EAST LYNNE

MRS. HENRY WOOD

EAST LYNNE.

EAST LYNNE

BY
MRS. HENRY WOOD,
AUTHOR OF
"THE CHANNINGS," "ROLAND YORKE," "JOHNNY LUDLOW," ETC

Five Hundred and Fortieth Thousand.

London
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1901

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

CONTENTS.

PART THE FIRST.

PART THE SECOND.

PART THE THIRD.

"Truly the heart is deceitful, and out of its depths of corruption
Rise, like an exhalation, the misty phantoms of passion;
Angels of light they seem, but are only delusions of Satan.
* * * * * * *
This is the cross I must bear; the sin and the swift retribution."

LONGFELLOW.

EAST LYNNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE LADY ISABEL.

IN an easy chair of the spacious and handsome library of his town-house sat William, Earl of Mount Severn. His hair was grey, the smoothness of his expansive brow was defaced by premature wrinkles, and his once attractive face bore the pale, unmistakable look of dissipation. One of his feet was cased in folds of linen, as it rested on a soft velvet ottoman, speaking of gout as plainly as any foot ever spoke yet. It would seem—to look at the man as he sat there—that he had grown old before his time. And so he had. His years were barely nine-and-forty ; yet in all, save years, he was an aged man.

A noted character had been the Earl of Mount Severn. Not that he had been a renowned politician, or a great general, or an eminent statesman, or even an active member of the Upper House : not for any of these had the earl's name been in the mouths of men. But for the most reckless among the reckless, for the spendthrift among spendthrifts, for the gamester above all gamesters, and for a gay man outstripping the gay ; by these characteristics did the world know Lord Mount Severn. It was said his faults were those of the head ; that a better heart or more generous spirit never beat in human form ; and there was much truth in this. It had been well for him had he lived and died plain William Vane. Up to his five-and-twentieth year he had been industrious and steady, had kept his terms in the Temple, and studied late and early. The sober application of William Vane had been a byword with the embryo barristers around ; Judge Vane, they ironically called him, and they strove ineffectually to allure him away to idleness and pleasure. But young Vane was ambitious, and he knew that on his own talents and exertions must depend his rising in the world. He was poor, of excellent family, but counting a relative in the old Earl of Mount Severn. The possibility of his succeeding to the earldom never occurred to him, for three healthy lives, two of them young, stood between him and the title. Yet those lives died off ; one of apoplexy, one of fever in Africa, the third boating at Oxford ; and the young Temple student, William Vane, suddenly found himself Earl of Mount Severn, and the lawful possessor of sixty thousand a year.

His first idea was, that he should never know how to spend his money : that such a sum, year by year, could *not* be spent. It was a wonder his head was not turned by adulation at the outset; he was courted, flattered, and caressed by all classes. He became the most attractive man of his day; for, independently of his newly-acquired wealth and title, he was of distinguished appearance and fascinating manners. Unfortunately, the prudence which had sustained William Vane, the poor law student, in his solitary Temple chambers, utterly forsook William Vane, the young Earl of Mount Severn, and he commenced his career at a speed so great, that all staid people said he was going to ruin and the deuce headlong.

But a peer of the realm, and one whose rent-roll is sixty thousand per annum, does not go to ruin in a day. There sat the earl in his library now, in his nine-and-fortieth year, and ruin had not come yet—that is, it had not overwhelmed him. But the embarrassments which had clung to him and been the destruction of his tranquillity, the bane of his existence, who shall describe them? The public knew them pretty well, his private friends better, his creditors best; but none, except himself, knew, or could ever know, the torment that was his portion; well-nigh driving him to distraction. Years ago, by dint of looking things steadily in the face, and by economizing, he might have retrieved his position; but he had done what most people will do in such cases—put off the evil day *sine die*, and gone on increasing his enormous list of debts. The hour of exposure and ruin was now fast advancing.

Perhaps the earl himself was thinking so, as he sat there before an ominous mass of papers which strewed the library table. His thoughts were back in the past. That was a foolish marriage of his, that Gretna Green match for love, foolish so far as prudence went; but the countess had been an affectionate wife to him, had borne with his follies and his neglect, and had been an admirable mother to their only child. One child alone had been theirs, and in her thirteenth year the countess had died. If they had only been blessed with a son—the earl groaned over the long-continued disappointment still—he might then have seen a way out of his difficulties. The boy, as soon as he was of age, would have joined with him in cutting off the entail, and——

"My lord," said a servant, entering the room and interrupting the earl's castles in the air, "a gentleman is asking to see you."

"Who is it?" cried the earl, sharply, not perceiving the card the man was bringing. No unknown person, although wearing the externa of a foreign ambassador, was ever admitted unceremoniously to the presence of Lord Mount Severn. Years of duns had taught his servants caution.

"His card is here, my lord. It is Mr. Carlyle, of West Lynne."

"Mr. Carlyle, of West Lynne," groaned the earl, whose foot just then gave an awful twinge; "what does he want? Show him up."

The servant did as he was bid, and introduced Mr. Carlyle. He was a very tall man of seven-and-twenty, of remarkably noble presence. He was somewhat given to stooping his head when he spoke to any one shorter than himself; it was a peculiar habit, almost to be called a bowing habit, and his father had possessed it before him; when told of it, he would laugh, and say he was unconscious of doing it. His features were good, his complexion was pale and clear, his hair dark, and his full eyelids drooped over his deep grey eyes. Altogether it was a countenance that both men and women liked to look upon, the index of an honourable, sincere nature; not that it would have been called a handsome face so much as a pleasing and distinguished one. Though only the son of a country lawyer, and destined to be a lawyer himself, he had received the training of a gentleman, had been educated at Rugby, and taken his degree at Oxford. He advanced at once to the earl in the straightforward way of a man who has come on business.

"Mr. Carlyle," said the latter, holding out his hand—he was always deemed the most affable peer of the age—"I am happy to see you. You perceive I cannot rise; at least without great pain and inconvenience: my enemy, the gout, has possession of me again. Take a seat. Are you staying in town?"

"I have just arrived from West Lynne. The chief object of my journey was to see your lordship."

"What can I do for you?" asked the earl, uneasily, for a suspicion now crossed his mind that Mr. Carlyle might be acting for some one of his many troublesome creditors.

Mr. Carlyle drew his chair nearer to the earl and spoke in a low tone. "A rumour has reached my ears, my lord, that East Lynne is in the market."

"A moment, sir," exclaimed the earl, reserve, not to say hauteur, in his tone, for his suspicions were gaining ground: "are we to converse confidentially together, as men of honour, or is there something concealed behind your question?"

"I do not understand you," said Mr. Carlyle.

"In a word—excuse my speaking plainly, but I must feel my ground—are you here on the part of some of my rascally creditors, to pump information out of me that otherwise they would not obtain?"

"My lord," said the visitor, "I know that a lawyer gains credit for possessing lax notions on the score of honour, but you can scarcely suspect that I should be guilty of underhand work towards you. I never was guilty of a mean trick in my life, to my recollection, and I do not think I ever shall be."

"Pardon me, Mr. Carlyle. If you knew half the tricks and *ruses* played upon me, you would not wonder at my suspecting the whole world. Proceed with your business."

"I heard that East Lynne was privately for sale: your agent dropped half a word to me in confidence. If so, I should wish to be the purchaser."

"For whom?" inquired the earl.

"Myself."

"You!" laughed the earl. "Egad! lawyering can't be such bad work, Carlyle."

"Nor is it," rejoined Mr. Carlyle, "with an extensive first-class connexion, such as ours. But you must remember that a good fortune was left me by my uncle, and a large one by my father."

"I know. The proceeds of lawyering also."

"Not altogether. My mother brought a fortune on her marriage, and it enabled my father to speculate successfully. I have been looking out for an eligible property to invest some money upon, and East Lynne will suit me well, provided I can have the refusal of it, and we agree about terms."

Lord Mount Severn mused for a few moments before he spoke.

"Mr. Carlyle," he began, "my affairs are in a very bad state, and ready money I must find somewhere. Now, East Lynne is not entailed; neither is it mortgaged to anything like its value, though the latter fact, as you may imagine, is not patent to the world. When I bought it a bargain, eighteen years ago, you were the lawyer on the other side, I remember."

"My father," smiled Mr. Carlyle. "I was a child at the time."

"Of course: I ought to have said your father. By selling East Lynne, a few thousands will come into my hands, after all claims on it are settled; I have no other means of raising the wind, and that is why I have resolved to part with it. But now, understand: if it were known abroad that East Lynne is going from me, I should have a hornet's nest about my ears: so that it must be disposed of, as you have just remarked, *privately*. Do you comprehend?"

"Perfectly," replied Mr. Carlyle.

"I would as soon you bought it as any one else, if, as you say, we can agree about terms."

"What does your lordship expect for it—at a rough estimate?"

"For particulars I must refer you to my men of business, Warburton and Ware. Not less than seventy thousand pounds."

"Too much, my lord," cried Mr. Carlyle, decisively.

"And that's not its value," returned the earl.

"These forced sales never do fetch their value," answered the plain-speaking lawyer. "I had thought, until this hint was given me by Beauchamp, that East Lynne was settled on your lordship's daughter."

"There's nothing settled on her," rejoined the earl, the contraction on his brow standing out more plainly. "That comes of your thoughtless, runaway marriages. I fell in love with General Conway's daughter, and she ran away with me, like a fool: that is, we were fools together for our pains. The general objected to me; and said I must sow my wild oats before he would give me Mary: so I took her to Gretna Green, and she became Countess of Mount Severn, without a settlement. It was an unfortunate affair, taking one thing with another. When her elopement was made known to the general, it killed him."

"Killed him!" interrupted Mr. Carlyle.

"It did. He had disease of the heart, and the excitement brought on the crisis. My poor wife never was happy from that hour: she blamed herself for her father's death; and I believe it led to her own. She was ill for years: the doctors called it consumption; but it was more like a wasting insensibly away, and consumption had never been in her family. No luck ever attends runaway marriages: I have noticed it since, in many, many instances: something bad is sure to turn up from it."

"There might have been a settlement executed after the marriage," observed Mr. Carlyle, for the earl had stopped, and seemed lost in thought.

"I know there might: but there was not. My wife had possessed no fortune; I was already deep in my career of extravagance; and neither of us thought of making provision for our future children: or, if we thought of it, we did not do it. There is an old saying, Mr. Carlyle, that what may be done at any time, is never done at all."

Mr. Carlyle bowed.

"So my child is portionless," resumed the earl, with a suppressed sigh. "The thought that it may be an embarrassing thing for her, were I to die before she is settled in life, crosses my mind when I am in a serious mood. That she will marry well there is little doubt, for she possesses beauty in a rare degree, and has been reared as an English girl should be, not to frivolity and foppery. She was trained by her mother, who (except for the mad act which she was persuaded into by me) was all goodness and refinement, for the first twelve years of her life, and, since then, by an admirable governess. No fear that she will be decamping to Gretna Green"

"She was a very lovely child," observed the lawyer. "I remember that."

"Ay; you have seen her at East Lynne, in her mother's lifetime. But, to return to business. If you become the purchaser of the East Lynne estate, Mr. Carlyle, it must be under the rose. The money that it brings, after paying off the mortgage, I must have, as I tell you, for my private use; and you know I should not be able to touch a farthing of it, if the confounded public got an inkling of the transfer. In the eyes of the world, the proprietor of East Lynne must still be Lord Mount Severn—at least for some little time afterwards. Perhaps you will not object to that?"

Mr. Carlyle considered before replying: and then the conversation was resumed, when it was decided that he should see Warburton and Ware the first thing in the morning, and confer with them. It was growing late when he rose to leave.

"Stay and dine with me," said the earl.

Mr. Carlyle hesitated, and looked down at his dress: plain, gentlemanly morning attire, but certainly not dinner costume for a peer's table.

"Oh, that's nothing," said the earl; "we shall be quite alone, except my daughter. Mrs. Vane, of Castle Marling, is staying with us; she came up to present my child at the last Drawing-room, but I think I heard something about her dining out to-day. If not, we will have it by ourselves here. Oblige me by touching the bell, Mr. Carlyle, and set the trouble down to the score of my unfortunate foot."

The servant entered.

"Inquire whether Mrs. Vane dines at home," said the earl.

"Mrs. Vane dines out, my lord," was the man's immediate reply. "The carriage is at the door now, waiting to take her."

"Very well. Mr. Carlyle remains."

At seven o'clock dinner was announced, and the earl was wheeled into the adjoining room. As he and Mr. Carlyle entered it at one door, some one else came in by the opposite one. Who—what—was it? Mr. Carlyle looked, not quite sure whether it was a human being: he almost thought it more like an angel.

A light, graceful, girlish form, a face of surpassing beauty, beauty that is rarely seen, save from the imagination of a painter, dark shining curls falling on her neck and shoulders smooth as a child's, fair delicate arms decorated with pearls, and a flowing dress of costly white lace. Altogether the vision did indeed look to the lawyer as one from a fairer world than this.

"My daughter, Mr. Carlyle; the Lady Isabel."

They took their seats at the table. Lord Mount Severn at its head, in spite of his gout and his footstool, and the young lady and Mr. Carlyle opposite each other. Mr. Carlyle had not deemed himself an especial admirer of woman's beauty, but the extraordinary loveliness of the young girl before him almost took away his senses and his self-possession. It was not so much the perfect contour of the exquisite features that struck him, or the rich damask of the delicate cheek, or the luxuriant falling hair; no, it was the sweet expression of the soft dark eyes. Never in his life had he seen eyes so pleasing. He could not withhold his gaze from her, and he became conscious, as he grew more familiar with her face, that there was in its character a sad, sorrowful look. Only at times was it to be noticed, when the features were in repose, and it lay chiefly in the very eyes he was admiring. Never does this unconsciously mournful expression exist, but it is a sure index of sorrow and suffering; but Mr. Carlyle understood it not. And who could connect sorrow with the anticipated brilliant future of Isabel Vane?

"Isabel," observed the earl, "you are dressed."

"Yes, papa. Not to keep old Mrs. Levison waiting tea. She likes to take it early, and I know Mrs. Vane must have kept her waiting dinner. It was past six when she drove from here."

"I hope you will not be late to-night, Isabel."

"It depends upon Mrs. Vane."

"Then I am sure you will be. When young ladies, in this fashionable world of ours, turn night into day, it is a bad thing for their roses. What say you, Mr. Carlyle?"

Mr. Carlyle glanced at the roses on the cheeks opposite to him; they looked too fresh and bright to fade lightly.

At the conclusion of dinner, a maid entered the room with a white cashmere mantle, placing it over the shoulders of her young lady, as she said the carriage was waiting.

Lady Isabel advanced to the earl. "Good-bye, papa."

"Good-night, my love," he answered, drawing her towards him, and kissing her sweet face. "Tell Mrs. Vane I will not have you kept out until morning hours; you are only a child yet. Mr. Carlyle, will you ring? I am debarred from seeing my daughter to the carriage."

"If your lordship will allow me—if Lady Isabel will pardon the attendance of one little used to wait upon young ladies, I shall be proud to see her to her carriage," was the somewhat confused answer of Mr. Carlyle, as he touched the bell.

The earl thanked him, the young lady smiled, and Mr. Carlyle conducted her down the broad lighted staircase, stood bareheaded by the door of the luxurious chariot, and handed her in. She put out her hand in her frank, pleasant manner, as she wished him good-night. The carriage rolled on its way, and Mr. Carlyle returned to the earl.

"Well, is she not a handsome girl?" he demanded.

"Handsome is not the word for beauty such as hers," was Mr. Carlyle's reply, in a low warm tone. "I never saw a face half so beautiful."

"She caused quite a sensation at the Drawing-room last week—as I hear. This everlasting gout kept me in-doors all day. And she is as good as she is beautiful."

The earl was not partial. Lady Isabel was wondrously gifted by nature, not only in mind and person, but in heart. She was as little like a fashionable young lady as it was well possible to be, partly because she had hitherto been secluded from the great world, partly from the care bestowed upon her training. During the lifetime of her mother, she had lived occasionally at East Lynne, but chiefly at a larger seat of the earl's in Wales, Mount Severn: since her mother's death, she had remained entirely at Mount Severn, under the charge of a judicious governess, a very small establishment being kept up for them, and the earl paying them impromptu and flying visits. Generous and benevolent was she; timid and sensitive to a degree; gentle and considerate to all. Do not cavil at her being thus praised: admire and love her whilst you may; she is worthy of it now, in her innocent girlhood; the time will come when such praise would be misplaced. Could the fate, that was to overtake his child, have been foreseen by the earl, he would have struck her down to death, in his love, as she stood before him, rather than suffer her to enter upon it.

CHAPTER II

THE BROKEN CROSS.

LADY ISABEL'S carriage continued its way, and deposited her at the residence of Mrs. Levison. Mrs. Levison was nearly eighty years of age, and very severe in speech and manner; or, as Mrs. Vane expressed it, "crabbed." She looked the image of impatience when Isabel entered, with her cap pushed awry as she pulled at her black satin gown, for Mrs. Vane had kept her waiting dinner, and Isabel was keeping her from her tea: and that does not agree with the aged, with their health or their temper.

"I fear I am late," exclaimed Lady Isabel, as she advanced to Mrs. Levison; "but a gentleman dined with papa to-day, and it made us rather longer at table."

"You are twenty-five minutes behind your time," cried the old lady, sharply, "and I want my tea. Emma, order it in."

Mrs. Vane rang the bell, and did as she was bid. She was a little woman of six-and-twenty, very plain in face, but elegant in figure, vastly accomplished, and vain to her fingers' ends. Her mother, who was dead, had been Mrs. Levison's daughter, and her husband, Raymond Vane, was heir presumptive to the earldom of Mount Severn.

"Won't you take off that tippet, child?" asked Mrs. Levison, who knew nothing of the new-fashioned names for such articles; mantle, bernous, and the whole string of them. Isabel threw it off, and sat down by her.

"The tea is not made, grandmamma!" exclaimed Mrs. Vane, in an accent of astonishment, as the servants appeared with the tray and the silver urn. "You surely do not have it made in the room!"

"Where should I have it made?" inquired Mrs. Levison.

"It is much more convenient to have it brought in ready made," said Mrs. Vane. "I dislike the *embarras* of making it."

"Indeed!" was the reply of the old lady; "and get it slopped over in the saucers, and as cold as milk! You always were lazy, Emma—and always given to those French words. I'd rather stick a printed label on my forehead, for my part, 'I speak French,' and let the world know it that way."

"Who makes tea for you in general?" asked Mrs. Vane, telegraphing a contemptuous grimace to Isabel behind her grandmother.

But the eyes of Lady Isabel fell timidly, and a blush rose to her cheeks. She did not like to appear to differ from Mrs. Vane, her senior, and her father's guest; but her mind revolted at the bare idea of ingratitude or ridicule cast to an aged parent.

"Harriet comes in and makes it for me," replied Mrs. Levison: "ay, and sits down and takes it with me when I am alone, which is pretty often. What do you say to that, Madame Emma; you, with your fine notions?"

"Just as you please, of course, grandmamma."

"And there's the tea caddy at your elbow, and the urn's fizzing away, and if we are to have any tea to-night, it had better be made at once."

"I don't know how much to put in," grumbled Mrs. Vane, who had the greatest horror of soiling her hands or her gloves: who, in short, had a particular antipathy to doing anything useful.

"Shall I make it, dear Mrs. Levison?" said Isabel, rising with alacrity. "I used to make it at Mount Severn, and I make it for papa."

"Do, child," replied the old lady. "You are worth ten of her."

Isabel laughed merrily, drew off her gloves, and sat down to the table: and at that moment a young and elegant man lounged into the room. He was considered handsome, with his clearly-cut features, his dark eyes, his raven hair, and his white teeth; but, to a keen observer, those features had not an attractive expression, and the dark eyes had a habit of looking away while he spoke to you. It was Francis, Captain Levison.

He was grandson to the old lady, and first cousin to Mrs. Vane. Few men were so fascinating in manners (at times and seasons), in face, and in form; few men won so completely upon their hearers' ears, and few were so heartless in their heart of hearts. The world courted him, and society honoured him: for, though he was a graceless spendthrift, and it was known that he was so, he was heir presumptive to the old and rich Sir Peter Levison.

The ancient lady spoke up. "Captain Levison; Lady Isabel Vane." They both acknowledged the introduction: and Isabel, a child yet in the ways of the world, blushed crimson at the admiring looks cast upon her by the young Guardsman. Strange—strange that she should make the acquaintance of those two men in the same day, almost in the same hour: the two, of all the human race, who were to exercise so powerful an influence over her future life!

"That's a pretty cross, child," cried Mrs. Levison, as Isabel stood by her when tea was over, and she and Mrs. Vane were about to depart on their evening visit.

She alluded to a golden cross, set with seven emeralds, which Isabel wore round her neck. It was of light, delicate texture, and was suspended from a thin, short gold chain.

"Is it not pretty?" answered Isabel. "It was given me by my dear mamma just before she died. Stay, I will take it off for you. I only wear it upon great occasions."

This, her first grand party at a duke's, seemed a very great occasion to the simply reared, inexperienced girl. She unclasped the chain, and placed it with the cross in the hands of Mrs. Levison.

"Why, I declare you have nothing on but that cross and some rubbishing pearl bracelets!" uttered Mrs. Vane to Isabel. "I did not look at you before."

"Mamma gave me both. The bracelets are those she used frequently to wear."

"You old-fashioned child! Because your mamma wore those bracelets years ago, is that a reason for your doing so now?" retorted Mrs. Vane. "Why did you not put on your diamonds?"

"I—did—put on my diamonds; but I—took them off again," stammered Isabel.

"What on earth for?"

"I did not like to be too fine," answered Isabel, with a laugh and a blush. "They glittered so! I feared it might be thought I had put them on *to look* fine."

"Ah! I see you mean to set up amongst that class of people who pretend to despise ornaments," scornfully remarked Mrs. Vane. "It is the refinement of affectation, Lady Isabel."

The sneer fell harmlessly on Isabel's ear. She only believed something had put Mrs. Vane out of temper. It certainly had: and that something, though Isabel little suspected it, was the evident admiration Captain Levison showed for her fresh young beauty. It quite absorbed him, and rendered him neglectful even of Mrs. Vane.

"Here, child, take your cross," said the old lady. "It is very pretty; prettier on your neck than diamonds would be. You don't want embellishing: never mind what Emma says."

Francis Levison took the cross and chain from her hand to pass them to Lady Isabel. Whether he was awkward, or whether her hands were full, for she held her gloves, her handkerchief, and had just taken up her mantle, certain it is that it fell; and the gentleman, in his too quick effort to regain it, managed to set his foot upon it, and the cross was broken in two.

"There! Now whose fault was that?" cried Mrs. Levison.

Isabel did not answer: her heart was very full. She took the broken cross, and tears dropped from her eyes: she could not help it.

"Why! you are never crying over a stupid bauble of a cross!" uttered Mrs. Vane, interrupting Captain Levison's expressions of regret at his awkwardness.

"You can have it mended, dear," interposed Mrs. Levison.

Lady Isabel chased away the tears, and turned to Captain Levison with a cheerful look. "Pray do not blame yourself," she good-naturedly said; "the fault was as much mine as yours: and, as Mrs. Levison says, it can be mended."

She disengaged the upper part of the cross from the chain as she spoke, and clasped the latter round her neck.

"You will not go with that thin string of gold on, and nothing else!" uttered Mrs. Vane.

"Why not?" returned Isabel. "If people say anything, I can tell them an accident happened to the cross."

Mrs. Vane burst into a mocking laugh of ridicule. "'If people say anything!'" she repeated, in a tone according with the laugh. "They are not likely to 'say anything,' but they will deem Lord Mount Severn's daughter unfortunately short of jewellery."

Isabel smiled and shook her head. "They saw my diamonds at the Drawing-room."

"If you had done such an awkward thing for me, Francis Levison," burst forth the old lady, "my doors should have been closed against you for a month. There! if you are to go, Emma, you had better go: dancing off to begin an evening at ten o'clock at night! In my time we used to go at seven: but it's the custom now to turn night into day."

"When George the Third dined at one o'clock upon boiled mutton and turnips," put in the graceless captain, who certainly held his grandmother in no greater reverence than did Mrs. Vane.

He turned to Isabel as he spoke, to hand her downstairs. Thus she was conducted to her carriage the second time that night by a stranger. Mrs. Vane went down by herself, as she best could, and her temper was not improved by the process.

"Good-night," said she to the captain.

"I shall not say good-night. You will find me there almost as soon as you."

"You told me you were not coming. Some bachelors' party in the way."

"Yes, but I have changed my mind. Farewell for the present, Lady Isabel."

"What an object you will look, with nothing on your neck but a school-girl's chain!" began Mrs. Vane, returning to the grievance as the carriage drove on.

"Oh, Mrs. Vane, what does it signify? I can only think of my broken cross. I am sure it must be an evil omen."

"An evil—what?"

"An evil omen. Mamma gave me that cross when she was dying. She told me to let it be to me as a talisman, always to keep it safely; and when I was in any distress, or in need of counsel, to look at it, and strive to recall what her advice would be, and to act accordingly. And now it is broken—broken!"

A gaslight flashed into the carriage upon the face of Isabel. "I declare," uttered Mrs. Vane, "you are crying again! I tell you what, Isabel: I am not going to chaperon red eyes to the Duchess of Dartford's, so if you can't put a stop to this, I shall order the carriage home, and go on alone."

Isabel meekly dried her eyes, sighing deeply as she did so. "I can have the pieces joined, I dare say; but it will never be the same cross to me again."

"What have you done with the pieces?" irascibly asked Mrs. Vane.

"I folded them in the thin paper Mrs. Levison gave me, and put it inside my frock. Here it is," touching the body. "I have no pocket on."

Mrs. Vane gave vent to a groan. She never had been a girl herself; she had been a woman at ten; and she complimented Isabel upon being little better than an imbecile. "'Put it inside my frock!'" she uttered, in a tone of scorn. "And you eighteen years of age! I fancied you left off 'frocks' when you left the nursery."

"I meant to say my dress," corrected Isabel.

"Meant to say you are a baby idiot!" was the inward comment of Mrs. Vane.

A few minutes, and Isabel forgot her grievance. The brilliant rooms were to her as an enchanting scene of dreamland, for her heart was in its springtide freshness, and the satiety of experience had not come. How could she remember even the broken cross, as she bent to the homage offered her, and drank in the honeyed words poured forth into her ear?

"Halloa!" cried an Oxford student, with a long rent-roll in prospective, who was screwing himself against the wall, out of the way of the waltzers: "I thought you had given up coming to these places."

"So I had," replied the fast nobleman addressed; "but I am on the look-out, so am forced into them again. I think a ball-room the greatest bore in life."

"On the look-out for what?"

"For a wife. My governor has stopped supplies; and has vowed, by his beard, not to advance another shilling, or pay a debt, until I reform. As a preliminary step towards it, he insists upon a wife, and I am trying to choose one, for I am deeper in than you can imagine."

"Take the new beauty, then."

"Who is she?"

"Lady Isabel Vane."

"Much obliged for the suggestion," replied the earl. "But one likes a respectable father-in-law. Mount Severn and I are too much in the same line, and might clash in the long run."

"One can't have everything: the girl's beauty is beyond common. I saw that rake, Levison, making up to her. He fancies he can carry all before him, where women are concerned."

"So he does, often," was the quiet reply.

"I hate the fellow! He thinks so much of himself, with his curled hair and his shining teeth and his white hands. He's as heartless as an owl. What was that hushed-up business about Miss Charteris?"

"Who's to know? Levison slipped out of the escapade like an eel, and the women protested that he was more sinned against than sinning. Three-fourths of the world believed them. Here he comes! And Mount Severn's daughter with him."

They were approaching at that moment, Francis Levison and Lady Isabel. He was expressing his regret at the untoward accident of the cross, for the tenth time that night. "I feel that it can never be atoned for," whispered he; "that the heartfelt homage of my whole life would not be sufficient compensation."

He spoke in a tone of thrilling gentleness, gratifying to the ear, but dangerous to the heart. Lady Isabel glanced up, and caught his eyes fixed upon her with the deepest tenderness, a language hers had never yet encountered. A vivid blush again rose to her cheek, her eyelids fell, and her timid words died away in silence.

"Take care, take care, my young Lady Isabel," murmured the Oxonian under his breath as they passed him; "that man is as false as he is high."

"I think he's a rascal," remarked the earl.

"I know he is: I know a thing or two about him. He would ruin her heart for the renown of the exploit, because she's a beauty, and then fling it away broken. He had none to offer in return for the gift."

"Just as much as my race-horse has," concluded the earl. "She is very beautiful."

CHAPTER III.

BARBARA HARE.

WEST LYNNE was a town of some importance, particularly in its own eyes, though being neither a manufacturing town nor a cathedral town, nor even the chief town of the county, it was somewhat primitive in its manners and customs. It sent two members to parliament, and it boasted a good market-place, covered over, and a large room above that, which was called the "town-hall," where the justices met and transacted their business—for the county magistrates still retained there that nearly obsolete name. Passing eastward out of the town, you came upon several detached gentlemen's houses, in the neighbourhood of which stood the church of St. Jude, which was more aristocratic (in the matter of its congregation) than the other churches of West Lynne. For about a mile these houses were scattered, the church being situated at their commencement close to the busy part of the place; and about a mile farther on you came upon the beautiful estate which was called East Lynne. As you drove along the road you might admire its green, undulating park; not as you walked, for an envious wall, unconscionably high, obstructed your view. Large, beautiful trees, affording a shelter, alike for human beings and for the deer, on a day of summer's heat, rose in that park, and a great gate between two lodges to the right of the road, gave you entrance to it, and conducted you to the house. It was not a very large house, compared with some country seats, but it was built in the villa style, was white and remarkably cheerful: altogether a charming place to look upon.

Between the houses mentioned, and East Lynne, the mile of road was very solitary, much overshadowed by trees. One house alone stood there, and that was about three-quarters of a mile before you came to East Lynne, and full a quarter of a mile after you had passed the houses. It was on the left, a square ugly red brick house with a weathercock above, standing some little distance from the road. A flat lawn extended before it, and close to the palings dividing it from the road, was a grove of trees, some yards in depth. The lawn was separated by a narrow gravel path, to which you gained access from the road by an equally narrow iron gate, which took you to the rustic portico of the house. You entered upon a large flagged hall with a reception room on either hand, and a wide staircase facing you; by the side of the staircase you passed on to the servants' apartments and offices. This place was called the Grove, and was the property and residence of Richard Hare, Esquire, commonly called Mr. Justice Hare.

The room to the left, as you went in, was the general sitting-room, the other was very much kept boxed up in lavender and brown holland, to be opened on state occasions. Justice and Mrs. Hare had three children, a son and two daughters. Anne the elder of the girls, had married young; Barbara, the younger, was now nineteen; and Richard, the eldest—But we shall come to him hereafter.

In this sitting-room, on a chilly evening early in May, a few days after that which had witnessed the visit of Mr. Carlyle to the Earl of Mount Severn, sat Mrs. Hare, a pale, delicate woman, buried in shawls and cushions: her arm-chair was drawn to the hearth, though there was no fire in it: but the day had been warm. At the window sat a pretty girl, very fair, with blue eyes, light hair, a bright complexion, and small aquiline features. She was listlessly turning over the leaves of a book.

"Barbara, I am sure it must be tea-time, now."

"Time seems to move slowly with you, mamma. It is scarcely a quarter of an hour since I told you it was only ten minutes past six."

"I am so thirsty," murmured the poor invalid. "Do go and look at the clock again, Barbara."

Barbara Hare rose with a gesture of impatience, opened the door, and glanced at the large clock in the hall. "It wants nine-and-twenty minutes to seven, mamma. I wish you would put your watch on of a day: four times have you sent me to look at that clock since dinner."

"I am so thirsty," repeated Mrs. Hare, with a sort of sob. "If seven o'clock would only strike! I am dying for my tea."

It may occur to the reader that a lady in her own house, "dying for her tea," might surely order it to be brought in, although the usual hour had not struck. Not so Mrs. Hare. Since her husband had first brought her home to that house, four-and-twenty years ago, she had never dared to express a will in it; scarcely, on her own responsibility, to give an order. Justice Hare was stern, imperative, obstinate, and self-conceited; she, timid, gentle, and submissive. She had loved him with all her heart, and her life had been one long yielding of her will to his: in fact, she had no will; his, was all in all. Far was she from feeling the servitude a yoke: some natures do not do so: and, to do Mr. Hare justice, his powerful will, that *must* bear down all before it, was in fault; not his kindness: he never meant to be unkind to his wife. Of his three children, Barbara alone had inherited this will, but in her it was very much softened.

"Barbara," began Mrs. Hare again, when she thought another quarter of an hour at least must have elapsed.

"Well, mamma."

"Ring, and tell them to be getting it in readiness, so that when seven strikes there may be no delay."

"Goodness, mamma! you know they always do have it ready. And there's no such hurry, for papa may not be home." But she rose, and rang the bell with a petulant motion, and when the man answered it, told him to have tea in to its time.

"If you knew, dear, how dry my throat is, how parched my mouth, you would have more patience with me."

Barbara closed her book, kissed her mamma with a repentant air, and turned listlessly to the window. She seemed tired, not with fatigue, but with what the French express by the word *ennui*. "Here comes papa," she presently said.

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried poor Mrs. Hare. "Perhaps he will not mind having tea in at once, if I tell him how much I want it."

The justice came in. A middle-sized man, with pompous features, a pompous walk, and a flaxen wig. In his aquiline nose, compressed lips, and pointed chin, might be traced a resemblance to his daughter; though he never could have been half so good-looking as was pretty Barbara.

"Richard," said Mrs. Hare from between her shawls, the instant he opened the door.

"Well?"

"Would you please let me have tea in now? Would you very much mind taking it a little earlier this evening? I am feverish again, and my tongue is so parched, I hardly know how to speak."

"Oh, it's near seven: you won't have long to wait."

With this exceedingly gracious answer to an invalid's request, Mr. Hare quitted the room again, and banged the door. He had not spoken unkindly or roughly, simply with indifference. But, ere Mrs. Hare's meek sigh of disappointment was over, the door was re-opened, and the flaxen wig was thrust in again.

"I don't mind if I do have it now. It will be a fine moonlight night, and I am going with Pinner as far as Beauchamp's, to smoke a pipe. Order it in, Barbara."

The tea was made, and taken, and the justice departed for Mr. Beauchamp's, Squire Pinner calling for him at the gate. Mr. Beauchamp was a gentleman who farmed a great deal of land, and was also Lord Mount Severn's agent, or steward, for East Lynne. He lived higher up the road, some little distance beyond East Lynne.

"I am so cold, Barbara," shivered Mrs. Hare, as she watched the justice down the gravel path. "I wonder if your papa would say it was foolish of me, if I told them to light a fire?"

"Have it lighted, if you like," responded Barbara, ringing the bell. "Papa will know nothing about it, one way or the other, for he won't be home till after bed-time. Jasper, mamma is cold, and would like a fire."

"Plenty of sticks, Jasper, that it may burn up quickly," said Mrs. Hare, in a pleading voice; as if the sticks were Jasper's, and not hers.

Mrs. Hare had her fire, drew her chair in front of it, and put her feet on the fender, to catch its warmth. Barbara, listless still, went into the hall, took up a woollen shawl from the stand, threw it over her shoulders, and went out. She strolled down the straight, formal path, and stood at the iron gate, looking over it into the public road. Not very public in that spot, and at that hour, but as lonely as one could wish. The night was calm and pleasant, though somewhat chilly for the beginning of May, and the moon was getting high in the sky.

"When will he come home?" she murmured, as she leaned her head upon the gate. "Oh, what would life be without him? How miserable these few days have been! I wonder what took him there! I wonder what is detaining him! Cornelia said he had only gone for a day."

The faint echo of footsteps in the distance stole upon her ear, and Barbara drew back a little, and hid herself under the shelter of the trees, not choosing to be seen by any stray passer-by. But, as they neared, a sudden change came over her; her eyes lighted up, her cheeks were dyed with crimson, and her veins tingled with excess of rapture—for she knew those footsteps, and loved them, only too well.

Cautiously peeping over the gate again, she looked down the road. A tall form, whose very height and strength bore a grace of which its owner was unconscious, was advancing rapidly towards her from the direction of West Lynne. Again she shrank away: true love is ever timid: and whatever may have been Barbara Hare's other qualities, her love at least was true and deep. But, instead of the gate opening, with the firm, quick motion peculiar to the hand which guided it, the footsteps seemed to pass onwards, and not to have turned at all towards it. Barbara's heart sank, and she stole to the gate again, and looked out with a yearning gaze.

Yes, surely enough, he was striding on, not thinking of her, not coming to her; and she, in the disappointment and impulse of the moment, called to him.

"Archibald!"

Mr. Carlyle—it was no other—turned on his heel, and approached the gate.

"Is it you, Barbara? Watching for thieves and poachers? How are you?"

"How are you?" she returned, holding the gate open for him to enter, as he shook hands, and striving to calm down her agitation. "When did you return?"

