BOOK THE FOURTH. SOMERSET, DARE AND DE STANCY.

I.

There was no part of Paula's journey in which Somerset did not think of her. He imagined her in the hotel at Havre, in her brief rest at Paris; her drive past the Place de la Bastille to the Boulevart Mazas to take the train for Lyons; her tedious progress through the dark of a winter night till she crossed the isothermal line which told of the beginning of a southern atmosphere, and onwards to the ancient blue sea.

Thus, between the hours devoted to architecture, he passed the next three days. One morning he set himself, by the help of John, to practise on the telegraph instrument, expecting a message. But though he watched the machine at every opportunity, or kept some other person on the alert in its neighbourhood, no message arrived to gratify him till after the lapse of nearly a fortnight. Then she spoke from her new habitation nine hundred miles away, in these meagre words:--

'Are settled at the address given. Can now attend to any inquiry about the building.'

The pointed implication that she could attend to inquiries about nothing

else, breathed of the veritable Paula so distinctly that he could forgive its sauciness. His reply was soon despatched:--

'Will write particulars of our progress. Always the same.'

The last three words formed the sentimental appendage which she had assured him she could tolerate, and which he hoped she might desire.

He spent the remainder of the day in making a little sketch to show what had been done in the castle since her departure. This he despatched with a letter of explanation ending in a paragraph of a different tenor:--

'I have demonstrated our progress as well as I could; but another subject has been in my mind, even whilst writing the former. Ask yourself if you use me well in keeping me a fortnight before you so much as say that you have arrived? The one thing that reconciled me to your departure was the thought that I should hear early from you: my idea of being able to submit to your absence was based entirely upon that.

'But I have resolved not to be out of humour, and to believe that your scheme of reserve is not unreasonable; neither do I quarrel with your injunction to keep silence to all relatives. I do not know anything I can say to show you more plainly my acquiescence in your wish "not to go too far" (in short, to keep yourself dear--by dear I mean not cheap--you have been dear in the other sense a long time, as you know), than by not urging you to go a single degree further in warmth than you please.'

When this was posted he again turned his attention to her walls and towers, which indeed were a dumb consolation in many ways for the lack of herself. There was no nook in the castle to which he had not access or could not easily obtain access by applying for the keys, and this propinquity of things belonging to her served to keep her image before him even more constantly than his memories would have done.

Three days and a half after the despatch of his subdued effusion the telegraph called to tell him the good news that

'Your letter and drawing are just received. Thanks for the latter. Will reply to the former by post this afternoon.'

It was with cheerful patience that he attended to his three draughtsmen in the studio, or walked about the environs of the fortress during the fifty hours spent by her presumably tender missive on the road. A light fleece of snow fell during the second night of waiting, inverting the position of long-established lights and shades, and lowering to a dingy grey the approximately white walls of other weathers; he could trace the postman's footmarks as he entered over the bridge, knowing them by the dot of his walking-stick: on entering the expected letter was waiting upon his table. He looked at its direction with glad curiosity; it was the first letter he had ever received from her.

'HOTEL ---, NICE,

Feb. 14.

'MY DEAR MR. SOMERSET' (the 'George,' then, to which she had so kindly treated him in her last conversation, was not to be continued in black and white),--

'Your letter explaining the progress of the work, aided by the sketch enclosed, gave me as clear an idea of the advance made since my departure as I could have gained by being present. I feel every confidence in you, and am quite sure the restoration is in good hands. In this opinion both my aunt and my uncle coincide. Please act entirely on your own judgment in everything, and as soon as you give a certificate to the builders for the first instalment of their money it will be promptly sent by my solicitors.

'You bid me ask myself if I have used you well in not sending intelligence of myself till a fortnight after I had left you. Now, George, don't be unreasonable! Let me remind you that, as a certain apostle said, there are a thousand things lawful which are not expedient. I say this, not from pride in my own conduct, but to offer you a very fair explanation of it. Your resolve not to be out of humour with me suggests that you have been sorely tempted that way, else why should such a resolve have been necessary?

'If you only knew what passes in my mind sometimes you would perhaps not be so ready to blame. Shall I tell you? No. For, if it is a great emotion, it may afford you a cruel satisfaction at finding I suffer through separation; and if it be a growing indifference to you, it will be inflicting gratuitous unhappiness upon you to say so, if you care for me; as I SOMETIMES think you may do A LITTLE.'

('O, Paula!' said Somerset.)

'Please which way would you have it? But it is better that you should guess at what I feel than that you should distinctly know it. Notwithstanding this assertion you will, I know, adhere to your first prepossession in favour of prompt confessions. In spite of that, I fear that upon trial such promptness would not produce that happiness which your fancy leads you to expect. Your heart would weary in time, and when once that happens, good-bye to the emotion you have told me of. Imagine such a case clearly, and you will perceive the probability of what I say. At the same time I admit that a woman who is ONLY a creature of evasions and disguises is very disagreeable.

'Do not write VERY frequently, and never write at all unless you have some real information about the castle works to communicate. I will explain to you on another occasion why I make this request. You will possibly set it down as additional evidence of my cold-heartedness. If so you must. Would you also mind writing the business letter on an independent sheet, with a proper beginning and ending? Whether you

inclose another sheet is of course optional.--Sincerely yours, PAULA POWER.'

Somerset had a suspicion that her order to him not to neglect the business letter was to escape any invidious remarks from her uncle. He wished she would be more explicit, so that he might know exactly how matters stood with them, and whether Abner Power had ever ventured to express disapproval of him as her lover.

