrets behind her back."

Allan's face flushed. "Good heavens, Midwinter," he exclaimed, "who could suspect me of that?"

"Nobody, Allan, who really knows you."

"The major knows me. The major is the last man in the world to misunderstand me. All I want him to do is to help me (if he can) to speak about a delicate subject to Miss Gwilt, without hurting her feelings. Can anything be simpler between two gentlemen?"

Instead of replying, Midwinter, still speaking as constrainedly as ever, asked a question on his side. "Do you mean to tell Major Milroy," he said, "what your intentions really are toward Miss Gwilt?"

Allan's manner altered. He hesitated, and looked confused.

"I have been thinking of that," he replied; "and I mean to feel my way first, and then tell him or not afterward, as matters turn out?"

A proceeding so cautious as this was too strikingly inconsistent with Allan's character not to surprise any one who knew him. Midwinter showed his surprise plainly.

"You forget that foolish flirtation of mine with Miss Milroy," Allan went on, more and more confusedly. "The major may have noticed it, and may have thought I meant--well, what I didn't mean. It might be rather awkward,

mightn't it, to propose to his face for his governess instead of his daughter?"

He waited for a word of answer, but none came. Midwinter opened his lips to speak, and suddenly checked himself. Allan, uneasy at his silence, doubly uneasy under certain recollections of the major's daughter which the conversation had called up, rose from the table and shortened the interview a little impatiently.

"Come! come!" he said, "don't sit there looking unutterable things; don't make mountains out of mole-hills. You have such an old, old head, Midwinter, on those young shoulders of yours! Let's have done with all these pros and cons. Do you mean to tell me in plain words that it won't do to speak to the major?"

"I can't take the responsibility, Allan, of telling you that. To be plainer still, I can't feel confident of the soundness of any advice I may give you in--in our present position toward each other. All I am sure of is that I cannot possibly be wrong in entreating you to do two things."

"What are they?"

"If you speak to Major Milroy, pray remember the caution I have given you! Pray think of what you say before you say it!"

"I'll think, never fear! What next?"

"Before you take any serious step in this matter, write and tell Mr. Brock. Will you promise me to do that?"

"With all my heart. Anything more?"

"Nothing more. I have said my last words."

Allan led the way to the door. "Come into my room," he said, "and I'll give you a cigar. The servants will be in here directly to clear away, and I want to go on talking about Miss Gwilt."

"Don't wait for me," said Midwinter; "I'll follow you in a minute or two."

He remained seated until Allan had closed the door, then rose, and took from a corner of the room, where it lay hidden behind one of the curtains, a knapsack ready packed for traveling. As he stood at the window thinking, with the knapsack in his hand, a strangely old, care-worn look stole over his

face: he seemed to lose the last of his youth in an instant.

What the woman's quicker insight had discovered days since, the man's slower perception had only realized in the past night. The pang that had wrung him when he heard Allan's avowal had set the truth self-revealed before Midwinter for the first time. He had been conscious of looking at Miss Gwilt with new eyes and a new mind, on the next occasion when they met after the memorable interview in Major Milroy's garden; but he had never until now known the passion that she had roused in him for what it really was. Knowing it at last, feeling it consciously in full possession of him, he had the courage which no man with a happier experience of life would have possessed--the courage to recall what Allan had confided to him, and to look resolutely at the future through his own grateful remembrances of the past.

Steadfastly, through the sleepless hours of the night, he had bent his mind to the conviction that he must conquer the passion which had taken possession of him, for Allan's sake; and that the one way to conquer it was--to go. No after-doubt as to the sacrifice had troubled him when morning came; and no after-doubt troubled him now. The one question that kept him hesitating was the question of leaving Thorpe Ambrose. Though Mr. Brock's letter relieved him from all necessity of keeping watch in Norfolk for a woman who was known to be in Somersetshire; though the duties of the steward's office were duties which might be safely left in Mr. Bashwood's tried and trustworthy hands--still, admitting these considerations, his mind was not easy at the thought of leaving Allan, at a time when a crisis was approaching in Allan's life.

He slung the knapsack loosely over his shoulder and put the question to his conscience for the last time. "Can you trust yourself to see her, day by day as you must see her--can you trust yourself to hear him talk of her, hour by hour, as you must hear him--if you stay in this house?" Again the answer came, as it had come all through the night. Again his heart warned him, in the very interests of the friendship that he held sacred, to go while the time was his own; to go before the woman who had possessed herself of his love had possessed herself of his power of self-sacrifice and his sense of gratitude as well.

He looked round the room mechanically before he turned to leave it. Every remembrance of the conversation that had just taken place between Allan and himself pointed to the same conclusion, and warned him, as his own conscience had warned him, to go.