"Only now: by the eight o'clock train, which came in beyond its time, having dawdled unpardonably at the stations. They little thought they had me in it, as their looks betrayed, when I got out. I have not been home yet."

"No! What will Cornelia say?"

"I went into the office for five minutes. But I have a few words to say to Beauchamp, and am going up at once. Thank you, I cannot come in now: I intend to do so on my return."

"Papa has gone up to Mr. Beauchamp's."

"Mr. Hare! Has he?"

"He and Squire Pinner," continued Barbara. "They are gone to have a smoking bout. And if you wait there with papa, it will be too late to come in, for he is sure not to be home before eleven or twelve."

Mr. Carlyle bent his head in deliberation. "Then I think it is of little use my continuing," said he, "for my business with Beauchamp is private. I must defer it until to-morrow."

He took the gate out of her hand, closed it, and placed the hand within his own arm, to walk with her to the house. It was done in a matter-of-fact, realistic sort of a way, with nothing of romance or sentiment about it; but Barbara Hare felt that she was in Eden.

"And how have you all been, Barbara, these few days?"

"Oh, very well. What made you start off so suddenly? You never said you were going, or came to wish us good-bye."

"You have just expressed it, Barbara—'suddenly.' A matter of business suddenly arose, and I suddenly went up upon it."

"Cornelia said you were gone only for a day."

"Did she? When in London I find many things to do. Is Mrs. Hare better?"

"Just the same. I think mamma's ailments are fancies, half of them: if she would only rouse herself, she would be better. What is in that parcel?"

"You are not to inquire, Miss Barbara. It does not concern you. It only concerns Mrs. Hare."

"It is something you have brought for mamma, Archibald!"

"Of course. A countryman's visit to London entails presents for his friends: at least, it used to do so in the old-fashioned days."

"When people made their wills before starting, and were a fortnight doing the journey in the waggon," laughed Barbara. "Grandpapa used to tell us tales of that, when we were children. But is it really something for mamma?"

"Don't I tell you so? I have brought something for you also."

"Oh! What is it?" she uttered, her colour rising, and wondering whether he was in jest or earnest.

"There's an impatient girl. 'What is it?' Wait a moment, and you shall see what it is."

He put the parcel, or roll, he was carrying upon a garden chair, and proceeded to search his pockets. Every pocket was visited, apparently in vain.

"Barbara, I think it is gone. I must have lost it somehow."

Her heart beat as she stood there silently, looking up at him in the moonlight. *Was* it lost? *What* had it been?

But, upon a second search, he came upon something in the pocket of his coat-tail. "Here it is, I believe: what brought it in there?" He opened a small box, and taking out a long gold chain, threw it round her neck. A locket was attached to it.

Her cheeks' crimson went and came, her heart beat more rapidly. She could not speak a word of thanks; and Mr. Carlyle took up the roll, and walked on into the presence of Mrs. Hare.

Barbara followed in a few minutes. Her mother was standing up, watching with pleased expectation the movements of Mr. Carlyle. No candles were in the room, but it was bright with firelight.

"Now, don't you laugh at me," quoth he, undoing the string of the parcel. "It is not a roll of velvet for a dress, and it is not a roll of parchment, conferring twenty thousand a year upon you. But it is—an air-cushion."

It was what poor Mrs. Hare, so worn with sitting and lying, had often longed for; she had heard that such a luxury was to be bought in London, but never remembered to have seen one. She took it almost with a greedy hand, casting a grateful look at Mr. Carlyle.

"How am I to thank you for it?" she murmured through her tears.

"If you thank me at all, I will never bring you anything again," cried he, gaily, pleased to see her so pleased; for, whatever the justice and Barbara may have done, *he* felt lively pity for Mrs. Hare, and sympathised with her sufferings. "I have heard you wish for the comfort of an air-cushion, and happening to see some displayed in a window in the Strand, it occurred to me to bring you one."

"How thin it is!" exclaimed Mrs. Hare.

"Thin! Oh yes, thin at present, because it is not 'fixed,' as our friends across the Atlantic say. See: this is the way to fill it with air. There; it is not thin now."

"It was so truly kind of you to think of me, Archibald."

"I have been telling Barbara that a visit to London entails gifts for friends," returned Mr. Carlyle. "Do you see how smart I have made Barbara?"

Barbara hastily took off the chain, and laid it before her mother.

"How beautiful!" uttered Mrs. Hare, in surprise. "Archibald, you are too good, too generous! This must have cost a great deal; this is beyond a trifle."

"Nonsense!" laughed Mr. Carlyle. "I'll tell you both how I came to buy it. I went into a jeweller's about my watch, which has taken to lose lately in a most unceremonious fashion, and there I saw a whole display of chains, hanging up; some ponderous enough for a sheriff, some light and elegant enough for Barbara. I dislike to see a thick chain on a lady's neck. They reminded me of the chain she lost the day she and Cornelia went with me to Lynneborough; a loss Barbara persisted in declaring was my fault, for dragging her through the town, sight-seeing, whilst Cornelia went shopping."

"But I was only joking when I said so," was Barbara's interruption. "Of course it would have happened had you not been with me; the links were always snapping."

"Well; these chains in the London shop put me in mind of Barbara's misfortune, and I chose one. Then the shopman brought forth some lockets, and enlarged upon their suitability for holding deceased relatives' hair, not to speak of sweethearts', until I told him he might attach one to the chain. I thought it might hold that piece of hair you prize, Barbara," he concluded, dropping his voice.

"What piece?" asked Mrs. Hare.

Mr. Carlyle glanced round the room, as if fearful the very walls might hear his whisper. "Richard's. Barbara showed it to me one day when she was turning out her desk, and said it was a curl cut off in that illness."

Mrs. Hare sank back in her chair, and hid her face in her hands, shivering visibly. The words evidently awoke some source of deep sorrow. "Oh, my boy! my boy!" she wailed: "my boy! my unhappy boy! Mr. Hare wonders at my ill-health, Archibald; Barbara ridicules it; but there lies the source of all my misery, mental and bodily. Oh, Richard! Richard!"

There was a distressing pause: for the topic admitted of neither hope nor consolation. "Put your chain on again, Barbara," Mr. Carlyle said, after a while, "and I wish you health to wear it out. Health and reformation, young lady."

Barbara smiled, and glanced at him with her pretty blue eyes, so full of love. "What have you brought for Cornelia?" she resumed.

"Something splendid," he answered, with a mock-serious face; "only, I hope I have not been taken in. I bought her a shawl. The vendors vowed it was true Parisian cashmere: I hope it won't turn out to be common Manchester."

"If it does, Cornelia will not know the difference."

"I can't answer for that. But, for my part, I don't see why foreign goods should bear the palm over British," observed Mr. Carlyle, becoming national. "If I wore shawls, I would discard the best French one ever made, for a good honest shawl from our own manufactories of Norwich or Paisley."

"Wait until you do wear them; you would soon tell a different tale," said Barbara, significantly.

Mrs. Hare took her hands from her pale face. "What was the price of the shawl?" she inquired.

"If I tell you, you must promise not to betray it to Cornelia. She would rail at me for my extravagance, and lay it up between folds of tissue paper, and never bring it out again. I gave eighteen guineas for it."

"That is a great deal," observed Mrs. Hare. "It ought to be a very good one. I never gave more than six guineas for a shawl in my life."

"And Cornelia, I dare say, never more than half six," laughed Mr. Carlyle. "Well, I shall wish you good evening and go to her; for if she knows I am back again, all this while, I shall be lectured."

He shook hands with them. Barbara, however, accompanied him to the front door, and stepped outside with him.

"You will catch cold, Barbara. You have left your shawl in-doors."

"Oh no, I shall not. How very soon you are leaving; you have scarcely stayed ten minutes."

"But you forget that I have not yet been home."

"You were on your road to Beauchamp's, and would not have been home for an hour or two in that case," spoke Barbara in a tone that savoured of resentment.

"That was different; that was upon business; and no one allows for business more readily than Cornelia. But I shall not hear the last of it, if I suffer anything but business to keep me away from her. She has five hundred inquiries, about London, at her tongue's end, this instant, be you very sure. Barbara, I think your mamma looks unusually ill."

"You know how she suffers a little thing to upset her, and last night she had what she calls one of her dreams," answered Barbara. "She says it is a warning that something bad is going to happen, and she has been in the most unhappy, feverish state possible all day. Papa has been quite angry about her being so weak and nervous, declaring that she ought to rouse herself out of her 'nerves.' Of course we dare not tell him about the dream."

"It related to—the——"

Mr. Carlyle stopped, and Barbara glanced round with a shudder, and drew close to him as she whispered. He had not given her his arm this time.

"Yes; to the murder. You know mamma has always declared that Bethel had something to do with it; she says her dreams would have convinced her of it, if nothing else did, and she dreamt she saw him with—with—you know."

"Hallijohn?" whispered Mr. Carlyle.

"With Hallijohn," assented Barbara with a shiver. "He appeared to be standing over him, as he lay on the floor; just as he *did* lie on it. And that wretched Afy was standing at the end of the kitchen, looking on."

"But Mrs. Hare ought not to suffer dreams to disturb her peace by day," remonstrated Mr. Carlyle. "It is not surprising that she dreams of the murder, because she is always dwelling upon it, but she should strive to throw the feeling from her with the night."

"You know what mamma is. Of course she ought to do so, but she cannot. Papa wonders what makes her get up so ill and trembling in a morning, and mamma has to make all sorts of excuses; for not a hint, as you are aware, must be breathed to him about the murder."

Mr. Carlyle gravely nodded.

"Mamma does so harp upon Bethel. And I know that this dream arose from nothing in the world but because she saw him pass the gate yesterday. Not that she thinks it was he who did it; unfortunately, there is no room for that; but she will persist that he had a hand in it in some way; and he haunts her dreams."

Mr. Carlyle walked on in silence; indeed, there was no reply that he could make. A cloud had fallen upon the house of Mr. Hare, and it was an unhappy subject. Barbara continued:

"But, for mamma to have taken it into her head that 'some evil is going to happen' because she has had this dream, and to make herself miserable over it, is so very absurd, that I have felt quite cross with her all day. Such nonsense, you know, Archibald, to believe that dreams give signs of what is going to happen! So far behind these enlightened days!"

"Your mamma's trouble is great, Barbara; and she is not strong."

"I think all our troubles have been great since—since that dark evening," responded Barbara.

"Have you heard from Anne?" inquired Mr. Carlyle, willing to change the subject.

"Yes, she is very well. What do you think they are going to name the baby? Anne: after her and mamma. So very ugly a name!"

"I do not think so," said Mr. Carlyle. "It is simple and unpretending; I like it much. Look at the long, pretentious names in our family—Archibald! Cornelia! And yours, too—Barbara! What a mouthful they all are!"

Barbara contracted her eyebrows. This was equivalent to saying that he did not like her name.

"Had the magistrates a busy day yesterday, do you know?" he resumed.

"Very much so, I believe. But you have not remained long enough for me to tell you any news."

They reached the gate, and Mr. Carlyle was about to pass out of it, when Barbara laid her hand on his arm to detain him, and spoke in a timid voice. "Archibald."

"What is it?"

"I have not said a word of thanks to you for this," she said, touching the chain and locket. "Do not deem me ungrateful."

"You foolish girl!—it is not worth thanks. There! now I am paid. Good night, Barbara."

He had bent down and kissed her cheek; swung through the gate, laughing, and strode away. "Don't say I never give you anything," he turned his head round to say. "Good night."

All her veins were tingling, all her pulses beating; her heart was throbbing with its sense of bliss. He had never kissed her, that she could remember, since she was a child. And when she returned in-doors her spirits were so extravagantly high, that Mrs. Hare wondered.

"Ring for the lamp, Barbara, and you can get to your work. But don't have the shutters closed: I like to look out on these light nights."

Barbara, however, did not take up her work; she also perhaps liked "looking out on a light night," for she sat down at the window. She was living the last half hour over again. "'Don't say I never give you anything,'" she murmured: "did he allude to the chain, or to the—the kiss? Oh, Archibald! why don't you say that you love me?"

Mr. Carlyle had been all his life upon intimate terms with the Hares. His father's first wife—for the late lawyer Carlyle had been twice married—had been a cousin of Justice Hare's, and this had caused the families to be much together. Archibald, the child of the second Mrs. Carlyle, had alternately teased and petted Anne and Barbara Hare, boy fashion. Sometimes he quarrelled with the pretty little girls, sometimes he caressed them, as he would have done had they been his sisters; and he made no scruple of declaring publicly to the pair, that Anne was his favourite. A gentle, yielding girl was she, like her mother; whereas Barbara displayed her own will, and it sometimes clashed with young Carlyle's.

The clock struck ten. Mrs. Hare took her customary dose of brandy-and-water, a small tumbler three parts full. Without it, she believed she could never sleep; it deadened unhappy thought, she said. Barbara, after making it, had turned again to the window, but did not resume her seat. She stood in front of it, her forehead bent forward against the middle pane. The lamp, casting a bright light, was behind her, so that her figure might be distinctly observed from the lawn, had any one been there to look upon it.

She stood in the midst of dreamland, giving way to all its enchanting and most delusive fascinations. She saw herself, in anticipation, the wife of Mr. Carlyle, the envied, thrice envied of all West Lynne; for, even as he was the dearest on earth to her heart, so was he the greatest match in the neighbourhood around. Not a mother but coveted him for her child; not a daughter but would have said "Yes, and thank you," to an offer from the attractive Archibald Carlyle. "I never was sure, quite sure, of it till to-night," murmured Barbara, caressing the locket, and holding it to her cheek: "I always thought he might mean something, or he might mean nothing; but to give me this—to kiss me—oh, Archibald!"

A pause. Barbara's eyes were fixed upon the moonlight.

"If he would only say he loved me! if he would only ease my aching heart! But it must come; I know it will; and if that cantankerous old Corny——"

Barbara Hare stopped. What was that, at the far end of the lawn, just in advance of the shade of the dense trees? Their leaves were not causing the movement, for it was a still night. It had been there some minutes and was evidently a human form. What *was* it? Surely it was making signs to her!

Or else it looked as though it were. That was certainly its arm moving, and now it advanced a pace nearer, and raised something which it wore on its head—a battered hat with a broad brim, a "wide-awake," encircled with a wisp of straw.

Barbara Hare's heart leaped, as the saying runs, into her mouth, and her face became deadly white in the moonlight. Her first thought was to alarm the servants; her second, to be still; for she remembered the fear and mystery that attached to the house. She went into the hall, shutting her mother into the parlour, and stood in the shade of the portico, gazing still. But the figure evidently followed her movements, and the hat was again taken off, and waved violently.

Barbara Hare turned sick with utter terror; *she* must fathom it; she must see who and what it was; for the servants she dared not call, and those movements were imperative, and might not be disregarded; but she possessed more innate courage than falls to the lot of many young ladies.

"Mamma," she said, returning to the parlour and catching up her shawl, while striving to speak without emotion, "I shall just walk down the path, and see if papa is coming."

Mrs. Hare did not reply. She was musing upon other things, in that quiescent, happy mood which a small portion of spirits will impart to one weak in body; and Barbara softly closed the door and stole out again to the portico. She stood a moment to rally her courage, and again the hat was waved impatiently.

Barbara Hare commenced her walk towards it; an undefined sense of evil filling her sinking heart. Mingling with it came, with a rush of terror, a fear of that other undefined evil—the evil Mrs. Hare had declared was foreshadowed in her dream.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOONLIGHT INTERVIEW.

COLD and still looked the old house in the moonbeams. Never was the moon brighter: it lighted the far-stretching garden, illumined even the weathercock, shone upon the portico, and upon Barbara as she had appeared in it. Stealing from the portico, walked Barbara, her eyes strained in dread affright on that grove of trees, at the foot of the garden. What was it that had stepped out of the trees, and mysteriously beckoned to her as she stood at the window, turning her heart to sickness as she gazed? Was it a human being, one to bring more evil on the house, where so much evil had already fallen; was it a supernatural visitant; or was it but a delusion of her own eyesight? Not the latter, certainly, for the figure was now emerging again, motioning to her as before; and, with a white face and shaking limbs, Barbara clutched her shawl round her and went down the path in the moonlight. The beckoning form retreated within the dark trees as she neared it, and Barbara halted.

"Who and what are you?" she asked under her breath. "What do you want?"

"Barbara," was the whispered, eager answer, "don't you recognize me?"

Too surely she did; the voice at any rate; and a cry escaped her, telling more of terror than of joy, though betraying both. She penetrated the trees, and burst into tears as one in the dress of a farm labourer caught her in his arms. In spite of his smock-frock, his straw-wisped hat and his false whiskers, black as Erebus, she knew him for her brother.

"Oh, Richard! where have you come from? What brings you here?"

"Did you know me, Barbara?" was his rejoinder.

"How was it likely—in this disguise? A thought crossed my mind that it might be some one from you, and even that turned me sick with terror. How could you be so hazardous as to come here?" she added, wringing her hands. "If you are discovered, it is certain death; death —upon—you know!"

"Upon the gallows," returned Richard Hare. "I do know it, Barbara."

"Then why risk it? Should mamma see you, it will kill her outright."

"I can't live on as I am living now," he answered, gloomily. "I have been working in London ever since——"

"In London!" interrupted Barbara.

"In London; and have never stirred out of it. But it is hard work for me, and now I have an opportunity of doing better, if I can obtain a little money. Perhaps my mother can let me have it. It is this that I have come to ask for."

"How are you working? What at?"

"In a stable-yard."

"A stable-yard!" she uttered, in a deeply-shocked tone. "Richard!"

"Did you expect it would be as a merchant; or a banker; or perhaps as secretary to one of her Majesty's ministers—or that I was a gentleman at large, living on my fortune?" retorted Richard Hare, in a tone of chafed anguish, painful to hear. "I earn twelve shillings a week, Barbara, and that has to find me in everything."

"Poor Richard! poor Richard!" she wailed, caressing his hand, and weeping over it. "Oh, what a miserable night's work that was! Our only comfort is, Richard, that you must have committed the deed in madness."

"I did not commit it at all," he replied.

"What?" she exclaimed.

"Barbara, I swear that I am innocent; I swear I was not present when the man was murdered; I swear that, from my own positive knowledge, my eyesight, I know no more who did it than you know. To guess at it is enough for me; and my guess is as sure and true a one as that that moon is in the heavens above us."

Barbara shivered as she drew closer to him. It was a shivering subject. "You surely do not mean to throw the guilt on Bethel?"

"Bethel?" slightly returned Richard Hare. "He had nothing to do with it. He was after his gins and his snares that night, though, poacher that he is!"

"Bethel is no poacher, Richard."

"Is he not?" rejoined Richard Hare, significantly. "The truth, as to what he is, may come out some time. Not that I wish it to come out; the man has done no harm to me, and he may go on poaching with impunity till doomsday, for all I care. He and Locksley——"

"Richard," interrupted his sister, in a hushed voice, "mamma entertains one fixed idea, which she cannot put from her. She says she is certain Bethel had something to do with the murder."

"Then she is wrong. Why should she think so?"

"How the conviction at first arose, I cannot tell you; I do not think she knows herself. But you remember how weak and fanciful she is, and since that dreadful night she is always having what she calls 'dreams,' meaning that she dreams of the murder. In all these dreams Bethel is a prominent object; and she says she feels an absolute certainty that he was, in some way, mixed up in it."

"Barbara, he was no more mixed up in it than you were."

"And—you say that you were not?"

"I was not even at the cottage at the time; I swear it to you. The man who did the deed was Thorn."

"Thorn!" echoed Barbara, lifting her head. "Who is Thorn?"

"I don't know. I wish I did · I wish I could unearth him. He was a friend of Afy's."

Barbara threw back her neck with a haughty gesture. "Richard!"

"What?"

"You forget yourself, when you mention that name to me."

"Well," returned Richard, "it was not to discuss these things that I have put myself in jeopardy And to assert my innocence can do no good: it cannot set aside the coroner's verdict of 'Wilful Murder against Richard Hare, the younger.' Is my father as bitter against me as ever?"

"Quite. He never mentions your name, or suffers it to be mentioned. He gave his orders to the servants that it never was to be spoken in the house again. Eliza could not, or would not, remember, and she persisted in still calling your room 'Mr. Richard's.' I think the woman did it heedlessly; not mischievously, to provoke papa: she was a good servant, and had been with us three years, you know. The first time she transgressed, papa warned her; the second, he thundered at her, as I believe no one else in the world can thunder; and the third time he turned her then and there from the doors. One of the other servants carried her bonnet and shawl out to the gate, and her boxes were sent away the same day. Papa took an oath that——Did you hear of it?"

"What oath? He takes many."

"This was a solemn one, Richard. After the delivery of the verdict, he took an oath in the justice-room, in the presence of his brother magistrates, that if he could find you he would deliver you up to justice, and that he *would* do so, though you might not turn up for ten years to come. You know his disposition, Richard, and therefore may be sure that he will keep it. Indeed, it is most dangerous for you to be here."

"I know that he never treated me as he ought," cried Richard, bitterly. "If my health was delicate, causing my poor mother to indulge me, ought that to have been a reason for his ridiculing me on every possible occasion, public and private? Had my home been made happier, I should not have sought the society I did elsewhere. Barbara, I must be allowed an interview with my mother."

Barbara Hare reflected before she spoke. "I do not see how it could be managed."

"Why can't she come out to me, as you have done? Is she up or in bed?"

"It is impossible to think of it to-night," returned Barbara, in an alarmed tone. "Papa may be in at any moment; he is spending the evening at Beauchamp's."

"It is hard to have been separated from her for eighteen months, and to go back without seeing her," returned Richard. "And about the money? It is a hundred pounds that I want."

"You must be here again to-morrow night, Richard. The money, no doubt, can be yours, but I am not so sure about your seeing mamma. I am terrified for your safety. But if it is as you say, that you are innocent," she added, after a pause, "could it not be proved?"

"Who is to prove it? The evidence is strong against me; and Thorn, did I mention him, would be as a myth to other people: no one knew anything of him."

"Is he a myth?" asked Barbara, in a low tone.

"Are you and I myths?" retorted Richard. "So! even *you* doubt me."

"Richard," she suddenly exclaimed, "why not tell the whole circumstances to Archibald Carlyle? If any one can help you, or take means to establish your innocence, he can. And you know that he is true as steel."

"There's no other man living should be trusted with the secret that I am here, except Carlyle. Where am I supposed to be, Barbara?"

"Some think you are dead, some that you are in Australia: the very uncertainty has nearly killed mamma. A report arose that you had been seen at Liverpool, in an Australian-bound ship, but we could not trace it to any foundation."

"It had none. I dodged my way to London, and there I have been ever since."

"Working in a stable-yard."

"I could not do better. I was not brought up to anything; and I did understand horses. Besides, a man that the police-runners were after could be safer in obscurity, considering he was a gentleman, than—"

Barbara turned suddenly and placed her hand upon her brother's mouth. "Be silent for your life," she whispered; "here's papa."

Voices were heard approaching the gate, that of Justice Hare and of Squire Pinner. The latter walked on, the former came in. The brother and sister cowered together, scarcely daring to breathe: you might have heard Barbara's heart beating. Mr. Hare closed the gate, and walked on up the path.

"I must go, Richard," she hastily said; "I dare not stay another minute. Be here again to-morrow night, and meanwhile I will see what can be done."

She was speeding away, but Richard held her back.

"You did not seem to believe my assertion of innocence. Barbara, we are here alone in the still night, with God above us: as truly as that you and I must some time meet Him face to face, I have told you truth. It was Thorn murdered Hallijohn, and I had nothing whatever to do with it."

Barbara came out of the trees and flew along, but Mr. Hare was already in, locking and barring the door. "Let me in, papa," she called out.

The justice opened the door again, and his flaxen wig, his aquiline nose, and his amazed eyes gazed at Barbara. "Halloa! what brings you out at this time of night, young lady?"

"I went down to the gate to look for you," she panted, "and had—had—strolled over to the side path. Did you not see me?"

Barbara was truthful by nature and habit; but, in such a cause, how could she avoid dissimulation? "Thank you, papa," she said, as she went in.

"You ought to have been in bed an hour ago," angrily responded Mr. Justice Hare.

CHAPTER V.

MR. CARLYLE'S OFFICE.

In the centre of West Lynne stood two houses adjoining each other, one large, the other much smaller. The large one was the Carlyle residence, and the small one was devoted to the Carlyle offices. The name of Carlyle bore a lofty standing in the county; Carlyle and Davidson were known as first-class practitioners; no pettifogging lawyers were they. It was Carlyle and Davidson in the days gone by; now it was Archibald Carlyle. The old firm were brothers-in-law, the first Mrs. Carlyle having been Mr. Davidson's sister. She had died and left one child, Cornelia, who was grown up when her father married again. The second Mrs. Carlyle died when her son, Archibald, was born, and his half-sister reared him, loved him, and ruled him. She bore for him all the authority of a mother; the boy had known no other, and when a little child, he had called her Mamma Corny. Mamma Corny had done her duty by him, that was not to be doubted; but Mamma Corny had never relaxed her rule; with an iron hand she liked to rule him now, in great things as in small, just as she had ruled in the days of his babyhood. And Archibald generally submitted, for the force of habit is strong. She was a woman of strong sense, but, in some things, of weak judgment: and the ruling passions of her life were love of Archibald, and love of saving money. Mr. Davidson had died earlier than Mr. Carlyle, and his fortune—he had never married—was left equally divided between Cornelia and Archibald. Archibald was not related to him, but he loved the open-hearted boy better than he did his niece Cornelia. Of Mr. Carlyle's property, a small portion only was bequeathed to his daughter, the rest to his son: and in this perhaps there was justice, since the £20,000 brought to Mr. Carlyle by his second wife had been chiefly instrumental in the accumulation of his large fortune.

Miss Carlyle, or, as she was called in the town, Miss Corny, had never married; it was pretty certain she never would; people thought that her intense love of her young brother kept her single, for it was not likely that the daughter of the rich Mr. Carlyle had wanted for offers. Other maidens confess to soft and tender impressions; to a hope of being, some time or other, solicited to abandon their father's name, and become somebody's better half. Not so Miss Carlyle: all who had approached her with the love-lorn tale, she sent quickly to the right-about. The last venture was from the new curate, and it occurred when she was in her fortieth year. He made his appearance at her house one morning betimes, in his white Sunday necktie, and a pair of new lavender gloves drawn on for the occasion. Miss Corny, who was an exceedingly active housekeeper in her own home, a great deal more so than her servants liked, had just been giving her orders for dinner. They comprised, amongst other things, a treacle-pudding for the kitchen, and she went herself to the store-closet with a basin to ladle out the necessary treacle. The closet opened from the dining-room, and it was while she was in it that the curate was ushered in. Miss Carlyle, who completely ignored ceremony, and had never stood upon it in her life, came out, basin of treacle in hand, which she deposited on the table while she disposed herself to listen to the reverend gentleman, who was twelve years her junior, and very diffident, so that he was some time getting his business out. Miss Corny wished him and his stammering somewhere, for she knew the pudding was waiting for the treacle, and helped him out as much as she could, putting in words when he seemed at fault for them. She supposed he wanted her name to some subscription, and she stood looking down at him with impatience, for he was at least a foot shorter than she. When the startling truth at length disclosed itself, that he had come begging for *her*, and not for money, Miss Carlyle for once lost her temper. She screamed out that he ought to be ashamed of himself for a raw boy as he was, and she flung the contents of the basin over his spotless shirt-front. How the crest-fallen divine escaped from the house and down West Lynne to his lodgings, he never cared to recall. The story got wind, and Miss Corny was not troubled with any more offers.

Mr. Carlyle was seated in his own private room in his office the morning after his return from town. His confidential clerk and manager stood near him, one who had far more to do with the management of affairs than Mr. Carlyle himself. It was Mr. Dill, a little, meek-looking man, with a bald head. He was on the rolls, had been admitted years and years ago, but had never set up for himself. Perhaps he thought the post of head manager in the office of Carlyle and Davidson, with its substantial salary, sufficient for his ambition; and manager he had been to them when the present Mr. Carlyle was in long clothes. He was a single man, and occupied handsome apartments near at hand. A shrewd surmise obtained weight in West Lynne that he was a devoted admirer of Miss Carlyle, humbly worshipping her at a distance. Whether this was so or not, certain it is that he was very fond of his present master, Mr. Archibald, as he generally styled him. He was now giving an account of what had transpired during the few days of absence.

"Jones and Rushworth have come to an outbreak at last," cried he, when he had pretty nearly arrived at the end of his catalogue, "and the upshot will be an action at the summer assizes. They were both here yesterday, one after the other, each wanting you to act for him, and will be here to-day for an answer."

"I will not act for either," said Mr. Carlyle; "I will have nothing to do with them. They are a bad lot, and it was an iniquitous piece of business their obtaining the money in the first instance. When rogues fall out, honest men get their own. I decline it altogether; let them carry themselves to some one else."

"Very good," replied Mr. Dill.

"Colonel Bethel's here, sir," said a clerk, opening the door, and addressing Mr. Carlyle. "Can you see him?"

Mr. Dill turned round to the clerk. "Ask the colonel to wait. I think that's about all," he added to his master, as the man withdrew.

"Very well. Dill, certain papers will be down in a few days, relating to mortgages and claims on the East Lynne estate; they are coming with the title deeds. I want them carefully looked over *by you*, and nothing said."

Mr. Dill gave a quiet nod.

"East Lynne is about to change hands. And, in purchasing property from an embarrassed man like Mount Severn, it is necessary to be keen and cautious," continued Mr. Carlyle.

"It is. Has he come to the end of his tether?"

"Not far short of it, I fancy; but East Lynne will be disposed of *sub rosa*. Not a syllable abroad, you understand."

"All right, Mr. Archibald. Who is the purchaser? It is a fine property."

Mr. Carlyle smiled. "You will know who, long before the world does. Examine the deeds with a Jew's eye. And now send in Bethel."

Between Mr. Carlyle's room and that of the clerks' was a small square space, or hall, having entrance also from the house passage; another room opened from it, a narrow one which was Mr. Dill's own peculiar sanctum; here he saw clients when Mr. Carlyle was out or engaged, and here he issued private orders. A little window, not larger than a pane of glass, looked out from it on to the clerks' office;

they called it Old Dill's peep-hole, and wished it anywhere else, for his spectacles might be discerned at it more often than was agreeable. The old gentleman had a desk also in their office, and there he frequently sat. He was sitting there in state, this same morning, keeping a sharp look out around him, when the door timidly opened, and the pretty face of Barbara Hare appeared, rosy with blushes.

"Can I see Mr. Carlyle?"

Mr. Dill rose from his seat and shook hands with her. She drew him into the passage, and he closed the door. Perhaps he felt surprised, for it was *not* the custom for ladies, young and single, to come there after Mr. Carlyle.

"Presently, Miss Barbara; he is engaged just now. The justices are with him."

"The justices!" uttered Barbara, in alarm, "and papa one of them? What shall I do? He must not see me; I would not have him see me here for the world."

An ominous sound of talking: the justices were evidently coming forth. Mr. Dill seized upon Barbara, drew her through the clerks' room, not daring to take her the other way lest he should encounter them, and shut her into his own. "What brought papa here at this moment?" thought Barbara, whose face was crimson.

A few minutes and Mr. Dill opened the door again. "They are gone now, and the coast's clear, Miss Barbara."

"I don't know what opinion you must form of me, Mr. Dill," she whispered, "but I will tell you in confidence that I am here on business for mamma, who was not well enough to come herself. It is a little private matter that she does not wish papa to know of."

"Child," answered the manager, "a lawyer receives visits from many people; and it is not the place of those about him to 'think.'"

He opened the door as he spoke, ushered her into the presence of Mr. Carlyle, and left her. The latter rose in astonishment.

"You must regard me as a client, and pardon the intrusion," said Barbara, with a forced laugh to hide her agitation. "I am here on the part of mamma: and I nearly met papa in your passage, which terrified me out of my senses. Mr. Dill shut me into his room."

Mr. Carlyle motioned to Barbara to seat herself, and then resumed his own seat, beside his table. Barbara could not avoid noticing how different his manners were in his office, from his evening manners when he was "off duty." Here he was the staid, calm man of business.

"I have a strange thing to tell you," she began, in a whisper, "but—is it possible that any one can hear us?" she broke off, with a look of dread. "It would be—it might be—death."

"It is quite impossible," calmly replied Mr. Carlyle. "The doors are double doors: did you not notice that they were so?"

Nevertheless, she left her chair, and stood close to Mr. Carlyle, resting her hand upon the table. He rose, of course.

"Richard is here."

"Richard!" repeated Mr. Carlyle. "At West Lynne!"

"He appeared at the house last night in disguise, and made signs to me from the grove of trees. You may imagine my alarm. He has been in London all this time, half starving, working—I feel ashamed to mention it to you—in a stable-yard! And oh, Archibald! he says he is innocent."

Mr. Carlyle made no reply to this: he probably put no faith in the assertion. "Sit down, Barbara," he said, drawing her chair closer.

Barbara sat down again, but her manner was hurried and nervous. "Is it quite sure that no stranger will come in? It would look so peculiar to see me here. But mamma was too unwell to come herself—or rather, she feared papa's questioning, if he found out that she came."

"Be at ease," replied Mr. Carlyle; "this room is sacred from the intrusion of strangers. What of Richard?"

"He says that he was not in the cottage at the time the murder was committed. That the person who really did it was a man of the name of Thorn."

"What Thorn?" asked Mr. Carlyle, suppressing all sign of incredulity.

"I don't know: a friend of Afy's, he said. Archibald, he swore to it in the most solemn manner: and I believe, as truly as that I am now repeating it to you, that he was speaking truth. I want you to see Richard, if possible: he is coming to the same place to-night. If he can tell his own tale to you, perhaps you might find out a way by which his innocence may be made manifest. You are so clever; you can do anything."

Mr. Carlyle smiled. "Not quite anything, Barbara. Was this the purport of Richard's visit—to say this?"

"Oh no: he thinks it is of no use to say it, for no one would believe him against the evidence. He came to ask for a hundred pounds; he says he has an opportunity of doing better if he can have that sum. Mamma has sent me to you: she has not the money by her, and she dare not ask papa for it, as it is for Richard. She bade me say that if you will kindly oblige her with the money to-day, she will arrange with you about its repayment."

"Do you want it now?" asked Mr. Carlyle. "If so I must send to the bank. Dill never keeps much money in the house when I am away."

"Not until evening. Can you manage to see Richard?"

"It is hazardous," mused Mr. Carlyle: "for him, I mean. Still, if he is to be in the grove to-night, I may as well be there also. What disguise is he in?"

"A farm labourer's—the best he could adopt about here—with large black whiskers. He is stopping about three miles off, he said, in some obscure hiding-place. And now," continued Barbara, "I want you to advise me: had I better inform mamma that Richard is here or not?"

Mr. Carlyle did not understand: and said so.

"I declare that I am bewildered," she exclaimed. "I should have premised that I have not yet told mamma it is Richard himself who is here: but that he had sent a messenger to beg for this money. Would it be advisable to acquaint her with the truth?"

"Why should you not? I think you ought to do so."

"Then I will. I feared the hazard, for she is sure to insist upon seeing him. Richard also wishes for an interview."

"It is only natural. Mrs. Hare must be thankful to hear, so far, that he is safe."

"I never saw anything like it," returned Barbara. "The change is akin to magic. She says it has put new life into her. And now for the last thing: how can we secure papa's absence from home to-night? It must be accomplished in some way. You know his temper: were I or mamma to suggest to him to go and see any friend, or to go to the club, he would immediately stop at home. Can you devise any plan? You see I appeal to you in all my troubles," she added, "as I and Anne used to do, when we were children."

It may be questioned if Mr. Carlyle heard the last remark. He drooped his eyelids in thought. "Have you told me all?" he asked presently, lifting them.

"I think so."

"Then I will think it over, and—"

"I shall not like to come here again," interrupted Barbara. "It—it—might excite suspicion; some one might see me, too, and mention it to papa. Neither ought you to send to our house."

"Well—contrive to be in the street at four this afternoon. Stay, that's your dinner-hour; be walking up the street at three; three precisely; I will meet you."

He rose, shook hands, and escorted Barbara through the small hall, along the passage to the house door: a courtesy probably not yet shown to any client by Mr. Carlyle. The door closed upon her, and Barbara had taken one step from it when something large loomed down upon her, like a ship in full sail.

She must have been the tallest lady in the world—out of a caravan. A fine woman in her day, but angular and bony now. Still, in spite of the angles, there was majesty in the appearance of Miss Carlyle.

"Why—what on earth!" began she—"Have *you* been with Archibald?"

Barbara Hare stammered out the excuse she had given to Mr. Dill.

"Your mamma sent you on business! I never heard of such a thing. Twice have I been in to see Archibald, and twice did Dill answer that he was engaged and must not be interrupted. I shall make old Dill explain his meaning for observing a mystery to me."

"There is no mystery," answered Barbara, feeling quite sick lest Miss Carlyle should proclaim that there was, before the clerks, or to her father. "Mamma wanted Mr. Carlyle's opinion upon a little private business, and, not feeling well enough to come herself, she sent me."