But not knowing, he waited anxiously for a new architectural event on which he might legitimately send her another line. This occurred about a week later, when the men engaged in digging foundations discovered remains of old ones which warranted a modification of the original plan. He accordingly sent off his professional advice on the point, requesting her assent or otherwise to the amendment, winding up the inquiry with 'Yours faithfully.' On another sheet he wrote:--'Do you suffer from any unpleasantness in the manner of others on account of me? If so, inform me, Paula. I cannot otherwise interpret your request for the separate sheets. While on this point I will tell you what I have learnt relative to the authorship of that false paragraph about your engagement. It was communicated to the paper by your uncle. Was the wish father to the thought, or could he have been misled, as many were, by appearances at the theatricals?

'If I am not to write to you without a professional reason, surely you can write to me without such an excuse? When you write tell me of

yourself. There is nothing I so much wish to hear of. Write a great deal about your daily doings, for my mind's eye keeps those sweet operations more distinctly before me than my bodily sight does my own.

'You say nothing of having been to look at the chapel-of-ease I told you of, the plans of which I made when an architect's pupil, working in metres instead of feet and inches, to my immense perplexity, that the drawings might be understood by the foreign workmen. Go there and tell me what you think of its design. I can assure you that every curve thereof is my own.

'How I wish you would invite me to run over and see you, if only for a day or two, for my heart runs after you in a most distracted manner. Dearest, you entirely fill my life! But I forget; we have resolved not to go VERY FAR. But the fact is I am half afraid lest, with such reticence, you should not remember how very much I am yours, and with what a dogged constancy I shall always remember you. Paula, sometimes I have horrible misgivings that something will divide us, especially if we do not make a more distinct show of our true relationship. True do I say? I mean the relationship which I think exists between us, but which you do not affirm too clearly.--Yours always.'

Away southward like the swallow went the tender lines. He wondered if she would notice his hint of being ready to pay her a flying visit, if permitted to do so. His fancy dwelt on that further side of France, the very contours of whose shore were now lines of beauty for him.

He prowled in the library, and found interest in the mustiest facts relating to that place, learning with aesthetic pleasure that the number of its population was fifty thousand, that the mean temperature of its atmosphere was 60 degrees Fahrenheit, and that the peculiarities of a mistral were far from agreeable.

He waited overlong for her reply; but it ultimately came. After the usual business preliminary, she said:--

'As requested, I have visited the little church you designed. It gave me great pleasure to stand before a building whose outline and details had come from the brain of such a valued friend and adviser.'

('Valued friend and adviser,' repeated Somerset critically.)

'I like the style much, especially that of the windows--Early English are they not? I am going to attend service there next Sunday, BECAUSE YOU WERE THE ARCHITECT, AND FOR NO GODLY REASON AT ALL. Does that content you? Fie for your despondency! Remember M. Aurelius: "This is the chief thing: Be not perturbed; for all things are of the nature of the Universal." Indeed I am a little surprised at your having forebodings, after my assurance to you before I left. I have none. My opinion is that, to be happy, it is best to think that, as we are the product of events, events will continue to produce that which is in harmony with us.... You are too faint-hearted, and that's the truth of

it. I advise you not to abandon yourself to idolatry too readily; you know what I mean. It fills me with remorse when I think how very far below such a position my actual worth removes me.

'I should like to receive another letter from you as soon as you have got over the misgiving you speak of, but don't write too soon. I wish I could write anything to raise your spirits, but you may be so perverse that if, in order to do this, I tell you of the races, routs, scenery, gaieties, and gambling going on in this place and neighbourhood (into which of course I cannot help being a little drawn), you may declare that my words make you worse than ever. Don't pass the line I have set down in the way you were tempted to do in your last; and not too many Dearests--at least as yet. This is not a time for effusion. You have my very warm affection, and that's enough for the present.'

As a love-letter this missive was tantalizing enough, but since its form was simply a continuation of what she had practised before she left, it produced no undue misgiving in him. Far more was he impressed by her omitting to answer the two important questions he had put to her. First, concerning her uncle's attitude towards them, and his conduct in giving such strange information to the reporter. Second, on his, Somerset's, paying her a flying visit some time during the spring. Since she had requested it, he made no haste in his reply. When penned, it ran in the words subjoined, which, in common with every line of their correspondence, acquired from the strangeness of subsequent circumstances an interest and a force that perhaps they did not

intrinsically possess.

'People cannot' (he wrote) 'be for ever in good spirits on this gloomy side of the Channel, even though you seem to be so on yours. However, that I can abstain from letting you know whether my spirits are good or otherwise, I will prove in our future correspondence. I admire you more and more, both for the warm feeling towards me which I firmly believe you have, and for your ability to maintain side by side with it so much dignity and resolution with regard to foolish sentiment. Sometimes I think I could have put up with a little more weakness if it had brought with it a little more tenderness, but I dismiss all that when I mentally survey your other qualities. I have thought of fifty things to say to you of the TOO FAR sort, not one of any other; so that your prohibition is very unfortunate, for by it I am doomed to say things that do not rise spontaneously to my lips. You say that our shut-up feelings are not to be mentioned yet. How long is the yet to last?

'But, to speak more solemnly, matters grow very serious with us, Paula--at least with me: and there are times when this restraint is really unbearable. It is possible to put up with reserve when the reserved being is by one's side, for the eyes may reveal what the lips do not. But when she is absent, what was piquancy becomes harshness, tender railleries become cruel sarcasm, and tacit understandings misunderstandings. However that may be, you shall never be able to reproach me for touchiness. I still esteem you as a friend; I admire you and love you as a woman. This I shall always do, however unconfiding you

prove.'