Had he honestly mentioned any one of the objections which he, or any man,

must have seen to Allan's attachment? Had he--as his knowledge of his friend's facile character bound him to do--warned Allan to distrust his own hasty impulses, and to test himself by time and absence, before he made sure that the happiness of his whole life was bound up in Miss Gwilt? No. The bare doubt whether, in speaking of these things, he could feel that he was speaking disinterestedly, had closed his lips, and would close his lips for the future, till the time for speaking had gone by. Was the right man to restrain Allan the man who would have given the world, if he had it, to stand in Allan's place? There was but one plain course of action that an honest man and a grateful man could follow in the position in which he stood. Far removed from all chance of seeing her, and from all chance of hearing of her--alone with his own faithful recollection of what he owed to his friend--he might hope to fight it down, as he had fought down the tears in his childhood under his gypsy master's stick; as he had fought down the misery of his lonely youth time in the country bookseller's shop. "I must go," he said, as he turned wearily from the window, "before she comes to the house again. I must go before another hour is over my head."

With that resolution he left the room; and, in leaving it, took the irrevocable step from Present to Future.

The rain was still falling. The sullen sky, all round the horizon, still lowered watery and dark, when Midwinter, equipped for traveling, appeared in Allan's room.

"Good heavens!" cried Allan, pointing to the knapsack, "what does that mean?"

"Nothing very extraordinary," said Midwinter. "It only means--good-by."

"Good-by!" repeated Allan, starting to his feet in astonishment.

Midwinter put him back gently into his chair, and drew a seat near to it for himself.

"When you noticed that I looked ill this morning," he said, "I told you that I had been thinking of a way to recover my health, and that I meant to speak to you about it later in the day. That latter time has come. I have been out of sorts, as the phrase is, for some time past. You have remarked it yourself, Allan, more than once; and, with your usual kindness, you have allowed it to excuse many things in my conduct which would have been otherwise unpardonable, even in your friendly eyes."

"My dear fellow," interposed Allan, "you don't mean to say you are going out on a walking tour in this pouring rain!"

"Never mind the rain," rejoined Midwinter. "The rain and I are old friends. You know something, Allan, of the life I led before you met with me. From the time when I was a child, I have been used to hardship and exposure. Night and day, sometimes for months together, I never had my head under a roof. For years and years, the life of a wild animal--perhaps I ought to say, the life of a savage--was the life I led, while you were at home and happy. I have the leaven of the vagabond--the vagabond animal, or the vagabond man, I hardly know which--in me still. Does it distress you to hear me talk of myself in this way? I won't distress you. I will only say that the comfort and the luxury of our life here are, at times, I think, a little too much for a man to whom comforts and luxuries come as strange things. I want nothing to put me right again but more air and exercise; fewer good breakfasts and dinners, my dear friend, than I get here. Let me go back to some of the hardships which this comfortable house is expressly made to shut out. Let me meet the wind and weather as I used to meet them when I was a boy; let me feel weary again for a little while, without a carriage near to pick me up; and hungry when the night falls, with miles of walking between my supper and me. Give me a week or two away, Allan--up northward, on foot, to the Yorkshire moors--and I promise to return to Thorpe Ambrose, better company for you and for your friends. I shall be back before you have time to miss me. Mr. Bashwood will take care of the business in the office; it is only for a fortnight, and it is for my own good--let me go!"

"I don't like it," said Allan. "I don't like your leaving me in this sudden manner. There's something so strange and dreary about it. Why not try riding, if you want more exercise; all the horses in the stables are at your disposal. At all events, you can't possibly go to-day. Look at the rain!"

Midwinter looked toward the window, and gently shook his head.

"I thought nothing of the rain," he said, "when I was a mere child, getting my living with the dancing dogs--why should I think anything of it now? My getting wet, and your getting wet, Allan, are two very different things. When I was a fisherman's boy in the Hebrides, I hadn't a dry thread on me for weeks together."

"But you're not in the Hebrides now," persisted Allan; "and I expect our friends from the cottage to-morrow evening. You can't start till after to-morrow. Miss Gwilt is going to give us some more music, and you know you like Miss Gwilt's playing."

Midwinter turned aside to buckle the straps of his knapsack. "Give me another chance of hearing Miss Gwilt when I come back," he said, with his head down, and his fingers busy at the straps.

"You have one fault, my dear fellow, and it grows on you," remonstrated Allan; "when you have once taken a thing into our head, you're the most obstinate man alive. There's no persuading you to listen to reason. If you will go," added Allan, suddenly rising, as Midwinter took up his hat and stick in silence, "I have half a mind to go with you, and try a little roughing it too!"

"Go with me!" repeated Midwinter, with a momentary bitterness in his tone, "and leave Miss Gwilt!"

Allan sat down again, and admitted the force of the objection in significant silence. Without a word more on his side, Midwinter held out his hand to take leave. They were both deeply moved, and each was anxious to hide his agitation from the other. Allan took the last refuge which his friend's firmness left to him: he tried to lighten the farewell moment by a joke.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "I begin to doubt if you're quite cured yet of your belief in the Dream. I suspect you're running away from me, after all!"