Miss Carlyle did not believe a word of this. "What business?" asked she, unceremoniously.

"It is nothing that could interest you. A trifling matter, relating to a little money. It's nothing, indeed."

"Then, if it's nothing, why were you closeted so long with Archibald?"

"He was asking the particulars," replied Barbara, recovering her equanimity.

Miss Carlyle sniffed: as she invariably did when dissenting from a problem. She was sure there was some mystery astir. She turned, and walked down the street with Barbara, but she was none the more likely to get anything out of her.

Mr. Carlyle returned to his room, deliberated a few moments, and then rang his bell. A clerk answered it.

"Go to the Buck's Head. If Mr. Hare and the other magistrates are there, ask them to step over to me."

The young man did as he was bid, and came back with the noted justices at his heels. They obeyed the summons with alacrity: for they believed they had brought themselves into a judicial scrape, and that Mr. Carlyle alone could get them out of it.

"I will not request you to sit down," began Mr. Carlyle, "for it is barely a moment I shall detain you. The more I think about this man's having been put in prison, the less I like it; and I have been considering that you had better, all five, come and smoke your pipes at my house this evening, when we shall have time to discuss what must be done. Come at seven, not later; and you will find my father's old jar replenished with the best broadcut, and half a dozen churchwarden pipes. Shall it be so?"

The whole five accepted the invitation eagerly. And they were filing out, when Mr. Carlyle laid his finger on the arm of Justice Hare.

"*You* will be sure to come, Mr. Hare," he whispered. "We could not get on without you. All heads," with a slight inclination towards those going out, "are not gifted with the clear good sense of yours."

"Sure and certain," responded the gratified justice: "fire and water shouldn't keep me away."

Soon after Mr. Carlyle was left alone, another clerk entered. "Miss Carlyle is asking to see you, sir, and Colonel Bethel's come again."

"Send in Miss Carlyle first," was the answer. "What is it, Cornelia?"

"Ah! You may well ask me what! Saying this morning that you could not dine at six, as usual, and then marching off, and never fixing the hour. How can I give my orders?"

"I thought business would have called me out, but I am not going now. We will dine a little earlier, Cornelia: say a quarter before six. I have invit—"

"What's up, Archibald?" interrupted Miss Carlyle.

"Up! Nothing, that I know of. I am very busy, Cornelia, and Colonel Bethel is waiting; I will talk to you at dinner-time."

In reply to this plain hint, Miss Carlyle deliberately seated herself in the client's chair, and crossed her legs, her shoes and her white stockings in full view: for Miss Corny disdained long dresses as much as she disdained crinoline; or, as the inflated machines were then called, corded petticoats, for crinoline had not come in. "I mean, what's up at the Hares, that Barbara should come here and be closeted with you? Business for her mother, she said."

"Why, you know the mess that Hare and the other justices have got into; committing that poor fellow to prison, because he was seen to pull up a weed in his garden on a Sunday," returned Mr. Carlyle, after an almost imperceptible pause. "Mrs. Hare—"

"A set of bumber-headed old donkeys!" was the complimentary interruption of Miss Carlyle. "The whole bench have not an ounce of sense between them."

"Mrs. Hare is naturally anxious for my opinion, for there may be some trouble over it, the man having appealed to the Home Secretary. She was too ill, Barbara said, to come to me herself. Cornelia, I have invited a party for to-night."

"A party!" echoed Miss Carlyle.

"Four or five of the justices; they are coming in to smoke their pipes. You must put out my father's leaden tobacco box, and—"

"They shan't come," screamed Miss Carlyle. "Do you think I'll be poisoned with tobacco-smoke from a dozen pipes?"

"You need not sit in the room."

"Nor they either. Clean curtains are just put up throughout the house, and I'll have no horrid pipes to blacken them."

"Cornelia," returned Mr. Carlyle, in a grave, firm tone, which, opinionated as she was, never failed in its effect upon her, "my having them is a matter of business; of business, you understand; and come they must. If you object to their being in the sitting-rooms, they must be in my bedroom."

The word "business" always bore for Miss Carlyle one meaning, that of money-making. Mr. Carlyle knew her weak point, and sometimes played upon it, when he could gain his end by no other means. Her love for money amounted almost to a passion; to acquire it, or to hear that he was acquiring it, was very dear to her. The same could not be said of him; many and many a dispute, that would have brought him in large sums, had it gone on to an action, did he labour to soothe down; and had reconciled his litigants by his plain sincere advice.

"I'll buy you some new curtains, Cornelia, if their pipes spoil these," he quietly resumed. "And I really must beg you to leave me."

"When I have come to the bottom of this affair with Barbara Hare," resolutely returned Miss Corny, dropping the point of contest as to the pipes. "You are very clever, Archie, but you can't deceive me. I asked Barbara what she came here for: business for her mamma, touching money matters, was her reply. I ask you: to hear your opinion about the scrape the bench have got into, is yours. Now, it's neither one nor the other, and I tell you, Archibald, I'll hear what it is. I should like to know what you and Barbara do with a secret between you."

She sat bold upright in her chair and stared at him, her lofty figure drawn to its full height. Not in features were they alike; some resemblance, perhaps, there might be in the expanse of the forehead and the way in which the hair grew, arched from the temples: Miss Carlyle's hair was going grey now, and she wore it in curls which were rarely smooth, fastened back by combs which were as rarely in their places. Her face was pale, well-shaped, and remarkable for nothing but a hard, decisive expression; her eyes, wide open and penetrating, were of a shade called "green." But though she could not boast her brother's good looks, there were many plainer women in West Lynne than Cornelia Carlyle.

Mr. Carlyle knew her and her resolute expression well, and he decided to tell her the truth. She was, to borrow the words Barbara had used to her brother with regard to him, true as steel. Confide to Miss Carlyle a secret, and she was trustworthy and impervious as he could be: but, let her once suspect that there was a secret which was being kept from her, and she would set to work like a ferret, and never stop until it was unearthed.

Mr. Carlyle bent forward and spoke in a whisper. "I will tell you if you wish, Cornelia, but it is not a pleasant thing to hear. Richard Hare has returned."

Miss Carlyle looked perfectly aghast. "Richard Hare! Is he mad?"

"It is not a very sane proceeding. He wants money from his mother, and Mrs. Hare sent Barbara to ask me to manage it for her. No wonder poor Barbara was flurried and nervous, for there's danger on all sides."

"Is he at their house?"

"How could he be there, and his father within it? He is in hiding two or three miles off, disguised as a labourer, and will be at the Grove to-night to receive this money. I have invited the justices here, to get Mr. Hare safe away from his own house. If he saw Richard, he would undoubtedly give him up to justice, and—putting graver considerations aside—that would be pleasant neither for you nor for me. To have a connection hanged for wilful murder would be an ugly blot on the Carlyle escutcheon, Cornelia."

Miss Carlyle sat in silence, revolving the news, a contraction on her ample brow.

"And now you know all, Cornelia, and I do beg you to leave me, for I am overwhelmed with work to-day."

She rose without a word, passed out, and left her brother in peace. He snatched up a note, the first apparently that lay to hand, put it in an envelope, sealed and addressed it to himself. Then he called in Mr. Dill, and gave it to him. The latter looked in surprise at the superscription.

"At eight o'clock to-night, Dill, bring this to my house. Don't send it in; ask for me. You understand."

The old gentleman replied by a nod, and put the note in his pocket.

Mr. Carlyle was walking down the street at three o'clock that afternoon, when he met Barbara Hare. "It is all arranged," he said to her in passing. "I entertain the bench of justices to-night, Barbara, to pipes and ale. Mr. Hare will make one of them."

She looked up in doubt. "Then—if you entertain them, you will not be able to come and meet Richard?"

"Trust to me," was all his answer, as he hurried on.

CHAPTER VI.

RICHARD HARE, THE YOUNGER.

THE bench of justices did not fail to keep their appointment: at seven o'clock they arrived at Miss Carlyle's, one following closely upon the heels of another. The reader may dissent from the expression "Miss Carlyle's," but it is the correct one, for the house was hers, not her brother's. Though it remained his home, as it had been in his father's time, the house was amongst the property bequeathed to Miss Carlyle.

Miss Carlyle chose to be present, in spite of the pipes and the smoke, and she was soon as deep in the discussion as the justices were. It was said in the town that she was as good a lawyer as her father had been: she undoubtedly possessed sound judgment in legal matters, and quick penetration. At eight o'clock a servant entered the room and addressed his master.

"Mr. Dill is asking to see you, sir."

Mr. Carlyle rose, and came back with an open note in his hand.

"I am sorry to find that I must leave you for half an hour. Some important business has arisen, but I will be back as soon as possible."

"Who has sent for you?" immediately demanded Miss Corny.

He gave her a quiet look, which she interpreted into a warning not to question. "Mr. Dill is here, and will join you to talk the affair over," he said to his guests. "He knows the law better than I do: but I shall not be long absent."

He quitted his house, and walked with a rapid step towards the Grove. The moon was bright, as on the previous evening. After he had left the town behind him, and was passing the scattered villas already mentioned, he cast an involuntary glance at the Wood, which rose behind them on his left hand. It was called Abbey Wood, from the circumstance that in old days an abbey had stood in its vicinity, all trace of which, save in tradition, had long passed away. There was one small house, or cottage, just within the wood, and in that cottage had occurred the murder for which Richard Hare's life was in jeopardy. It was no longer occupied, for no one would rent it or live in it.

Mr. Carlyle opened the gate of the Grove, and glanced at the trees on either side, but he neither saw nor heard any sign of Richard's being concealed there. Barbara was at the window, looking out, and she came herself and opened the door to Mr. Carlyle.

"Mamma is in a most excited state," she whispered to him as he entered. "I knew how it would be."

"Has he come yet?"

"I have no doubt of it, but he has made no signal."

Mrs. Hare, feverish and agitated, with a burning spot on her delicate cheeks, stood by her chair, not occupying it. Mr. Carlyle placed a pocket-book in her hands. "I have brought it chiefly in notes," he said: "they will be easier for him to carry than gold."

Mrs. Hare answered only by a look of gratitude, and clasped Mr. Carlyle's hand in both hers. "Archibald, I *must* see my boy; how can it be managed? Must I go into the garden to him, or may he come in here?"

"I think he might come in; you know how very bad the night air is for you. Are the servants astir much this evening?"

"Things seem to have turned out luckily," said Barbara. "It happens to be Anne's birthday, so mamma sent me just now into the kitchen with a cake and a bottle of wine, desiring them to drink her health. I shut the door, and told them to make themselves comfortable; if we wanted anything, we would ring."

"Then they are safe," observed Mr. Carlyle, "and Richard may come in."

"I will ascertain whether he is there," said Barbara.

"Stay where you are, Barbara; I will go myself," interposed Mr. Carlyle. "Have the door open when you see us coming up the path."

Barbara gave a faint cry, and, trembling, clutched the arm of Mr. Carlyle. "There he is! See: standing out from the trees, just opposite this window."

Mr. Carlyle turned to Mrs. Hare. "I shall not bring him in immediately. For, if I am to have an interview with him, it must be got over first, that I may go back to the justices, and keep Mr. Hare all safe."

He proceeded on his way, gained the trees, and plunged into them. Leaning against one, stood Richard Hare. Apart from his disguise, and the false and fierce black whiskers, he was a blue-eyed, fair, pleasant-looking young man, slight, and of middle height, and quite as yielding and gentle as his mother. In her, this mildness of disposition was rather a graceful quality; in Richard it was regarded as a contemptible misfortune. In his boyhood he had been nicknamed Leafy Dick, and when a stranger inquired wherefore, the answer was, that as a leaf is swayed by the wind, so he was swayed by every one about him, never possessing a will of his own. In short, Richard Hare, though of an amiable, loving nature, was not overburdened with what the world calls brains. Brains he certainly had, but they were not sharp ones.

"Is my mother coming out to me?" asked Richard, after a few interchanged sentences with Mr. Carlyle.

"No. You are to go indoors. Your father is away, and the servants are shut up in the kitchen and will not see you. Though if they did, they could never recognize you in that trim. A fine pair of whiskers, Richard."

"Let us go in, then. I am all in a twitter till I get away. Am I to have the money?"

"Yes, yes. But, Richard, your sister says you wish to disclose to me the true history of that lamentable night. You had better speak while we are here."

"It was Barbara who wanted you to hear it; I think it of little moment. If the whole place heard the truth from me, it would do no good, for I should obtain no belief: not even from you."

"Try me, Richard: in as few words as possible."

"Well—there was a row at home about my going so much to Hallijohn's. The governor and my mother thought I went after Afy; perhaps I did, perhaps I didn't. Hallijohn had asked me to lend him my gun, and that evening, when I went to see Af—when I went to see some one—never mind——"

"Richard," interrupted Mr. Carlyle, "there's an old saying, and it is sound advice: 'Tell the whole truth to your lawyer and your doctor.' If I am to judge whether anything can be attempted for you, you must tell it to me; otherwise I would rather hear nothing. It shall be sacred trust."

"Then, if I must, I must," returned the yielding Richard. "I did love the girl; I would have waited till I was my own master to make her my wife, though it had been for years and years. I could not do it, you know, in the face of my father's opposition."

"Your wife?" rejoined Mr. Carlyle, with some emphasis.

Richard looked surprised. "Why, you don't suppose I meant anything else! I wouldn't have been such a blackguard."

"Well, go on, Richard. Did she return your love?"

"I can't be certain. Sometimes I thought she did, sometimes not; she used to play and shuffle, and she liked too much to be with—him. I thought her capricious—telling me I must not come this evening, and I must not come the other; but I found out they were the evenings she expected him. We were never there together."

"You forget that you have not indicated 'him' by any name, Richard. I am at fault."

Richard Hare bent forward till his black whiskers brushed Mr. Carlyle's shoulder. "It was that cursed Thorn."

Mr. Carlyle remembered the name Barbara had mentioned. "Who was Thorn? I never heard of him."

"Neither did any one else, I expect, in West Lynne. He took precious good care of that. He lived some miles away, and used to come over in secret."

"Courting Afy?"

"Yes, he did come courting her," returned Richard, in a savage tone. "Distance was no barrier to him. He would come galloping over at dusk, tie his horse to a tree in the wood, and pass an hour or two with Afy, in the house, when her father was not at home; roaming about the wood with her, when he was."

"Come to the point, Richard: to the evening."

"Hallijohn's gun was out of order, and he requested the loan of mine. I had made an appointment with Afy to be at her house that evening, and I went down after dinner, carrying the gun with me. My father called after me to know where I was going: I said, out with young Beauchamp, not caring to meet his opposition; and the lie told against me at the inquest. When I reached Hallijohn's: going the back way along the fields and through the wood path as I generally did go: Afy came out all reserve, as she could be at times, and said she was unable to receive me then, and I must go back home. We had a few words about it, and as we were speaking, Locksley passed, and saw me with the gun in my hand. I gave way to her; she could do just what she liked with me, for I loved the very ground she trod on. I gave her the gun, telling her it was loaded, and she took it in-doors, shutting me out. I did not go away; I had a suspicion that she had Thorn there, though she denied it to me; and I hid myself in some trees near the house. Again Locksley came into view, saw me there, and called out to know why I was hiding. I went farther off, and did not answer him—what were my private movements to him?—and that also told against me at the inquest. Not long afterwards, twenty minutes, perhaps, I heard a shot, which seemed to be in the direction of the cottage. 'Somebody having a late pop at the partridges,' thought I: for the sun was then setting, and at that moment I saw Bethel emerge from the trees and run in the direction of the cottage. That was the shot that killed Hallijohn."

There was a pause. Mr. Carlyle looked keenly at Richard Hare in the moonlight.

"Very soon, almost in the same minute, as it seemed, one came panting and tearing along the path leading from the cottage. It was Thorn. His appearance startled me: I had never seen a man show more utter terror. His face was livid, his eyes seemed starting, and his lips were drawn back from his teeth. Had I been a strong man, I should surely have attacked him; I was mad with jealousy; for I then saw that Afy had sent me away that she might entertain him."

"I thought you said this Thorn never came except at dusk?" observed Mr. Carlyle.

"I never knew him to do so until that evening. All I can say is, he was there then. He flew along swiftly, and I afterwards heard the sound of his horse's hoofs, galloping away. I wondered what was up, that he should look so scared; I wondered whether he had quarrelled with Afy. I ran to the house, leaped up the two steps, and—Carlyle—I fell over the prostrate body of Hallijohn! He was lying just within, on the kitchen floor, dead. Blood was round about him, and my gun, just discharged, was thrown near him: he had been shot in the side."

Richard stopped for breath. Mr. Carlyle did not speak.

"I called to Afy. No one answered. No one was in the lower rooms; and it seemed that no one was in the upper. A sort of panic came over me; a fear: you know they always said at home I was a coward: I could not have remained another minute with that dead man, had it been to save my own life. I caught up the gun, and was making off, when——"

"Why did you catch up the gun?" interrupted Mr. Carlyle.

"Ideas pass through our minds more quickly than we can speak them, especially in these sort of moments," was the reply of Richard Hare. "Some vague notion flashed on my brain that *my gun* ought not to be found near the murdered body of Hallijohn. I was flying from the door, I say, when Locksley emerged from the wood, in full view, and what possessed me I can't tell, but I did the worst thing I could do—flung the gun indoors again, and got away, although Locksley called after me to stop."

"Nothing told so much against you as that," observed Mr. Carlyle. "Locksley deposed that he had seen you leave the cottage, gun in hand, apparently in great commotion; that the moment you saw him, you hesitated, as from fear, flung back the gun, and escaped."

Richard stamped his foot. "Ay; and all owing to my cursed cowardice. They had better have made a woman of me, and brought me up in petticoats. But let me go on. I came upon Bethel: he was standing in that half-circle where the trees have been cut down. Now I knew that Bethel, if he had gone straight in the direction of the cottage, must have met Thorn quitting it. 'Did you encounter that hound?' I asked him. 'What hound?' returned Bethel. 'That fine fellow, that Thorn, who comes after Afy,' I answered, for I did not mind mentioning her name in my passion. 'I don't know any Thorn,' returned Bethel, 'and I did not know any one was after Afy, but yourself.' 'Did you hear a shot?' I went on. 'Yes,' he replied;

'I suppose it was Locksley, for he's about this evening.' 'And I saw you,' I continued, 'just in the moment the shot was fired, turn round the corner in the direction of Hallijohn's.' 'So I did,' he said, 'but only to strike into the wood, a few paces up. What's your drift?' 'Did you not encounter Thorn, running from the cottage?' I persisted. 'I have encountered no one,' he said, 'and I don't believe any one is about but ourselves and Locksley.' I quitted him and came off," concluded Richard Hare; "he evidently had not seen Thorn, and knew nothing."

"And you decamped the same night, Richard? It was a fatal step."

"Yes, I was a fool. I thought I'd wait quietly, and see how things turned out; but you don't know all. Three or four hours later, I went to the cottage again, and managed to get a minute's speech with Afy. I never shall forget it. Before I could say a syllable she flew out at me, accusing me of being the murderer of her father, and fell into hysterics out there on the grass. The noise brought people from the house—plenty were in it then—and I retreated. 'If *she* can think me guilty, the world will think me guilty,' was my argument, and that night I went right off, to remain in hiding for a day or two, until I saw my way clear. It never came clear: the coroner's inquest sat, and the verdict floored me for ever. And Afy—but I won't curse her—fanned the flame against me, by denying that any one had been there that night. She had been at home alone, she said, and had strolled out at the back door, to the path that leads from West Lynne, and was lingering there when she heard a shot. Five minutes afterwards she returned to the house, and found Locksley standing over her dead father."

Mr. Carlyle remained silent, rapidly running over in his mind the chief points of Richard Hare's communication. "Four of you, as I understand it, were in the neighbourhood of the cottage that night, and from one or other the shot no doubt proceeded. You were at a distance, you say, Richard; Bethel also could not have been—"

"It was not Bethel who did it," interrupted Richard; "it is an impossibility. I saw him, as I tell you, in the same moment that the gun was fired."

"But now, where was Locksley?"

"It is equally impossible that it could have been Locksley. He was within my view at the time, at right angles from me, deep in the wood, away from the paths altogether. It was Thorn did the deed, beyond all doubt, and the verdict ought to have been wilful murder against him. Carlyle, I see you don't believe my story."

"What you say has startled me, and I must take time to consider whether I believe it or not," replied Mr. Carlyle, in his straightforward manner. "The most singular thing, if you witnessed Thorn's running away from the cottage in the manner you describe, is, that you did not come forward, and denounce him."

"I didn't do it because I was a fool, a coward, as I have been all my life," rejoined Richard. "I can't help it: it was born with me, and will go with me to my grave. What would have been my word, that it was Thorn, when there was no one to corroborate it? And the discharged gun, mine, was a damnatory proof against me."

"Another thing strikes me as curious," cried Mr. Carlyle. "If this man, Thorn, was in the habit of coming to West Lynne, evening after evening, how was it that he was never observed? This is the first time I have heard any stranger's name mentioned in connection with the affair, or with Afy."

"Thorn chose by-roads, and he never came, except that once, but at dusk or dark. It was evident to me at the time that he was courting her in secret. I told Afy so; and that it argued no good for her. You are not attaching credit to what I say, and it is only what I expected; nevertheless, I swear that I have related facts to you. As surely as that we—I, Thorn, Afy, and Hallijohn—must one day meet together before our Maker, I have told you the truth."

The words were solemn, their tone earnest, and Mr. Carlyle remained silent, his thoughts full.

"To what other end should I say this?" went on Richard. "It can do me no service: all the assertions I could put forth would not go a jot towards clearing me."

"No, it would not," assented Mr. Carlyle. "If ever you are cleared, it must be by proofs. But—I will keep my thoughts on the matter, and should anything arise—— What sort of a man was this Thorn?"

"In age he might have been three or four and twenty, tall and slender; an out-and-out aristocrat."

"And his connections? Where did he live?"

"I never knew. Afy, in her boasting way, would say he had to come from Swainson—a ten-mile ride!"

"From Swainson!" quickly interrupted Mr. Carlyle. "Could it be one of the Thorns of Swainson?"

"None of the Thorns there that I know. He was a totally different man, with his perfumed hands, and his rings, and his dainty gloves. That he was an aristocrat I believe, but of bad taste and style, displaying a profusion of jewellery."

A half smile flitted over Mr. Carlyle's face. "Was it real, Richard?"

"It was. He would wear diamond shirt-studs, diamond rings, diamond pins; brilliants, all of the first water. My impression was, that he put them on to dazzle Afy. She told me once that she could be a grander lady, if she chose, than I could ever make her. A lady on the cross, I answered her, but never on the square. Thorn was not a man to entertain honest intentions towards one in the station of Afy Hallijohn; but girls are as simple as geese."

"By your description it could not have been one of the Thorns of Swainson. Wealthy tradesmen, fathers of young families, short, stout, and heavy as Dutchmen, staid and respectable. Very unlikely men, they, to run into an expedition of the sort."

"What expedition?" questioned Richard. "The murder?"

"The riding after Afy. Richard, where is Afy?"

Richard Hare lifted his face in surprise. "How should I know? I was just going to ask you."

Mr. Carlyle paused. He thought Richard's answer an evasive one. "She disappeared immediately after the funeral; and it was thought—in short, Richard, the neighbourhood gave her credit for having gone after and joined you."

"No! did they? what a pack of idiots! I have never seen or heard of her, Carlyle, since that unfortunate night. If she went after any one, it was after Thorn."

"Was the man good-looking?"

"I suppose the world would call him so. Afy thought such an Adonis had never been coined, out of fable. He had shining black hair and whiskers, dark eyes and handsome features. But his vain dandyism spoilt him."

Mr. Carlyle could ascertain no more particulars, and it was time Richard went in. They proceeded up the path. "What a blessing it is the servants' windows don't look this way," shivered Richard, treading on Mr. Carlyle's heels. "If they should be looking out upstairs!"

His apprehensions were groundless, and he entered unseen. Mr. Carlyle's part was over. He left the poor banned exile to his short interview with his hysterical and tearful mother, Richard nearly as hysterical as she, and made the best of his way home again, pondering over what he had heard.

Not a shadow of doubt had hitherto existed in his mind that George Hallijohn had met his death at the hands of Richard Hare. But, in defiance of the coroner's jury, and the universal opinion, he had never believed it to be *wilful* murder. Richard was mild, kind, inoffensive, the last man to be guilty of cruelty, or to commit a deliberate crime; and Mr. Carlyle had always thought that, could the truth be brought to light, the fatal shot would be found to have been the result of an accident, or, at worst, a scuffle, in which the gun might have gone off. It was rumoured that Hallijohn had objected to Richard's visits to his daughter, and it might have come, that night, to an outbreak.

Who was this Thorn? He certainly could not be a creation of Richard's inventive faculties. Still, it was strange that his name had never been mentioned; that he and his visits were unknown to the neighbourhood. Was the fellow an aristocrat, as Richard had called him, shallow-pated and contemptible, with his shining hair and his bejewelled fingers, or was he a member of the swell mob? And was he in truth the real author of the murder? Be it as it would, sufficient food had been supplied to call forth all Mr. Carlyle's acumen—and he possessed no slight share of it.

The magistrates made a good evening of it, Mr. Carlyle entertaining them to supper. They took up their pipes for another whiff when the meal was over, but Miss Carlyle retired to bed: the smoke, to which she had not been accustomed since her father's death, had made her head ache and her eyes smart. About eleven they wished Mr. Carlyle good night, and departed, but Mr. Dill, in obedience to a nod from his superior, remained.

"Sit down again a moment, Dill; I want to ask you a question. You are intimate with the Thorns of Swainson: do they happen to have any relative, a nephew, or cousin perhaps, a dandy young fellow?"

"I went over last Sunday fortnight to spend the day with young Jacob," was the answer of Mr. Dill, one wider from the point than he generally gave. Mr. Carlyle smiled.

"*Young* Jacob! He must be forty, I suppose."

"About that. But you and I estimate age differently, Mr. Archibald. They have no nephew: the old man never had but those two children, Jacob and Edward. Neither have they any cousin. Rich men they are growing now: Jacob has set up his carriage."

Mr. Carlyle mused, but he expected the answer, for neither had he heard of the brothers Thorn, tanners, curriers, and leather-dressers, possessing a relative of the name. "Dill," said he, "something has arisen which, in my mind, casts a doubt upon Richard Hare's guilt. I question whether he had anything to do with the murder."

Mr. Dill opened his eyes. "But his flight, Mr. Archibald? And his remaining away?"

"Suspicious circumstances, I grant: still, I have good cause to doubt. At the time it happened, some dandy fellow used to come courting Afy Hallijohn in secret: a tall, slender man, as he is described to me, bearing the name of Thorn, and living at Swainson. Could it have been one of the Thorn family?"

"Mr. Archibald!" remonstrated the old clerk: "as if those two respectable gentlemen, with wives and babies, would come sneaking after that fly-away Afy?"

"No reflection on them," returned Mr. Carlyle. "This was a young man, three or four and twenty, a head taller than either. I thought it might be a relative."

"I have repeatedly heard them say that they are alone in the world; the two last of the name. Depend upon it, it was no one connected with them. Who says any one came over after Afy, Mr. Archibald? I never knew but of one doing so, and that was Richard Hare."

Mr. Carlyle could not say, "Richard himself told me," so he left the question unanswered. "Sufficient grounds have been furnished me to cast a doubt upon Richard Hare's guilt, and to lay it upon this Thorn," he observed. "And I intend to institute a little private investigation, under the rose, and see if any fact can be brought to light. You must help me."

"With all my heart," responded Mr. Dill. "Not that I believe it could have been any one but Richard."

"The next time you go to Swainson, try and discover whether a young fellow named Thorn (whether connected with the Thorns or not) was living there at the time. Good-looking, black hair, whiskers, and eyes, and given to deck himself out in diamond pins, studs, and rings. He has been called an aristocrat to me, but I think it equally likely that he was a member of the swell mob, doing the fine gentleman—which they always overdo. See if you can ferret out anything."

"I will," said Mr. Dill. And he wished Mr. Carlyle good night.

The servant came in to remove the glasses and the obnoxious pipes, which latter Miss Carlyle had ordered to be consigned to the open air the instant they were done with. Mr. Carlyle sat in a brown study: presently he looked round at the man.

"Is Joyce gone to bed?"

"No, sir. She's just going."

"Send her here when you have taken away those things."

Joyce came in, the upper servant at Miss Carlyle's. She was of middle height, and would never see five and thirty again; her forehead was broad, her grey eyes were deeply set, and her face was pale.

Altogether she was plain, but sensible-looking. She was the half-sister to Afy Hallijohn.

"Shut the door, Joyce."

Joyce did as she was bid, came forward and stood by the table.

"Have you ever heard from your sister, Joyce?" began Mr. Carlyle, somewhat abruptly.

"No, sir," was the reply. "I think it would be a wonder if I did hear."

"Why so?"

"If she could go off after Richard Hare, who had sent her father into his grave, she would be more likely to hide herself and her doings, than to proclaim them to me, sir."

"Who was that other, that fine gentleman, who came after her?"

The colour mantled in Joyce's cheeks, and she dropped her voice. "Sir! did you hear of him?"

"Not at the time. Since. He came from Swainson, did he not?"

"I believe so, sir. Afy never would say much about him. We did not agree upon the point; I said a person of his rank would do her no good; and Afy flew out when I spoke against him."

Mr. Carlyle caught her up. "His rank! what was his rank?"

"Afy bragged of his being next door to a lord; and he looked like it. I only saw him once; I had gone home early, and there he sat with Afy. His white hands were glittering with rings, and his shirt was finished off with shining stones, where the buttons ought to be."

"Have you seen him since?"

"Never since, never but that once, and I don't think I should know him if I did see him. He got up, sir, as soon as I went into the parlour, shook hands with Afy, and left. A fine upright man he was, nearly as tall as you, sir, but very thin; those soldiers always do carry themselves well."

"How do you know he was a soldier?" quickly rejoined Mr. Carlyle.

"Afy told me so. 'The captain,' she had used to call him; but she said he was not a captain yet awhile—the next grade below it. A—a——"

"Lieutenant?" suggested Mr. Carlyle.

"Yes, sir, that was it; Lieutenant Thorn. As he was going through the kitchen that evening he dropped his handkerchief, such a beauty, it was. I picked it up, but Afy snatched it from me, and running to the door, called after him, 'Captain Thorn, you have dropped your handkerchief,' and he turned, and took it from her. And when he was fairly off she began upon me for coming home and spoiling sport, and we had a quarrel. I had seen young Hare also the same evening in the wood, dodging about as if waiting for the other to go. 'She'll come to no good between the two,' was my thought, and I said it to her, and a fine passion it put her into. It was but a week afterwards that—the evil happened to poor father."

"Joyce," said Mr. Carlyle, "has it never struck you that Afy is more likely to have followed this Lieutenant Thorn than Richard Hare?"

"No, sir," answered Joyce. "I have felt certain always that she is with Richard Hare, and nothing can turn me from the belief. All West Lynne is convinced of it."

Mr. Carlyle did not attempt to "turn her from the belief." He dismissed her, and sat on still revolving the case in all its bearings.

Richard Hare's short interview with his mother had soon terminated. It lasted only a quarter of an hour, both dreading interruption from the servants. And, with the hundred pounds in his pocket and desolation at his heart, the ill-fated young man once more quitted his childhood's home. Mrs. Hare and Barbara watched him steal down the path in the tell-tale moonlight, and gain the road, both feeling that those farewell kisses they had pressed upon his lips would not be renewed for years, and might be never.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS CARLYLE AT HOME.

THE church clocks of West Lynne struck eight one lovely morning in July, and then the bells chimed out, in token that it was Sunday. Simultaneously with the bells, Miss Carlyle burst out of her bedroom in one of her ordinary morning costumes, but not the one in which she was wont to be seen on a Sunday. She wore a buff gingham gown, reaching nearly to her ankles, and a lavender print "bedgown," which was tied round the waist with a cord and tassels, and ornamented below with a frill. It had been the morning costume of her mother in the old-fashioned days, and Miss Carlyle despised new fashions too much to discard it. Modern ladies might cavil at the style, but they could not do so at the quality and freshness of the materials, for in that Miss Carlyle was scrupulously particular. On Sunday mornings it was her custom to appear attired for the day, and her not doing so now proved that she must have some domestic work in prospect. Her head-dress cannot be described; it was like nothing in the fashion-book or out of it: some might have called it a turban, some a night-cap, and some might have thought it was taken from a model of the dunce's cap and bells in the parish school; at any rate, it was something very high, and expansive, and white, and stern and imposing.

Miss Carlyle stepped across the corridor to a door opposite her own, and gave a thump at it, sufficiently loud to awaken the seven sleepers. "Get up, Archibald."

"Up!" cried a drowsy voice within. "What for? It's only eight o'clock."

"If it's only six, you must get up," repeated Miss Carlyle, in her authoritative manner. "The breakfast is waiting, and I must have it over, for we are all at sixes and sevens."

Miss Carlyle descended the stairs, and entered the breakfast-room, where all appeared in readiness for the meal. She had a sharp tongue on occasions, and a sharp eye always, which saw everything. The room looked on to the street, and the windows were up, their handsome white curtains, spotless as Miss Carlyle's head-dress, waving gently in the summer breeze. Miss Carlyle's eyes peered round the room, and caught sight of some dust. She strode into the kitchen to salute Joyce with the information. Joyce stood at the kitchen fire superintending the toasting of some bacon.

"How dare you be so negligent, Joyce? You have never dusted the breakfast-parlour."

"Never dusted it!" returned Joyce; "where could your eyes have been, ma'am, to see that?"

"On the dust," replied Miss Carlyle. "Go and put yours on it, and take the duster with you. I cannot sit down in an untidy room. Just because you have a little extra work to do this morning, you are turning lazy."

"No, ma'am," retorted Joyce with spirit, for she felt the charge was unfounded: "I have exerted myself to the utmost this morning. I was up at five o'clock to get the double work comfortably over, that you might have no occasion to find fault, and I was as particular over the breakfast-parlour as I always am. You insist upon having the windows thrown up, and of course the dust will fly in."

Joyce retreated with her duster just as a bell was heard to ring, and a respectable-looking serving-man, of middle height and portly form, entered the kitchen.

"Do you want anything, Peter?" inquired Miss Carlyle.

"Master's shaving water, ma'am. He has rung for it."

"Master can't have it, then," was the retort of Miss Carlyle. "Go and say so. Tell him that the breakfast is waiting, and he must shave afterwards."

Peter retired with the message, most probably softening it in the delivery, and Miss Carlyle presently returned to the breakfast-room and seated herself at the table to wait for her brother.

Miss Carlyle the previous evening had embroiled herself in a dispute with her cook. The latter, who was of a fiery temper, retorted insolently, and her mistress gave her warning, for insolence from a servant she never put up with, and rarely indeed was it offered her. The girl, in her passion, said she did not want to wait for warning, she'd go at once: and off she went. Miss Carlyle pronounced the house well rid of her. Miss Carlyle was rigid upon one point—that of having as little work done upon a Sunday as possible, and when the Sunday's dinner was of a nature that could be advanced on the Saturday, it had to be done: upon this rock had Miss Carlyle and the cook split. To add to the inconvenience, the housemaid was from home enjoying a holiday.

Mr. Carlyle came into the breakfast-room completely dressed: he had an invincible dislike to appear otherwise, and he had shaved in cold water. "Why are we breakfasting at eight this morning?" he inquired.

"Because I have so much to do. And if I cannot get breakfast over early I shall never finish in time for church," was the reply of Miss Carlyle. "The cook's gone."

"The cook gone!" repeated Mr. Carlyle.

"It all happened after you went out to spend the evening, and I did not sit up to tell you. We are to have ducks for dinner to-day, and she knew they had to be stuffed and prepared yesterday, the gravy made, and the giblet-pie made and baked: in short, everything done, except the absolute roasting. I asked her last night if it was done. 'Oh yes, it was all done,' she said; and I told her to bring me the giblet-pie to look at, knowing she has a knack of burning the crust of her pies. Well, she could not do so; she had told me a falsehood, Archibald, and had no pie to bring, for the ducks were just as they came into the house; she had idly put it all off until to-day, thinking I should never find her out; but my asking for the pie floored her. She was insolent, and what with that and the lie, I gave her warning, but she chose to leave last night. I have it all to do myself this morning."

"Can't Joyce do it?" returned Mr. Carlyle.

"Joyce! Much she knows about cooking; Joyce's cooking won't do for my table. Barbara Hare is going to spend the day here."

"Indeed."

"Barbara called last evening, full of trouble. She and the justice had been having a dispute, and she said she wished I would invite her for to-day. Barbara has been laying in a stock of finery; the justice caught sight of it as it came home, and Barbara suffered. Serve her right, vain little minx. Just hark at the bells clashing out!"

Mr. Carlyle lifted his head. The bells of St. Jude's Church were ringing a merry peal as for a wedding, or any other festivity. "What can that be for?" he exclaimed.

"Archibald, you are not half as sharp as I was at your age. What should they be ringing for, but out of compliment to the arrival of Lord Mount Severn?"

