CHAPTER XIX.

THE CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

If John managed to be happy without Lillie in Springdale, Lillie managed to be blissful without him in New York.

"The bird let loose in Eastern skies" never hastened more fondly home than she to its glitter and gayety, its life and motion, dash and sensation. She rustled in all her bravery of curls and frills, pinkings and quillings,--a marvellous specimen of Parisian frostwork, without one breath of reason or philosophy or conscience to melt it.

The Follingsbees' house might stand for the original of the Castle of Indolence.

> "Halls where who can tell
> What elegance and grandeur wide expand,--
> The pride of Turkey and of Persia's land?
> Soft quilts on quilts; on carpets, carpets spread;
> And couches stretched around in seemly band;
> And endless pillows rise to prop the head:
> So that each spacious room was one full swelling bed."

It was not without some considerable profit that Mrs. Follingsbee had

read Balzac and Dumas, and had Charlie Ferrola for master of arts in her establishment. The effect of the whole was perfect; it transported one, bodily, back to the times of Montespan and Pompadour, when life was all one glittering upper-crust, and pretty women were never troubled with even the shadow of a duty.

It was with a rebound of joyousness that Lillie found herself once more with a crowded list of invitations, calls, operas, dancing, and shopping, that kept her pretty little head in a perfect whirl of excitement, and gave her not one moment for thought.

Mrs. Follingsbee, to say the truth, would have been a little careful about inviting a rival queen of beauty into the circle, were it not that Charlie Ferrola, after an attentive consideration of the subject, had assured her that a golden-haired blonde would form a most complete and effective tableau, in contrast with her own dark rich style of beauty. Neither would lose by it, so he said; and the impression, as they rode together in an elegant open barouche, with ermine carriage robes, would be "stunning." So they called each other ma soeur, and drove out in the park in a ravishing little pony-phaeton all foamed over with ermine, drawn by a lovely pair of cream-colored horses, whose harness glittered with gold and silver, after the fashion of the Count of Monte Cristo. In truth, if Dick Follingsbee did not remind one of Solomon in all particulars, he was like him in one, that he "made silver and gold as the stones of the street" in New York.

Lillie's presence, however, was all desirable; because it would draw the calls of two or three old New York families who had hitherto stood upon their dignity, and refused to acknowledge the shoddy aristocracy. The beautiful Mrs. John Seymour, therefore, was no less useful than ornamental, and advanced Mrs. Follingsbee's purposes in her "Excelsior" movements.

"Now, I suppose," said Mrs. Follingsbee to Lillie one day, when they had been out making fashionable calls together, "we really must call on Charlie's wife, just to keep her quiet."

"I thought you didn't like her," said Lillie.

"I don't; I think she is dreadfully common," said Mrs. Follingsbee: "she is one of those women who can't talk any thing but baby, and bores Charlie half to death. But then, you know, when there is a liaison like mine with Charlie, one can't be too careful to cultivate the wives. Les convenances, you know, are the all-important things. I send her presents constantly, and send my carriage around to take her to church or opera, or any thing that is going on, and have her children at my fancy parties: yet, for all that, the creature has not a particle of gratitude; those narrow-minded women never have. You know I am very susceptible to people's atmospheres; and I always feel that that creature is just as full of spite and jealousy as she can stick in her skin."

It will be remarked that this was one of those idiomatic phrases which got lodged in Mrs. Follingsbee's head in a less cultivated period of her life, as a rusty needle sometimes hides in a cushion, coming out unexpectedly when excitement gives it an honest squeeze.

"Now, I should think," pursued Mrs. Follingsbee, "that a woman who really loved her husband would be thankful to have him have such a rest from the disturbing family cares which smother a man's genius, as a house like ours offers him. How can the artistic nature exercise itself in the very grind of the thing, when this child has a cold, and the other the croup; and there is fussing with mustard-paste and ipecac and paregoric,--all those realities, you know? Why, Charlie tells me he feels a great deal more affection for his children when he is all calm and tranquil in the little boudoir at our house; and he writes such lovely little poems about them, I must show you some of them. But this creature doesn't appreciate them a bit: she has no poetry in her."

"Well, I must say, I don't think I should have," said Lillie, honestly. "I should be just as mad as I could be, if John acted so."