Midwinter looked at him, uncertain whether he was in jest or earnest. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"What did you tell me," retorted Allan, "when you took me in here the other day, and made a clean breast of it? What did you say about this room, and the second vision of the dream? By Jupiter!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet once more, "now I look again, here is the Second Vision! There's the rain pattering against the window--there's the lawn and the garden outside--here am I where I stood in the Dream--and there are you where the Shadow stood. The whole scene complete, out-of-doors and in; and I've discovered it this time!"

A moment's life stirred again in the dead remains of Midwinter's superstition. His color changed, and he eagerly, almost fiercely, disputed Allan's conclusion.

"No!" he said, pointing to the little marble figure on the bracket, "the scene is not complete--you have forgotten something, as usual. The Dream is wrong this time, thank God--utterly wrong! In the vision you saw, the statue was

lying in fragments on the floor, and you were stooping over them with a troubled and an angry mind. There stands the statue safe and sound! and you haven't the vestige of an angry feeling in your mind, have you?" He seized Allan impulsively by the hand. At the same moment the consciousness came to him that he was speaking and acting as earnestly as if he still believed in the Dream. The color rushed back over his face, and he turned away in confused silence.

"What did I tell you?" said Allan, laughing, a little uneasily. "That night on the Wreck is hanging on your mind as heavily as ever."

"Nothing hangs heavy on me," retorted Midwinter, with a sudden outburst of impatience, "but the knapsack on my back, and the time I'm wasting here. I'll go out, and see if it's likely to clear up."

"You'll come back?" interposed Allan.

Midwinter opened the French window, and stepped out into the garden.

"Yes," he said, answering with all his former gentleness of manner; "I'll come back in a fortnight. Good-by, Allan; and good luck with Miss Gwilt!"

He pushed the window to, and was away across the garden before his friend could open it again and follow him.

Allan rose, and took one step into the garden; then checked himself at the window, and returned to his chair. He knew Midwinter well enough to feel the total uselessness of attempting to follow him or to call him back. He was gone, and for two weeks to come there was no hope of seeing him again. An hour or more passed, the rain still fell, and the sky still threatened. A heavier and heavier sense of loneliness and despondency--the sense of all others which his previous life had least fitted him to understand and endure--possessed itself of Allan's mind. In sheer horror of his own uninhabitably solitary house, he rang for his hat and umbrella, and resolved to take refuge in the major's cottage.

"I might have gone a little way with him," thought Allan, his mind still running on Midwinter as he put on his hat. "I should like to have seen the dear old fellow fairly started on his journey."

He took his umbrella. If he had noticed the face of the servant who gave it to him, he might possibly have asked some questions, and might have heard some news to interest him in his present frame of mind. As it was, he went

out without looking at the man, and without suspecting that his servants knew more of Midwinter's last moments at Thorpe Ambrose than he knew himself. Not ten minutes since, the grocer and butcher had called in to receive payment of their bills, and the grocer and the butcher had seen how Midwinter started on his journey.

The grocer had met him first, not far from the house, stopping on his way, in the pouring rain, to speak to a little ragged imp of a boy, the pest of the neighborhood. The boy's customary impudence had broken out even more unrestrainedly than usual at the sight of the gentleman's knapsack. And what had the gentleman done in return? He had stopped and looked distressed, and had put his two hands gently on the boy's shoulders. The grocer's own eyes had seen that; and the grocer's own ears had heard him say, "Poor little chap! I know how the wind gnaws and the rain wets through a ragged jacket, better than most people who have got a good coat on their backs." And with those words he had put his hand in his pocket, and had rewarded the boy's impudence with a present of a shilling. "Wrong here-abouts," said the grocer, touching his forehead. "That's my opinion of Mr. Armadale's friend!"

The butcher had seen him further on in the journey, at the other end of the town. He had stopped--again in the pouring rain--and this time to look at nothing more remarkable than a half-starved cur, shivering on a doorstep. "I had my eye on him," said the butcher; "and what do you think he did? He crossed the road over to my shop, and bought a bit of meat fit for a Christian. Very well. He says good-morning, and crosses back again; and, on the word of a man, down he goes on his knees on the wet doorstep, and out he takes his knife, and cuts up the meat, and gives it to the dog. Meat, I tell you again, fit for a Christian! I'm not a hard man, ma'am," concluded the butcher, addressing the cook, "but meat's meat; and it will serve your master's friend right if he lives to want it."

With those old unforgotten sympathies of the old unforgotten time to keep him company on his lonely road, he had left the town behind him, and had been lost to view in the misty rain. The grocer and the butcher had seen the last of him, and had judged a great nature, as all natures are judged from the grocer and the butcher point of view.

THE END OF THE SECOND BOOK.