"Ay; no doubt. The East Lynne pew is in St. Jude's Church."

East Lynne had changed owners, and was now the property of Mr. Carlyle. He had bought it as it stood, furniture and all; but the transfer had been conducted with secrecy, and was suspected by none. Whether Lord Mount Severn thought it might prevent any one from getting scent of the matter, or whether he wished to take farewell of a place he had formerly been fond of, certain it is that he desired to visit it for a week or two. Mr. Carlyle most readily and graciously acquiesced; and the earl, his daughter, and retinue had arrived the previous day.

West Lynne was in ecstasies. It called itself an aristocratic place, and indulged hopes that the earl might be intending to confer upon it permanently the light of his presence, by taking up his residence again at East Lynne. The toilets prepared to greet his admiring eyes were prodigious, and pretty Barbara Hare was not the only young lady who had thereby to encounter the paternal storm.

Miss Carlyle completed her dinner preparations, all she did not choose to trust to Joyce, and was ready for church at the usual time, plainly but well dressed. As she and Archibald were leaving their house, they saw something looming up the streets, flashing and gleaming in the sun. A pink parasol came first, a pink bonnet and feather came behind it, a grey brocaded dress, and white gloves.

"The little vain idiot!" ejaculated Miss Carlyle. But Barbara sailed up the street towards them, unconscious of the apostrophe.

"Well done, Barbara!" was the salutation of Miss Carlyle. "The justice might well exclaim! You are finer than a sunbeam."

"Not half so fine as many another in church will be to-day," responded Barbara, as she lifted her shy blue eyes and blushing face to answer the greeting of Mr. Carlyle. "West Lynne seems bent on out-dressing the Lady Isabel. You should have been at the milliner's yesterday morning, Miss Carlyle."

"Is all the finery coming out to-day?" gravely inquired Mr. Carlyle, as Barbara turned with them towards the church and he walked by her side and his sister's, for he had an objection, almost as invincible as a Frenchman's, to giving his arm to two ladies.

"Of course," replied Barbara. "The earl and his daughter will be coming to church."

"Suppose she should not be in peacock's plumes?" cried Miss Carlyle, with an imperturbable face.

"Oh, but she's sure to be—if you mean richly dressed," cried Barbara, hastily.

"Or, suppose they should not come to church?" laughed Mr. Carlyle. "What a disappointment to the bonnets and feathers!"

"After all, Barbara, what are they to us, or we to them?" resumed Miss Carlyle. "We may never meet. We insignificant West Lynne gentry should not intrude ourselves upon East Lynne. It would scarcely be fitting to do so; or be deemed so by the earl and Lady Isabel."

"That's just what papa said," grumbled Barbara. "He caught sight of this bonnet yesterday, and, when by way of excuse, I said I had it to call on them, he asked whether I thought the obscure West Lynne families would venture to thrust their calls on Lord Mount Severn, as though they were of the county aristocracy. It was the feather put him out."

"It is a very long one," remarked Miss Carlyle, grimly surveying it.

Barbara was to sit in the Carlyle pew that day, for she thought the farther she was away from the justice the better: there was no knowing that he might not take a sly revengeful cut at the feather during the service, and so spoil its beauty. Scarcely were they seated, when some strangers came quietly up the aisle; a gentleman who limped as he walked, with furrowed brow and grey hair; and a young lady. Barbara looked round with eagerness, but looked away again; they could not be the expected strangers, the young lady's dress was too plain for that. A clear muslin dress with small lilac sprigs upon it, and a straw bonnet: Miss Corny might have worn it herself on a week day, and not have found herself too smart; but it was a pleasant dress for a hot summer's day. But the old beadle, in his many-caped coat, was walking before them sideways with his marshalling baton, and he marshalled them into the East Lynne pew, unoccupied for so many years.

"Who in the world can they be?" whispered Barbara to Miss Carlyle.

"The earl and Lady Isabel."

The colour flushed into Barbara's face, and she stared at Miss Corny. "Why—she has no silks, and no feathers, and no anything!" cried Barbara. "She's more plainly dressed than any one in church!"

"Plainer than any of the fine ones—than you, for instance. The earl is much altered, but I should have known them both anywhere. I should have known her from her likeness to her poor mother; just the same eyes, and sweet expression."

Ay, those brown eyes, so full of sweetness and melancholy: few, who had once seen, could mistake or forget them, and Barbara Hare, forgetting where she was, looked at them much that day. "She is very lovely," thought Barbara, "and her dress is certainly that of a lady. I wish I had not had this streaming pink feather. What fine jackdaws she must think us all!"

The earl's carriage, an open barouche, was waiting at the gate at the conclusion of the service. He handed his daughter in, and was putting his gouty foot upon the step to follow her, when he observed Mr. Carlyle. The earl turned and held out his hand. A man who could purchase East Lynne was worthy of being received as an equal, though he was but a country lawyer.

Mr. Carlyle shook hands with the earl, approached the carriage, and raised his hat to Lady Isabel. She bent forward with her pleasant smile, and put her hand into his.

"I have many things to say to you," said the earl. "I wish you would go home with us. If you have nothing better to do, be East Lynne's guest for the remainder of the day."

He smiled peculiarly as he spoke, and Mr. Carlyle echoed it. East Lynne's guest! that was what the earl was, at present. Mr. Carlyle turned aside to tell his sister.

"Cornelia, I shall not be home to dinner; I am going with Lord Mount Severn. Good day, Barbara."

Mr. Carlyle stepped into the carriage, was followed by the earl, and it drove away. The sun shone still, but the day's brightness had gone out for Barbara Hare.

"How does he know the earl so well? How does he know Lady Isabel?" she reiterated in her astonishment.

"Archibald knows something of most people," replied Miss Corny. "He saw the earl frequently when he was in town in the spring, and Lady Isabel once or twice. What a lovely face she has!"

Barbara made no reply. She returned with Miss Carlyle to the attraction of the ducks and the giblet-pie, but her manner was as absent as her heart, and that had run away to East Lynne.

"Oh, the refinement of courtly life, the unnecessary profusion of splendour!" thought Mr. Carlyle, as he sat down to the earl's dinner-table that day. The display of silver, of glittering glass, of costly china; the various wines and the rich viands, too varied and rich for the earl's gout; the numerous servants in their handsome livery; the table's pleasant master, and its refined young mistress! In spite of the earl's terrible embarrassments, he had never yet curtailed the pomp of home expenditure: how he had maintained it was a marvel; how long he would succeed in maintaining it was another. Very unnecessary and unjustifiable was the splendour under the circumstances, but it had its attractions. Exceedingly great were the attractions that day, all things combined. Take care of your senses, Mr. Carlyle.

Isabel left them after dinner, and sat alone, her thoughts running on many things. On her dear mother, with whom she was last at East Lynne, on the troublesome gout that would not quite leave her father, and on the scenes she had lately mixed in in London. She had met one there so constantly that he had almost become dangerous to her peace, or would have done so, had she remained much longer. Even now, as she thought of him, a thrill quickened her veins. It was Francis Levison. Mrs. Vane had been guilty of worse than thoughtlessness, in throwing them so frequently together. Mrs. Vane was a cold, selfish, and a bad woman; bad, inasmuch as, except her own heartless self, she cared for no human being on the face of the wide earth.

With a sigh, Isabel rose, and scattered her reflections to the winds. Her father and his guest did not appear to be in haste to come into tea, and she sat down to the piano.

The earl was certainly not in haste; he never was in haste to quit his wine; every glass was little less than poison to him in his state of health, but he would not forego it. They were deep in conversation, when Mr. Carlyle, who was speaking, broke off in the middle of a sentence and listened.

A strain of the sweetest music had arisen; it seemed almost close to his ear, but he knew not whence it came; a voice, low and clear and sweet, was accompanying it, and Mr. Carlyle held his breath. It was the Benedictus, sung to Mornington's chant.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel: for he hath visited and redeemed his people. And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us: in the house of his servant David."

The conversation of the earl and Mr. Carlyle had been of the eager bustling world, of money getting and money spending, money owing and money paying, and that sacred chant broke in upon them with strange contrast, soothing the ear, but reproving the heart.

"It is Isabel," explained the earl. "Her singing carries a singular charm with it; and I think that charm lies in her subdued, quiet style: I hate squalling display. Her playing is the same. Are you fond of music?"

"I have been reproached by scientific performers with having neither ear nor taste for what they call good music," smiled Mr. Carlyle; "but I like *that*."

"The instrument is placed against the wall, and the partition is thin," remarked the earl. "Isabel little thinks she is entertaining us, as well as herself."

Indeed she did not. She sang chant after chant, now one psalm to them, now another. Then she sang the collect for the seventh Sunday after Trinity, and then she went back again to the chants. And Mr. Carlyle sat on, drinking in that delightful music, and never heeding how the evening was running on into night.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. KANE'S CONCERT.

BEFORE Lord Mount Severn had completed the fortnight of his proposed stay, the gout came back seriously. It was impossible for him to move away from East Lynne. Mr. Carlyle assured him he was only too pleased that he should remain as long as might be convenient to him, and the earl expressed his acknowledgments; he hoped soon to be re-established on his legs.

But he was not. The gout came and the gout went; not positively laying him up in bed, but rendering him unable to leave his rooms: and this continued until October, when he grew much better. The county families had been neighbourly, calling on the invalid earl, and occasionally carrying off Lady Isabel, but his chief and constant visitor had been Mr. Carlyle. The earl had grown to like him in no common degree, and was disappointed if Mr. Carlyle spent an evening away from him, so that he had become, as it were, quite domesticated with the earl and Isabel. "I am not equal to general society," he observed to his daughter, "and it is considerate and kind of Carlyle to come here and cheer my loneliness."

"Extremely kind," said Isabel. "I like him very much, papa."

"I don't know any one whom I like half as well," was the rejoinder of the earl.

Mr. Carlyle went up as usual the same evening, and in the course of it the earl asked Isabel to sing.

"I will if you wish, papa," was the reply, "but the piano is so much out of tune that it is not pleasant to sing to it. Is there no one in West Lynne who could come here and tune my piano, Mr. Carlyle?" she added, turning to him.

"Certainly there is. Kane would do it. Shall I send him to-morrow?"

"I should be glad; if it would not be giving you too much trouble. Not that tuning will very much improve it, old thing that it is. Were we to be much at East Lynne, I should ask papa to exchange it for a new one."

Little thought Lady Isabel that that very piano was Mr. Carlyle's, and not hers. The earl coughed, and exchanged a smile and a glance with his guest.

Mr. Kane was the organist of St. Jude's Church, a man of embarrassment and sorrow, who had long had a sore fight with the world. When he arrived at East Lynne the following day, Lady Isabel happened to be playing, and she stood by and watched him begin his work. She was courteous and affable; she was so to every one; and the poor music-master took courage to speak of his own affairs, and to prefer an humble request—that she and Lord Mount Severn would patronize and personally attend a concert he was about to give the following week. A scarlet blush came into his thin cheeks as he confessed that he was very poor, could scarcely live, and that he was getting up this concert in his desperate need. If it succeeded—well: he could then go on again; if not, he should be turned out of his home, and his furniture sold for the two years' rent he owed—and he had seven children.

Isabel, all her sympathies awakened, sought the earl. "Oh, papa! I have to ask you the greatest favour! Will you grant it?"

"Ay, child, you don't ask them often. What is it?"

"I want you to take me to a concert at West Lynne."

The earl fell back in surprise and stared at Isabel.

"A concert at West Lynne!" he laughed. "To hear rustics scraping the fiddle! My dear Isabel!"

She poured out what she had just heard, with her own comments and additions. "Seven children, papa! and if the concert does not succeed he must give up his home, and turn out into the streets with them—it is, you see, almost as a matter of life or death to him. He is very poor."

"I am poor myself," said the earl.

"I was so sorry for him when he was speaking. He kept turning red and white, and catching his breath in agitation; it was painful to him to tell of his embarrassments. I am sure he is a gentleman."

"Well, you may take a pound's worth of tickets, Isabel, and give them to the upper servants. A village concert!"

"Oh, papa, it is not that; can't you see it is not? If you and I promise to be present, all the families round West Lynne will attend, and he will have the room full. They will go because we do; he said so; it they thought it was our servants who were going, they would keep away. Just think, papa, how you would like this furniture to be taken away from you! and his having a full concert would stop it. Make a sacrifice for once, dearest papa, and go, if it be only for an hour. *I* shall enjoy it, if it's nothing but a fiddle and a tambourine."

"You gipsy! you are as bad as a professional beggar There, go and tell the fellow we will look in for half an hour."

She flew back to Mr. Kane, her eyes dancing. She spoke quietly, as she always did, but her own satisfaction gladdened her voice.

"I am happy to tell you that papa has consented. He will take four tickets, and we will attend the concert."

The tears rushed into Mr. Kane's eyes. Isabel was not sure they were not in her own. He was a tall, thin, delicate-looking man, with long white fingers and a long neck. He faltered forth his thanks, and an inquiry whether he might be allowed to state openly that they would be present.

"Tell every one," said she, eagerly—"every one you meet, if you think it will be the means of inducing people to attend. I shall tell all friends who call upon me, and ask them to go."

When Mr. Carlyle came up in the evening, the earl was temporarily absent from the room. Isabel began to speak of the concert.

"It is a hazardous venture for Kane," observed Mr. Carlyle. "I fear he will only lose money, and add to his embarrassments."

"Why do you fear that?" she asked.

"Because, Lady Isabel, nothing gets patronized at West Lynne; nothing native; and people have heard so long of poor Kane's necessities, that they think little of them. If some foreign artist, with an unpronounceable name, came flashing down to give a concert, West Lynne would flock to it."

"Is he so poor, so very poor?"

"Very. He is half starved."

"Starved!" repeated Isabel, an expression of perplexity arising to her face, as she looked at Mr. Carlyle, for she scarcely understood him. "Do you mean that he does not have enough to eat?"

"Of bread he may have, but not of much better nourishment. His salary, as organist, is thirty pounds, and he gets a little stray teaching. But he has his wife and children to keep, and no doubt serves them before himself. I dare say he scarcely knows what it is to taste meat."

The words brought a bitter pang to Lady Isabel. Not enough to eat! And she, in her carelessness, her ignorance, her indifference—she scarcely knew what term to give it—had not thought to order him a meal in their house of abundance! He had walked from West Lynne, occupied himself an hour with her piano, and set off to walk back again, battling with his hunger. A word from her, and a repast had been set before him, out of their superfluities, such as he never now sat down to: and that word she had not spoken.

"You are looking grave, Lady Isabel."

"I am taking contrition to myself. Never mind; it cannot now be helped; but it will always be a dark spot on my memory."

"What is it?"

She lifted her repentant face to his, and smiled. "Never mind, I say, Mr. Carlyle; what is past cannot be recalled. He looks like a gentleman."

"Who? Kane? A gentleman bred: his father was a clergyman. Kane's ruin was his love of music; it prevented his setting to any better-paid profession; his early marriage also was a drawback, and kept him down. He is young still."

"Mr. Carlyle, I would not be one of your West Lynne people for the world. Here is a poor gentleman struggling with adversity, and you won't put your hands out to help him!"

He smiled at her warmth. "Some of us will take tickets, I for one, but I don't know about attending the concert. I fear few will do that."

"Because that's just the thing that would serve him! If one went, another would go. Well, I shall try and show West Lynne that I don't take a lesson from their book; I shall be there before it begins, and never come out till the last song is over. I am not too grand to go, if West Lynne is."

"You surely do not think of going!"

"I surely do think of it. And papa goes with me; I persuaded him. And I have given Mr. Kane our promise to do so."

Mr. Carlyle paused. "I am glad to hear it; it will be a perfect boon to Kane. If it once goes abroad that Lord Mount Severn and Lady Isabel intend to honour the concert, there won't be standing room in the place."

She danced round with a little gleeful step. "What high and mighty personages Lord Mount Severn and Lady Isabel seem to be! If you had any goodness of heart, Mr. Carlyle, you would enlist yourself in the cause also."

"I think I will," he smiled.

"Papa says you hold sway at West Lynne. If you proclaim that you mean to go, you will induce others to go also."

"I will proclaim that you do," he answered. "That will be sufficient. But, Lady Isabel, you must not expect much gratification from the performances."

"A tambourine will be quite enough for me; I told papa so. I shan't think of the music; I shall think of poor Mr. Kane. Mr. Carlyle, I know you can be kind if you like; I know you would rather be kind than otherwise; it is to be read in your face; try and do what you can for him."

"I will," he warmly answered.

Mr. Carlyle sold many tickets the following day; or rather, caused them to be sold. He praised the concert far and wide, and proclaimed that Lord Mount Severn and his daughter would not think of missing it. Mr. Kane's house was besieged for tickets, and when Mr. Carlyle went home to luncheon at midday, which he did not often do, he laid down two at Miss Corny's elbow.

"What's this? Concert tickets! Archibald, you have never gone and bought these!"

What would she have said had she known that the two were not the extent of his investment?

"Ten shillings to throw away upon two paltry bits of cardboard!" chafed Miss Carlyle. "You always were a noodle in money matters, Archibald, and always will be. I wish I had the keeping of your purse!"

"What I have given will not hurt me, Cornelia, and Kane is badly off. Think of his troop of children."

"Oh dear," said Miss Corny; "I imagine he should think of them! That's always it: poor folks get a heap of children about them, and then ask for pity. I should say it would be more just if they asked for blame."

"Well, there the tickets are, bought and paid for, so they may as well be used. You will go with me, Cornelia."

"And stick ourselves there upon empty benches, like two geese, and sit staring and counting the candles! A pleasant evening!"

"You need not fear empty benches. The Mount Severns are going, and West Lynne is racing after tickets. I suppose you have a—a—cap," looking at the nondescript article decorating his sister's head, "that will do to go in, Cornelia: if not, you had better order one."

This suggestion put up Miss Carlyle. "Hadn't you better have your hair curled, and your coat-tails lined with white satin?" retorted she. "My gracious! a fine new cap to go to their mess of a concert in, after paying ten shillings for the tickets! The world's coming to something."

Mr. Carlyle left her and her grumbling to return to the office. Lord Mount Severn's carriage was passing at the moment, and Isabel Vane was within it. She caused it to stop when she saw Mr. Carlyle, and he advanced to her.

"I have been to Mr. Kane's myself for the tickets," said she, with a beaming look; "I came into West Lynne on purpose. I told the coachman to find out where he lived, and he did so. I thought if the people saw me and the carriage there, they would guess what I wanted. I do hope he will have a full concert."

"I am sure he will," replied Mr. Carlyle, as he released her hand. And Lady Isabel signed the carriage to drive on.

As Mr. Carlyle turned away, he met Otway Bethel, a nephew of Colonel Bethel's, who was tolerated in the colonel's house because he had no other home, and appeared incapable of making himself one. Some persons persisted in calling him a gentleman—as he was by birth—others called him a *mauvais sujet.* The two are united sometimes. He was dressed in a velveteen suit, and had a gun in his hand; indeed, he was rarely seen without a gun, being inordinately fond of sport. But, if all tales whispered were true, he supplied himself with game in other ways than by shooting, which had the credit of going up to London dealers. For the last six months, or near it, he had been away from West Lynne.

"Why, where have you been hiding yourself?" exclaimed Mr. Carlyle. "The colonel has been inconsolable."

"Come, no gammon, Carlyle. I have been on the tramp through France and Germany. Man likes a change sometimes. As to the revered colonel, he would not be inconsolable if he saw me nailed up in a six-foot box, and carried out feet foremost."

"Bethel, I have a question to ask you," continued Mr. Carlyle, dropping his light manner and his voice together. "Take your thoughts back to the night of Hallijohn's murder."

"I wish you may get it!" cried Mr. Bethel. "The reminiscence is not attractive."

"You'll do it," quietly said Mr. Carlyle. "It has been told to me, though it did not appear at the inquest, that Richard Hare held a conversation with you in the wood, a few minutes after the deed was done. Now—"

"Who told you that?" interrupted Bethel.

"That is not the question. My authority is indisputable."

"It is quite true. I said nothing about it, for I did not want to make the case worse against Dick Hare than it already was. He certainly did accost me, as a man flurried out of his life."

"Asking if you had seen a certain lover of Afy's fly from the cottage. One Thorn."

"That was the purport. Thorn? Thorn?—I think Thorn was the name he mentioned. My opinion was, that Dick was either wild, or acting a part."

"Now, Bethel, I want you to answer me truly. The question cannot affect you either way, but I must know whether you did see this Thorn leave the cottage."

Bethel shook his head. "I know nothing whatever about any Thorn, and I saw no one but Dick Hare. Not but that a dozen Thorns might have run from the cottage without my seeing them."

"You heard this shot fired?"

"Yes; but I never gave a thought to mischief. I knew Locksley was in the wood, and supposed it came from him. I ran across the path, bearing towards the cottage, and struck into the wood on the other side. By-and-by, Dick Hare pitched upon me, as one startled out of his senses, and asked if I had seen Thorn leave the cottage. Thorn—that *was* the name."

"And you had not?"

"I had seen no one but Dick, excepting Locksley. My impression was that no one else was about; I think so still."

"But Richard—"

"Now look you here, Carlyle, I won't do Dick Hare an injury, even by a single word, if I can help it. And it is of no use setting me on to it."

"I should be the last to set you on to injure any one, especially Richard Hare," rejoined Mr. Carlyle, "and my motive is to do Richard good, not harm. I hold a suspicion, no matter whence gathered, that it was not Richard Hare who committed the murder, but another. Can you throw any light upon the subject?"

"No, I can't. I have always thought poor wavering Dick was no one's enemy but his own: but as to throwing any light upon that night's work, I can't do it. Cords should not have dragged me to the inquest to give evidence against Dick, and for that reason I was glad Locksley never let out that I was on the spot. How the deuce it got about afterwards, I can't tell; but that was no matter; *my* evidence did not help on the verdict. And, talking of that, Carlyle, how has it come to your knowledge that Richard Hare accosted me? I have not opened my lips upon it to mortal man."

"It is of no consequence how," repeated Mr. Carlyle; "I do know it, and that is sufficient. I was in hopes you had really seen this Thorn leave the cottage."

Otway Bethel shook his head. "I should not lay too much stress upon any 'Thorns' having been there, were I you, Carlyle. Dick Hare was as one crazy that night, and might see shapes and forms where none existed."

CHAPTER IX.

THE BATS AT THE WINDOW.

THE concert was to take place on a Thursday, and on the following Saturday Lord Mount Severn intended finally to quit East Lynne. Preparations for departure were in progress, but when Thursday morning dawned, it appeared a question whether they would not once more be rendered nugatory. The house was roused betimes, and Mr. Wainwright, the surgeon from West Lynne, was summoned to the earl's bedside: he had experienced another and a violent attack. The peer was exceedingly annoyed and vexed, and very irritable.

"I may be kept here a week—a fortnight—a month longer now!" he uttered fretfully to Isabel.

"I am very sorry, papa. I dare say you do find East Lynne dull."

"Dull! that's not it: I have other reasons for wishing East Lynne to be quit of us. And now you can't go to this fine concert."

Isabel's face flushed. "Not go, papa?"

"Why, who is to take you? I can't get out of bed.

"Oh, papa, I must be there. Otherwise it would look almost as though—as though we had announced what we did not mean to perform. You know it was arranged that we should join the Ducies: the carriage can still take me to the concert-room, and I can go in with them."

"Just as you please. I thought you would have jumped at any plea for staying away."

"Not at all," laughed Isabel. "I should like West Lynne to see that I don't despise Mr. Kane and his concert."

Later in the day, the earl grew alarmingly worse: his paroxysms of pain were awful. Isabel, who was kept from the room, knew nothing of the danger, and the earl's groans did not penetrate to her ears. She dressed in a happy mood, full of laughing wilfulness, Marvel, her maid, superintending in stiff displeasure, for the attire chosen did not meet with her approbation. When ready, she went into the earl's room.

"Shall I do, papa?"

Lord Mount Severn raised his swollen eyelids and drew the clothes from his flushed face. A vision was standing before him, a beauteous queen, a gleaming fairy; he hardly knew what she looked like. She had put on a white lace dress and her diamonds; the dress was rich, and the jewels flashed from her hair, from her pretty neck, from her delicate arms; and her cheeks were flushed and her curls were flowing.

The earl stared at her in amazement. "How could you dress yourself like that for a concert? You are out of your senses, Isabel."

"Marvel thinks so too," was the gay answer; "she has had a cross face since I told her what to put out. But I did it on purpose, papa; I thought I would show those West Lynne people that *I* think the poor man's concert worth going to, and worth dressing for."

"You will have the whole room staring at you."

"I don't mind. I'll bring you word all about it. Let them stare."

"You vain child! You have dressed yourself to please your vanity. But, Isabel, you—ooooooh!"

Isabel started as she stood: the earl's groan was terrible.

"An awful twinge, child. There, go along: talking makes me worse."

"Papa, shall I stay at home with you?" she gravely asked. "Every consideration should give way to illness. If you would like me to remain, or if I can do any good, pray let me."

"Quite the contrary; I had rather you were away. You can do no earthly good, for I could not have you in the room. Good-bye, darling. If you see Carlyle, tell him I shall hope to see him to-morrow."

Marvel threw a mantle over her shoulders, and she went down to the carriage, which waited.

The concert was held in the noted justice-room, over the market-place, called by courtesy the town-hall. It was large, and excellent for sound; many a town of far greater importance cannot boast so good a music-room. In the way of performers, Mr. Kane had done his poor best; a lady, quite fourth rate, had been engaged from London, and the rest were local artistes.

Barbara Hare would not have missed the concert for the world, but Mrs. Hare had neither health nor spirits for it. It was arranged that the justice and Barbara should accompany the Carlyles, and they proceeded to Miss Carlyle's in time for coffee. Something was said about a fly, but Miss Carlyle negatived it, asking what had come to their legs: it was a fine night, and the distance was very short. Barbara had no objection to the walk with Mr. Carlyle.

"How is it that we see so little of you now?" she began, as they went along, Mr. Justice Hare and Miss Carlyle preceding them.

"I have been so much engaged at East Lynne: the earl finds his evenings dull. They go on Saturday, and my time will be my own again."

"You were expected at the parsonage last night; we were looking out for you all the evening."

"Not expected by Mr. and Mrs. Little, I think. I told them I was engaged to dine at East Lynne."

"They were saying—some of them—that you might as well take up your abode at East Lynne, and wondered what your attraction could be. They said"—Barbara compelled her voice to calmness—"that if Isabel Vane were not the Lady Isabel, they should think you went there for her sake."

"I am much obliged at their interesting themselves so much about me," equably returned Mr. Carlyle. "More so than Lady Isabel Vane would probably be. I am surprised that you should retail such nonsense, Barbara."

"They said it; I did not," answered Barbara, with a swelling heart. "Is it true that Lady Isabel sings so well? They were making out that her singing is divine."

"You had better not let Cornelia hear you say that, or you will have a reproof," laughed Mr. Carlyle. "As I did, when I said she had an angel's face."

Barbara turned her own face full upon him: it looked pale in the gaslight. "Did you say she had an angel's face? Do you think it one?"

"I really believe I did say so, but I can't be quite sure; Cornelia snapped me up so quickly," he answered, laughing. "Barbara," he added, dropping his voice, "we have still not heard from Richard."

"No. You and mamma both think we shall hear; I say not, for I feel sure he will be afraid to write. I know he promised, but I have never thought he would perform."

"There would be no risk in sending the letters under cover to me, and it would be a relief and a comfort to Mrs. Hare."

"You know how timorous Richard is. Otway Bethel is home again," she continued. "You said you should question him when he returned, Archibald."

"I have done so, but he appears to know nothing. He seems well disposed towards Richard, but casts doubt on the assertion that Thorn, or any stranger, was in the wood that night."

"It is very strange what Thorn it could have been."

"Very," assented Mr. Carlyle. "I can make out nothing from Swainson. No person whatever, answering the description and named Thorn, was living there at the time, so far as I am able to ascertain. All we can do is to wait, and hope that time may bring elucidation with it."

They reached the town-hall as he spoke. A busy crowd was gathered round the entrance; people going in to attend the concert, and the mob watching them. Drawn up at a short distance, so as not to obstruct other vehicles, was the aristocratic carriage of Lord Mount Severn; the coachman sat on his hammercloth, and two powdered footmen waited with it.

"Lady Isabel Vane is sitting there," exclaimed Barbara as she passed.

Mr. Carlyle felt surprised. What could she be waiting for? where could the earl be? A doubt came over him, he could not define why, that something was wrong.

"Will you pardon me if I quit you for one moment, Barbara, whilst I speak to Lady Isabel?"

He waited for neither acquiescence nor dissent, but left Barbara standing where she was, and accosted Isabel. The diamonds gleamed in her hair, as she bent towards him.

"I am waiting for Mrs. Ducie, Mr. Carlyle. I did not like to remain all alone in the ante-room, so I stayed here. When Mrs. Ducie's carriage comes up, I shall get out. I am going in with her, you know."

"And the earl?"

"Oh, have you not heard? Papa is ill again."

"Ill again?" repeated Mr. Carlyle.

"Very ill indeed. Mr. Wainwright was sent for at five o'clock this morning, and has been with him a good deal of the day. Papa bade me say that he hoped to see you to-morrow."

Mr. Carlyle rejoined Barbara: they entered the hall and began to ascend the stairs, just as another aristocratic equipage dashed up, to scatter and gratify the mob. Barbara turned her head to look: it was that of the Honourable Mrs. Ducie.

The room was pretty full then, and Mrs. Ducie, her two daughters, and Isabel were conducted to seats by Mr. Kane—seats he had reserved for them at the upper end, near the orchestra. The same dazzling vision which had burst on the sight of Lord Mount Severn fell on that of the audience, in Isabel, with her rich white dress, her glittering diamonds, her flowing curls, and her wondrous beauty. The Miss Ducies, plain girls, in brown silks, turned up their noses more than nature had done it for them, and Mrs. Ducie heaved an audible sigh. "The poor motherless girl is to be pitied, my dears," she whispered; "she has no one to point out to her suitable attire: this ridiculous decking out must have been Marvel's idea."

But she looked as a lily amidst poppies and sun-flowers, whether the "decking out" was ridiculous or not. Was Lord Mount Severn right, when he accused her of so dressing in self-gratification? Very likely: for, has not the great preacher said, that childhood and youth are vanity?

Miss Carlyle, the justice, and Barbara also had seats near the orchestra, for Miss Carlyle in West Lynne was a person to be considered, and not to be hidden behind others. Mr. Carlyle, however, preferred to join the gentlemen who congregated and stood round about the door, inside and out. There was scarcely standing room in the place: Mr. Kane had, as was anticipated, a bumper, and the poor man could have worshipped Lady Isabel, for he knew he owed it to her.

It was very long: country concerts generally are so: and was about three parts over when a powdered head, larger than any cauliflower ever grown, was discerned ascending the stairs behind the group of gentlemen: which head, when it brought its body into full view, was discovered to belong to one of the footmen of Lord Mount Severn. The calves alone, cased in their silk stockings, were a sight to be seen; and these calves betook themselves inside the concert-room, with a deprecatory bow for permission to the gentlemen they had to steer through, and there they came to a standstill, the cauliflower turning itself about from right to left.

"Well, I'll be jiffied!" cried an astonished old foxhunter, who had been elbowed by the footman. "The cheek these fellows have!"

The fellow in question did not appear, however, to be enjoying any great amount of cheek just then, for he looked perplexed, humbled, and uneasy. Suddenly his eye fell on Mr. Carlyle, and it lighted up.

"Beg pardon, sir: could you happen to inform me whereabouts my young lady is sitting?"

"At the other end of the room, near the orchestra."

"I am sure I don't know how ever I am to get to her, then," returned the man, more in self-soliloquy, than to Mr. Carlyle. "The room's full, and I don't like crushing by. My lord is taken alarmingly worse, sir," he explained in an awe-struck tone; "it is feared he is dying."

Mr. Carlyle was painfully startled.

"His screams are awful, sir. Mr. Wainwright and another doctor from West Lynne are with him, and an express has gone to Lynneborough for physicians. Mrs. Mason said we were to fetch my young lady home, and not lose a moment; and we brought the carriage, sir, Wells galloping his horses all the way."

"I will bring Lady Isabel," said Mr. Carlyle.

"I'm sure, sir, I should be under everlasting obligation if you would," returned the man.

Mr. Carlyle worked his way through the crowded room. He was tall and slender. Many looked daggers at him, for a pathetic song was just then being given by a London lady. He disregarded all, and stood before Isabel.

"I thought you were not coming to speak to me to-night. Is it not a famous room? I am so pleased."

"More than famous, Lady Isabel. But," continued he gravely, "Lord Mount Severn does not find himself so well, and he has sent the carriage for you."

"Papa not so well!" she quickly exclaimed.

"Not quite. At any rate, he wishes you to go home. Will you allow me to pilot you through the room?"

"Oh, my dear, considerate papa!" she laughed. "He fears I shall be wearied, and would emancipate me before the time. Thank you, Mr. Carlyle, but I will wait until the end."

"No, no, Lady Isabel, it is not that. Lord Mount Severn is indeed worse."

Her countenance changed to seriousness; but she was not alarmed. "Very well. When this song is over: not to disturb the room."

"I think you had better lose no time," he urged. "Never mind the song and the room."

She rose instantly, and put her arm within Mr. Carlyle's. A hasty word of explanation to Mrs. Ducie, and he led her away, the room, in its surprise, making for them what space it might. Many an eye fol-

lowed them, but none more curiously and eagerly than Barbara Hare's.
"Where is he going to take her?" involuntarily uttered Barbara.

"How should I know?" retorted Miss Corny. "Barbara, you have done nothing but fidget all the evening: what's the matter with you? Folks come to a concert to listen, not to talk and fidget."

Isabel's mantle was procured from the ante-room, where it had been left, and she descended the stairs with Mr. Carlyle. The carriage was drawn up close to the entrance, and the coachman had his reins gathered ready to start. The footman, not the one who had gone upstairs, threw open the chariot door as soon as he saw her. He was new in the service; a simple country native, just engaged. She withdrew her arm from Mr. Carlyle's, and stood a moment before stepping in, looking at the man.

"Is papa much worse?"

"Oh yes, my lady: he was screaming shocking. But they think he'll live till morning."

With a sharp cry, she seized the arm of Mr. Carlyle, seized it for support in her shock of agony. Mr. Carlyle rudely thrust the man away: he could willingly have flung him at full length on to the pavement.

"Oh, Mr. Carlyle, why did you not tell me?" she shivered.

"My dear Lady Isabel, I am grieved that you are told now. But, take comfort: you know how ill he frequently is, and this may be only an ordinary attack. Step in. I trust we shall find it nothing more."

"Are you going home with me?"

"Certainly. I shall not leave you to go alone."

She moved to the other side of the chariot, making room for him.

"Thank you: I will sit outside."

"But the night is cold."

"Oh no." He closed the door, and took his seat by the coachman: the footmen got up behind, and the carriage sped away. Isabel gathered herself into her corner, and moaned aloud in her suspense and helplessness.

"Do not spare your horses," said Mr. Carlyle to Wells. "Lady Isabel will be ill with anxiety."

"She'll be worse before morning, poor child," returned the coachman. "I have lived in the service fifteen year, sir, and have watched her grow up from a little thing," he hastened to add, as if in apology for his familiarity.

"Is the earl really in danger?"

"Ay, sir, that he is. I have seen two cases in my life of gout in the stomach, and a few hours closed both. I heard a word dropped, as I came out, that Mr. Wainwright thought it was going on to the heart."

"The earl's former attacks have been alarming and painful," remarked Mr. Carlyle, clinging to hope.

"Yes, sir, I know; but this bout is different. Besides," resumed Wells, in a confidential tone, "those bats didn't come for nothing."

"Bats!" uttered Mr. Carlyle.

"And it's a sure sign, sir, that death is on its road to the house, safe and speedy."

"Wells, what are you talking about?"

"The bats have been round the house this evening, sir. Nasty things! I hate 'em at all times."

"Bats are fond of flying about at night-time," remarked Mr. Carlyle, glancing aside at the steady old coachman, with a half suspicion that he might not have been keeping himself quite so steady as usual. "It is their nature to do so."

"But they don't come in shoals, sir, round about you, and in at the windows. To-night, when we got back, after leaving my young lady at the concert, I told Joe just to take out the horses and leave the carriage outside, as it would be required again. I went indoors, and there they told me that Mrs. Mason wanted me, and I was to go up to the library to her. She was sitting there, sir, you see, to be close at hand, if anything was needed in my lord's room. So I wiped my shoes, and up to the library I went, and knocked at the door. 'Come in,' she called out, and in I walked, and there she was by herself, standing at the open window. 'You are airy to-night, ma'am,' says I; 'it's hardly weather for open windows:' for, as you see, sir, it's quite a frost."

Mr. Carlyle glanced down at the road and the hedges.