II.

Without knowing it, Somerset was drawing near to a crisis in this soft correspondence which would speedily put his assertions to the test; but the knowledge came upon him soon enough for his peace.

Her next letter, dated March 9th, was the shortest of all he had received, and beyond the portion devoted to the building-works it contained only the following sentences:--

'I am almost angry with you, George, for being vexed because I am not more effusive. Why should the verbal I LOVE YOU be ever uttered between two beings of opposite sex who have eyes to see signs? During the seven or eight months that we have known each other, you have discovered my regard for you, and what more can you desire? Would a reiterated assertion of passion really do any good? Remember it is a natural instinct with us women to retain the power of obliging a man to hope, fear, pray, and beseech as long as we think fit, before we confess to a reciprocal affection.

'I am now going to own to a weakness about which I had intended to keep silent. It will not perhaps add to your respect for me. My uncle, whom in many ways I like, is displeased with me for keeping up this correspondence so regularly. I am quite perverse enough to venture to disregard his feelings; but considering the relationship, and his kindness in other respects, I should prefer not to do so at present.

Honestly speaking, I want the courage to resist him in some things. He said to me the other day that he was very much surprised that I did not depend upon his judgment for my future happiness. Whether that meant much or little, I have resolved to communicate with you only by telegrams for the remainder of the time we are here. Please reply by the same means only. There, now, don't flush and call me names! It is for the best, and we want no nonsense, you and I. Dear George, I feel more than I say, and if I do not speak more plainly, you will understand what is behind after all I have hinted. I can promise you that you will not like me less upon knowing me better. Hope ever. I would give up a good deal for you. Good-bye!'

This brought Somerset some cheerfulness and a good deal of gloom. He silently reproached her, who was apparently so independent, for lacking independence in such a vital matter. Perhaps it was mere sex, perhaps it was peculiar to a few, that her independence and courage, like Cleopatra's, failed her occasionally at the last moment.

One curious impression which had often haunted him now returned with redoubled force. He could not see himself as the husband of Paula Power in any likely future. He could not imagine her his wife. People were apt to run into mistakes in their presentiments; but though he could picture her as queening it over him, as avowing her love for him unreservedly, even as compromising herself for him, he could not see her in a state of domesticity with him.

Telegrams being commanded, to the telegraph he repaired, when, after two days, an immediate wish to communicate with her led him to dismiss vague conjecture on the future situation. His first telegram took the following form:--

'I give up the letter writing. I will part with anything to please you but yourself. Your comfort with your relative is the first thing to be considered: not for the world do I wish you to make divisions within doors. Yours.'

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday passed, and on Saturday a telegram came in
reply:--

'I can fear, grieve at, and complain of nothing, having your nice promise to consider my comfort always.'

This was very pretty; but it admitted little. Such short messages were in themselves poor substitutes for letters, but their speed and easy frequency were good qualities which the letters did not possess. Three days later he replied:--

'You do not once say to me "Come." Would such a strange accident as my arrival disturb you much?'

She replied rather quickly:--

'I am indisposed to answer you too clearly. Keep your heart strong: 'tis a censorious world.'

The vagueness there shown made Somerset peremptory, and he could not help replying somewhat more impetuously than usual:-- 'Why do you give me so much cause for anxiety! Why treat me to so much mystification! Say once, distinctly, that what I have asked is given.'

He awaited for the answer, one day, two days, a week; but none came. It was now the end of March, and when Somerset walked of an afternoon by the river and pool in the lower part of the grounds, his ear newly greeted by the small voices of frogs and toads and other creatures who had been torpid through the winter, he became doubtful and uneasy that she alone should be silent in the awakening year.

He waited through a second week, and there was still no reply. It was possible that the urgency of his request had tempted her to punish him, and he continued his walks, to, fro, and around, with as close an ear to the undertones of nature, and as attentive an eye to the charms of his own art, as the grand passion would allow. Now came the days of battle between winter and spring. On these excursions, though spring was to the forward during the daylight, winter would reassert itself at night, and not unfrequently at other moments. Tepid airs and nipping breezes met on the confines of sunshine and shade; trembling raindrops that were still akin to frost crystals dashed themselves from the bushes as he pursued

his way from town to castle; the birds were like an orchestra waiting for the signal to strike up, and colour began to enter into the country round.

But he gave only a modicum of thought to these proceedings. He rather thought such things as, 'She can afford to be saucy, and to find a source of blitheness in my love, considering the power that wealth gives her to pick and choose almost where she will.' He was bound to own, however, that one of the charms of her conversation was the complete absence of the note of the heiress from its accents. That, other things equal, her interest would naturally incline to a person bearing the name of De Stancy, was evident from her avowed predilections. His original assumption, that she was a personification of the modern spirit, who had been dropped, like a seed from the bill of a bird, into a chink of mediaevalism, required some qualification. Romanticism, which will exist in every human breast as long as human nature itself exists, had asserted itself in her. Veneration for things old, not because of any merit in them, but because of their long continuance, had developed in her; and her modern spirit was taking to itself wings and flying away. Whether his image was flying with the other was a question which moved him all the more deeply now that her silence gave him dread of an affirmative answer.

For another seven days he stoically left in suspension all forecasts of his possibly grim fate in being the employed and not the beloved. The week passed: he telegraphed: there was no reply: he had sudden fears for

her personal safety and resolved to break her command by writing.

'STANCY CASTLE, April 13.