"Oh, my dear! the cases are different: Charlie has such peculiarities of genius. The artistic nature, you know, requires soothing." Here they stopped, and rang at the door of a neat little house, and were ushered into a pair of those characteristic parlors which show that they have been arranged by a home-worshipper, and a mother. There were

plants and birds and flowers, and little genre pictures of children, animals, and household interiors, arranged with a loving eye and hand.

"Did you ever see any thing so perfectly characteristic?" said Mrs. Follingsbee, looking around her as if she were going to faint.

"This woman drives Charlie perfectly wild, because she has no appreciation of high art. Now, I sent her photographs of Michel Angelo's 'Moses,' and 'Night and Morning;' and I really wish you would see where she hung them,--away in yonder dark corner!"

"I think myself they are enough to scare the owls," said Lillie, after a moment's contemplation.

"But, my dear, you know they are the thing," said Mrs. Follingsbee: "people never like such things at first, and one must get used to high art before one forms a taste for it. The thing with her is, she has no docility. She does not try to enter into Charlie's tastes."

The woman with "no docility" entered at this moment,--a little snow-drop of a creature, with a pale, pure, Madonna face, and that sad air of hopeless firmness which is seen unhappily in the faces of so many women.

"I had to bring baby down," she said. "I have no nurse to-day, and he has been threatened with croup."

"The dear little fellow!" said Mrs. Follingsbee, with officious graciousness. "So glad you brought him down; come to his aunty?" she inquired lovingly, as the little fellow shrank away, and regarded her with round, astonished eyes. "Why will you not come to my next reception, Mrs. Ferrola?" she added. "You make yourself quite a stranger to us. You ought to give yourself some variety."

"The fact is, Mrs. Follingsbee," said Mrs. Ferrola, "receptions in New York generally begin about my bed-time; and, if I should spend the night out, I should have no strength to give to my children the next day."

"But, my dear, you ought to have some amusement."

"My children amuse me, if you will believe it," said Mrs. Ferrola, with a remarkably quiet smile.

Mrs. Follingsbee was not quite sure whether this was meant to be sarcastic or not. She answered, however, "Well! your husband will come, at all events."

"You may be quite sure of that," said Mrs. Ferrola, with the same quietness.

"Well!" said Mrs. Follingsbee, rising, with patronizing cheerfulness,

"delighted to see you doing so well; and, if it is pleasant, I will send the carriage round to take you a drive in the park this afternoon. Good-morning."

And, like a rustling cloud of silks and satins and perfumes, she bent down and kissed the baby, and swept from the apartment.

Mrs. Ferrola, with a movement that seemed involuntary, wiped the baby's cheek with her handkerchief, and, folding it closer to her bosom, looked up as if asking patience where patience is to be found for the asking.

"There! I didn't I tell you?" said Mrs. Follingsbee when she came out; "just one of those provoking, meek, obstinate, impracticable creatures, with no adaptation in her."

"Oh, gracious me!" said Lillie: "I can't imagine more dire despair than to sit all day tending baby."

"Well, so you would think; and Charlie has offered to hire competent nurses, and wants her to dress herself up and go into society; and she just won't do it, and sticks right down by the cradle there, with her children running over her like so many squirrels."

"Oh! I hope and trust I never shall have children," said Lillie, fervently, "because, you see, there's an end of every thing. No more

fun, no more frolics, no more admiration or good times; nothing but this frightful baby, that you can't get rid of."

Yet, as Lillie spoke, she knew, in her own slippery little heart, that the shadow of this awful cloud of maternity was resting over her; though she laced and danced, and bid defiance to every law of nature, with a blind and ignorant wilfulness, not caring what consequences she might draw down on herself, if only she might escape this.

And was there, then, no soft spot in this woman's heart anywhere? Generally it is thought that the throb of the child's heart awakens a heart in the mother, and that the mother is born again with her child. It is so with unperverted nature, as God meant it to be; and you shall hear from the lips of an Irish washer-woman a genuine poetry of maternal feeling, for the little one who comes to make her toil more toilsome, that is wholly withered away out of luxurious circles, where there is every thing to make life easy. Just as the Chinese have contrived fashionable monsters, where human beings are constrained to grow in the shape of flower-pots, so fashionable life contrives at last to grow a woman who hates babies, and will risk her life to be rid of the crowning glory of womanhood.