"'Come in, Wells,' Mrs. Mason called out, sharply, 'come and look here.' I went and stood by her side, sir, and I never saw such a sight in my life. The bats were flying about in scores, in hundreds, a cloud of them, diving down at the window, and flapping their wings. Right inside they came, and would have touched our faces, only we drew back. Where on earth they had come from I can't think, for I had not been indoors a minute, and there was not one about outside, that I had seen. 'What does all this mean, Wells?' cried Mrs. Mason, 'the bats must have turned wild to-night. I opened the window to look at them, for they quite startled me. Did you ever see them so thick?' 'No, ma'am, nor so near,' I answered her. 'And I don't like to see them, for it betokens no good: it's a sign.' Well, sir, with that she burst out laughing," continued Wells, "for she's one of those who ridicule signs and dreams, and the like. She is an educated woman, perhaps you know, sir, and, years ago, was nursery governess to Lady Isabel; and those educated people are mighty hard of belief."

Mr. Carlyle nodded.

"'What is it a sign of, Wells?' Mrs. Mason went on to me, in a jesting sort of way. 'Mrs. Mason, ma'am,' said I, 'I can't say that I ever saw the bats clanned together and making their visit, like this; but I have heard, times out of number, that they have been known to do it, and that it is a sure sign death is at the very door of the house.' 'I hope death is not at the door of this house,' sighed Mrs. Mason, thinking, no doubt, of my lord, and she closed the window as she spoke, and the nasty things beat against it with their wings. Mrs. Mason then spoke to me of the business she had wanted me upon; she was talking to me three minutes, perhaps, and when she had finished, I turned to look at the window again. But there was not a single bat there; they had all gone, all disappeared in that little space of time. 'What has become of them?' cried Mrs. Mason; and I opened the window, and looked up and down, but they were clean gone, and the air and the sky were as clear as they are at this moment."

"Gone to flap at somebody else's window, perhaps," remarked Mr. Carlyle, with a very disbelieving smile.

"Not long after that, sir, the house was in commotion. My lord was in mortal agony, and Mr. Wainwright said (so the word ran in the servants'-hall) that the gout had reached the stomach, and might be rushing on to the heart. Denis went galloping off to Lynneborough for physicians, and we put to the horses and came tearing off for my young lady."

"Well," observed Mr. Carlyle, "I hope he will recover the attack, Wells, in spite of the gout and the bats."

The coachman shook his head, and turning his horses sharply round, whipped them up through the lodge gates.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Mason, waited at the hall door to receive Lady Isabel. Mr. Carlyle helped her out of the carriage, and gave her his arm up the steps. She scarcely dared to inquire.

"Is he better? May I go to his room?" she panted.

Yes, the earl was better; better, in so far as that he was quiet and senseless. She moved hastily towards the chamber. Mr. Carlyle drew the housekeeper aside.

"Is there any hope?"

"Not the slightest, sir. He is dying."

The earl knew no one: pain had gone for the present, and he lay on his bed, calm; but his face, which had death in it all too plainly, startled Isabel. She did not scream or cry; she was perfectly quiet, save that she had a fit of shivering. "Will he soon be better?" she whispered to Mr. Wainwright, who stood there.

The surgeon coughed. "Well, he—he—we must hope it, my lady."

"But why does his face look like that? It is pale—grey: I never saw any one else look so."

"He has been in great pain, my lady; and pain leaves its traces on the countenance."

Mr. Carlyle, who had come in, and was standing by the surgeon, touched his arm to draw him from the room. He noticed the look on the earl's face, and did not like it; he wished to question the surgeon. Lady Isabel saw that Mr. Carlyle was about to quit the room, and beckoned to him.

"Do not leave the house, Mr. Carlyle. When he wakes up, it may cheer him to see you here; he liked you very much."

"I will not leave it, Lady Isabel. I did not think of doing so."

In time—it seemed an age—the medical men arrived from Lynneborough; three of them; the groom had thought he could not summon too many. It was a strange scene they entered upon: the ghastly peer, growing restless again now, battling with his departing spirit; and the gala robes, the sparkling gems adorning the young girl watching at his side. They comprehended the case without difficulty: she had been suddenly called from some scene of gaiety.

They stooped to look at the earl, and felt his pulse, and touched his heart, and exchanged a few murmured words with Mr. Wainwright. Isabel had stood back to give them place, but her anxious eyes followed their every movement. They did not seem to notice her, and she stepped forward.

"Can you do anything for him? Will he recover?"

They all turned at the address, and looked at her. One spoke: it was an evasive answer.

"Tell me the truth," she implored, with feverish impatience; "you must not trifle with me. Do you not know me? I am his only child, and I am here alone."

The first thing was to get her away from the room, for the great change was approaching, and the parting struggle between the body and the spirit might be one of warfare; no sight for her. But, in answer to their suggestions that she should go, she only leaned her head upon the pillow by her father, and moaned in despair.

"She must be got out of the room," cried one of the physicians, almost angrily. "Ma'am"—turning suddenly upon Mrs. Mason—"are there no relatives in the house, no one who can exert influence over the young lady?"

"She has scarcely any relatives in the world," replied the housekeeper; "no near ones. And we happen to be, just now, quite alone."

But Mr. Carlyle, seeing the urgency of the case, for the earl with every minute grew more excited, approached and whispered to her. "You are as anxious as we can be for your father's recovery."

"*As* anxious!" she uttered reproachfully.

"You know what I would imply. Of course our anxiety can be as nothing to yours."

"As nothing; *as nothing*. I think my heart will break."

"Then—forgive me—you should not oppose the wishes of his medical attendants. They wish to be alone with him; and time is being lost."

She rose up; she placed her hands on her brow as if to collect the sense of the words; and then she addressed the doctors.

"Is it really necessary that I should leave the room; necessary *for him?*"

"It is necessary, my lady; absolutely essential."

She quitted the room without another word, and turned into the library, an apartment in the same wing, where the bats had paid their visits earlier in the evening. A large fire burnt in the grate, and she walked up to it, and leaned her hand and forehead on the mantelpiece.

"Mr. Carlyle," she said, without raising it.

"I am here," he answered, for he had followed her in. "What can I do for you?"

"I have come away, you see. Until I may go in again will you bring me word how he is—continually?"

"Indeed I will."

As he quitted the room, Marvel sailed into it, a very fine lady's-maid. "Would my lady change her dress?"

No, my lady would not. "They might be calling me to papa at the moment the dress was off."

"But so very unsuitable, my lady—that rich dress for a night-scene such as this."

"Unsuitable! What does it signify? Who thinks of my dress?"

But, by-and-by, Mrs. Mason quietly took off the diamonds, and threw a warm shawl over her neck and arms, for she was shivering still.

Some of the medical men left; Mr. Wainwright remained. Nothing more could be done for Lord Mount Severn in this world, and the death scene was prolonged and terrible. He was awake to pain again of some sort; whether of mind or body they could not say. Pain! mortal, shrieking, writhing agony. Is it, or is it not the case, that a badly-spent life entails one of these awful death-beds?

Very rebellious, very excited grew Isabel towards morning. Mr. Carlyle had brought her perpetual tidings from the sick-room, softening down the actual facts. She could not understand that she need be kept away from it, and she almost had a battle with Mr. Carlyle.

"It is cruel so to treat me," she exclaimed, pride alone enabling her to suppress her sobs. "Pent up here, the night has seemed to me as long as ten. When your father was dying, were you kept away from him?"

"My dear young lady—a hardy, callous man may go where you may not."

"You are not hardy and callous."

"I spoke of man's general nature."

"I shall act upon my own responsibility. I am obliged by all your kindness, Mr. Carlyle," she hastily added, "but you really have no right to keep me from my father. And I shall go to him."

Mr. Carlyle placed himself before her, his back against the door. His grave, kind face looked into hers with the deepest sympathy and tenderness. "Forgive me, dear Lady Isabel; I cannot let you go."

She broke into a passion of tears and sobs as he led her back to the fire, and stood there with her.

"He is my dear father, I have only him in the wide world."

"I know; I know; I feel for you all that you are feeling. Twenty times this night I have wished, forgive me the thought, that you were my sister, so that I might express my sympathy more freely, and comfort you."

"Tell me, then, why I am kept away. If you can show me a sufficient cause, I will be reasonable, and obey; but do not say again I should be disturbing him, for it is not true."

"He is too ill for you to see him, his symptoms are too painful; were you to go in, in defiance of advice, you would regret it all your after-life."

"Is he dying?"

Mr. Carlyle hesitated. Ought he to dissemble with her as the doctors had done? A strong feeling was upon him that he ought not.

"I trust to you not to deceive me," she simply said.

"I fear he is. I believe he is."

She rose up; she grasped his arm in the sudden fear that flashed over her. "You are deceiving me, and he is dead!"

"I am not deceiving you, Lady Isabel. He is not dead: but—it may be very near."

She laid her face down upon the sofa pillow. "Going for ever from me! going for ever. Oh, Mr. Carlyle, let me see him for a minute! just one farewell! will you not try for me?"

He knew how hopeless it was, but he turned to leave the room. "I will go and see. But you will remain here quietly: you will not come."

She bowed her head in acquiescence, and he closed the door. Had she indeed been his sister, he would probably have turned the key upon her. He entered the earl's chamber, but not many seconds did he remain in it.

"It is over," he whispered to Mrs. Mason, whom he met in the corridor. "And Mr. Wainwright is asking for you."

"You are soon back," cried Isabel, lifting her head. "May I go?"

He sat down and took her hand, shrinking from his task. "I wish I could comfort you," he exclaimed in a tone of deep emotion.

Her face turned of a ghastly whiteness, as white as another's not far away. "Tell me the worst," she breathed.

"I have nothing to tell you but the worst. May God support you, dear Lady Isabel."

She turned to hide her face and its misery from him, and a low wail of anguish escaped from her, betraying its own tale of despair.

The grey dawn of morning was breaking over the world, advent of another bustling day in life's history; but the spirit of William Vane, Earl of Mount Severn, had soared away from it for ever.

CHAPTER X.

THE KEEPERS OF THE DEAD.

EVENTS, between the death of Lord Mount Severn and his interment, occurred quickly; to one of them the reader may feel inclined to demur, as believing that it could have no foundation in fact, in the actions of real life. He would be wrong. The circumstances really occurred.

The earl died on Friday morning, at daylight. The news spread rapidly; it generally does on the death of a peer, if he have been of note (whether good or bad) in the world. It was known in London before the day was over; the consequence of which was, that by Saturday morning early, a shoal of what the late earl would have called harpies had arrived to surround East Lynne. There were creditors for small sums and for great, for five or ten pounds, up to five or ten thousand. Some were civil; some impatient; some loud and rough and angry; some came in to put executions on the effects, and some—*to arrest the body!*

This last act was accomplished cleverly. Two men, each with a remarkably hooked nose, stole away from the hubbub of the clamourers, and peering cunningly about, made their way to the side, or tradesman's entrance. A kitchen maid answered their general appeal at the bell.

"Has the coffin come yet?" said they.

"Coffin? no!" was the girl's reply. "The shell ain't here yet. Mr. Jones didn't promise that till nine o'clock, and it haven't gone eight."

"It won't be long," quoth they, "it's on its road. We'll go up to his lordship's room, and be getting ready for it."

The girl called the butler. "Two men from Jones's, the undertaker's, sir," announced she. "The shell's coming on, and they want to go up and make ready for it."

The butler marshalled them upstairs himself, and introduced them to the room. "That will do," said they, as he was about to enter with them; "we won't trouble you to wait." And, closing the door upon the unsuspicious butler, they took up their station on either side the dead, like a couple of ill-omened mutes. They had placed an arrest upon the corpse; it was theirs, until their claim was satisfied, and they sat down to thus watch and secure it. Pleasant occupation!

It may have been an hour later that Lady Isabel, leaving her own chamber, opened noiselessly that of the dead. She had been in it several times the previous day; at first with the housekeeper; afterwards, when the nameless dread was somewhat effaced, alone. But she felt nervous again this morning, and had gained the bed before she ventured to lift her eyes from the carpet and encounter the sight. Then she started, for there sat two strange-looking men—and not attractive men, either.

It darted through her mind that they must be people from the neighbourhood, come to gratify an idle and unpardonable curiosity: her first impulse was to summon the butler: her second, to speak to them herself.

"Do you want anything here?" she quietly said.

"Much obleeged for the inquiry, miss. We are all right."

The words and tone struck her as being singular in the extreme: and they kept their seats, too, as though they had a right to be there.

"Why are you here?" she repeated. "What are you doing?"

"Well, miss, I don't mind telling you, for I suppose you are his daughter"—pointing his left thumb over his shoulder at the late peer—"and we hear he have got no other relative anigh him. We have been obleeged, miss, to perform a unpleasant dooty, and secure him."

The words were as Greek to her: and the men saw that they were.

"He unfort'nately owed a sight of money, miss—as you perhaps be aware on, and our employers is in, deep. So, as soon as they heard what had happened, they sent us down to arrest the dead corpse: and we have done it."

Amazement, horror, fear, struggled together in the shocked mind of Lady Isabel. Arrest the dead! She had never heard of a like calamity; nor could she have believed in it. Arrest it for what purpose? What to do? With a panting heart and ashy lips she turned from the room. Mrs. Mason happened to be passing near the stairs, and Isabel flew to her, seizing her with both hands in her terror, as she burst into a fit of nervous tears.

"Those men—in there!" she gasped.

"What men, my lady?" returned Mrs. Mason in surprise.

"I don't know; I don't know. I think they are going to stop there: they say they have taken papa."

After a pause of bewildered astonishment, the housekeeper left her standing where she was, and went to the earl's chamber, to see if she could fathom the mystery of the words. Isabel leaned against the balustrades; partly for support, partly that she seemed afraid to stir from them; and the ominous disturbance, downstairs, reached her ears. Strangers, interlopers, appeared to be in the hall, talking vehemently, and complaining in bitter tones. More and more terrified, she held her breath to listen.

"Where's the good of your seeing the young lady?" cried the butler, in a tone of remonstrance. "She knows nothing about the earl's affairs; she is in grief enough, just now, without any other worry."

"I will see her," retorted a dogged voice. "If she's too upstart and mighty to come down and answer a question or two, why, I'll find my way to her. Here we are, a shameful crowd of us, swindled out of our own, told there's nobody we can speak to; nobody here but the young lady, and she must not be troubled! She didn't find it trouble to help to spend our money! She has no honour and not the feelings of a lady, if she don't come and speak to us."

Repressing her rebellious emotion, Lady Isabel glided partly down the staircase, and softly called to the butler.

"What is all this?" she asked. "I must know."

"Oh, my lady, don't go amongst those rough men! You cannot do any good; pray go back before they see you. I have sent for Mr. Carlyle, and expect him here every moment."

"Did papa owe them *all* money?" she shivered.

"I am afraid he did, my lady."

She went swiftly on; and, passing through the few stragglers in the hall, entered the dining-room, where the greater number had congregated, and the hubbub was loudest. All anger, at least all external anger, was hushed at her sight. She looked so young, so innocent, so childlike in her pretty morning dress, her fair face shaded by falling curls, so little fitted to combat with, or understand *their* business, that instead of pouring forth complaints, they hushed them into silence.

"I heard some one saying that I ought to see you," she began, agitation causing the words to come forth brokenly. "What did you want with me?"

Then they poured out their complaints, but not angrily, and she listened until she grew sick. There were many and formidable claims; promissory notes and I O U's, overdue bills and underdue bills: heavy outstanding debts of all sorts, and trifles (comparatively speaking) for housekeeping, servants' liveries, and out-door servants' wages.

What was Isabel Vane to answer? what excuse to offer? what hope or promise to give? She stood in bewilderment, unable to speak, turning from one to the other, her sweet eyes full of pity and contrition.

"The fact is, young lady," said one who bore the exterior of a gentleman, "we should not have come down to trouble you—at least, I can answer for myself—but his lordship's men of business, Warburton and Ware, to whom many of us hastened last evening, told us there would not be a shilling for anybody, unless it could be had from the furniture. When it comes to that, it is, 'first come, first served,' and I got down by morning light, and levied an execution."

"Which was levied before you came," put in a man, who might be brother to the two upstairs, to judge by his nose. "But what's such furniture as this, to our claims—if you come to compare 'em? no more than a bucket of water is to the Thames."

"What can I do?" shivered Lady Isabel. "What is it you wish me to do? I have no money to give you. I——"

"No, miss," broke in a pale, quiet man; "if report tells true, you are more wronged than we are, for you won't have a roof to put your head under, or a guinea to call your own."

"He has been a scoundrel to everybody," interrupted an intemperate voice; "he has ruined thousands."

The speech was hissed down: even they were not men gratuitously to insult a delicate young lady.

"Perhaps you'll just answer us a question, miss," persisted the voice, in spite of the hisses. "Is there any ready money that can——"

But another person had entered the room—Mr. Carlyle. He caught sight of the white face and trembling hands of Isabel, and interrupted the last speaker with little ceremony.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, in a tone of authority. "What do you want?"

"If you are a friend of the late peer's, you ought to know what we want," was the response. "We want our debts paid."

"But this is not the place to come to," returned Mr. Carlyle: "your flocking here, in this extraordinary manner, will do no good. You must go to Warburton and Ware."

"We have been to them—and received their answer. A cool assurance that there'll be nothing for anybody."

"At any rate, you will get nothing here," observed Mr. Carlyle, to the collected assembly. "Allow me to request you to leave the house at once."

It was not likely that they would do so at his bidding. And they said it.

"Then I warn you of the consequences of a refusal," quietly said Mr. Carlyle: "you are trespassing upon a stranger's property. This house was not Lord Mount Severn's: he sold it some time ago."

They knew better. Some laughed, and said these tricks were stale.

"Listen, gentlemen," rejoined Mr. Carlyle, in the plain, straightforward manner that carried its own truth with it. "To assert what could be disproved when the earl's affairs came to be investigated, would be simply foolish. I give you my word of honour as a man—that this estate, with the house and all that it contains, passed legally, months ago, from the hands of Lord Mount Severn: and, during his recent sojourn here, he was only a visitor in it. Go and ask his men of business whether it is so or not."

"Who purchased it?" was the inquiry.

"Mr. Carlyle, of West Lynne. Some of you may possibly know him by reputation."

Some of them did. "A cute young lawyer," observed a voice; "as his father was before him."

"I am he," proceeded Mr. Carlyle. "And being a 'cute lawyer,' as you do me the honour to decide, you cannot suppose I should risk my money upon any sale not perfectly safe and legal. I was not an agent in the affair; I employed agents: for it was my own money that I invested, and East Lynne is mine."

"Is the purchase-money paid over?" inquired more than one.

"It was paid over at the time: last June."

"What did Lord Mount Severn do with the money?"

"I do not know," replied Mr. Carlyle. "I am not cognizant of Lord Mount Severn's private affairs."

Significant murmurs arose: "Strange that the earl should stop two or three months at a place that wasn't his!"

"It may appear so to you, but allow me to explain," returned Mr. Carlyle. "The earl expressed a wish to pay East Lynne a few days' visit, by way of farewell, and I acceded to the request. Before the few days were over, he was taken ill, and remained, from that time, too ill to quit it. This day, this very day, gentlemen, was at length fixed for his departure."

"And you tell us you bought the furniture?"

"Everything as it stands. You need not doubt my word, for proofs will be forthcoming. East Lynne was in the market for sale: I heard of it, and became the purchaser—just as I might have bought an estate from any of you. And now, as this is my house, and you have no claim upon me, I should be obliged to you to withdraw."

"Perhaps you will claim the horses and carriages next, sir," cried the man with the hooked nose.

Mr. Carlyle lifted his head haughtily. "What is mine, is mine; legally purchased and paid for; a just price. The carriages and horses I have nothing to do with: Lord Mount Severn brought them down with him."

"And I have a safe watcher over them in the out premises, to see that they don't run away," nodded the man, complacently. "And, if I don't mistake, there is a safe watcher over something else upstairs."

"What a cursed scoundrel Mount Severn was!"

"Whatever he may have been, it does not give you the right to outrage the feelings of his daughter," warmly interrupted Mr. Carlyle: "and I should have thought that men, calling themselves Englishmen, would have disdained the shame. Allow me, Lady Isabel," he added, imperatively taking her hand to lead her from the room. "I will remain and deal with this business."

But she hesitated. The injury her father had done these men was telling painfully on her sense of right, and she essayed to speak a word of apology, of sorrow: she thought she ought to do so; she did not like them to think her quite heartless. But it was a painful task, and the colour went and came in her pale face, and her breath was laboured from excess of tribulation.

"I am very sorry," she stammered; and, with the effort of speaking, emotion overcame her, and she burst into tears. "I did not know anything of all this: my father's affairs were not spoken of before me. I believe I have not anything: if I had, I would divide it amongst you as equally as I could. But should it ever be in my power, should money ever be mine, I will thankfully pay all your claims."

All your claims! Lady Isabel little thought what that "all" would include. However, such promises, made at such a moment, fall heedlessly on the ear. Scarcely one present who did not feel sympathy and sorrow for her, and Mr. Carlyle led her from the room. He closed the door upon the noisy crew, and then her sobs came forth hysterically.

"I am so grieved, Lady Isabel! Had I foreseen this annoyance, you should have been spared it. Can you go upstairs alone?—or shall I call Mrs. Mason?"

"Oh yes, I can go alone: I am not ill, only frightened and sick. This is not the worst," she shivered. "There are two men up--up—with—with papa."

Up with papa! Mr. Carlyle was puzzled. He saw that she was shaking from head to foot as she stood before him.

"I cannot understand it, and it terrifies me," she continued, attempting an explanation. "They are sitting in the room close to him; they have taken him, they say."

A blank, thunderstruck pause. Mr. Carlyle looked at her; he did not speak; and then he turned and looked at the butler, who was standing near them. But the man only responded by giving his head a half shake, and Mr. Carlyle saw that it was an ominous one.

"I will clear the house of these," he said to Lady Isabel, pointing to the dining-room, "and then join you upstairs."

"Two ruffians, sir, and they have possession of the body," whispered the butler into Mr. Carlyle's ear, as Lady Isabel departed. "They obtained entrance to the chamber by a sly, deceitful trick, saying they were the undertaker's men, and that he can't be buried, unless their claims are paid, if it's for a month to come. It has upset us all, sir; Mrs. Mason, while telling me—for she was the first to know it—was as ill as she could be."

At present Mr. Carlyle returned to the dining-room, and bore the brunt of the anger of those savage, and—it may be said—ill-used men. Not that it was vented upon him; quite the contrary; but on the memory of the unhappy peer, who was lying overhead. A few had taken the precaution to insure the earl's life, and they were the best off. They left the house after a short time, for Mr. Carlyle's statement was indisputable, and they knew the law better than to remain trespassers on his property.

But the custodians of the dead could not be so dismissed. Mr. Carlyle proceeded to the death-chamber, and examined their authority. A similar case had never occurred under his own observation: though it had under his father's, and Mr. Carlyle remembered hearing of it. The body of a church dignitary, who had died deeply in debt, was arrested as it was being carried through the cloisters to its grave in the cathedral. These men, sitting over Lord Mount Severn, enforced heavy claims, and there they must sit, until the arrival of Mr. Vane from Castle Marling—now the Earl of Mount Severn.

On the following morning, Sunday, Mr. Carlyle proceeded again to East Lynne, and found, to his surprise, that there was no arrival. Isabel was in the breakfast-room alone, the meal on the table untouched, and she shivering—on a low ottoman before the fire. She looked so ill, that Mr. Carlyle could not forbear remarking upon it.

"I have not slept, and I am very cold," she answered. "I did not close my eyes all night; I was too terrified to do so."

"Terrified at what?" he asked.

"At those men," she whispered. "It is strange that Mr. Vane has not arrived."

"Is the post in?"

"I don't know,' she apathetically replied. "I have received nothing."

She had scarcely spoken when the butler entered with his salver full of letters, most of them bearing condolence to Lady Isabel. She singled out one and hastened to open it, for it bore the Castle Marling postmark. "It is Mrs. Vane's handwriting," she remarked to Mr. Carlyle.

"*Castle Marling, Saturday.*

"MY DEAR ISABEL,—I am dreadfully grieved and shocked at the news conveyed in Mr. Carlyle's letter to my husband, for he has gone cruising in his yacht, and I opened it. Goodness knows where he may be: round the coast somewhere; but he said he should be home by Sunday, and as he is generally pretty punctual in keepirg his word, I expect him. Be assured he will not lose a moment in hastening to East Lynne.

"I cannot express what I feel for you, and am too bouleversée to write more. Try and keep up your spirits, and believe me, dear Isabel, with sincere sympathy and regret, faithfully yours,

"EMMA MOUNT SEVERN."

The colour came into Isabel's pale cheek as she read the signature. She thought, had she been the writer, she should, in that first letter, have still signed herself Emma Vane. Isabel handed the note to Mr. Carlyle. "It is very unfortunate," she sighed.

Mr. Carlyle glanced over it, as quickly as Mrs. Vane's illegible writing would allow him, and drew in his lips in a peculiar way when he came to the signature. Perhaps at the same thought which had struck Isabel.

"Had Mrs. Vane been worth a rush, she would have come herself, knowing your lonely situation," he uttered impulsively.

Isabel leaned her head upon her hand. All the difficulties and embarrassments of her position came crowding upon her mind. No orders had been given in preparation for the funeral, and she felt that she had no right to give any. The Earls of Mount Severn were buried at Mount Severn, but to take her father thither would involve great expense: would the present earl sanction that? Since the previous morning, she seemed to have grown old in the world's experiences; her ideas were changed, the bent of her thoughts had been violently turned from its course. Instead of being a young lady of position, of wealth and rank, she appeared to herself more in the light of an unfortunate pauper; an interloper in the house she was inhabiting. It has been the custom in romance to represent young ladies, especially if they are handsome and interesting, as being altogether oblivious of every-day cares and necessities, supremely indifferent to the future prospects of poverty—poverty that brings hunger and thirst and cold and nakedness in its train; but, be assured, this apathy never exists in real life. Isabel Vane's grief for her father—whom, whatever may have been the aspect he wore for others, *she* had deeply loved and reverenced—was sharply poignant: but in the midst of that grief, and of the singular troubles his death had brought forth, she could not close her eyes to her own future. Its uncertainty, its foreshadowed embarrassments did obtrude themselves, and the words of that plain-speaking creditor kept ringing in her ears—"You won't have a roof to put your head under, or a guinea to call your own." Where was she to go?—with whom to live? she was in Mr. Carlyle's house, now. And how was she to pay the servants? Money was owing to them all.

"Mr. Carlyle, how long has this house been yours?" she asked, breaking the silence.

"The purchase was completed in June. Did Lord Mount Severn never tell you he had sold it to me?"

"No; never. All these things are yours?" glancing round the room.

"The furniture was sold with the house. Not these sort of things," he added, his eye falling on the silver of the breakfast-table: "not plate and linen."

"Not plate and linen! Then those poor men, who were here yesterday, have a right to them," she quickly cried.

"I scarcely know. I believe the plate goes with the entail—and the jewels go also. The linen cannot be of much consequence, either way."

"Are my clothes my own?"

He smiled at her simplicity; and assured her that they were no one else's.

"I did not know," she sighed; "I did not understand. So many strange things have happened in the last day or two, that I seem to understand nothing."

Indeed she could not understand. She had no definite ideas on the subject of this transfer of East Lynne to Mr. Carlyle: plenty of indefinite ones, and they were haunting her. Fears of debt to him, and of the house and its contents being handed over to him in liquidation, were working in her brain.

"Does my father owe you any money?" she breathed in a timid tone.

"Not any," he replied. "Lord Mount Severn was never indebted to me in his life."

"Yet you purchased East Lynne!"

"As any one else might have done," he answered, discerning the drift of her thoughts. "I was in search of an estate for investment, and East Lynne suited me."

"I feel my position, Mr. Carlyle," she resumed, the rebellious tears forcing themselves to her eyes, "thus to be intruding upon you for a shelter. And I cannot help myself."

"You can help grieving me," he gently answered, "which you do when you talk of obligation. The obligation is on my side, Lady Isabel; and when I express a hope that you will continue at East Lynne while it can be of service to you, however prolonged that period may be, I assure you I say it in all sincerity."

"You are truly kind," she faltered; "and for a few days—until I can think—until—— Oh, Mr. Carlyle, are papa's affairs really so bad as they said yesterday?" she broke off, her perplexities recurring to her with vehement force. "Is there nothing left?"

Now, Mr. Carlyle might have given the evasive assurance that there would be plenty left, just to tranquillize her. But to use deceit with her would have pricked against every feeling of his nature; and he saw how implicitly she relied upon his truth.

"I fear things are not very bright," he answered. "That is, so far as we can see at present. But there may be some settlement effected for you that you do not know of. Warburton and Ware——"

"No," she interrupted; "I never heard of a settlement, and I am sure there is none. I see the worst plainly: I have no home; no home, and no money. This house is yours; the town-house and Mount Severn go to Mr. Vane. And I have nothing."

"But surely Mr. Vane will be delighted to welcome you to your old home. The houses pass to him—but it almost seems as though you had a greater right to them than he or Mrs. Vane."

"My home with them!" she retorted, as if the words had stung her. "What are you saying, Mr. Carlyle?"

"I beg your pardon, Lady Isabel. I should not have presumed to touch upon these points myself, but——"

"Nay, I think I ought to beg yours," she interrupted, more calmly. "I am only grateful for the interest you take in them; the kindness you have shown. But I could never make my home with Mrs. Vane."

Mr. Carlyle rose. He could do no good by remaining, and did not think well to intrude longer. He suggested that it might be more pleasant if Isabel had a friend with her: Mrs. Ducie would, no doubt, be willing to come, and she was a kind and motherly woman.

Isabel shook her head with a passing shudder. "Have strangers here, with—all—that—in papa's chamber!" she uttered. "Mrs. Ducie drove over yesterday; perhaps to remain; I don't know; but I was afraid of questions, and would not see her. When I think of—that—I feel thankful that I am alone."

The housekeeper stopped Mr. Carlyle as he was going out. "Sir, what is the news from Castle Marling? Pound said there was a letter. Is Mr. Vane coming?"

"He was out yachting. Mrs. Vane expected him home yesterday, so it is to be hoped that he will be here to-day."

"What will be done if he does not come?" she breathed. "The leaden coffin ought to be soldered down—for you know, sir, the state he was in when he died."

"It can be soldered down without Mr. Vane."

"Of course—without Mr. Vane. It's not that, sir. Will those men allow it to be done? The undertakers were here this morning at daybreak, and those men intimated that they were not going to *lose sight* of the dead. The words sounded significant to us, but we asked them no questions. Have they a right to prevent it, sir?"

"Upon my word I cannot tell," replied Mr. Carlyle. "The proceeding is so rare a one that I know little what legal right they have, or have not. Do not mention this fear to Lady Isabel. And when Mr. Va—— when Lord Mount Severn arrives, send down to inform me of it."

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW PEER, AND THE BANK-NOTE.

A POST-CHAISE was driven furiously up the avenue that Sunday afternoon. It contained the new peer, Lord Mount Severn. The more direct line of rail from Castle Marling brought him within five miles of West Lynne, and thence he had travelled in a hired chaise. Mr. Carlyle soon joined him, and almost at the same time Mr. Warburton arrived from London. Absence from town at the period of the earl's death had prevented Mr. Warburton's earlier attendance. Business was entered upon immediately.

The present earl knew that his predecessor had been an embarrassed man, but he had no conception of the extent of the evil. They had not been intimate, and rarely came into contact with each other. As the various items of news were now detailed to him—wasteful expenditure, disastrous ruin, a total absence of provision for Isabel—he stood petrified and aghast. He was a tall, stout man of three and forty years, his nature honourable, his manners cold, and his countenance severe.

"It is the most iniquitous piece of business I ever heard of," he exclaimed to the two lawyers. "Of all reckless fools, Mount Severn must have been the worst!"

"Unpardonably improvident, as regards his daughter," was the assenting remark.

"Improvident! it must have been rank madness," retorted the earl. "No man in his senses could leave a child to the mercy of the world, as he has left her. She has not a shilling; literally not a shilling in her possession. I put the question to her—what money was in the house when the earl died. Twenty or twenty-five pounds, she answered, which she had since given to Mason, who required it for housekeeping purposes. If the girl wants a ribbon for herself, she has not the money to pay for it! Can you realize such a case?" continued the excited peer. "I will stake my veracity that such a one never yet occurred."

"No money for her own personal wants!" exclaimed Mr. Carlyle.

"Not a halfpenny in the world. And there are no funds, and will be none, that I can see, for her to draw upon."

"Quite correct, my lord," nodded Mr. Warburton. "The entailed estates go to you, and what trifling matters of personal property may be left, the creditors will take care of."

"I understand that East Lynne is yours," cried the earl, turning sharply upon Mr. Carlyle. "Isabel has just said so."

"It is," was the reply. "It became mine last June. I believe his lordship kept the fact a close secret."

"He was obliged to keep it secret," interposed Mr. Warburton, addressing Lord Mount Severn, "for not a stiver of the purchase-money could he have fingered, had it got wind. Beyond ourselves and Mr. Carlyle's agents, the fact was known to none."

"It is strange, sir, that you could not urge the claims of his child upon the earl," rejoined the new peer to Mr. Warburton, his tone one of harsh reproof. "You were in his confidence; you knew the state of his affairs; it was in your line of duty to do it."

"And, knowing the state of his affairs, my lord, we knew how useless the urging it would be," returned Mr. Warburton. "He had allowed the time to slip by when he could have made a provision for her: the power to do so had passed, years ago. Once or twice I have brought it under his notice, but it was a sore point with him, and he would not pursue it. I do not think he was uneasy about her: he depended upon her making a good marriage during his lifetime; not expecting to die so young."

"Out of his power!" repeated the earl, stopping in his impatient pacings of the room and facing Mr. Warburton. "Don't tell me, sir! he should have done something. He might have insured his life for a few thousands, if nothing else. The child is without anything; without even pocket-money! Do you understand?"

"Unfortunately I understand only too well," returned the lawyer. "But your lordship has only a faint idea of the burdens Lord Mount Severn had upon him. The interest alone on his debts was frightful—and the deuce's own work there used to be to get it. Not to speak of the kites he let loose: he would fly them, and nothing could stop him; and they had to be provided for."

"Oh, I know," replied the earl, with a gesture of contempt. "Drawing one bill to cover another: that was his system."

"Draw!" echoed Mr. Warburton: "he would have drawn a bill upon Aldgate pump. It was a downright mania with him."

"Urged to it by his necessities, I conclude," put in Mr. Carlyle.

"He had no business to have such necessities, sir," cried the earl, wrathfully. "But let us proceed to business. What money is there lying at his bankers, Mr. Warburton? Do you know?"

"None," was the blank reply. "We overdrew the account ourselves a fortnight ago, to meet one of his pressing liabilities. We hold a little; and, had he lived a week or two longer, the autumn rents would have been paid in—though they must have been as quickly paid out again."

"I'm glad there's something. What is the amount?"

"My lord," answered Mr. Warburton, shaking his head in a self-pitying manner, "I am sorry to tell you that what we hold will not half satisfy our own claims: money actually paid out of our pockets."

"Then where on earth is the money to come from, sir? For the funeral; for servants' wages; for everything, in short?"

"There is none to come from anywhere," was the reply of Mr. Warburton.

Lord Mount Severn strode the carpet more fiercely. "Wicked improvidence! shameful profligacy! callous-hearted man! To live a rogue, and die a beggar, leaving his daughter to the charity of strangers!"

"Her case presents the worst feature of the whole," remarked Mr. Carlyle. "What will she do for a home?"

"She must, of course, find it with me," replied his lordship. "And I should hope, a better one than this. With all these debts and duns at his elbow, Mount Severn's house could not have been a bower of roses."

"I fancy she knew nothing of the state of affairs; had seen little, if anything, of the embarrassments," returned Mr. Carlyle.

"Nonsense!" said the peer.

"Mr. Carlyle is right, my lord," observed Mr. Warburton, looking over his spectacles. "Lady Isabel was in safety at Mount Severn until the spring, and the purchase-money from East Lynne was a stop-gap for many things, and made matters easy for the moment. However, his imprudences are at an end now."

"No, they are not at an end," returned Lord Mount Severn: "they leave their effects behind them. I hear there was a fine scene yesterday morning: some of the unfortunate wretches he has taken in made their appearances here, all the way from town."

"Oh, they are Jews, half of them," slightingly spoke Mr. Warburton. "If they do lose a little, it will be an agreeable novelty to them."

"Jews have as much right to their own as we have, Mr. Warburton," was the peer's angry reprimand. "And if they were Turks and infidels, it would not excuse Mount Severn's practices. Isabel says it was you, Mr. Carlyle, who contrived to get rid of them."

"By convincing them that East Lynne and its furniture belonged to me. But there are those two men upstairs, in possession of—of him: I could not get rid of them."

The earl looked at him. "I do not understand you."

"Did you not know that they have seized the corpse?" asked Mr. Carlyle, dropping his voice. "Two men have been posted over it, like sentinels, since yesterday morning. And there's a third in the house, I hear, who relieves each by turn, that they may go down to the hall and take their meals."

The earl had halted in his walk and drawn near to Mr. Carlyle, his mouth open, his face a marvel of consternation. "By George!" was all Mr. Warburton uttered, and snatched off his glasses.