'DEAR PAULA,--Are you ill or in trouble? It is impossible in the very unquiet state you have put me into by your silence that I should abstain from writing. Without affectation, you sorely distress me, and I think you would hardly have done it could you know what a degree of anxiety you cause. Why, Paula, do you not write or send to me? What have I done that you should treat me like this? Do write, if it is only to reproach me. I am compelled to pass the greater part of the day in this castle, which reminds me constantly of you, and yet eternally lacks your presence. I am unfortunate indeed that you have not been able to find half-an-hour during the last month to tell me at least that you are alive.

'You have always been ambiguous, it is true; but I thought I saw encouragement in your eyes; encouragement certainly was in your eyes, and who would not have been deluded by them and have believed them sincere? Yet what tenderness can there be in a heart that can cause me pain so wilfully!

'There may, of course, be some deliberate scheming on the part of your relations to intercept our letters; but I cannot think it. I know that the housekeeper has received a letter from your aunt this very week, in

which she incidentally mentions that all are well, and in the same place as before. How then can I excuse you?

'Then write, Paula, or at least telegraph, as you proposed. Otherwise I am resolved to take your silence as a signal to treat your fair words as wind, and to write to you no more.'

III.

He despatched the letter, and half-an-hour afterwards felt sure that it would mortally offend her. But he had now reached a state of temporary indifference, and could contemplate the loss of such a tantalizing property with reasonable calm.

In the interim of waiting for a reply he was one day walking to Markton, when, passing Myrtle Villa, he saw Sir William De Stancy ambling about his garden-path and examining the crocuses that palisaded its edge. Sir William saw him and asked him to come in. Somerset was in the mood for any diversion from his own affairs, and they seated themselves by the drawing-room fire.

'I am much alone now,' said Sir William, 'and if the weather were not very mild, so that I can get out into the garden every day, I should feel it a great deal.'

'You allude to your daughter's absence?'

'And my son's. Strange to say, I do not miss her so much as I miss him. She offers to return at any moment; but I do not wish to deprive her of the advantages of a little foreign travel with her friend. Always, Mr. Somerset, give your spare time to foreign countries, especially those which contrast with your own in topography, language, and art. That's my advice to all young people of your age. Don't waste your money on

expensive amusements at home. Practise the strictest economy at home, to have a margin for going abroad.'

Economy, which Sir William had never practised, but to which, after exhausting all other practices, he now raised an altar, as the Athenians did to the unknown God, was a topic likely to prolong itself on the baronet's lips, and Somerset contrived to interrupt him by asking--

'Captain De Stancy, too, has gone? Has the artillery, then, left the barracks?'

'No,' said Sir William. 'But my son has made use of his leave in running over to see his sister at Nice.'

The current of quiet meditation in Somerset changed to a busy whirl at this reply. That Paula should become indifferent to his existence from a sense of superiority, physical, spiritual, or social, was a sufficiently ironical thing; but that she should have relinquished him because of the presence of a rival lent commonplace dreariness to her cruelty.

Sir William, noting nothing, continued in the tone of clever childishness which characterized him: 'It is very singular how the present situation has been led up to by me. Policy, and policy alone, has been the rule of my conduct for many years past; and when I say that I have saved my family by it, I believe time will show that I am within the truth. I hope you don't let your passions outrun your policy, as so

many young men are apt to do. Better be poor and politic, than rich and headstrong: that's the opinion of an old man. However, I was going to say that it was purely from policy that I allowed a friendship to develop between my daughter and Miss Power, and now events are proving the wisdom of my course. Straws show how the wind blows, and there are little signs that my son Captain De Stancy will return to Stancy Castle by the fortunate step of marrying its owner. I say nothing to either of them, and they say nothing to me; but my wisdom lies in doing nothing to hinder such a consummation, despite inherited prejudices.'

Somerset had quite time enough to rein himself in during the old gentleman's locution, and the voice in which he answered was so cold and reckless that it did not seem his own: 'But how will they live happily together when she is a Dissenter, and a Radical, and a New-light, and a Neo-Greek, and a person of red blood; while Captain De Stancy is the reverse of them all!'

'I anticipate no difficulty on that score,' said the baronet. 'My son's star lies in that direction, and, like the Magi, he is following it without trifling with his opportunity. You have skill in architecture, therefore you follow it. My son has skill in gallantry, and now he is about to exercise it profitably.'

'May nobody wish him more harm in that exercise than I do!' said Somerset fervently.

A stagnant moodiness of several hours which followed his visit to Myrtle Villa resulted in a resolve to journey over to Paula the very next day. He now felt perfectly convinced that the inviting of Captain De Stancy to visit them at Nice was a second stage in the scheme of Paula's uncle, the premature announcement of her marriage having been the first. The roundness and neatness of the whole plan could not fail to recommend it to the mind which delighted in putting involved things straight, and such a mind Abner Power's seemed to be. In fact, the felicity, in a politic sense, of pairing the captain with the heiress furnished no little excuse for manoeuvring to bring it about, so long as that manoeuvring fell short of unfairness, which Mr. Power's could scarcely be said to do.

The next day was spent in furnishing the builders with such instructions as they might require for a coming week or ten days, and in dropping a short note to Paula; ending as follows:--

'I am coming to see you. Possibly you will refuse me an interview. Never mind, I am coming--Yours, G. SOMERSET.'

The morning after that he was up and away. Between him and Paula stretched nine hundred miles by the line of journey that he found it necessary to adopt, namely, the way of London, in order to inform his father of his movements and to make one or two business calls. The afternoon was passed in attending to these matters, the night in speeding onward, and by the time that nine o'clock sounded next morning

through the sunless and leaden air of the English Channel coasts, he had reduced the number of miles on his list by two hundred, and cut off the sea from the impediments between him and Paula.