There was a time in Lillie's life, when she was sixteen years of age, which was a turning-point with her, and decided that she should be the heartless woman she was. If at that age, and at that time, she had decided to marry the man she really loved, marriage might indeed have

proved to her a sacrament. It might have opened to her a door through which she could have passed out from a career of selfish worldliness into that gradual discipline of unselfishness which a true love-marriage brings.

But she did not. The man was poor, and she was beautiful; her beauty would buy wealth and worldly position, and so she cast him off. Yet partly to gratify her own lingering feeling, and partly because she could not wholly renounce what had once been hers, she kept up for years with him just that illusive simulacrum which such women call friendship; which, while constantly denying, constantly takes pains to attract, and drains the heart of all possibility of loving another.

Harry Endicott was a young man of fine capabilities, sensitive, interesting, handsome, full of generous impulses, whom a good woman might easily have led to a full completeness. He was not really Lillie's cousin, but the cousin of her mother; yet, under the name of cousin, he had constant access and family intimacy.

This winter Harry Endicott suddenly returned to the fashionable circles of New York,--returned from a successful career in India, with an ample fortune. He was handsomer than ever, took stylish bachelor lodgings, set up a most distracting turnout, and became a sort of Marquis of Farintosh in fashionable circles. Was ever any thing so lucky, or so unlucky, for our Lillie?--lucky, if life really does run on the basis of French novels, and if all that is needed is the

sparkle and stimulus of new emotions; unlucky, nay, even gravely terrible, if life really is established on a basis of moral responsibility, and dogged by the fatal necessity that "whatsoever man or woman soweth, that shall he or she also reap."

In the most critical hour of her youth, when love was sent to her heart like an angel, to beguile her from selfishness, and make self-denial easy, Lillie's pretty little right hand had sowed to the world and the flesh; and of that sowing she was now to reap all the disquiets, the vexations, the tremors, that go to fill the pages of French novels,--records of women who marry where they cannot love, to serve the purposes of selfishness and ambition, and then make up for it by loving where they cannot marry. If all the women in America who have practised, and are practising, this species of moral agriculture should stand forth together, it would be seen that it is not for nothing that France has been called the society educator of the world.

The apartments of the Follingsbee mansion, with their dreamy voluptuousness, were eminently adapted to be the background and scenery of a dramatic performance of this kind. There were vistas of drawing-rooms, with delicious boudoirs, like side chapels in a temple of Venus, with handsome Charlie Ferrola gliding in and out, or lecturing dreamily from the corner of some sofa on the last most important crinkle of the artistic rose-leaf, demonstrating conclusively that beauty was the only true morality, and that there was no sin but bad taste; and that nobody knew what good taste was but

himself and his clique. There was the discussion, far from edifying, of modern improved theories of society, seen from an improved philosophic point of view; of all the peculiar wants and needs of etherealized beings, who have been refined and cultivated till it is the most difficult problem in the world to keep them comfortable, while there still remains the most imperative necessity that they should be made happy, though the whole universe were to be torn down and made over to effect it.

The idea of not being happy, and in all respects as blissful as they could possibly be made, was one always assumed by the Follingsbee clique as an injustice to be wrestled with. Anybody that did not affect them agreeably, that jarred on their nerves, or interrupted the delicious reveries of existence with the sharp saw-setting of commonplace realities, in their view ought to be got rid of summarily, whether that somebody were husband or wife, parent or child.

Natures that affected each other pleasantly were to spring together like dew-drops, and sail off on rosy clouds with each other to the land of Do-just-as-you-have-a-mind-to.

The only thing never to be enough regretted, which prevented this immediate and blissful union of particles, was the impossibility of living on rosy clouds, and making them the means of conveyance to the desirable country before mentioned. Many of the fair illuminatae who were quite willing to go off with a kindred spirit, were withheld by

the necessities of infinite pairs of French kid gloves, and gallons of cologne-water, and indispensable clouds of mechlin and point lace, which were necessary to keep around them the poetry of existence.