"Mr. Carlyle, do I understand you aright—that the body of the late earl has been seized for debt?" demanded the peer solemnly. "Seize a dead body! Am I awake or dreaming?"

"It is what they have done. They got into the room by stratagem."

"Is it possible that transactions so infamous are permitted by our law?" ejaculated the earl. "Arrest a dead man! I never heard of such a thing. I am shocked beyond expression. Isabel said something about two men, I remember: but she was so full of grief and agitation, that I only half comprehended what she said upon any subject. Why, what will be done? Cannot we bury him?"

"I fancy not. The housekeeper told me this morning she feared they would not even suffer the coffins to be closed. And that ought to be done with all speed."

"It is perfectly horrible," uttered the earl.

"Who has done it? do you know?" inquired Mr. Warburton.

"Some one of the name of Anstey," replied Mr. Carlyle. "In the absence of any member of the family, I took upon myself to pay the chamber a visit, and examine into the men's authority. The claim is about three thousand pounds."

"If it's Anstey who has done it, it is a personal debt of the earl's, really owing, every pound of it," observed Mr. Warburton. "A sharp man, though, that Anstey, to hit upon such a scheme."

"And a shameless and a scandalous man," added Lord Mount Severn. "Well, this is a pretty thing! What's to be done?"

While they consult let us look for a moment at Lady Isabel. She sat alone, in great perplexity, indulging the deepest grief. Lord Mount Severn had intimated to her, kindly and affectionately, that henceforth she must find her home with him and his wife. Isabel returned a faint "thank you," and, as soon as he left her, burst into a paroxysm of rebellious tears. "Have her home with Mrs. Vane!" she uttered to her own heart. "No, never: rather would she die, rather would she work for her living, rather would she eat a crust and drink water!" And so on, and so on. Young demoiselles are somewhat prone to indulge in these flights of fancy: but they are in most cases impracticable and foolish; exceedingly so were they in that of Lady Isabel Vane. Work for their living! It may appear very feasible in theory; but theory and practice are as opposite as light and darkness. The plain fact was, that Isabel had no alternative whatever: she must accept a home with Lady Mount Severn: and the conviction that it must be so stole over her spirit, even while her hasty lips were protesting that she would not. Lord Mount Severn wished to despatch her to Castle Marling at once, but this she successfully resisted, and it was decided that she should travel the day after the funeral.

Mr. Warburton, authorized by the earl, relieved the death-chamber of its two intruders: though—very much to the surprise of the household—the obnoxious men still remained in the house. Mr. Warburton no doubt had his reasons; he was a cautious practitioner: and the men continued ostensibly in charge, until the earl was buried. Some said that if the lawyer released them, another arrest might be expected.

On Friday morning the interment took place—in St. Jude's churchyard, at West Lynne. Isabel's heart again rebelled bitterly: she thought it would have been at Mount Severn. The earl remarked, but not in her hearing, that he should have too much expense upon him, to go to unnecessary outlay over the funeral. Certainly he performed honourably all that could be required from him. He paid all tradesmen's debts, and those owing to the servants, gave them each a month's wages and a month's board wages in lieu of the customary warning of dismissal, and paid for their mourning. Pound, the butler, he retained in his own service. With regard to Isabel's mourning, he had desired her to have everything suited to her station and degree. The carriages and horses, on which a detainer had been placed, he bought in for his own use: they were in excellent condition.

Two mourners only attended the funeral, the earl and Mr. Carlyle: the latter was no relative of the deceased, and only a recent friend: but the earl had invited him, probably not liking to parade alone his trappings of woe. Some of the county aristocracy were pall-bearers, and many private carriages followed.

All was bustle on the following morning. The earl was to depart, and Isabel was to depart; but not together. In the course of the day the domestics would disperse. The earl was speeding to London, and the chaise to convey him to the railway station at West Lynne was already at the door when Mr. Carlyle arrived.

"I was beginning to fear you would not be here; I have barely five minutes to spare," observed the earl, as he shook hands. "You are sure you fully understood about the tombstone?"

"Perfectly," replied Mr. Carlyle. "How is Lady Isabel?"

"Very down-hearted, I fear, poor child, for she did not breakfast with me," returned the earl. "Mason told me that she was in a convulsion of grief. A bad man, a *bad* man was Mount Severn," he emphatically added, as he rose and rang the bell.

"Let Lady Isabel be informed that I am ready to depart, and that I wait to see her," he said to the servant who answered it. "And while she is coming, Mr. Carlyle," he added, "allow me to express my obligation to you. How I should have got through this worrying business without you, I cannot divine. You have promised, mind, to pay me a visit, and I shall expect it speedily."

"Promised conditionally—that I find myself in your neighbourhood," smiled Mr. Carlyle. "Should——"

Isabel entered, dressed also, and ready, for she was to depart immediately after the earl. Her crape veil was over her face, but she threw it back.

"My time is up, Isabel, and I must go. Is there anything you wish to say to me?"

She opened her lips to speak, but glanced at Mr. Carlyle, and hesitated. He was standing at the window, with his back towards them.

"I suppose not," said the earl, answering himself, for he was in a hurry to be off, as many others are when starting on a journey. "You will have no trouble whatever, my dear; Pound will see to everything. Only mind you have some refreshment in the middle of the day, for you won't be at Castle Marling before dinner-time. Tell Mrs. Va—— tell Lady Mount Severn that I had no time to write, and will do so from town."

But Isabel stood before him in an attitude of uncertainty—of expectancy, it may be said, her colour varying.

"What is it? You wish to say something."

She certainly did wish to say something, but she did not know how. It was a moment of embarrassment to her, intensely painful; and the presence of Mr. Carlyle did not tend to lessen it. The latter had no idea his absence was wished for.

"I—I—do not like to ask you, but I—have—no money," she stammered, her delicate features flushing crimson.

"Bless me, Isabel! I declare I forgot all about it," cried the earl, in a tone of vexation. "Not being accustomed to——this aspect of affairs is so new——" He broke off his disjointed sentences, unbuttoned his coat, drew out his purse, and paused over its contents.

"Isabel, I have run myself very short, and have little beyond what will take me to town. You must make three pounds do for the present, my dear. Pound has the funds for the journey. Once at Castle Marling, Lady Mount Severn will supply you: but you must tell her, or she will not know."

He shot some gold out of his purse as he spoke, and left two sovereigns, and two half-sovereigns on the table. "Farewell, my dear; make yourself happy at Castle Marling; I shall be home soon."

Passing from the room with Mr. Carlyle, he stood talking with that gentleman for a minute, his foot on the step of the chaise; and, the next, he was being whirled away. Mr. Carlyle returned to the breakfast-room, where Isabel, an ashy whiteness having replaced the crimson of her cheeks, was taking up the gold.

"Will you do me a favour, Mr. Carlyle?"

"I will do anything I can for you."

She pushed a sovereign and a half towards him. "It is for Mr. Kane. I told Marvel to send and pay him, but it seems she forgot it, or put it off, and he is not paid. The tickets were a sovereign: the rest is for tuning the piano. Will you kindly give it to him? If I trust one of the servants, it may be forgotten again in the hurry of their departure."

"Kane's charge for tuning a piano is five shillings," remarked Mr. Carlyle."

"But he was a long time occupied with it, and he did something to the leathers. It is not too much: besides, I never ordered him anything to eat. He wants money even more than I do," she added with a poor attempt at a smile. "But for thinking of him, I should not have mustered courage to beg of Lord Mount Severn—as you have just heard me do. In that case, do you know what I should have done?"

"What should you have done?" he smiled.

"I should have asked you to pay him for me, and I would have repaid you as soon as I had any money of my own. I had a great mind to ask you, do you know; it would have seemed less painful than being obliged to beg of Lord Mount Severn."

"I hope it would," he answered, in a low, earnest tone. "What else can I do for you?"

She was about to answer "Nothing; that he had done enough:" but at that moment their attention was attracted by a bustle outside, and they moved to the window.

It was the carriage coming round for Lady Isabel. The late earl's chariot, which was to convey her to the railway station six or seven miles off. It had four post-horses to it, the number having been designated by Lord Mount Severn, who appeared to wish Isabel to leave the neighbourhood in as much state as she had entered it. The carriage was packed, and Marvel was perched outside.

"All is ready," she said, "and the time has come for me to go. Mr. Carlyle, I am about to leave you a legacy—those pretty gold and silver fish, that I bought a few weeks back."

"But why do you not take them?"

"Take them to Lady Mount Severn's! No, I would rather leave them with you. Throw a few crumbs into the globe now and then."

Her face was wet with tears, and he knew she was talking hurriedly to cover her emotion.

"Sit down a few minutes," he said.

"No—no. I had better go at once."

He took her hand to conduct her to the carriage. The servants were gathered in the hall, waiting for her; some had grown grey in her father's service. She put out her hand, she strove to say a word of thanks and of farewell, and she thought she should choke at the effort to keep down her sobs. At length it was over; a kind look around, a yearning wave of the hand, and she passed on with Mr. Carlyle.

Pound had ascended to his place by Marvel, and the post-boys were waiting the signal to start, but Mr. Carlyle had the carriage door open again, and was bending in, holding her hand.

"I have not said a word of thanks to you for all your kindness, Mr. Carlyle," she cried, her breath laboured. "I am sure you have seen that I could not."

"I wish I could have done more; I wish I could have shielded you from the annoyances you have been obliged to endure!" he answered. "Should we never meet again——"

"Oh, but we shall meet again," she interrupted. "You promised Lord Mount Severn."

"True: we may so meet; casually; once in a way: but our ordinary paths in life lie far and wide apart. God for ever bless you, dear Lady Isabel!"

The post-boys touched their horses, and the carriage sped on. She drew down the blinds, and leaned back in an agony of tears: tears for the home she was leaving, for the father she had lost. Her last thoughts had been of gratitude to Mr. Carlyle; but she had more cause to be grateful to him than she yet knew of. Emotion soon spends itself, and as her eyes cleared, she saw a bit of crumpled paper lying on her lap, which appeared to have fallen from her hand. Mechanically she took it up and opened it: it was a bank-note for a hundred pounds.

Ah! reader, you will say this is a romance, and a far-fetched one, but it is verily and indeed true. Mr. Carlyle had taken it with him to East Lynne, that morning, with its destined purpose.

Lady Isabel strained her eyes and gazed at the note: gazed, and gazed again. Where could it come from? What brought it there? Suddenly the undoubted truth flashed upon her: Mr. Carlyle had left it in her hand.

Her cheeks burnt, her fingers trembled, her angry spirit was up in arms. In that first moment of discovery, she was ready to resent it as an insult; but when she came to remember the sober facts of the last few days, her anger subsided into admiration of his wondrous kindness. Did he not know that she was without a home to call her own, without money—absolutely without money, except what would be given her in charity?

Well, now, what should she do? Of course she could not use the note; that was out of the question; and to re-enclose it to him would pain him; she felt that a nature, capable of generosity so delicate, would be deeply wounded at having its generosity thrown back upon itself. Should she so pain him? Did he deserve it at her hands? No. She would keep the note until she had an opportunity of personally returning it to him.

Leaning over the entrance-gate of their house, between the grove of dark trees, was Barbara Hare. She had heard the hour of Lady Isabel's departure named; and, woman-like, *rival*-like—for in that light had Barbara's fanciful and jealous heart grown to regard Lady Isabel—posted herself there, to watch for it. Little saw she. Nothing but the carriage, the horses, and the attendants; for the blinds were down.

She stood there long, long after the carriage had passed; and presently her father came up from the direction of West Lynne.

"Barbara, have you seen Carlyle?"

"No, papa."

"I have been to his office, but they thought he had gone up to East Lynne. Perhaps he will be coming by. I want to catch him if I can."

Mr. Hare stood outside, and rested his elbow on the gate: Barbara stood within. It is probable the one was quite as anxious as the other to meet Mr. Carlyle.

"What do you think the report is?" suddenly exclaimed the justice. "The place is full of it. That Carlyle——"

Justice Hare took a step into the road, to obtain a better view of the way from East Lynne. Barbara's face flushed in the suspense created by his unfinished words.

"That Mr. Carlyle what, papa?" she asked, as he stepped back again.

"It is Carlyle coming," observed the justice; "I thought they were his long legs. That he has bought East Lynne, Barbara!"

"Oh, papa! Can it be true? Mr. Carlyle bought East Lynne!"

"As likely as not. He and Miss Corny have a pretty nest of golden eggs laid by between them. I put the question to Dill just now; but he was as close as he always is, and said neither one way nor the other. Good morning!" called out the justice, as Mr. Carlyle approached. "We are impatient on the bench to know if you have news from the Ipsley Union, because our Union vows the paupers shan't stop over to-day."

"Yes," answered Mr. Carlyle; "they admit the claim, so you may despatch them at once. How are you, Barbara?"

"That's all right, then," returned Mr. Hare. "Carlyle, people are saying that you have purchased East Lynne."

"Are they? Well, they are not far wrong. East Lynne is mine, I believe."

"Let you lawyers alone for speed, when you have yourselves for clients. Here is the earl, dead scarcely a week, and East Lynne already transferred to you."

"Not so, justice. East Lynne was mine months before the earl died."

"What, when he was stopping there? To think of that! A pretty rent you charged him, I'll be bound."

"No rent at all," responded Mr. Carlyle, with a smile. "He was an honorary tenant for the time being."

"Then you were a great fool," observed the justice. "Beg pardon, Carlyle—you are a young man, and I am an old one; or soon shall be. The earl was another fool to get himself so awfully embarrassed."

"Sadly embarrassed," chimed in Barbara. "I heard last night that there was nothing left for Lady Isabel; that she had actually no money to pay for her mourning. The Smiths told the Herberts, and the Herberts told me. Do you fancy it is true, Archibald?"

Mr. Carlyle appeared much amused. "I wonder they did not say Lady Isabel had no mourning, as well as no money: it would have been only a little stretch further. What would East Lynne do without its marvels?"

"Ah, what indeed?" cried Justice Hare. "I met her carriage, spanking along with four horses, her maid and man outside. A young lady, travelling in that state, would not be at a loss for mourning and money, Miss Barbara."

"People must gossip, you know, sir," said Mr. Carlyle. "My East Lynne purchase will be magnified into the purchase of West Lynne also, before the day is over. Good morning; good morning, Barbara."

When Lord Mount Severn reached London, and the hotel which the Vanes were in the habit of using, the first object his eyes lighted on was his own wife, whom he believed to be safe at Castle Marling. He inquired the cause.

Lady Mount Severn gave herself little trouble to explain. She had been up a day or two—could order her mourning so much better in person—and William did not seem well, so she brought him up for a change.

"I am sorry you came to town, Emma," remarked the earl, after listening. "Isabel has gone to-day to Castle Marling."

Lady Mount Severn quickly lifted her head. "What's she gone there for?"

"It is the most disgraceful piece of business altogether," returned the earl, without replying to the immediate question. "Mount Severn has died worse than a beggar, and there's not a shilling left for Isabel."

"It was not expected that there would be much."

"But there's nothing; not a penny; nothing even for her own personal expenses. I gave her a pound or two to-day, for she was completely without funds."

The countess opened her eyes. "Where will she live? What will become of her?"

"She must live with us. She——"

"With us!" interrupted Lady Mount Severn, her voice almost reaching a scream. "That she never shall."

"She must, Emma. There is nowhere else for her to live. I have been obliged to decide it so; and she has gone, as I tell you, to Castle Marling to-day."

Lady Mount Severn grew pale with anger. She rose from her seat, and confronted her husband, the table being between them. "Listen, Raymond, I *will not* have Isabel Vane under my roof. I hate her. How could you be cajoled into sanctioning such a thing?"

"I was not cajoled into it, and my sanction was not asked," he coldly replied. "I proposed it. Where else is she to live?"

"I don't care where," was the obstinate retort. "Never with us."

"Consider the thing dispassionately," returned his lordship. "She has no other relatives, no claim on any one else. I, the succeeding peer (who might not have come into the estates for twenty years hence had

Mount Severn's been a good life), am bound in courtesy, in good feeling, to afford her a home. Do you not see it?"

"No, I do not," returned the countess. "And I will not have her."

"She is at Castle Marling now; has gone to it as her home," resumed the earl; "and even you, when you return, will scarcely venture to turn her out again, into the road, or send her to the workhouse, or solicit her Majesty's ministers for a grant for her from the pension fund, and draw down upon yourself the censure of the world. I think you might show better feeling, Emma."

Lady Mount Severn did not retort openly. She possessed her share of common sense, and the argument of the earl was certainly difficult to answer—"Where was Isabel to go if not to them?" But she muttered angry words, and her face looked ready to spit fire.

"She will not trouble you long," carelessly remarked the earl. "One so lovely as Isabel will be sure to marry early; and she appears as gentle and sweet-tempered a girl as I ever saw, so whence can arise your dislike to her, I don't pretend to guess. Many a man will be too ready to forget her want of fortune for the sake of her face."

"She shall marry the first who asks her," snapped the angry lady. "I'll take care of that."

CHAPTER XII.

LIFE AT CASTLE MARLING.

ISABEL had been in her new home about ten days when Lord and Lady Mount Severn arrived at Castle Marling: which was not a castle, you may as well be told, but only the name of a town, very near to which was their residence, a small estate. Lord Mount Severn welcomed Isabel; Lady Mount Severn, also, after a fashion; but her manner was so repellent, so insolently patronizing, that it brought the indignant crimson to the cheeks of Isabel. And, if this was the case at the first meeting, what do you suppose it must have been as time went on? Galling slights, petty vexations, chilling annoyances were put upon her, trying her powers of endurance to their very utmost: she would wring her hands when alone, and passionately wish that she could find another refuge.

Lady Mount Severn lived only in admiration, and she gathered around her those who would offer her its incense. She carried her flirtations to the very verge of propriety; no further: there existed not a woman less likely to forget herself, or peril her fair fame, than Emma, Countess of Mount Severn; and no woman was more scornfully unforgiving to those who did forget themselves. She was the very essence of envy, of selfishness: she had never been known to invite a young and attractive woman to her house; she would as soon have invited a leper. And now you can understand her wrath, when she heard that Isabel Vane was to be her permanent inmate; Isabel, with her many charms, her youth, and her unusual beauty. At Christmas some visitors were down there; chiefly young men, and they were not wary enough to dissemble the fact that the young beauty was a far greater attraction than the exacting countess. Then broke forth, beyond bounds, her passion; and in a certain private scene, when she forgot all but passion, and lost sight of the proprieties of life, Isabel was *told* that she was a hated intruder, her presence only suffered because there was no help for it.

The earl and countess had two children, both boys, and in February the younger one, always a delicate child, died. This somewhat altered their plans. Instead of proceeding to London after Easter, as had been decided upon, they would not go until May. The earl had passed part of the winter at Mount Severn, looking after the repairs and renovations that were being made there. In March he went to Paris, full of grief for the loss of his boy; far greater grief than was experienced by Lady Mount Severn.

April approached; and, with it, Easter. To the unconcealed dismay of Lady Mount Severn, her grandmother, Mrs. Levison, wrote her word that she required change, and should pass Easter with her at Castle Marling. Lady Mount Severn would have given her diamonds to have got out of it, but there was no escape: diamonds that were once Isabel's; at least, which Isabel had worn. On the Monday in Passion Week the old lady arrived: and, with her, Francis Levison. They had no other guests.

Things went on pretty smoothly until Good Friday, but it was a deceitful calm: my lady's jealousy was kindling, for Captain Levison's attentions to Isabel were driving her wild. At Christmas his admiration had been open enough, but it was more so now. Better from any one else could Lady Mount Severn have borne this than from Francis Levison. She had suffered the young Guardsman, cousin though he was, to grow rather dear to her; dangerously dear it might have become had she been a less cautious woman. More welcome to her that all the world, rather than he, had given admiration to Isabel. Why did she have him there, throwing him into Isabel's companionship, as she had done the previous year in London, asks the reader. It is more than I can tell; why do people do foolish things?

On Good Friday afternoon, Isabel strolled out with little William Vane: Captain Levison joined they, and they never came in until nearly dinner-time, when the three entered together, Lady Mount Severn doing penance all the time, and nursing her rage against Isabel, for Mrs. Levison kept her indoors. There was barely time to dress for dinner, and Isabel went straight to her room. Her dress was off, her dressing-gown on, Marvel was busy with her hair, and William chattering at her knee, when the door was flung open, and my lady entered.

"Where have you been?" demanded she, shaking with passion. Isabel knew the signs.

"Strolling about in the shrubberies and grounds," answered Isabel.

"How dare you disgrace yourself?"

"I do not understand you," said Isabel, her heart beginning to beat unpleasantly. "Marvel, you are pulling my hair."

When women, liable to intemperate fits of passion, give the reins to them, they neither know nor care what they say. Lady Mount Severn broke into a torrent of reproach and abuse, most degrading and unjustifiable.

"Is it not sufficient that you are allowed an asylum in my house, but you must also disgrace it? Three hours have you been hiding yourself with Francis Levison! You have done nothing but flirt with him from the moment he arrived; you did nothing else at Christmas."

The attack was longer and broader, but that was the substance of it, and Isabel was goaded to resistance, to anger little less great than that of the countess. This!—and before her attendant! She, an earl's daughter, so much better born than Emma Mount Severn, to be thus insultingly accused in the other's mad jealousy. Isabel tossed her hair from the hands of Marvel, rose up, and confronted the countess, constraining her voice to calmness.

"I do not flirt," she said; "I have never flirted. I leave that"—and she could not wholly suppress in tone the scorn she felt—"to married women: though it seems to me that it is a fault less venial in them than in single ones. There is but one inmate of this house who flirts, so far as I have seen since I have lived in it: it is you, not I, Lady Mount Severn."

The home truth told on her ladyship. She turned white with rage, forgot herself, and, raising her right hand, struck Isabel a stinging blow upon the left cheek. Confused and terrified, Isabel stood in pain, and before she could speak or act, my lady's left hand was raised to the other cheek, and a blow left on that. Lady Isabel shivered as with a sudden chill, and cried out, a sharp, quick cry; covered her outraged face and sank down upon the dressing-chair. Marvel threw up her hands in dismay, and William Vane could not have burst into a louder roar had he been beaten himself. The boy was of a sensitive nature—and he was frightened.

Lady Mount Severn finished up the scene by boxing William for his noise, jerked him out of the room, and told him he was a monkey.

Isabel Vane lay through the livelong night, weeping tears of anguish and indignation. She could not remain at Castle Marling: who would do so, after so great an outrage?—Yet, where was she to go? Fifty times in the course of the night did she wish that she was laid beside her father; for her feelings obtained the mastery of her reason: in her calm moments she would have shrunk from the idea of death, as the young and healthy must do. Various schemes crossed her brain: that she would take flight to France, and lay her case before Mount Severn; that she would beg an asylum with old Mrs. Levison; that she would find out Mason, and live with her. Daylight rejected them all. She had not flirted with Captain Levison, but she had received his attention, and suffered his admiration: a woman never flirts where she loves; and it had come to love, or something very near it, in Isabel's heart.

She rose on the Saturday morning, weak and languid, the effects of the night of grief, and Marvel brought her breakfast up. William Vane stole into her room afterwards: he was attached to her in a remarkable degree.

"Mamma's going out," he exclaimed in the course of the morning. "Look, Isabel."

Isabel went to the window. Lady Mount Severn was in the pony carriage, Francis Levison driving.

"We can go down now, Isabel. No one will be there."

She assented, and went down with William. But scarcely were they in the drawing-room when a servant entered with a card on a salver.

"A gentleman, my lady, wishes to see you."

"To see me?" returned Isabel, in surprise. "Or Lady Mount Severn?"

"He asked for you, my lady."

She took up the card. "Mr. Carlyle." "Oh!" she uttered, in a tone of joyful surprise, "show him in."

It is curious, nay, appalling, to trace the thread of a human life; how the most trivial occurrences lead to the great events of existence, bringing forth happiness or misery, weal or woe. A client of Mr. Carlyle's, travelling from one part of England to the other, was arrested by illness at Castle Marling: grave illness it appeared to be, inducing fears of death. He had not, as the phrase goes, settled his affairs, and Mr. Carlyle was telegraphed for in haste, to make his will, and for other private matters. This journey appeared to Mr. Carlyle a very simple occurrence, and yet it was destined to lead to events that would end only with his own life.

Mr. Carlyle entered, unaffected and gentlemanly as ever, with his noble form, his attractive face, and his drooping eyelids. She advanced to meet him, holding out her hand, her countenance betraying her pleasure. "This is indeed unexpected," she exclaimed. "How very glad I am to see you!"

"Business brought me yesterday to Castle Marling. I could not leave it again without calling on you. I hear that Lord Mount Severn is absent."

"He is in France," she rejoined. "I said we should be sure to meet again: do you remember, Mr. Carlyle? You——"

Isabel suddenly stopped, for with the word "remember;" she also remembered something—the hundred-pound note; and what she was saying faltered on her tongue. She grew confused, indeed, for alas! she had changed and partly spent it. *How* was it possible to ask Lady Mount Severn for money? and the earl was nearly always away. Mr. Carlyle saw her embarrassment, though he did not detect its cause.

"What a fine boy?" exclaimed he, looking at the child.

"It is Lord Vane," said Isabel.

"A truthful, earnest spirit, I am sure," he continued, gazing at his open countenance. "How old are you, my little man?"

"I am six, sir; and my brother was four."

Isabel bent over the child; an excuse to cover her embarrassment. "You do not know this gentleman, William. It is Mr. Carlyle, and he has been very kind to me."

The little lord turned his thoughtful eyes on Mr. Carlyle, apparently studying his countenance. "I shall like you, sir, if you are kind to Isabel. Are you kind to her?"

"Very, very kind," murmured Isabel, leaving William and turning to Mr. Carlyle, but not looking at him. "I don't know what to say; I ought to thank you: I did not intend to use the—to use it—but I—I——"

"Hush!" he interrupted, laughing at her confusion; "I do not know what you are talking of. I have a great misfortune to break to you, Lady Isabel."

She lifted her eyes and her glowing cheeks, somewhat aroused from her own thoughts.

"Two of your fish are dead. The gold ones."

"Are they?"

"I believe the frost killed them; I don't know what else it could have been. You may remember those bitter days we had in January: they died then."

"You are very good to take care of them, all this time. How is East Lynne looking? Dear East Lynne! Is it occupied?"

"Not yet. I have spent some money upon it, and it repays the outlay."

The excitement of his arrival had worn off, and she was looking herself again, pale and sad; he could not help observing that she was changed.

"I cannot expect to look so well at Castle Marling as I did at East Lynne," she answered.

"I trust it is a happy home to you?" said Mr. Carlyle, speaking upon impulse.

She glanced up at him, a look that he would never forget: it certainly told of despair. "No," she said, shaking her head, "it is a miserable home, and I cannot remain in it. I have been awake all night, thinking where I can go, but I cannot tell. I have not a friend in the wide world."

Never let people talk secrets before children, for be assured that they understand a great deal more than is imagined: the saying that "Little pitchers have great ears" is wonderfully true. Lord Vane held up his head to Mr. Carlyle.

"Isabel told me this morning that she should go away from us. Shall I tell you why? Mamma beat her yesterday when she was angry."

"Be quiet, William!" interrupted Lady Isabel, her face flaming.

"Two great slaps upon her cheeks," continued the young viscount; "and Isabel cried so, and I screamed, and then mamma hit me. But boys are made to be hit; nurse says they are. Marvel came into the nursery when we were at tea, and told nurse about it. She says Isabel's too good-looking, and that's why mamma——"

Isabel stopped the child's tongue, rang a peal at the bell, and marshalled him to the door; despatching him to the nursery by the servant who answered it.

Mr. Carlyle's eyes were full of indignant sympathy. "Can this be true?" he asked, in a low tone, when she returned to him. "You do indeed want a friend."

"I must bear my lot," she replied, obeying the impulse which prompted her to confide in Mr. Carlyle. "At least till Lord Mount Severn returns."

"And then?"

"I really do not know," she said, the rebellious tears rising faster than she could choke them down. "He has no other home to offer me; but with Lady Mount Severn I cannot and will not remain. She would break my heart, as she has already well-nigh broken my spirit. I have not deserved it of her, Mr. Carlyle."

"No, I am sure you have not," he warmly answered. "I wish I could help you! What can I do?"

"You can do nothing," she said. "What can any one do?"

"I wish, I wish I could help you!" he repeated. "East Lynne was not, take it for all in all, a pleasant home to you, but it seems you changed for the worse when you left it."

"Not a pleasant home!" she echoed, its reminiscences appearing delightful in that moment, for it must be remembered that all things are estimated by comparison. "Indeed it was; I may never have so pleasant a one again. Oh, Mr. Carlyle, do not disparage East Lynne to me! Would I could awake, and find the last few months but a hideous dream!—that I could find my dear father alive again!—that we were still living peacefully at East Lynne! It would be a very Eden to me now."

What was Mr. Carlyle about to say? What emotion was it that agitated his countenance, impeded his breath, and dyed his face blood-red? His better genius was surely not watching over him, or those words had never been spoken.

"There is but one way," he began, taking her hand and nervously playing with it, probably unconscious that he did so; "only one way in which you could return to East Lynne. And that way—I may not presume, perhaps, to point it out."

She looked at him, and waited for an explanation.

"If my words offend you, Lady Isabel, check them, as their presumption deserves, and pardon me. May I—dare I—offer you to return to East Lynne as its mistress?"

She did not comprehend him in the slightest degree; the drift of his meaning never dawned upon her. "Return to East Lynne as its mistress?" she repeated, in bewilderment.

"And as my wife."

No possibility of misunderstanding him now, and the shock and surprise were great. She had stood there by Mr. Carlyle's side, conversing confidentially with him, esteeming him greatly, feeling as if he were her truest friend on earth, clinging to him in her heart, as to a haven of refuge, loving him almost as she would love a brother, suffering her hand to remain in his. *But to be his wife!*—The idea had never presented itself to her in any shape until this moment, and her first emotion was one of entire opposition, her first movement to express it, as she essayed to withdraw herself and her hand away from him.

But Mr. Carlyle did not suffer it. He not only retained that hand, but took the other also, and spoke, now the ice was broken, eloquent words of love. Not unmeaning phrases of rhapsody, about hearts and darts and dying for her, as some one else might have spoken; but earnest-hearted words of deep tenderness, calculated to win upon the mind's good sense, as well as upon the ear and heart. And, it may be, that had her imagination not been filled up with that "some one else," she would have said "Yes" there and then.

They were suddenly interrupted. Lady Mount Severn entered, and took in the scene at a glance: Mr. Carlyle's bent attitude of devotion, his imprisonment of the hands, and Isabel's perplexed and blushing countenance. She threw up her head and her little inquisitive nose, and stopped short on the carpet; her freezing looks demanding an explanation, as plainly as looks can do so. Mr. Carlyle turned to her, and, by way of sparing Isabel, proceeded to introduce himself. Isabel had just presence of mind left to name her: "Lady Mount Severn."

"I am sorry that Lord Mount Severn should be absent, to whom I have the honour of being known," he said. "I am Mr. Carlyle."

"I have heard of you," replied her ladyship, scanning his good looks, and feeling cross that his homage should be given where she saw it was given: "but I had *not* heard that you and Lady Isabel Vane were on the extraordinary terms of intimacy that—that——"

"Madam," he interrupted, as he handed a chair to her ladyship and took another himself, "we have never yet been on terms of extraordinary intimacy. I was begging the Lady Isabel to grant that we might become so: I was asking her to become my wife."

The avowal was as a shower of incense to the countess, and her ill-humour melted into sunshine. It was a solution to her great difficulty, a loophole by which she might get rid of her *bête noire*, the hated Isabel. A flush of gratification lighted her face, and she became full of graciousness to Mr. Carlyle.

"How very grateful Isabel must feel to you," quoth she. "I speak openly, Mr. Carlyle, because I know that you were cognizant of the unprotected state in which she was left by the earl's improvidence, placing marriage for her, at any rate a high marriage, almost out of the question. East Lynne is a beautiful place, I have heard."

"For its size; it is not large," replied Mr. Carlyle, as he rose; for Isabel had also risen and was coming forward.

"And pray what is Lady Isabel's answer?" quickly asked the countess, turning to her.

Not to her did Isabel condescend to give an answer, but she approached Mr. Carlyle, and spoke in a low tone.

"Will you give me a few hours for consideration?"

"I am only too happy that you should accord it consideration, for it speaks to me of hope," was his reply, as he opened the door for her to pass out. "I will be here again this afternoon."

It was a perplexing debate that Lady Isabel held with herself in the solitude of her chamber, whilst Mr. Carlyle touched upon ways and means to Lady Mount Severn. Isabel was little more than a child, and as a child she reasoned, looking neither far nor deep: the shallow, palpable aspect of affairs alone presenting itself to her view. That Mr. Carlyle was not of rank equal to her own, she scarcely remembered: East Lynne seemed a very fair settlement in life, and in point of size, beauty, and importance, it was superior to the home she was now in. She forgot that her position at East Lynne as Mr. Carlyle's wife would not be what it had been as Lord Mount Severn's daughter; she forgot that she should be tied to a quiet home, shut out from the great world, from the pomps and vanities to which she was born. She liked Mr. Carlyle much, she liked to be with him, she experienced pleasure in conversing with him; in short, but for that other ill-omened fancy which had crept over her, there would have been a danger of her falling in love with Mr. Carlyle. And oh! to be removed for ever from the bitter dependence on Lady Mount Severn—East Lynne would, after that, seem what she had called it, Eden.

"So far it appears favourable," mentally exclaimed poor Isabel, "but there is the other side of the question. It is not only that I do not love Mr. Carlyle, but I fear I do love, or very nearly love, Francis Levison. I wish *he* would ask me to be his wife!—or that I had never seen him."

Isabel's soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Levison and the countess. What the latter had said to the old lady to win her over to the cause, was best known to herself, but she was eloquent in it. They both used every possible argument to induce her to accept Mr. Carlyle: the old lady declaring that he was worth a dozen empty-headed men of the great world.

Isabel listened, now swayed one way, now the other, and when the afternoon came, her head was aching with perplexity. The stumbling-block that she could not get over was Francis Levison. She saw Mr. Carlyle's approach from her window, and went down to the drawing-room, not in the least knowing what her reply was to be. A shadowy idea was presenting itself that she would ask him for longer time, and write her answer.

In the drawing-room was Francis Levison, and her heart beat wildly: which said beating might have convinced her that she ought not to marry another.

"Where have you been hiding yourself?" cried he. "Did you hear of our mishap with the pony carriage?"

"No," was her answer.

"I was driving Emma into town. The pony took fright, kicked, plunged, and went down upon his knees; she took fright in her turn, got out, and walked back. I gave the brute some chastisement and a race, and brought him to the stables, getting home in time to be introduced to Mr. Carlyle. He seems an out-and-out good fellow, Isabel, and I congratulate you."

She looked up at him.

"Don't start. We are all in the family, and my lady told me; I won't betray it abroad. She says East Lynne is a place to be coveted. I wish you happiness, Isabel."

"Thank you," she returned, in a sarcastic tone, though her throat beat and her lips quivered. "You are premature in your congratulations, Captain Levison."

"Am I? Keep my good wishes, then, till the right man comes. I am beyond the pale myself, and dare not think of entering the happy state," he added, in a pointed tone. "I have indulged dreams of it, like others, but I cannot afford to indulge them seriously: a poor man, with uncertain prospects, can only play the butterfly, perhaps to his life's end."

He quitted the room as he spoke. It was impossible for Isabel to misunderstand him, but a feeling shot across her mind, for the first time, that he was false and heartless. One of the servants appeared, showing in Mr. Carlyle: nothing false or heartless about *him.* He closed the door, and approached her. She did not speak, and her lips were white and trembling. Mr. Carlyle waited.

"Well?" he said at length, in a gentle tone. "Have you decided to grant my prayer?"

"Yes. But——" She could not go on. What with one agitation and another, she had difficulty in conquering her emotion. "But—I was going to tell you——"

"Presently," he whispered, leading her to a sofa; "we can both afford to wait now. Isabel, you have made me very happy!"

"I ought to tell you, I must tell you," she began again, in the midst of hysterical tears. "Though I have said 'Yes' to your proposal, I do not—yet— It has come upon me by surprise," she stammered. "I like you very much; I esteem and respect you: but I do not yet love you."

"I should wonder if you did. But you will let me earn your love, Isabel?"

"Oh yes," she earnestly answered. "I hope so."

He drew her closer to him, bent his face, and took from her lips his first kiss. Isabel was passive; she supposed he had gained the right to do so. "My dearest! it is all I ask!"

Mr. Carlyle stayed over the following day, and before he departed, in the evening, arrangements had been discussed. The marriage was to take place immediately: all concerned had a motive for hurrying it on. Mr. Carlyle was anxious that the fair flower should be his; Isabel was sick of Castle Marling, sick of some of the people in it; my lady was sick of Isabel. In less than a month it was to be, and Francis Levison sneered over the "indecent haste." Mr. Carlyle wrote to the earl. Lady Mount Severn announced that she should present Isabel with her trousseau, and wrote to London to order it. It is a positive fact that when he was taking leave of Isabel she clung to him.