On awakening from a fitful sleep in the grey dawn of the morning following he looked out upon Lyons, quiet enough now, the citizens unaroused to the daily round of bread-winning, and enveloped in a haze of fog.

Six hundred and fifty miles of his journey had been got over; there still intervened two hundred and fifty between him and the end of suspense. When he thought of that he was disinclined to pause; and pressed on by the same train, which set him down at Marseilles at mid-day.

Here he considered. By going on to Nice that afternoon he would arrive at too late an hour to call upon her the same evening: it would therefore be advisable to sleep in Marseilles and proceed the next morning to his journey's end, so as to meet her in a brighter condition than he could boast of to-day. This he accordingly did, and leaving Marseilles the next morning about eight, found himself at Nice early in the afternoon.

Now that he was actually at the centre of his gravitation he seemed even further away from a feasible meeting with her than in England. While afar off, his presence at Nice had appeared to be the one thing needful

for the solution of his trouble, but the very house fronts seemed now to ask him what right he had there. Unluckily, in writing from England, he had not allowed her time to reply before his departure, so that he did not know what difficulties might lie in the way of her seeing him privately. Before deciding what to do, he walked down the Avenue de la Gare to the promenade between the shore and the Jardin Public, and sat down to think.

The hotel which she had given him as her address looked right out upon him and the sea beyond, and he rested there with the pleasing hope that her eyes might glance from a window and discover his form. Everything in the scene was sunny and gay. Behind him in the gardens a band was playing; before him was the sea, the Great sea, the historical and original Mediterranean; the sea of innumerable characters in history and legend that arranged themselves before him in a long frieze of memories so diverse as to include both AEneas and St. Paul.

Northern eyes are not prepared on a sudden for the impact of such images of warmth and colour as meet them southward, or for the vigorous light that falls from the sky of this favoured shore. In any other circumstances the transparency and serenity of the air, the perfume of the sea, the radiant houses, the palms and flowers, would have acted upon Somerset as an enchantment, and wrapped him in a reverie; but at present he only saw and felt these things as through a thick glass which kept out half their atmosphere.

At last he made up his mind. He would take up his quarters at her hotel, and catch echoes of her and her people, to learn somehow if their attitude towards him as a lover were actually hostile, before formally encountering them. Under this crystalline light, full of gaieties, sentiment, languor, seductiveness, and ready-made romance, the memory of a solitary unimportant man in the lugubrious North might have faded from her mind. He was only her hired designer. He was an artist; but he had been engaged by her, and was not a volunteer; and she did not as yet know that he meant to accept no return for his labours but the pleasure of presenting them to her as a love-offering.

So off he went at once towards the imposing building whither his letters had preceded him. Owing to a press of visitors there was a moment's delay before he could be attended to at the bureau, and he turned to the large staircase that confronted him, momentarily hoping that her figure might descend. Her skirts must indeed have brushed the carpeting of those steps scores of times. He engaged his room, ordered his luggage to be sent for, and finally inquired for the party he sought.

'They left Nice yesterday, monsieur,' replied madame.

Was she quite sure, Somerset asked her?

Yes, she was quite sure. Two of the hotel carriages had driven them to the station.

Did she know where they had gone to?

This and other inquiries resulted in the information that they had gone to the hotel at Monte Carlo; that how long they were going to stay there, and whether they were coming back again, was not known. His final question whether Miss Power had received a letter from England which must have arrived the day previous was answered in the affirmative.

Somerset's first and sudden resolve was to follow on after them to the hotel named; but he finally decided to make his immediate visit to Monte Carlo only a cautious reconnoitre, returning to Nice to sleep.

Accordingly, after an early dinner, he again set forth through the broad Avenue de la Gare, and an hour on the coast railway brought him to the beautiful and sinister little spot to which the Power and De Stancy party had strayed in common with the rest of the frivolous throng.

He assumed that their visit thither would be chiefly one of curiosity, and therefore not prolonged. This proved to be the case in even greater measure than he had anticipated. On inquiry at the hotel he learnt that they had stayed only one night, leaving a short time before his arrival, though it was believed that some of the party were still in the town.

In a state of indecision Somerset strolled into the gardens of the Casino, and looked out upon the sea. There it still lay, calm yet lively; of an unmixed blue, yet variegated; hushed, but articulate even

to melodiousness. Everything about and around this coast appeared indeed jaunty, tuneful, and at ease, reciprocating with heartiness the rays of the splendid sun; everything, except himself. The palms and flowers on the terraces before him were undisturbed by a single cold breath. The marble work of parapets and steps was unsplintered by frosts. The whole was like a conservatory with the sky for its dome.

For want of other occupation he went round towards the public entrance to the Casino, and ascended the great staircase into the pillared hall. It was possible, after all, that upon leaving the hotel and sending on their luggage they had taken another turn through the rooms, to follow by a later train. With more than curiosity he scanned first the reading-rooms, only however to see not a face that he knew. He then crossed the vestibule to the gaming-tables.

IV.

Here he was confronted by a heated phantasmagoria of splendour and a high pressure of suspense that seemed to make the air quiver. A low whisper of conversation prevailed, which might probably have been not wrongly defined as the lowest note of social harmony.