Although it was well understood among them that the religion of the emotions is the only true religion, and that nothing is holy that you do not feel exactly like doing, and every thing is holy that you do; still these fair confessors lacked the pluck of primitive Christians, and could not think of taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods, even for the sake of a kindred spirit. Hence the necessity of living in deplored marriage-bonds with husbands who could pay rent and taxes, and stand responsible for unlimited bills at Stewart's and Tiffany's. Hence the philosophy which allowed the possession of the body to one man, and of the soul to another, which one may see treated of at large in any writings of the day.

As yet Lillie had been kept intact from all this sort of thing by the hard, brilliant enamel of selfishness. That little shrewd, gritty common sense, which enabled her to see directly through other people's illusions, has, if we mistake not, by this time revealed itself to our readers as an element in her mind: but now there is to come a decided thrust at the heart of her womanhood; and we shall see whether the paralysis is complete, or whether the woman is alive.

If Lillie had loved Harry Endicott poor, had loved him so much that at one time she had seriously balanced the possibility of going to

housekeeping in a little unfashionable house, and having only one girl, and hand in hand with him walking the paths of economy, self-denial, and prudence,--the reader will see that Harry Endicott rich, Harry Endicott enthroned in fashionable success, Harry Endicott plus fast horses, splendid equipages, a fine city house, and a country house on the Hudson, was something still more dangerous to her imagination.

But more than this was the stimulus of Harry Endicott out of her power, and beyond the sphere of her charms. She had a feverish desire to see him, but he never called. Forthwith she had a confidential conversation with her bosom friend, who entered into the situation with enthusiasm, and invited him to her receptions. But he didn't come.

The fact was, that Harry Endicott hated Lillie now, with that kind of hatred which is love turned wrong-side out. He hated her for the misery she had caused him, and was in some danger of feeling it incumbent on himself to go to the devil in a wholly unnecessary manner on that account.

He had read the story of Monte Cristo, with its highly wrought plot of vengeance, and had determined to avenge himself on the woman who had so tortured him, and to make her feel, if possible, what he had felt.

So, when he had discovered the hours of driving observed by Mrs.

Follingsbee and Lillie in the park, he took pains, from time to time, to meet them face to face, and to pass Lillie with an unrecognizing stare. Then he dashed in among Mrs. Follingsbee's circle, making himself everywhere talked of, till they were beset on all hands by the inquiry, "Don't you know young Endicott? why, I should think you would want to have him visit, here."

After this had been played far enough, he suddenly showed himself one evening at Mrs. Follingsbee's, and apologized in an off-hand manner to Lillie, when reminded of passing her in the park, that really he wasn't thinking of meeting her, and didn't recognize her, she was so altered; it had been so many years since they had met, &c. All in a tone of cool and heartless civility, every word of which was a dagger's thrust not only into her vanity, but into the poor little bit of a real heart which fashionable life had left to Lillie.

Every evening, after he had gone, came a long, confidential conversation with Mrs. Follingsbee, in which every word and look was discussed and turned, and all possible or probable inferences therefrom reported; after which Lillie often laid a sleepless head on a hot and tumbled pillow, poor, miserable child! suffering her punishment, without even the grace to know whence it came, or what it meant. Hitherto Lillie had been walking only in the limits of that kind of permitted wickedness, which, although certainly the remotest thing possible from the Christianity of Christ, finds a great deal of tolerance and patronage among communicants of the altar. She had lived

a gay, vain, self-pleasing life, with no object or purpose but the simple one to get each day as much pleasurable enjoyment out of existence as possible. Mental and physical indolence and inordinate vanity had been the key-notes of her life. She hated every thing that required protracted thought, or that made trouble, and she longed for excitement. The passion for praise and admiration had become to her like the passion of the opium-eater for his drug, or of the brandy-drinker for his dram. But now she was heedlessly steering to what might prove a more palpable sin.

Harry the serf, once half despised for his slavish devotion, now stood before her, proud and free, and tantalized her by the display he made of his indifference, and preference for others. She put forth every art and effort to recapture him. But the most dreadful stroke of fate of all was, that Rose Ferguson had come to New York to make a winter visit, and was much talked of in certain circles where Harry was quite intimate; and he professed himself, indeed, an ardent admirer at her shrine.