"I wish I could take you now, my darling," he uttered. "I cannot bear to leave you here."

"I wish you could!" she sighed. "You have seen only the sunny side of Lady Mount Severn."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. DILL'S SHAKING.

THE sensations of Mr. Carlyle when he returned to West Lynne were very much like those of an Eton boy, who knows he has been in mischief, and dreads detection. Always open as to his own affairs, for he had nothing to conceal, he yet deemed it expedient to dissemble now. He felt that his sister would be bitter at the prospect of his marrying; instinct had taught him that, years ago; and he believed that, of all women, the most objectionable to her would be Lady Isabel, for Miss Carlyle looked to the useful, and had neither sympathy nor admiration for the beautiful. He was not sure but she might be capable of endeavouring to frustrate the marriage, should news of it reach her ears, and her indomitable will had carried many strange things in her life: therefore you will not blame Mr. Carlyle for observing entire reticence as to his future plans.

A family of the name of Carew had been about to take East Lynne: they wished to rent it, furnished, for three years. Upon some of the minor arrangements they and Mr. Carlyle were opposed, but the latter declined to give way. During his absence at Castle Marling, news had arrived from them: they acceded to all his terms, and would enter upon East Lynne as soon as was convenient. Miss Carlyle was full of congratulation; it was off their hands, she said: but the first letter Mr. Carlyle wrote was—to decline them. He did not tell this to Miss Carlyle. The final touches of the house were given, preparatory to the reception of its inhabitants, and three maid and two men-servants hired and sent there, upon board wages, until the family should arrive.

One evening, three weeks after Mr. Carlyle's visit to Castle Marling, Barbara Hare called at Miss Carlyle's, and found them going to tea, much earlier than usual.

"We dined earlier," said Miss Corny, "and I ordered tea in as soon as dinner went away. Otherwise Archibald would have taken none."

"I am as well without tea," said he. "I have still a mass of business to get through."

"You are not so well without it," cried Miss Corny, "and I don't choose that you should go without it. Take off your bonnet, Barbara. He does things like no one else; he is off to Castle Marling to-morrow, and could never open his lips until just now to say so."

"Is that invalid—Brewster, or whatever his name is—laid up at Castle Marling still?" asked Barbara.

"He is there still," said Mr. Carlyle.

Barbara sat down to the tea-table, though protesting that she ought not to remain, for she had told her mamma she should be home to make tea. Miss Carlyle interrupted what she was saying, by telling her brother that she should go presently and pack his things.

"Oh no," returned he, with alarming quickness, "I will pack them myself, thank you. Peter, you can put the portmanteau in my room. The large one."

"The large one!" echoed Miss Corny, who could never let anything pass without her interference; "why, it's as big as a house. What in the world can you want dragging that with you?"

"I have papers and things to take, besides clothes."

"I am sure I could pack all your things in the small one," persisted Miss Corny. "I'll try. You only tell me what you want put in. Take the small portmanteau to your master's room, Peter."

Mr. Carlyle glanced at Peter, and Peter glanced back again with an imperceptible nod. "I prefer to pack my things myself, Cornelia. What have you done now?"

"A stupid trick," she answered—for, in fidgeting with a knife, Miss Corny had cut her finger. "Have you any sticking-plaster, Archibald?"

He opened his pocket-book, and laid it on the table while he took from it some black plaster. Miss Carlyle's inquisitive eyes caught sight of a letter lying there. *Sans cérémonie*, she stretched out her hand, caught it up, and opened it.

"Who is this from? It is a lady's writing."

Mr. Carlyle laid his hand flat upon it, as if to hide it from her view. "Excuse me, Cornelia; that is a private letter."

"Private nonsense!" retorted Miss Corny. "I am sure you receive no letters that I may not read. It bears yesterday's postmark."

"Oblige me with the letter," he returned; and Miss Carlyle, in her astonishment at the calmly authoritative tone, yielded it to him.

"Archibald, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," answered he, returning the letter to the pocket-book, and putting it into his pocket, leaving out the sticking-plaster for Miss Corny's benefit. "It's not fair to look into a man's private letters, is it, Barbara?"

He laughed good-humouredly as he looked at Barbara. But she had seen with surprise that a deep flush of emotion had risen to his face—he, so calm a man! Miss Carlyle was not one to be put down easily, and she returned to the charge.

"Archibald, if ever I saw the Vane crest, it is on the seal of that letter."

"Whether the Vane crest is on the letter, or not, the contents of it were written for my eye alone," he rejoined. And somehow, Miss Carlyle did not like the firm tone. Barbara broke the silence.

"Shall you call on the Mount Severns this time?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Do they talk yet of Lady Isabel's marrying?" pursued Barbara. "Did you hear anything of it?"

"I cannot charge my memory with all I heard or did not hear, Barbara. Your tea wants more sugar, does it not?"

"A little," she answered, and Mr. Carlyle drew the sugar-basin towards her cup, and dropped four or five large lumps into it, before any one could stop him.

"What's that for?" asked Miss Corny.

He burst into laughter. "I forgot what I was doing. Really, Barbara, I beg your tea's pardon. Cornelia will give you another cup."

"But it's a cup of tea and so much good sugar wasted," tartly responded Miss Corny.

Barbara sprang up the moment tea was over. "I don't know what mamma will say to me. And it is beginning to grow dusk! She will think it is late for me to be out alone."

"Archibald can walk with you," said Miss Carlyle.

"I don't know that," cried he, in his plain, open way. "Dill is waiting for me in the office, and I have some hours' work before me. However—I suppose you won't care to put up with Peter's attendance; so make haste with your bonnet, Barbara."

No need to tell Barbara that, when the choice between him and Peter depended on the speed she could exert. She wished good evening to Miss Carlyle, and went out with him, he taking her parasol from her hand. It was a calm, lovely night, very light still, and they went by the field way.

Barbara could not forget Isabel Vane. She never had forgotten her, or the jealous feeling that arose in her heart at Mr. Carlyle's constant visits to East Lynne when she inhabited it. She returned to the subject now.

"I asked you, Archibald, whether you had heard that Lady Isabel was likely to marry."

"And I answered you, Barbara, that my memory could not carry all I may have heard."

"But did you?" persisted Barbara.

"You are persevering," he smiled. "I believe Lady Isabel is likely to marry."

Barbara drew a relieved sigh. "To whom?"

The same amused smile played on his lips. "Do you suppose I could put premature questions? I may be able to tell you more about it after my next return from Castle Marling."

"Do try and find out," said she. "Perhaps it is to Lord Vane. Who is it says that more marriages arise from habitual association than——"

She stopped, for Mr. Carlyle had turned his eyes upon her, and was laughing.

"You are a clever guesser, Barbara. Lord Vane is a little fellow, five or six years old."

"Oh," returned Barbara, considerably discomfited.

"And the nicest child in the world," he warmly continued: "open tempered, generous hearted, earnest spirited. Should I have children of my own," he added, switching the hedge with the parasol, and speaking in an abstracted manner, as if forgetful of his companion, "I could wish them to be like William Vane."

"A very important confession," gaily returned Barbara, "after contriving to impress West Lynne with the conviction that you would be an old bachelor."

"I don't know that I ever promised West Lynne anything of the sort," cried Mr. Carlyle.

Barbara laughed now. "I suppose West Lynne judges by appearances. When a man owns to thirty years——"

"Which I don't do," interrupted Mr. Carlyle, considerably damaging the hedge and the parasol. "I may be an old married man before I am thirty; the chances are, that I shall be."

"Then you must have chosen your wife," she quickly cried.

"I do not say I have not, Barbara. All in good time to proclaim it, though."

Barbara withdrew her arm from Mr. Carlyle's, under pretence of repinning her shawl. Her heart was beating, her whole frame trembling, and she feared he might detect her emotion. She never thought he could allude to any one but herself. Poor Barbara!

"How flushed you look, Barbara!" he exclaimed. "Have I walked too fast?"

She seemed not to hear, intent upon her shawl. Then she took his arm again, and they walked on, Mr. Carlyle striking the hedge and the grass more industriously than ever. Another minute, and—the handle was in two.

"I thought you would do it," said Barbara, while he was regarding the parasol with ludicrous dismay. "Never mind; it is an old one."

"I will bring you another to replace it. What is the colour? Brown. I won't forget. Hold the relics a minute, Barbara."

He put the pieces into her hand, and taking out a note-case, made a note in pencil.

"What's that for?" she inquired.

He held it close to her eyes that she might discern what he had written: "Brown parasol. B. H." "A reminder for me, Barbara, in case I forget."

Barbara's eye detected another item or two, already entered in the case. "Piano." "Plate." "I jot down the things, as they occur to me, that I must get in London," he explained. "Otherwise I should forget half of them."

"In London! I thought you were going in an opposite direction: to Castle Marling."

It was a slip of the tongue, but Mr. Carlyle repaired it. "I may probably have to visit London as well as Castle Marling. How bright the moon looks rising there, Barbara!"

"So bright—that, or the sky—that I saw your secrets," answered she. "Piano! Plate! What can you want with either, Archibald?"

"They are for East Lynne," he quietly replied.

"Oh, for the Carews." And Barbara's interest in the items was gone.

They turned into the road just below the Grove, and reached it. Mr. Carlyle held the gate open for Barbara.

"You will come in and say good night to mamma. She was saying to-day what a stranger you have made of yourself lately."

"I have been busy. And I really have not the time to-night. You must remember me to her instead."

He closed the gate again. But Barbara leaned over it, unwilling to let him go.

"Shall you be away a week?"

"I dare say I may. Here, take the wreck of the parasol, Barbara: I was about to carry it off with me. I can buy you a new one without stealing the old one."

"Archibald, I have long wished to ask you something," said she in a tone of suppressed agitation, as she took the pieces and flung them upon the path by the dense trees. "You will not think me foolish?"

"What is it?"

"When you gave me the gold chain and locket a year ago—you remember?"

"Yes. Well?"

"I put some of that hair of Richard's into it, and a bit of Anne's, and of mamma's; a tiny little bit of each. And there is room for more, you see."

She held it to him as she spoke, for she always wore it round her neck, attached to the chain.

"I cannot see well by this light, Barbara. If there is room for more, what of that?"

"I like to think that I possess a memento of my best friends, or of those who were dear to me. I wish you to give me a bit of your hair to put with the rest—as it was you who gave me the locket."

"My hair!" replied Mr. Carlyle, in a tone of as much astonishment as if she had asked for his head. "What good would that do you, Barbara, or the locket either?"

Her face flushed painfully: her heart beat. "I like to have a remembrance of the friends I—I care for," she stammered. "Nothing more, Archibald."

He detected neither the emotion nor the depth of feeling, the *sort* of feeling that had prompted the request, and he met it with good-natured ridicule.

"What a pity you did not tell me yesterday, Barbara! I had my hair cut, and might have sent you the snippings. Don't be a goose, child, and exalt me into a Wellington, to bestow hair and autographs. I can't stop a minute longer. Good night."

He hastened away with quick strides, and Barbara covered her face with her hands. "What have I done? what have I done?" she re-iterated aloud. "Is it in his nature to be thus indifferent—thus matter of fact? Has he no sentiment? But it will come. Oh, the bliss this night has brought forth! There was truth in his tone beneath its vein of mockery, when he spoke of his chosen wife. I need not go far to guess who it is—he has told no one else, and he pays attention to none but me. Archibald, when once I am your wife you shall know how fondly I love you; you cannot know till then."

She lifted her fair young face, beautiful in its radiance, and gazed at the deepening moonlight; then turned away and pursued her path up the garden walk, unconscious that something, wearing a bonnet, pushed its head beyond the trees to steal a look after her. Barbara would have said less, had she divined there was a third party at the interview.

It was three mornings after the departure of Mr. Carlyle that Mr. Dill appeared before Miss Carlyle, bearing a letter. She was busy contemplating the effect of some new muslin curtains, just put up, and did not pay attention to him.

"Will you please take the letter, Miss Cornelia. The postman left it in the office with ours. It is from Mr. Archibald."

"Why, what has he to write to me about?" retorted Miss Corny. "Does he say when he is coming home?"

"You had better see, Miss Cornelia. He does not say anything about his return in mine."

She opened the letter, glanced at it, and sank into a chair: more overcome, more stupefied than she had felt in her whole life.

Castle Marling, May 1st.

"MY DEAR CORNELIA,—I was married this morning to Lady Isabel Vane, and hasten briefly to acquaint you with the fact. I will write you more fully to-morrow or the next day, and explain all things.

"Ever your affectionate brother,

"ARCHIBALD CARLYLE."

"It is a hoax," were the first guttural sounds that escaped from Miss Carlyle's throat, when speech returned to her.

Mr. Dill only stood like a stone image.

"It is a hoax, I say," raved Miss Carlyle. "What are you standing there for, like a gander on one leg?" she reiterated, venting her anger upon the unoffending man. "*Is* it a hoax, or is it not?"

"I am overdone with amazement, Miss Corny. It is not a hoax: I have had a letter, too."

"It can't be true; it *can't* be true. He had no more thought of being married when he left here, three days ago, than I have."

"How can we tell that, Miss Corny? How are we to know that he did not go to be married? I fancy he did."

"Go to be married!" shrieked Miss Corny, in a passion; "he would not be such a fool. And to that fine lady-child! No, no."

"He has sent this to be inserted in the county journals," said Mr. Dill, holding forth a scrap of paper. "They are married, sure enough."

Miss Carlyle took it and held it before her; her hand was cold as ice, and shook as with palsy.

"Married.—On the 1st inst., at Castle Marling, by the Chaplain to the Earl of Mount Severn, Archibald Carlyle, Esquire, of East Lynne, to the Lady Isabel Mary Vane, only child of William, late Earl of Mount Severn."

Miss Carlyle tore the paper to atoms and scattered it. Mr. Dill afterwards made copies from memory, and sent them to the journal offices. But let that pass.

"I will never forgive him," she deliberately uttered; "and I will never forgive or tolerate her. The senseless idiot! to go and marry Mount Severn's expensive daughter! a thing who goes to court in feathers and a train—streaming out three yards behind her!"

"He is not an idiot, Miss Cornelia."

"He is worse; he is a wicked madman," she retorted, in a state midway between rage and tears. "He must have been stark staring mad to go and do it; and had I gathered an inkling of the project I would have taken out a commission of lunacy against him. Ay, you may stare, old Dill, but I would, as truly as I hope to have my sins forgiven. Where are they to live?"

"I expect they will live at East Lynne."

"What?" screamed Miss Corny. "Live at East Lynne with the Carews! You are going mad too, I think."

"The negotiation with the Carews is at an end, Miss Cornelia. When Mr. Archibald returned from Castle Marling at Easter, he wrote to decline them. I saw the copy of the letter in the copying-book. I expect he had settled matters then with Lady Isabel, and had decided to keep East Lynne for himself."

Miss Carlyle's mouth had opened with consternation. Recovering partially, she rose from her seat, and drawing herself to her full and majestic height, she advanced behind the astounded gentleman, seized the collar of his coat with both hands, and shook him for several minutes. Poor old Dill, short and slight, was as a puppet in her hands, and thought his breath had gone for ever.

"I would have taken out a lunacy commission for you also, you sly villain! You are in the plot: you have been aiding and abetting him: you knew as much of it as he did."

"I declare solemnly, to the Goodness that made me, I did not," gasped the ill-treated man, when he could recover speech. "I am as innocent as a baby, Miss Corny. When I had the letter just now in the office, you might have knocked me down with a feather."

"What has he gone and done it for? an expensive girl without a shilling! And how dared you be privy to the refusal of East Lynne to the Carews? You *have* abetted him. But he never can be fool enough to think of living there!"

"I was not privy to it, Miss Corny, before it was done. And, had I been—I am only Mr. Archibald's servant. Had he not intended to take East Lynne for his residence, he would not announce himself as Archibald Carlyle, *of East Lynne.* And he can well afford it, Miss Corny; you know he can; and he only takes up his proper position in going to it," added the faithful clerk, soothingly. "And she is a sweet, pretty, lovable creature, though she is a noble lady."

"I hope his folly will come home to him!" was the wrathful rejoinder.

"Heaven forbid!" cried old Dill.

"Idiot! idiot! WHAT possessed him?" cried the exasperated Miss Corny.

"Well, Miss Corny, I must hasten back to the office," concluded Mr. Dill, by way of terminating the conference. "And I am truly vexed, ma'am, that you should have fancied there was cause to fall out upon me."

"I shall do it again before the day's over, if you come in my way," hotly responded Miss Corny.

She sat down as soon as she was alone, and her face assumed a stony, rigid look. Her hands fell upon her knees, and Mr. Carlyle's letter dropped to the ground. After a while her features began to work, and she nodded her head, and lifted, now one hand, now the other, apparently debating various points in her own mind. By-and-by she rose, attired herself in her bonnet and shawl, and took the way to Justice Hare's. She felt that the news which would be poured out to West Lynne before the day was over, did reflect a slight upon herself. Her much-loved brother had forsaken her, to take to himself one nearer and dearer, and had done it in dissimulation: therefore she herself would be the first to proclaim it, far and wide.

Barbara was at the window in the usual sitting-room, as Miss Corny entered the Grove. A grim smile, in spite of her outraged feelings, crossed that lady's lips, when she thought of the blow about to be dealt out to Barbara. Very clearly had she penetrated to the love of that young lady for Archibald; to her hopes of becoming his wife.

"What brings Cornelia here?" thought Barbara, who was looking very pretty in her summer attire, for the weather was unusually warm, and she had assumed it. "How are you!" she said, leaning from the window. "Would you believe it? the warm day has actually tempted mamma forth; papa is driving her to Lynneborough. Come in; the hall door is open."

Miss Carlyle came in, without answering; and seating herself upon a chair, emitted a few dismal groans, by way of preliminary.

Barbara turned to her quickly. "Are you ill? Has anything upset you?"

"Upset me! you may say that," ejaculated Miss Corny, in wrath. "It has turned my heart and my feelings inside out. What do you say? A glass of wine? Nonsense! don't talk of wine to me. A heavy misfortune has befallen us, Barbara. Archibald——"

"Upon Archibald!" interrupted Barbara, in her quick alarm. "Oh! some accident has happened to him—to the railway train! Perhaps he—he—has got his legs broken!"

"I wish to my heart he had!" warmly returned Miss Corny. "He and his legs are all right, more's the pity! It is worse than that, Barbara."

Barbara ran over various disasters in her mind; and, knowing the bent of Miss Carlyle's disposition, began to refer to some pecuniary loss. "Perhaps it is about East Lynne," hazarded she. "The Carews may not be coming to it."

"No, they are not coming to it," was the tart retort. "Some one else is, though; my wise brother. Archibald has gone and made a fool of himself, Barbara, and now he is coming home to live at East Lynne."

Though there was much that was unintelligible to Barbara in this, she could not suppress the flush of gratification that rose to her cheek and dyed it with blushes. "You are going to be taken down a notch or two, my lady," thought clear-sighted Miss Carlyle. "The news fell upon me this morning like a thunderbolt," she said aloud. "Old Dill brought it to me. I shook him for his pains."

"Shook old Dill!" reiterated the wondering Barbara.

"I shook him till my arms ached: he won't forget it in a hurry. He has been abetting Archibald in his wickedness; concealing things from me that he ought to have come and declared; and I am not sure that I can't have the two indicted for conspiracy."

Barbara sat in amazement; without the faintest idea of what Miss Corny could be driving at.

"You remember that child, Mount Severn's daughter? I think I see her now, coming into the concert-room, in her white robes, and her jewels, and her flowing hair, looking like a young princess in a fairy-tale—all very well for her, for what she is, but not for us."

"What of her?" uttered Barbara.

"Archibald has married her."

In spite of Barbara's full consciousness that she was under the penetrating eyes of Miss Corny, and in spite of her own efforts for calmness, every feature in her face turned to a ghastly whiteness. But, like Miss Carlyle, she at first took refuge in disbelief.

"It is not true, Cornelia."

"It is quite true. They were married yesterday at Castle Marling, by Lord Mount Severn's chaplain. Had I known it then, and could I have got there, I might have contrived to part them, though the Church ceremony had passed: I should have tried. But," added the plain-speaking Miss Corny, "yesterday was one thing, and to day's another; and of course nothing can be done now."

"Excuse me an instant," gasped Barbara, in a low tone; "I forgot to give an order mamma left for the servants."

An order for the servants! She swiftly passed upstairs to her own room, and flung herself down on its floor in utter anguish. The past had cleared itself of its mists; the scales that were before Barbara's eyes had fallen from them. She saw now that while she had cherished false and delusive hopes in her almost idolatrous passion for Archibald Carlyle, she had never been cared for by him. Even the previous night she had lain awake some of its hours, indulging dreams of the sweetest phantasy—and that was the night of his wedding-day! With a sharp wail of despair, Barbara flung her arms up and closed her aching eyes: she knew that from that hour her life's sunshine had departed.

The cry had been louder than she heeded, and one of the maids, who was outside the door, opened it gently and looked in. There lay Barbara, and there was no mistaking that she lay in dire anguish; not of body, but of mind. The servant judged it an inopportune moment to intrude, and quickly reclosed the door.

Barbara heard the click of the latch, and it recalled her to herself; recalled her to reality; to the necessity of outwardly surmounting the distress at the present moment. She rose up, drank a glass of water, mechanically smoothed her hair and her brow, so contracted with pain, and forced her manner to calmness.

"Married to another! married to another!" she moaned, as she went down the stairs, "and, that other, *her!* Oh, fortitude! oh, dissimulation! at least come to my aid before his sister!"

There was actually a smile on her face as she entered the room. Miss Carlyle opened her grievance again without delay, as if to compensate for the few minutes' imposed silence.

"As sure as we are living here, I would have tried for a commission of lunacy against him, had I known this, and so I told Dill. Better have confined him as a harmless lunatic for a couple of years, than suffer him to go free and obtain his fling in this mad manner. I never thought he would marry: I have warned him against it ever since he was in leading-strings."

"It is an unsuitable match," said Barbara.

"It is just as suitable as Beauty and the Beast in the children's story. She, a high-born beauty, brought up to revel in expense, in jewels, in feasts, in show; and he, a—a—a—dull bear of a lawyer, like the beast in the tale."

Had Barbara been less miserable she would have laughed outright. Miss Carlyle continued:

"I have taken my resolution. I go to East Lynne to-morrow, and discharge those five dandies of servants. I was up there on Saturday, and there were all three of my damsels decked out in fine mousseline-de-laine gowns, with peach bows in their caps, and the men in striped jackets, playing at footmen. Had I known then that they were Archibald's servants and not hired for the Carews!"

Barbara said nothing.

"I shall go up and dismiss the lot, and remove myself and my servants to East Lynne, and let my own house furnished. Expenses will be great enough with *her* extravagant habits; too great to keep on two households. And a fine sort of household Archibald would have of it at East Lynne, with that ignorant baby, befrilled, and bejewelled, and becurled, to direct it."

"But will she like that?"

"If she does not like it, she can lump it," replied Miss Carlyle. "And now that I have told you the news, Barbara, I am going back again; and I had almost as soon have had to tell you that he was in his coffin."

"Are you sure you are not jealous?" asked Barbara, some uncontrollable impulse prompting her to say it.

"Perhaps I am," returned Miss Carlyle, with asperity. "Perhaps, had you brought up a lad as I have brought up Archibald, and loved nothing else in the world, far or near, you would be jealous, when you found him discarding you with contemptuous indifference, and taking a young wife to his bosom, to be more to him than you had been."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EARL'S ASTONISHMENT.

THE announcement of the marriage in the newspapers was the first intimation of it Lord Mount Severn received. He was little less thunderstruck than Miss Corny, and came steaming to England the same day, thereby missing his wife's letter, which gave *her* version of the affair. He met Mr. Carlyle and Lady Isabel in London, where they were staying, at one of the West-end hotels, for a day or two: they were going farther. Isabel was alone when the earl was announced.

"What is the meaning of this, Isabel?" began he, without circumlocution or greeting. "You are married!"

"Yes," she answered, with her pretty, innocent blush. "Some days ago."

"And to Carlyle the lawyer! How did it come about?"

Isabel began to think how it had come about, sufficiently to give a clear answer. "He asked me," she said, "and I accepted him. He came to Castle Marling at Easter, and asked me then. I was very much surprised."

The earl looked at her attentively. "Why was I kept in ignorance of this, Isabel?"

"I did not know you were kept in ignorance of it. Mr. Carlyle wrote to you, as did Lady Mount Severn."

Lord Mount Severn was as a man in the dark, and looked like it. "I suppose this comes," soliloquized he aloud, "of your father's having allowed the gentleman to dance daily attendance at East Lynne. And so you fell in love with him."

"Indeed no," answered she, in an amused tone. "I never thought of such a thing as falling in love with Mr. Carlyle."

"Then don't you love him?" abruptly asked the earl.

"No!" she whispered, timidly. "But I like him much—oh, very much. And he is so good to me!"

The earl stroked his chin, and mused. Isabel had destroyed the only conclusion he had been able to come to, as to the motives for the hasty marriage. "If you do not love Mr. Carlyle, how comes it that you are so wise in the distinction between "liking" and "love"? It cannot be that you love any one else!"

The question told home, and Isabel turned crimson. "I shall love my husband in time," was all she answered, as she bent her head, and played nervously with her watch-chain.

"My poor child!" involuntarily exclaimed the earl. But he was one who liked to fathom the depth of everything. "Who has been staying at Castle Marling since I left?" he asked sharply.

"Mrs. Levison came down."

"I alluded to gentlemen—young men."

"Only Francis Levison," she replied.

"Francis Levison! You have never been so foolish as to fall in love him *him!*"

The question was so pointed, so abrupt, and Isabel's self-consciousness moreover so great, that she betrayed lamentable confusion; and the earl had no further need to ask. Pity stole into his hard eyes as they fixed themselves on her downcast glowing face.

"Isabel," he gravely began, "Captain Levison is not a good man. If ever you were inclined to think him one, dispossess your mind of the idea, and hold him at arm's distance. Drop his acquaintance; encourage no intimacy with him."

"I have already dropped it," said Isabel, "and I shall not take it up again. But Lady Mount Severn must think well of him, or she would not have him there."

"She thinks none too well of him; none can do so of Francis Levison," returned the earl, significantly. "He is her cousin, and is one of those idle, vain, empty-headed flatterers whom it is her pleasure to group about her. Do you be wiser, Isabel. But this does not solve the enigma of your marriage with Carlyle; on the contrary, it renders it the more unaccountable. He must have cajoled you into it."

Before Isabel could reply, Mr. Carlyle entered. He held out his hand to the earl: the earl did not appear to see it.

"Isabel," said he, "I am sorry to turn you out; I suppose you have only this one sitting-room. I wish to say a few words to Mr. Carlyle."

She left them, and the earl wheeled round and faced Mr. Carlyle, speaking in a stern, haughty tone.

"How came this marriage about, sir? Do you possess so little honour, that, taking advantage of my absence, you must intrude yourself into my family, and clandestinely espouse Lady Isabel Vane?"

Mr. Carlyle stood confounded, *not* confused. He drew himself up to his full height, looking every whit as fearless, and far more noble than the peer. "My lord, I do not understand you."

"Yet I speak plainly. What is it but a clandestine procedure, to take advantage of a guardian's absence, and beguile a young girl into a marriage beneath her?"

"There has been nothing clandestine in my conduct towards Lady Isabel Vane; there shall be nothing but honour in my conduct towards Lady Isabel Carlyle. Your lordship has been misinformed."

"I have not been informed at all," retorted the earl. "I was allowed to learn this from the public papers; I, the only relative of Lady Isabel."

"When I proposed for Lady Isabel——"

"Only a month ago," sarcastically interrupted the earl.

"Only a month ago," calmly repeated Mr. Carlyle, "my first action, after Isabel accepted me, was to write to you. But that I imagine you may not have received the letter, by stating you first heard of our marriage through the papers, I should say the want of courtesy lay on your lordship's side, for having vouchsafed me no reply to it."

"What were the contents of the letter?"

"I stated what had occurred, mentioning what I was able to do in the way of settlements, also that both Isabel and myself wished that the ceremony might take place as soon as possible."

"And pray where did you address the letter?"

"Lady Mount Severn could not give me the address. She said, if I would intrust the letter to her she would forward it, for she expected daily to hear from you. I did give her the letter, and I heard no more of the matter, except that her ladyship sent me a message, when Isabel was writing to me, that as you had returned no reply, you of course approved."

"Is this fact?" cried the earl.

"My lord!" coldly replied Mr. Carlyle. "Whatever may be my defects in your eyes, I am at least a man of truth. Until this moment, the suspicion that you were in ignorance of the contemplated marriage never occurred to me."

"So far, then, I beg your pardon, Mr. Carlyle. But how came the marriage about at all?—how came it to be hurried over in this unseemly fashion? You made the offer at Easter, Isabel tells me, and you married her three weeks after it."

"And I would have married her and brought her away the day I did make it, had it been practicable," returned Mr. Carlyle. "I have acted throughout for her comfort and happiness."

"Oh, indeed!" returned the earl, returning to his disagreeable tone. "Perhaps you will put me in possession of the facts, and of your motives."

"I warn you that the facts, to you, will not bear a pleasant sound, Lord Mount Severn."

"Allow me to be the judge of that," said the earl.

"Business took me to Castle Marling on Good Friday. On the following day I called at your house: after your own and Isabel's invitation, it was natural that I should call: in fact, it would have been a breach of good feeling not to do so. I found Isabel ill-treated and miserable: far from enjoying a happy home in your house——"

"What, sir?" interrupted the earl. "Ill-treated and miserable!"

"Ill-treated even to blows, my lord."

The earl stood as one petrified, staring at Mr. Carlyle.

"I learned it, I must premise, through the chattering revelations of your little son: Isabel of course would not have mentioned it to me; but when the child had spoken, she did not deny it. In short, she was too broken-hearted, too completely bowed in spirit, to deny it. It aroused all my feelings of indignation: it excited in me an irresistible desire to emancipate her from this cruel life, and take her where she would find affection and—I hope—happiness. There was only one way in which I could do this, and I risked it. I asked her to become my wife, and to return to her home at East Lynne."

The earl was slowly recovering from his petrifaction. "Then—am I to understand that, when you called that day at my house, you carried no intention with you of proposing to Isabel?"

"Not any. It was a sudden step, called forth by the circumstances under which I found her."

The earl paced the room, perplexed still, and evidently disturbed. "May I inquire if you love her," he abruptly said.

Mr. Carlyle paused ere he spoke, and a red flush dyed his face. "Those are feelings man rarely acknowledges to man, Lord Mount Severn, but I will answer you. I do love her passionately and sincerely. I learnt to love her at East Lynne; but I could have carried my love silently within me to the end of my life, and never betrayed it, but for that unexpected visit to Castle Marling. If the idea of making her my wife had not previously occurred to me as practicable, it was that I deemed her rank incompatible with my own."

"As it was," said the earl.

"Country solicitors have married peers' daughters before now," remarked Mr. Carlyle. "I only add another to the list."

"But you cannot keep her as a peer's daughter, I presume?"

"East Lynne will be her home. Our establishment will be small and quiet, as compared with her father's. I explained to Isabel how quiet at the first, and she might have retracted, had she wished: I explained also in full to Lady Mount Severn. East Lynne will descend to our eldest son, should we have children. My profession is most lucrative, my income good: were I to die to-morrow, Isabel would enjoy East Lynne, and about three thousand a year. I gave these details in the letter which appears to have miscarried."

The earl made no immediate reply: he was absorbed in thought.

"Your lordship perceives, I hope, that there has been nothing 'clandestine' in my conduct to Lady Isabel."

Lord Mount Severn held out his hand. "I refused your hand when I came in, Mr. Carlyle, as you may have observed: perhaps you will refuse yours now, though I should be proud to shake it. When I find myself in the wrong, I am not above acknowledging the fact: and I must state my opinion that you have behaved most kindly and honourably."

Mr. Carlyle smiled and put his hand into the earl's. The latter retained it, while he spoke in a whisper.

"Of course I cannot be ignorant that, in speaking of Isabel's ill-treatment, you alluded to my wife. Has it transpired beyond yourselves?"

"You may be sure that neither Isabel nor myself would mention it: we shall dismiss it from amongst our reminiscences. Let it be as though you never heard it: it is past and done with."

"Isabel," said the earl, as he was departing that evening, for he remained to spend the day with them, "I came here this morning almost prepared to strike your husband, and I go away honouring him. Be a good and faithful wife to him, for he deserves it."

"Of course I shall be," she answered, in surprise.

Lord Mount Severn went on to Castle Marling, and there he had a stormy interview with his wife: so stormy that the sounds penetrated to the ears of the domestics. He left again the same day, in anger, and proceeded to Mount Severn.

"He will have time to cool down before we meet in London," was the comment of my lady.

CHAPTER XV.

COMING HOME.

MISS CARLYLE was as good as her word. She quitted her own house, and removed to East Lynne with Peter and two of her handmaidens. In spite of Mr. Dill's grieved remonstrances, she discharged the servants whom Mr. Carlyle had engaged; all except one man: she might have retained one of the maids also, but for the episode of the mousseline-de-laine dresses and the caps with peach bows: for she had sense to remember, in spite of her prejudices, that East Lynne would require more hands in its service than her own home.

On a Friday night, about a month after the wedding, Mr. Carlyle and his wife came home. They were expected, and Miss Carlyle went through the hall to receive them, and stood on the upper steps, between the pillars of the portico. An elegant chariot with four post-horses was drawing up: Miss Carlyle compressed her lips as she scanned it. She was attired in a handsome dark silk dress and a new cap: her anger had had time to cool down in the last month, and her strong common sense told her that the wiser plan would be to make the best of it. Mr. Carlyle came up the steps with Isabel.

"You here, Cornelia! that was kind. How are you? Isabel, this is my sister."

Lady Isabel put forth her hand, and Miss Carlyle condescended to touch the tips of her fingers. "I hope you are well, ma'am," she jerked out.

Mr. Carlyle left them together, and went back to search for some trifles which had been left in the carriage. Miss Carlyle led the way to a sitting-room, where the supper-tray was laid. "You would like to go upstairs and take your things off before supper, ma'am?" she said, in the same jerky tone, to Lady Isabel.

"Thank you. I will go to my rooms, but I do not require supper. We have dined."

"Then what would you like to take?" asked Miss Corny.

"Some tea, if you please. I am very thirsty."

"Tea!" ejaculated Miss Corny. "So late as this! I don't know that they have boiling water. You'd never sleep a wink all night, ma'am, if you took tea at eleven o'clock."

"Oh—then never mind," replied Lady Isabel. "It is of no consequence. Do not let me give trouble."

Miss Carlyle whisked out of the room; upon what errand was best known to herself: and in the hall she and Marvel came to an encounter. No words passed, but each eyed the other grimly. Marvel was very stylish, with five flounces to her dress, a veil and a parasol. Meanwhile, Lady Isabel sat down and burst into tears and sobs. A chill had come over her: it did not seem like coming home to East Lynne. Mr. Carlyle entered and witnessed the grief.

"Isabel!" he uttered in amazement, as he hastened up to her. "My darling, what ails you?"

"I am tired, I think," she gently answered; "and coming into the house again made me think of papa. I should like to go to my rooms, Archibald, but I don't know which they are."

Neither did Mr. Carlyle know, but Miss Carlyle came whisking in again, and said, "The best rooms; those next the library. Should she go up with my lady?"

Mr. Carlyle preferred to go himself, and he held out his arm to Isabel. She drew her veil over her face as she passed Miss Carlyle.

The branches were not lighted, and the room looked cold and comfortless. "Things seem all at sixes and sevens in the house," remarked Mr. Carlyle. "I fancy the servants must have misunderstood my letter, and not have expected us until to-morrow night."

"Archibald," she said, taking off her bonnet, "I do feel very tired, and—and—low-spirited: may I undress at once, and not go down again to-night?"

He looked at her and smiled. "*May* you not go down again! Have you forgotten that you are at last in your own home? A happy home, I trust, it will be to you, my darling: I will strive to render it so."

She leaned upon him and sobbed aloud. He tenderly bore with her mood, soothing her to composure, now and then gently kissing the face she held to him. Oh, his was a true heart; he fervently intended to cherish this fair flower he had won: but, alas! it was just possible he might miss the way, unless he could emancipate himself from his sister's thraldom. Isabel did not love him: of that she was conscious; but her deep and earnest hope by night and by day was that she might learn to love him, for she knew that he deserved it.

They heard Marvel's voice, and Isabel turned, poured out some water, and began dashing it over her face and eyes. She did not care that Marvel, who was haughtily giving orders about some particular trunk, should see her grief.

"What will you take, Isabel?" asked Mr. Carlyle. "Some tea?"

"No, thank you," replied she, remembering Miss Carlyle's answer.

"But you must take something. You complained of thirst in the carriage."

"Water will do—will be best for me, I mean. Marvel can get it for me."