The people gathered at this negative pole of industry had come from all civilized countries; their tongues were familiar with many forms of utterance, that of each racial group or type being unintelligible in its subtler variations, if not entirely, to the rest. But the language of meum and tuum they collectively comprehended without translation. In a half-charmed spell-bound state they had congregated in knots, standing, or sitting in hollow circles round the notorious oval tables marked with figures and lines. The eyes of all these sets of people were watching the Roulette. Somerset went from table to table, looking among the loungers rather than among the regular players, for faces, or at least for one face, which did not meet his gaze.

The suggestive charm which the centuries-old impersonality Gaming, rather than games and gamesters, had for Somerset, led him to loiter on even when his hope of meeting any of the Power and De Stancy party had vanished. As a non-participant in its profits and losses, fevers and frenzies, it had that stage effect upon his imagination which is usually exercised over those who behold Chance presented to them with spectacular piquancy without advancing far enough in its acquaintance to

suffer from its ghastly reprisals and impish tricks. He beheld a hundred diametrically opposed wishes issuing from the murky intelligences around a table, and spreading down across each other upon the figured diagram in their midst, each to its own number. It was a network of hopes; which at the announcement, 'Sept, Rouge, Impair, et Manque,' disappeared like magic gossamer, to be replaced in a moment by new. That all the people there, including himself, could be interested in what to the eye of perfect reason was a somewhat monotonous thing--the property of numbers to recur at certain longer or shorter intervals in a machine containing them--in other words, the blind groping after fractions of a result the whole of which was well known--was one testimony among many of the powerlessness of logic when confronted with imagination.

At this juncture our lounger discerned at one of the tables about the last person in the world he could have wished to encounter there. It was Dare, whom he had supposed to be a thousand miles off, hanging about the purlieus of Markton.

Dare was seated beside a table in an attitude of application which seemed to imply that he had come early and engaged in this pursuit in a systematic manner. Somerset had never witnessed Dare and De Stancy together, neither had he heard of any engagement of Dare by the travelling party as artist, courier, or otherwise; and yet it crossed his mind that Dare might have had something to do with them, or at least have seen them. This possibility was enough to overmaster Somerset's reluctance to speak to the young man, and he did so as soon as an

opportunity occurred.

Dare's face was as rigid and dry as if it had been encrusted with plaster, and he was like one turned into a computing machine which no longer had the power of feeling. He recognized Somerset as indifferently as if he had met him in the ward of Stancy Castle, and replying to his remarks by a word or two, concentrated on the game anew.

'Are you here alone?' said Somerset presently.

'Quite alone.' There was a silence, till Dare added, 'But I have seen some friends of yours.' He again became absorbed in the events of the table. Somerset retreated a few steps, and pondered the question whether Dare could know where they had gone. He disliked to be beholden to Dare for information, but he would give a great deal to know. While pausing he watched Dare's play. He staked only five-franc pieces, but it was done with an assiduity worthy of larger coin. At every half-minute or so he placed his money on a certain spot, and as regularly had the mortification of seeing it swept away by the croupier's rake. After a while he varied his procedure. He risked his money, which from the look of his face seemed rather to have dwindled than increased, less recklessly against long odds than before. Leaving off backing numbers en plein, he laid his venture a cheval; then tried it upon the dozens; then upon two numbers; then upon a square; and, apparently getting nearer and nearer defeat, at last upon the simple chances of even or odd, over or under, red or black. Yet with a few fluctuations in his favour fortune

bore steadily against him, till he could breast her blows no longer. He rose from the table and came towards Somerset, and they both moved on together into the entrance-hall.

Dare was at that moment the victim of an overpowering mania for more money. His presence in the South of Europe had its origin, as may be guessed, in Captain De Stancy's journey in the same direction, whom he had followed, and troubled with persistent request for more funds, carefully keeping out of sight of Paula and the rest. His dream of involving Paula in the De Stancy pedigree knew no abatement. But Somerset had lighted upon him at an instant when that idea, though not displaced, was overwhelmed by a rage for play. In hope of being able to continue it by Somerset's aid he was prepared to do almost anything to please the architect.

'You asked me,' said Dare, stroking his impassive brow, 'if I had seen anything of the Powers. I have seen them; and if I can be of any use to you in giving information about them I shall only be too glad.'

'What information can you give?'

'I can tell you where they are gone to.'

'Where?'

'To the Grand Hotel, Genoa. They went on there this afternoon.'

'Whom do you refer to by they?'

'Mrs. Goodman, Mr. Power, Miss Power, Miss De Stancy, and the worthy captain. He leaves them tomorrow: he comes back here for a day on his way to England.'

Somerset was silent. Dare continued: 'Now I have done you a favour, will you do me one in return?'

Somerset looked towards the gaming-rooms, and said dubiously, 'Well?'

'Lend me two hundred francs.'

'Yes,' said Somerset; 'but on one condition: that I don't give them to you till you are inside the hotel you are staying at.'

'That can't be; it's at Nice.'

'Well I am going back to Nice, and I'll lend you the money the instant we get there.'

'But I want it here, now, instantly!' cried Dare; and for the first time there was a wiry unreasonableness in his voice that fortified his companion more firmly than ever in his determination to lend the young man no money whilst he remained inside that building.

'You want it to throw it away. I don't approve of it; so come with me.'

'But,' said Dare, 'I arrived here with a hundred napoleons and more, expressly to work out my theory of chances and recurrences, which is sound; I have studied it hundreds of times by the help of this.' He partially drew from his pocket the little volume that we have before seen in his hands. 'If I only persevere in my system, the certainty that I must win is almost mathematical. I have staked and lost two hundred and thirty-three times. Allowing out of that one chance in every thirty-six, which is the average of zero being marked, and two hundred and four times for the backers of the other numbers, I have the mathematical expectation of six times at least, which would nearly recoup me. And shall I, then, sacrifice that vast foundation of waste chances that I have laid down, and paid for, merely for want of a little ready money?'

'You might persevere for a twelvemonth, and still not get the better of your reverses. Time tells in favour of the bank. Just imagine for the sake of argument that all the people who have ever placed a stake upon a certain number to be one person playing continuously. Has that imaginary person won? The existence of the bank is a sufficient answer.'

'But a particular player has the option of leaving off at any point favourable to himself, which the bank has not; and there's my opportunity.'

'Which from your mood you will be sure not to take advantage of.'

'I shall go on playing,' said Dare doggedly.

'Not with my money.'

'Very well; we won't part as enemies,' replied Dare, with the flawless politeness of a man whose speech has no longer any kinship with his feelings. 'Shall we share a bottle of wine? You will not? Well, I hope your luck with your lady will be more magnificent than mine has been here; but--mind Captain De Stancy! he's a fearful wildfowl for you.'

'He's a harmless inoffensive soldier, as far as I know. If he is not--let him be what he may for me.'

'And do his worst to cut you out, I suppose?'

'Ay--if you will.' Somerset, much against his judgment, was being stimulated by these pricks into words of irritation. 'Captain De Stancy might, I think, be better employed than in dangling at the heels of a lady who can well dispense with his company. And you might be better employed than in wasting your wages here.'

'Wages--a fit word for my money. May I ask you at what stage in the appearance of a man whose way of existence is unknown, his money ceases

to be called wages and begins to be called means?'

Somerset turned and left him without replying, Dare following his receding figure with a look of ripe resentment, not less likely to vent itself in mischief from the want of moral ballast in him who emitted it. He then fixed a nettled and unsatisfied gaze upon the gaming-rooms, and in another minute or two left the Casino also.

Dare and Somerset met no more that day. The latter returned to Nice by the evening train and went straight to the hotel. He now thanked his fortune that he had not precipitately given up his room there, for a telegram from Paula awaited him. His hand almost trembled as he opened it, to read the following few short words, dated from the Grand Hotel, Genoa:--

'Letter received. Am glad to hear of your journey. We are not returning to Nice, but stay here a week. I direct this at a venture.'

This tantalizing message--the first breaking of her recent silence--was saucy, almost cruel, in its dry frigidity. It led him to give up his idea of following at once to Genoa. That was what she obviously expected him to do, and it was possible that his non-arrival might draw a letter or message from her of a sweeter composition than this. That would at least be the effect of his tardiness if she cared in the least for him; if she did not he could bear the worst. The argument was good enough as far as it went, but, like many more, failed from the narrowness of its

premises, the contingent intervention of Dare being entirely undreamt of. It was altogether a fatal miscalculation, which cost him dear.

Passing by the telegraph-office in the Rue Pont-Neuf at an early hour the next morning he saw Dare coming out from the door. It was Somerset's momentary impulse to thank Dare for the information given as to Paula's whereabouts, information which had now proved true. But Dare did not seem to appreciate his friendliness, and after a few words of studied civility the young man moved on.

And well he might. Five minutes before that time he had thrown open a gulf of treachery between himself and the architect which nothing in life could ever close. Before leaving the telegraph-office Dare had despatched the following message to Paula direct, as a set-off against what he called Somerset's ingratitude for valuable information, though it was really the fruit of many passions, motives, and desires:--

'G. Somerset, Nice, to Miss Power, Grand Hotel, Genoa.

'Have lost all at Monte Carlo. Have learnt that Captain D. S. returns here to-morrow. Please send me one hundred pounds by him, and save me from disgrace. Will await him at eleven o'clock and four, on the Pont-Neuf.'

V.

Five hours after the despatch of that telegram Captain De Stancy was rattling along the coast railway of the Riviera from Genoa to Nice. He was returning to England by way of Marseilles; but before turning northwards he had engaged to perform on Miss Power's account a peculiar and somewhat disagreeable duty. This was to place in Somerset's hands a hundred and twenty-five napoleons which had been demanded from her by a message in Somerset's name. The money was in his pocket--all in gold, in a canvas bag, tied up by Paula's own hands, which he had observed to tremble as she tied it.

As he leaned in the corner of the carriage he was thinking over the events of the morning which had culminated in that liberal response. At ten o'clock, before he had gone out from the hotel where he had taken up his quarters, which was not the same as the one patronized by Paula and her friends, he had been summoned to her presence in a manner so unexpected as to imply that something serious was in question. On entering her room he had been struck by the absence of that saucy independence usually apparent in her bearing towards him, notwithstanding the persistency with which he had hovered near her for the previous month, and gradually, by the position of his sister, and the favour of Paula's uncle in intercepting one of Somerset's letters and several of his telegrams, established himself as an intimate member of the travelling party. His entry, however, this time as always,

had had the effect of a tonic, and it was quite with her customary self-possession that she had told him of the object of her message.

'You think of returning to Nice this afternoon?' she inquired.

De Stancy informed her that such was his intention, and asked if he could do anything for her there.

Then, he remembered, she had hesitated. 'I have received a telegram,' she said at length; and so she allowed to escape her bit by bit the information that her architect, whose name she seemed reluctant to utter, had travelled from England to Nice that week, partly to consult her, partly for a holiday trip; that he had gone on to Monte Carlo, had there lost his money and got into difficulties, and had appealed to her to help him out of them by the immediate advance of some ready cash. It was a sad case, an unexpected case, she murmured, with her eyes fixed on the window. Indeed she could not comprehend it.

To De Stancy there appeared nothing so very extraordinary in Somerset's apparent fiasco, except in so far as that he should have applied to Paula for relief from his distresses instead of elsewhere. It was a self-humiliation which a lover would have avoided at all costs, he thought. Yet after a momentary reflection on his theory of Somerset's character, it seemed sufficiently natural that he should lean persistently on Paula, if only with a view of keeping himself linked to her memory, without thinking too profoundly of his own dignity. That

the esteem in which she had held Somerset up to that hour suffered a tremendous blow by his apparent scrape was clearly visible in her, reticent as she was; and De Stancy, while pitying Somerset, thanked him in his mind for having gratuitously given a rival an advantage which that rival's attentions had never been able to gain of themselves.

After a little further conversation she had said: 'Since you are to be my messenger, I must tell you that I have decided to send the hundred pounds asked for, and you will please to deliver them into no hands but his own.' A curious little blush crept over her sobered face--perhaps it was a blush of shame at the conduct of the young man in whom she had of late been suspiciously interested--as she added, 'He will be on the Pont-Neuf at four this afternoon and again at eleven tomorrow. Can you meet him there?'

'Certainly,' De Stancy replied.

She then asked him, rather anxiously, how he could account for Mr. Somerset knowing that he, Captain De Stancy, was about to return to Nice?

De Stancy informed her that he left word at the hotel of his intention to return, which was quite true; moreover, there did not lurk in his mind at the moment of speaking the faintest suspicion that Somerset had seen Dare.

She then tied the bag and handed it to him, leaving him with a serene and impenetrable bearing, which he hoped for his own sake meant an acquired indifference to Somerset and his fortunes. Her sending the architect a sum of money which she could easily spare might be set down to natural generosity towards a man with whom she was artistically co-operating for the improvement of her home.

She came back to him again for a moment. 'Could you possibly get there before four this afternoon?' she asked, and he informed her that he could just do so by leaving almost at once, which he was very willing to do, though by so forestalling his time he would lose the projected morning with her and the rest at the Palazzo Doria.

'I may tell you that I shall not go to the Palazzo Doria either, if it is any consolation to you to know it,' was her reply. 'I shall sit indoors and think of you on your journey.'

The answer admitted of two translations, and conjectures thereon filled the gallant soldier's mind during the greater part of the journey. He arrived at the hotel they had all stayed at in succession about six hours after Somerset had left it for a little excursion to San Remo and its neighbourhood, as a means of passing a few days till Paula should write again to inquire why he had not come on. De Stancy saw no one he knew, and in obedience to Paula's commands he promptly set off on foot for the Pont-Neuf.

Though opposed to the architect as a lover, De Stancy felt for him as a poor devil in need of money, having had experiences of that sort himself, and he was really anxious that the needful supply entrusted to him should reach Somerset's hands. He was on the bridge five minutes before the hour, and when the clock struck a hand was laid on his shoulder: turning he beheld Dare.

Knowing that the youth was loitering somewhere along the coast, for they had frequently met together on De Stancy's previous visit, the latter merely said, 'Don't bother me for the present, Willy, I have an engagement. You can see me at the hotel this evening.'

'When you have given me the hundred pounds I will fly like a rocket, captain,' said the young gentleman. 'I keep the appointment instead of the other man.'

De Stancy looked hard at him. 'How--do you know about this?' he asked breathlessly.

'I have seen him.'

De Stancy took the young man by the two shoulders and gazed into his eyes. The scrutiny seemed not altogether to remove the suspicion which had suddenly started up in his mind. 'My soul,' he said, dropping his arms, 'can this be true?'

'What?'

'You know.'

Dare shrugged his shoulders; 'Are you going to hand over the money or no?' he said.

'I am going to make inquiries,' said De Stancy, walking away with a vehement tread.

'Captain, you are without natural affection,' said Dare, walking by his side, in a tone which showed his fear that he had over-estimated that emotion. 'See what I have done for you. You have been my constant care and anxiety for I can't tell how long. I have stayed awake at night thinking how I might best give you a good start in the world by arranging this judicious marriage, when you have been sleeping as sound as a top with no cares upon your mind at all, and now I have got into a scrape--as the most thoughtful of us may sometimes--you go to make inquiries.'

'I have promised the lady to whom this money belongs--whose generosity has been shamefully abused in some way--that I will deliver it into no hands but those of one man, and he has not yet appeared. I therefore go to find him.'

Dare laid his hand upon De Stancy's arm. 'Captain, we are both warm, and

punctilious on points of honour; this will come to a split between us if we don't mind. So, not to bring matters to a crisis, lend me ten pounds here to enable me to get home, and I'll disappear.'

In a state bordering on distraction, eager to get the young man out of his sight before worse revelations should rise up between them, De Stancy without pausing in his walk gave him the sum demanded. He soon reached the post-office, where he inquired if a Mr. Somerset had left any directions for forwarding letters.

It was just what Somerset had done. De Stancy was told that Mr. Somerset had commanded that any letters should be sent on to him at the Hotel Victoria, San Remo.

It was now evident that the scheme of getting money from Paula was either of Dare's invention, or that Somerset, ashamed of his first impulse, had abandoned it as speedily as it had been formed. De Stancy turned and went out. Dare, in keeping with his promise, had vanished. Captain De Stancy resolved to do nothing in the case till further events should enlighten him, beyond sending a line to Miss Power to inform her that Somerset had not appeared, and that he therefore retained the money for further instructions.