Mr. Carlyle left the room, and the lady's-maid undressed her mistress in swelling silence, her tongue quivering with its rage and wrongs. Marvel thought herself more hardly used than any lady's-maid ever had been yet. From the very hour of the wedding her anger had been gathering, for there had been no gentleman-valet to take care of *her* during the wedding-journey. Bad enough! but she had come home to find that there was no staff of upper servants at all: no housekeeper; no steward; no, as she expressed it, anybody. Moreover, she and Miss Carlyle had just come to a clash. Marvel was loftily calling about her in the hall for somebody to carry up a small parcel, which contained, in fact, her lady's dressing-case, and Miss Carlyle had desired her to carry it up herself. But that she had learnt who the lady was, Marvel in her indignation might have felt inclined to throw the dressing-case at her head.

"Anything else, my lady?"

"No," replied Lady Isabel. "You may go."

Isabel, wrapped in her dressing-gown, her warm slippers on, sat with a book; and Marvel, wishing her good night, retired. Mr. Carlyle, meanwhile, had sought his sister, who, finding she was to be the only one to take supper, was then helping herself to the wing of a fowl. She had chosen that day to dine early.

"Cornelia," he began, "I do not understand all this. I don't see my servants, and I see yours. Where are mine?"

"Gone away," said Miss Carlyle, in her decisive, off-hand manner.

"Gone away!" responded Mr. Carlyle. "What for? I believe they were excellent servants."

"Very excellent! Decking themselves out in buff mousseline-de-laine dresses on a Saturday morning, and fine caps garnished with peach. Never attempt to dabble in domestic matters again, Archibald, for you only get taken in. Cut me a slice of that tongue."

"But in what did they do wrong?" he repeated, as he obeyed her.

"Archibald Carlyle, how could you go and make a fool of yourself? If you must have married, were there not plenty of young ladies in your own sphere of society——"

"Stay," he interrupted. "I wrote you a full statement of my motives and actions, Cornelia; I concealed nothing that it was necessary you should know: I am not disposed to enter upon a further discussion of the subject, and you must pardon my saying so. Let us return to the topic of the servants. Where are they?"

"I sent them away. Because they were superfluous encumbrances," she hastily added, as he would have interrupted her. "We have four in the house, and my lady has brought a fine maid, I see, making five. I have come up here to live."

Mr. Carlyle felt checkmated. He had always bowed to the will of Miss Corny, but he had an idea that he and his wife would be better without her. "And your own house?" he exclaimed.

"I have let it furnished: the people entered to-day. You cannot turn me out of East Lynne, into the road, or to furnished lodgings, Archibald. There will be enough expense, without our keeping on two houses: and most people, in your place, would jump at the prospect of my living here. Your wife will be mistress; I do not intend to take her honours from her; but I shall save her a world of trouble in management, and be as useful to her as a housekeeper. She will be glad of that, inexperienced as she is: I dare say she never gave a domestic order in her life."

This was a view of the case to Mr. Carlyle, so plausibly put, that he began to think it might be all for the best. He had great reverence for his sister's judgment: force of habit is strong upon all of us. Still—he did not know.

"There is certainly room for you at East Lynne, Cornelia, but——"

"A little too much," put in Miss Corny. "I think a house half its size might content us all, and still have been grand enough for Lady Isabel."

"East Lynne is mine," said Mr. Carlyle.

"So is your folly," rejoined Miss Cornelia.

"And with regard to servants," proceeded Mr. Carlyle, passing over the remark, "I shall certainly keep as many as I think necessary. I cannot give my wife splendour, but I will give her comfort. The horses and carriages will take one man's——"

Miss Corny turned faint all over. "What on earth are you talking of?"

"I bought a pretty open carriage in town, and a pair of ponies for it. The carriage we came home in was Lord Mount Severn's present. Post-horses will do for that at present, but——"

"Oh, Archibald! the sins that you are committing!"

"Sins?" echoed Mr. Carlyle.

"Wilful waste makes woeful want. I taught that to you as a child. To be thrifty is a virtue; to squander is a sin."

"It may be a sin where you cannot afford it. To spend wisely is neither a squander nor a sin. Never fear, Cornelia, that I shall run beyond my income."

"Say at once an empty pocket is better than a full one," angrily returned Miss Carlyle. "Did you buy that fine piano which has arrived?"

"It was my present to Isabel."

Miss Corny groaned. "What did it cost?"

"The cost is of no consequence. The old piano here was a bad one, and I bought a better."

"What did it cost?" repeated Miss Carlyle.

"A hundred and twenty guineas," he answered. Obedience to her will was yet powerful within him.

Miss Corny threw up her hands and eyes. At that moment Peter entered with some hot water which his master had rung for. Mr. Carlyle rose, and looked on the sideboard.

"Where's the wine, Peter?"

The servant put out some port and sherry. Mr. Carlyle drank a glass, and then proceeded to mix some wine and water. "Shall I mix some for you, Cornelia?" he asked.

"I'll mix for myself if I want any. Who is that for?"

"Isabel."

He quitted the room, carrying the wine and water, and entered his wife's. She was sitting half buried it seemed in the arm-chair, her face muffled up. As she raised it he saw that it was flushed and agitated, that her eyes were bright and her frame was trembling.

"What is the matter?" he hastily asked.

"I grew nervous after Marvel went," she whispered, grasping him, as if for protection from terror. "I could not find the bell, and that made me worse; so I came back to the chair and covered my head over, hoping some one would come up"

"I have been talking to Cornelia. But what made you nervous?"

"Oh! I was very foolish. I kept thinking of frightful things; they would come into my mind. Do not blame me, Archibald. This is the room papa died in."

"Blame you, my darling!" he uttered with deep feeling.

"I thought of a dreadful story about the bats, that the servants told —I dare say you never heard it; and I kept thinking, 'Suppose they were at the windows now, behind the blinds.' And then I was afraid to look at the bed: I fancied I might see—— You are laughing!"

Yes, he was smiling; for he knew that these moments of nervous fear are best met jestingly. He made her take the wine and water, and then he showed her where the bell was, ringing it as he did so. Its position had been moved in some late alterations to the house.

"Your rooms shall be changed to-morrow, Isabel."

"No, let us remain in these. I shall like to feel that papa was once their occupant. I won't grow nervous again."

But, even as she spoke, her actions belied her words. Mr. Carlyle had gone to the door and opened it, and she flew to him, cowering behind him.

"Shall you be very long, Archibald?" she whispered.

"Not more than an hour," he answered. But he hastily put back one of his hands, and held her tightly in his protecting grasp. Marvel was coming along the corridor in answer to the bell.

"Have the goodness to let Miss Carlyle know that I am not coming down again to-night," he said.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Carlyle shut the door, and then looked at his wife and laughed. "He is very kind to me," thought Isabel.

With the morning began the perplexities of Lady Isabel Carlyle. But first of all, just fancy the group at breakfast. Miss Carlyle descended in the startling costume the reader has seen; took her seat at the breakfast-table, and there sat bolt upright. Mr. Carlyle came down next; and then Lady Isabel entered in an elegant half-mourning dress with flowing black ribbons.

"Good morning, ma'am. I hope you slept well?" was Miss Carlyle's salutation.

"Quite well, thank you," she answered, as she took her seat opposite Miss Carlyle. Miss Carlyle pointed to the top of the table.

"That is your place, ma'am. But I will pour out the coffee, and save you the trouble, if you wish it."

"I should be glad if you would," answered Lady Isabel.

So Miss Carlyle proceeded to her duties, very stern and grim. The meal was nearly over, when Peter came in, and said the butcher had come up for orders. Miss Carlyle looked at Lady Isabel, waiting, of course, for her to give them. Isabel was silent with perplexity: she had never given such an order in her life. Utterly ignorant was she of the requirements of a household; and she did not know whether to suggest a few joints of meat or a whole cow. It was the presence of that grim Miss Corny which put her out: alone with her husband, she would have said, "What ought I to order, Archibald? Tell me." Peter waited.

"A—something to roast and boil, if you please," stammered Lady Isabel.

She spoke in a low tone; embarrassment makes cowards of the best of us; and Mr. Carlyle repeated it after her. He knew no more about housekeeping than she did.

"Something to roast and boil, tell the man, Peter."

Up started Miss Corny; she could not stand that. "Are you aware, Lady Isabel, that an order, such as that, would only puzzle tne butcher? Shall I give the necessary orders for to-day? The fish-monger will be up presently."

"Oh! I wish you would!" cried the relieved Lady Isabel. "I have not been accustomed to it; but I must learn. I don't think I know anything about housekeeping."

Miss Corny's answer was to stalk out of the room. Isabel rose from her chair, as a bird released from its cage, and stood by her husband's side. "Have you finished, Archibald?"

"I think I have, dear. Oh! here's my coffee. There; I have finished now."

"Let us go round the grounds."

He rose, laid his hands playfully on her slender waist, and looked at her. "You may as well ask me to take a journey to the moon. It is past nine, and I have not been to the office for a month."

Tears rose in her eyes. "I wish you could stay with me! I wish you could be always with me. East Lynne will not be East Lynne without you."

"I will be with you as much as ever I can, my dearest," he whispered. "Come and walk with me through the park."

She ran for her bonnet, gloves, and parasol. Mr. Carlyle waited for her in the hall, and they went out together.

He thought it a good opportunity to speak about his sister. "She wishes to remain with us," he said. "I do not know what to decide. On the one hand, I think she might save you the worry of household management: on the other, I fancy we shall be happier by ourselves."

Isabel's heart sank within her at the idea of that stern Miss Corny, mounted over her as resident guard; but, refined and sensitive, almost painfully considerate for the feelings of others, she raised no word of objection. As he and Miss Carlyle pleased, she answered.

"Isabel," he said, with grave earnestness, "I wish it to be as you please: that is, I wish matters to be arranged as may best please you; and I will have them so arranged. My chief object in life now is your happiness."

He spoke in all the sincerity of truth, and Isabel knew it; and the thought came across her that with him by her side, her loving protector, Miss Carlyle could not mar her life's peace. "Let her stay, Archibald: she will not incommode us."

"At any rate, it can be tried for a month or two, and we shall see how it works," he musingly observed.

They reached the park gates. "I wish I could go with you and be your clerk," she cried, unwilling to release his hand. "I should not have all that long way to go back by myself."

He laughed and shook his head, telling her that she wanted to bribe him into taking her back, but it could not be. And away he went, after saying farewell.

Isabel wandered back, and then wandered though the rooms: they looked lonely; not as they had seemed to look in her father's time. In her dressing-room knelt Marvel, unpacking. She rose when Lady Isabel entered.

"Can I speak to you a moment, if you please, my lady?"

"What is it?"

Then Marvel poured forth her tale. That she feared so small an establishment would not suit her, and if my lady pleased she would like to leave at once: that day. Anticipating it, she had not unpacked her things.

"There has been some mistake about the servants, Marvel, but it will be remedied as soon as possible. And I told you, before I married, that Mr. Carlyle's establishment would be a limited one."

"My lady, perhaps I could put up with that; but I never could stop in the house with"—that female Guy, had been on the tip of Marvel's tongue; but she remembered in time of whom she was speaking—"with Miss Carlyle. I fear, my lady, we have both tempers that would clash, and might be flying at each other: I could not stop, my lady, for untold gold. And if you please to make me forfeit my running quarter's salary, why, I must do it. So, when I have set your ladyship's things to rights, I hope you'll allow me to go."

Lady Isabel would not condescend to ask her to remain, but she wondered how she should manage without a maid. She drew her desk towards her. "What is the amount due to you?" she inquired, as she unlocked it.

"Up to the end of the quarter, my lady?" cried Marvel, in a brisk tone.

"No," coldly replied Lady Isabel. "Up to to-day."

"I have not had time to reckon, my lady."

Lady Isabel took a pencil and paper, made out the account, and laid it down in gold and silver on the table. "It is more than you deserve, Marvel," she remarked, "and more than you would receive in most places. You ought to have given me proper notice."

Marvel melted into tears, and began a string of excuses. "She should never have wished to leave so kind a lady, but for attendant ill-conveniences, and she hoped my lady would not object to testify to her character." Lady Isabel quitted the room in the midst of it: and in the course of the day Marvel took her departure, Joyce telling her that she ought to be ashamed of herself.

"I couldn't help myself," retorted Marvel; "and I'm sorry to leave her, for she's a pleasant young lady to serve."

"Well, I know I'd have helped myself," was Joyce's remark. "I would not go off in this unhandsome way from a good mistress."

"Perhaps you wouldn't," loftily returned Marvel, "but my feelings are delicate, and can't bear to be trampled upon. The same house is not going to hold me and that tall female image, who's more fit to be carried about at a foreign carnival than some that they do carry."

So Marvel left. And when Lady Isabel went to her room to dress for dinner, Joyce entered it.

"I am not much accustomed to a lady's-maid's duties," said she, "but

Miss Carlyle has sent me, my lady, to do what I can for you, if you will allow me."

Isabel thought it was kind of Miss Carlyle.

"And if you please to trust me with the keys of your things, I will take charge of them for you, my lady, until you are suited with a maid," Joyce resumed.

"I don't know anything about the keys," answered Isabel. "I never keep them."

Joyce did her best, and Lady Isabel went down. It was nearly six o'clock, the dinner hour, and she strolled to the park gates, hoping to meet Mr. Carlyle. Taking a few steps out, she looked down the road, but could not see him coming; so she turned in again, and sat down under a shady tree and out of view of the road. It was remarkably warm weather for the closing days of May.

Half an hour, and then Mr. Carlyle came hurrying up, passed the gates, and turned on to the grass. There was his wife. She had fallen asleep, her head leaning against the trunk of the tree. Her bonnet and parasol lay at her feet, her scarf had dropped, and she looked like a lovely child, her lips partly open, her cheeks flushed, and her beautiful hair falling around. It was an exquisite picture, and his heart beat quicker within him as he felt it was his own. A smile stole over his lips as he stood looking at her. She opened her eyes, and for a moment could not remember where she was. Then she started up.

"Oh, Archibald! have I been asleep?"

"Ay; and might have been stolen and carried off. I could not afford that, Isabel."

"I don't know how I came to fall asleep. I was listening for you."

"What have you been doing all day?" he asked, as he drew her arm within his, and they walked on.

"Oh, I hardly know," she sighed. "Trying the new piano, and looking at my watch, wishing the time would go more quickly, that you might come home. The ponies and carriage have arrived, Archibald."

"I know they have, my dear. Have you been out-of-doors much?"

"No, I waited for you." And then she told him about Marvel. He felt vexed, saying she must replace her with all speed. Isabel said she knew of one, a young woman who had left Lady Mount Severn while she, Isabel, was at Castle Marling: her health was delicate, and Lady Mount Severn's place was too hard for her.

"Write to her," said Mr. Carlyle.

"You have kept dinner waiting more than half an hour," began Miss Corny, in a loud tone of complaint, to her brother, meeting them in the hall. "And I thought you must be lost, ma'am," she added, to Isabel.

Why in the world did she add that objectionable "ma'am" to every sentence? It was out of place in all respects to Isabel: more especially considering her own age and Isabel's youth. Mr. Carlyle knitted his brow whenever it came out, and Joyce felt sure that Miss Corny did it "in her temper." He hastily answered her that he could not get away from the office earlier, and went up to his dressing-room. Isabel hurried after him, probably dreading some outbreak of Miss

Carlyle's displeasure, but the door was shut, and, scarcely at home yet as a wife, she did not like to open it. When he appeared, there she was, leaning against the door-post.

"Isabel! Are you there?"

"I am waiting for you. Are you ready?"

"Nearly." He drew her inside, caught her to him, and held her against his heart.

There was an explosion on the following morning. Mr. Carlyle ordered the pony-carriage for church, but his sister interrupted him.

"Archibald! what are you thinking of? I will not permit it."

"Permit what?" asked Mr. Carlyle.

"The cattle to be taken out on a Sunday. I am a religious woman, ma'am," she added, turning sharply to Isabel, "and I cannot countenance Sunday travelling. I was taught my catechism, Lady Isabel."

Isabel did not feel comfortable. She knew that a walk to St. Jude's Church and back in the present heat would knock her up for the day, but she shrank from offending Miss Carlyle's prejudices. She was standing at the window with her husband, Miss Carlyle being seated at a distant table, with the Bible before her.

"Archibald, perhaps if we walk very slowly it will not hurt me," she softly whispered.

He smiled and nodded and whispered in return: "Be quite ready by half-past ten."

"Well—is she going to walk?" snapped Miss Corny, as Isabel left the room.

"No. She could not bear the walk in this heat, and I shall certainly not allow her to attempt it. We shall go in early. John will put up the ponies and be at church before the service begins."

"Is she made of sugar, and would melt?" retorted Miss Corny.

"She is a gentle, tender plant; one that I have taken to my bosom and vowed before my Maker to love and to cherish: and, by His help, I will do so."

He spoke in a firm tone, almost as sharp as Miss Corny's, and quitted the room. Miss Carlyle raised her hand and pressed it to her temples: as if something pained her there.

The carriage came round, a beautiful little equipage, and Isabel was ready. As Mr. Carlyle drove slowly down the dusty road, they came upon Miss Corny striding along in the sun, with a great umbrella over her head. She would not turn to look at them.

Once more, as in the year gone by, St. Jude's Church was in a flutter of expectation. It expected to see a whole paraphernalia of bridal finery, and again it was doomed to disappointment, for Isabel had not put off mourning for her father. She was in black, a thin gauze dress, and her white bonnet had small black flowers inside and out. For the first time in his life Mr. Carlyle took possession of the pew belonging to East Lynne, filling the place where the poor earl used to sit. Not so Miss Corny: she sat in her own.

Barbara was there with the justice and Mrs. Hare. Her face wore a grey, dusky hue, of which she was only too conscious, but could not subdue. Her covetous eyes would wander to that other face with its singular loveliness, and its sweetly earnest eyes, sheltered under the protection of him, for whose sheltering protection she had so long yearned. Poor Barbara did not benefit much by the services that day.

Afterwards, they went across the churchyard to the west corner, where stood the tomb of Lord Mount Severn. Isabel looked at the inscription, her veil shading her face.

"Not here, and now, my darling," he whispered, pressing her arm to his side, for he felt her silent sobs. "Strive for calmness."

"It seems but the other day he was at church with me, and now—here!"

Mr. Carlyle suddenly changed their places, so that they stood with their backs to the hedge, and to any curious stragglers who might be lingering in the road.

"There ought to be railings round the tomb," she presently said, after a successful battle with her emotion.

"I thought so, and I suggested it to Lord Mount Severn, but he appeared to think differently. I will have it done."

"I put you to great expense," she said.

Mr. Carlyle glanced quickly at her, a dim fear penetrating his mind that his sister might have been *talking* in her hearing. "An expense I would not be without for the whole world. You know it, Isabel."

"And I have nothing to repay you with," she sighed.

He looked excessively amused; and, gazing into her face, the expression of his eyes made her smile. "Here is John with the carriage," she exclaimed. "Let us go, Archibald."

Standing outside the gates, talking to the rector's family, were several ladies, one of them Barbara Hare. She watched Mr. Carlyle place his wife in the carriage, she watched him drive away. Barbara's very lips were white as she bowed in return to his greeting.

"The heat is so great," murmured Barbara, when those around noticed her paleness.

"Ah! you ought to have gone home in the phaeton with Mr. and Mrs. Hare—as they desired you."

"I wished to walk," returned the unhappy Barbara.

"What a pretty girl!" said Lady Isabel to her husband. "What is her name?"

"Barbara Hare."

CHAPTER XVI.

BARBARA HARE'S REVELATION.

THE county carriages began to arrive at East Lynne, to pay the wedding visit to Mr. and Lady Isabel Carlyle. Some appeared with all the pomp of coronets and hammercloths, and bedizened footmen with calves and wigs and gold-headed canes; some came with four horses, and some even with outriders. It is the custom still in certain localities to be preceded by outriders when paying visits of ceremony, and there are people who like the dash it causes. Mr. Carlyle might have taken up his abode at East Lynne without any such honours being paid him, but his marriage with Lady Isabel had sent him up in county estimation. Amongst the rest went Justice and Mrs. Hare and Barbara. The old-fashioned, large yellow chariot was brought out, and the fat, sleek, long-tailed coach-horses: only on state occasions was that chariot awakened out of its repose.

Isabel happened to be in her dressing-room, talking to Joyce. She had grown to like Joyce very much, and was asking her whether she would continue to wait upon her—as the maid, for whom she had written, was not well enough to come.

Joyce's face lighted up with pleasure at the proposal. "Oh, my lady, you are very kind! I should so like it. I would serve you faithfully, to the best of my ability: and I know I could do your hair well, if you allowed me to try: I have been practising upon my own, night and morning."

Isabel laughed. "But Miss Carlyle may not be inclined to transfer you to me."

"I think she would, my lady. She said, a day or two ago, that I appeared to suit you, and you might have me altogether if you wished, provided I could still make her gowns, which I could very well do, for yours is an easy service. I make them to please her, you see, my lady."

"Do you make her caps also?" demurely asked Lady Isabel.

Joyce smiled. "Yes, my lady: but I am allowed to make them only according to her own pattern."

"Joyce, if you become my maid, you must wear smarter caps yourself."

"I know that, my lady—at least, different ones. But Miss Carlyle is very particular, and only allows muslin caps to her servants. I would wear plain white net, if you don't object, my lady: neat and close, with a little quilled white ribbon."

"They are the best that you can wear. I do not wish you to be fine, like Marvel."

"Oh, my lady! I shall never be fine," shuddered Joyce. And Joyce believed she had cause to shudder at finery. She was about to speak further, when a knock came at the dressing-room door. Joyce went to open it, and saw one of the housemaids, a girl who had recently been engaged, a native of West Lynne. Isabel heard the colloquy.

"Is my lady there?"

"Yes."

"Some visitors. Peter ordered me to come and tell you. I say Joyce, it's the Hares. And *she's* with them. Her bonnet's got blue convolvulums inside, and a white feather out, as long as Martha's hearth-broom. I watched her out of the carriage."

"Who?" sharply returned Joyce.

"Why, Miss Barbara. Only fancy her coming to pay the wedding visit *here*. My lady had better take care that she don't get a bowl of poison mixed for her. Master's out, or else I'd have given a shilling to see the interview between the three."

Joyce sent the girl away, closed the door, and turned to her mistress, quite unconscious that the half-whispered conversation had been audible.

"Some visitors in the drawing-room, my lady, Susan says. Mr. Justice Hare and Mrs. Hare, and Miss Barbara."

Isabel descended, her mind full of the mysterious words spoken by Susan. The justice was in a new flaxen wig, obstinate-looking and pompous; Mrs. Hare pale, delicate, and lady-like; Barbara, beautiful: such was the impression they made upon Isabel.

They paid rather a long visit. Isabel quite fell in love with the gentle and suffering Mrs. Hare, who had risen to leave when Miss Carlyle entered. Miss Carlyle wished them to remain longer; had something, she said, to show Barbara. The justice declined: he had a brother-justice coming to dine with him at five; it was then half-past four: Barbara might stay if she liked.

Barbara's face crimsoned: nevertheless she accepted the invitation, proffered her by Miss Carlyle, to remain at East Lynne for the rest of the day.

Dinner-time approached, and Isabel went up to dress for it. Joyce was waiting, and entered upon the subject of the service.

"My lady, I have spoken to Miss Carlyle, and she is willing that I should be transferred to you, but she says I ought first of all to acquaint you with certain unpleasant facts in my history, and the same thought had occurred to me. Miss Carlyle is not over-pleasant in manner, my lady, but she is very upright and just."

"What facts?" asked Lady Isabel, sitting down to have her hair brushed.

"My lady, I'll tell you as shortly as I can. My father was a clerk in Mr. Carlyle's office—of course I mean the late Mr. Carlyle. My mother died when I was eight years old, and my father afterwards married again, a sister of Mr. Kane's wife——"

"Mr. Kane, the music-master?"

"Yes, my lady. She was a governess; she and Mrs. Kane had both been governesses, they were quite ladies, so far as education and manners went, and West Lynne said that in stooping to marry my father she lowered herself dreadfully. But he was a very handsome man, and a clever man also, though self-taught. Well, they married, and at the end of a year Afy was born——"

"Who?" interrupted Lady Isabel.

"My half-sister, Afy. In another year her mother died, and an aunt of her mother sent for the child, and said she should bring her up. I remained at home with my father, going to school in the day, and when I grew up, I went to learn millinery and dressmaking. We lived in the prettiest cottage, my lady; it was in the wood, and it was my father's own. After I was out of my time, I used to go round to different ladies' houses to work, seeing to my father's comforts night and morning, for the woman who did the housework only came in for a few hours in the day. That went on for years, and then Afy came home. Her aunt had died, and her money died with her, so that though she had brought up Afy well, she could leave her nothing. Afy quite frightened us. Her notions were fine, and her dress was fine; she was gay and giddy and very pretty, and would do nothing all day but read books, which she used to get at the West Lynne library. My father did not like it: we were only plain, working people, and she wanted to set up for a lady—the effect of bringing her up above her station. Many a breeze had she and I together, chiefly about her dress. The next thing, she got acquainted with young Richard Hare."

Lady Isabel looked up quickly.

"Mr. Justice Hare's only son; own brother to Miss Barbara," proceeded Joyce, dropping her voice, as though Barbara might hear her in the drawing-room. "Oh, she was very flighty; she encouraged Mr. Richard, and he soon grew to love her with quite a wild sort of love; he was rather simple, and Afy used to laugh at him behind his back. She encouraged others too, and would have them there in an evening, when the house was free. My father was secretary to the literary institution, and had to be there two evenings in the week, after office hours at Mr. Carlyle's; he was fond of shooting, too, and, if home in time, would go out with his gun; and as I scarcely ever got home before nine o'clock, Afy was often alone, and she took the opportunity of having one or other of her admirers there."

"Had she many admirers?" asked Lady Isabel, who seemed inclined to treat the tale jokingly.

"The chief one, my lady, was Richard Hare. She got acquainted with somebody else, a stranger, who used to ride over from a distance to see her; but I fancy there was nothing in it; Mr. Richard was the one. And it went on and on, till—till—he killed her father."

"Who?" uttered the startled Lady Isabel.

"Richard Hare, my lady. My father had told Afy that Mr. Richard should not come there any longer, for when gentlemen go in secret after poor girls, it is well known they have not marriage in their thoughts: my father would have interfered more than he did, but that he judged well of Mr. Richard, and did not think he was one to do Afy real harm—but he did not know how flighty she was. However, one day he heard people talking about t in West Lynne, coupling her name and Mr. Richard's offensively together, and at night he told Afy, before me, that it should not go on any longer, and she must not encourage him. My lady, the next night Richard Hare shot my father."

"How very dreadful!"

"Whether it was done on purpose, or whether the gun went off in a scuffle, I can't tell: people think it was wilful murder. I never shall forget the scene, my lady, when I got home that night: it was at Justice Hare's that I had been working. My father was lying on the floor, dead; and the house was full of people. Afy could give no particulars: she had gone out to the wood path at the back, and never heard or saw anything amiss; but when she went in again, there lay father. Mr. Locksley was leaning over him; he told Afy that he had heard the shot, and came up in time to see Richard Hare fling the gun away, and fly from the house with his shoes stained with blood."

"Oh, Joyce! I do not like to hear this. What was done to Richard Hare?"

"He escaped, my lady. He went off that same night, and has never been heard of since. There's a judgment of murder out against him, and his own father would be the first to deliver him up to justice. It is a dreadful thing to have befallen the Hare family, who are high and respectable people: it is killing Mrs. Hare by inches. Afy——"

"What is it, that name, Joyce?"

"My lady, she was christened by a very fine name—Aphrodite: so I and my father never called her anything but Afy. But I have the worst to tell you yet, my lady—the worst as regards her. As soon as the inquest was over, she went off, after Richard Hare."

Lady Isabel uttered an exclamation.

"She did indeed, my lady," returned Joyce, turning away her wet eyelashes and her flushed cheeks from the gaze of her mistress. "Nothing has been heard of either of them: and it is hardly likely but what they went out of England—perhaps to Australia; perhaps to America; nobody knows. What with the shame of that, and the shock of my poor father's murder, I had an attack of illness. It was a nervous fever, and it lasted long: Miss Carlyle had me at her house, and she and her servants nursed me through it. She's good at heart, my lady, is Miss Carlyle, only her manners are against her, and she will think herself better than other people. After that illness, I stayed with her as upper maid, and never went out to work again."

"How long is it since this happened?"

"It will be four years next September, my lady. The cottage has stood empty ever since, for nobody will live in it; they say it is tainted with murder. And I can't sell it, because Afy has a right in it as well as I. I go to it sometimes, and open the windows, and air it. And this was what I had to tell you, my lady, before you decide to take me into your service. It is not every lady would like to engage one whose sister has turned out so badly."

Lady Isabel did not see that it ought to make any difference. She said so: and then leaned back in her chair, and mused.

"Which dress, my lady?"

"Joyce, what was that I heard you and Susan gossiping about at the door?" Lady Isabel suddenly asked. "About Miss Hare giving me a bowl of poison. You should tell Susan not to whisper so loudly."

Joyce smiled, though she was rather confused. "It was only a bit of nonsense, of course, my lady. The fact is, that people think Miss Barbara was much attached to Mr. Carlyle, regularly in love with him, and many thought it would be a match. But I don't fancy she would have been the one to make him happy, with all her love."

A hot flush passed over the brow of Lady Isabel; a sensation very like jealousy flew to her heart. No woman likes to hear that another woman either is or has been attached to her husband: a doubt always arises whether the feeling may not have been reciprocated.

Lady Isabel descended. She wore a costly black lace dress, its low body and sleeves trimmed with white lace as costly, and ornaments of jet. She looked inexpressibly beautiful, and Barbara turned from her with a feeling of sickening jealousy; from her beauty, from her attire, even from the fine, soft handkerchief, which displayed the badge of her rank—the coronet of an earl's daughter. Barbara looked well too: she was in a light-blue silk robe, and her pretty cheeks were damask with her mind's excitement. On her neck she wore the gold chain given to her by Mr. Carlyle—she had not discarded that.

They stood together at the window, looking at Mr. Carlyle as he came up the avenue. He saw them, and nodded. Lady Isabel watched the damask cheeks turn to crimson at sight of him.

"How do you do, Barbara?" he cried, as he shook hands. "Come to pay us a visit at last? you have been tardy over it. And how are you, my darling?" he whispered, bending over his wife: but she missed his kiss of greeting. Well; would she have had him give it her in public? No; but she was in the mood to notice the omission.

Dinner over, Miss Carlyle beguiled Barbara out of doors. To exhibit the beauties of the East Lynne pleasure-grounds, the rarities of the conservatory, thinks the reader. Not at all: she was anxious to show off the stock of vegetables, the asparagus and cucumber beds; worth a hundred acres of flowers in Miss Carlyle's estimation. Barbara went unwillingly: she would rather be in *his* presence than away from it; and she could not help feeling this, although he was the husband of another. Isabel remained indoors: Barbara was Miss Carlyle's guest.

"How do you like her?" abruptly asked Barbara, alluding to Lady Isabel.

"Better than I thought I should," acknowledged Miss Carlyle. "I had expected airs and graces and pretence, and I must say she is free from them. She seems quite wrapped up in Archibald, and watches for his coming home as a cat watches for a mouse. She is dull without him."

Barbara plucked a rose as they passed a bush, and began pulling it to pieces, leaf by leaf. "Dull! how does she employ her time?"

"In doing nothing," snappishly retorted Miss Carlyle. "Sings a bit, and plays a bit, and reads a bit, and receives her visitors, and idles away her days in that manner. She coaxes Archibald out here after breakfast, and he ought not to let himself be coaxed; it makes him late at his office; and then she dances down to the park gates with him, hindering him still further, for he would go alone in half the time. One morning it poured with rain: she actually went all the same. I told her she would spoil her dress: oh, that was nothing, she said, and Archibald wrapped a shawl round her and took her. Of course to spoil dresses is nothing to her! And in an evening she goes down to meet him again; she would have gone to-day, if you had not been here. Oh, she is first with him now; business is second."

Barbara compelled her manner to indifference. "I suppose it is natural."

"I suppose it is absurd," was the retort of Miss Carlyle. "I give them very little of my company, especially of an evening. They go strolling out together, or she sings to him, he hanging over her as if she were gold; to judge by appearances, she is more precious to him than any gold that ever was coined into money. I'll tell you what I saw last night. They had post-horses to the close carriage yesterday, and went to return some visits, never reaching home till past seven, and keeping me and dinner waiting. Archibald had what he is not often subject to, a severe headache, and he went into the next room after dinner, and lay on the sofa. She carried a cup of tea to him, and never came back, leaving her own on the table till it was perfectly cold. I pushed open the door to tell her so. There was my lady's cambric handkerchief, soaked in eau-de-Cologne, lying on his forehead; and there was my lady herself, kneeling down and looking at him, he with his arm thrown round her to hold her there. Now I just ask you, Barbara, whether there's any sense in fadding with a man like that? If ever he had a headache before he was married, I used to mix him up a good dose of salts and senna, and tell him to go to bed early and sleep the pain off."

Barbara made no reply: but she turned her face from Miss Carlyle.

They came upon the gardener, and Miss Carlyle entered into a discussion with him, a somewhat warm one; she insisted upon having certain work done in a certain way; he asserting that Mr. Carlyle had ordered it done another. Barbara grew tired, and returned to the house.

Isabel and her husband were in the adjoining room, at the piano, and Barbara had an opportunity of hearing that sweet voice. She did as Miss Carlyle confessed to have done, pushed open the door between the two rooms, and looked in. It was the twilight hour, almost too dusk to see; but she could distinguish Isabel seated at the piano, and Mr. Carlyle standing behind her. She was singing one of the ballads from the opera of the "Bohemian Girl:" "When other lips."

"Why do you like the song so much, Archibald?" she asked when she had finished it.

"I don't know. I never liked it so much until I heard it from you."

"I wonder if they have come in. Shall we go into the next room?"

"Just this one first, this translation from the German. ''Twere vain to tell thee all I feel.' There's real music in that song."

"Yes, there is. Do you know, Archibald, your taste is just like papa's. He liked all these quiet, imaginative songs, and so do you. And so do I," she laughingly added, "if I must speak the truth. Mrs. Vane used to stop her ears and make a face, when papa made me sing them. Papa returned the compliment; for he would walk out of the room if she began her loud Italian airs. I speak of the time when she was with us in London."

She ceased, and began the song, singing it exquisitely, in a low, sweet, earnest tone, the chords of the accompaniment, at its conclusion, dying off gradually into silence.

"There, Archibald! I am sure I have sung you ten songs at least," she said, leaning her head back against him, and looking at him from her upturned face. "You ought to pay me for them."

He did pay her; holding the dear face to him, and taking from it impassioned kisses. Barbara turned to the window, a low moan escaping her, as she pressed her forehead on one of its panes, and looked forth into the dusky night. Isabel came in on her husband's arm.

"Are you here alone, Miss Hare? I really beg your pardon. I supposed you were with Miss Carlyle?"

"Where is Cornelia, Barbara?"

"I have only just come in," was Barbara's reply. "I dare say she is following me."

So she was, for she came upon them as they were speaking, her voice raised in anger.

"Archibald, what have you been telling Blair about that geranium bed? He says you have been ordering him to make it oval. We decided that it should be square."

"Isabel would prefer it oval," was his reply.

"But it will be best square," repeated Miss Carlyle.

"It is all right, Cornelia; Blair has his orders. I wish it to be oval."

"He is a regular muff, is that Blair, and as obstinate as a mule," cried Miss Carlyle.

"Indeed, Cornelia, I think him a very good servant."

"Oh, of course," snapped Miss Carlyle. "You never can see faults in any one. You always were a simpleton in some things, Archibald."

Mr. Carlyle laughed good-humouredly; he was of an even, calm temper: and he had, all his life, been subjected to the left-handed compliments of his sister. Isabel resented these speeches in her heart; she was growing more attached to her husband day by day.

"It is well everyone does not think so," cried he, with a glance at his wife and Barbara, as they drew round the tea-table.

The evening went on to ten o'clock, and as the time-piece struck the hour, Barbara rose from her chair in amazement. "I did not think it was so late. Surely some one must have come for me."

"I will inquire," was Lady Isabel's answer; and Mr. Carlyle rang the bell. No one had come for Miss Hare.

"Then I fear I must trouble Peter," cried Barbara. "Mamma may be gone to rest, tired, and papa must have forgotten me. It would never do for me to be locked out," she gaily added.

"As you were one night before," said Mr. Carlyle, significantly.

He alluded to the night when Barbara was in the grove of trees with her unfortunate brother, and Mr. Hare was on the point, unconsciously, of locking her out. She had given Mr. Carlyle the history; but its recollection now called up a sharp pain, and a change passed over her face.

"Oh, don't, Archibald!" she uttered, in the impulse of the moment; "don't recall it." Isabel wondered.

"Can Peter take me?" continued Barbara.

"I had better take you," said Mr. Carlyle. "It is late."

Barbara's heart beat at the words; it beat as she put her things on; as she said good night to Lady Isabel and Miss Carlyle; it beat to throbbing as she went out with him and took his arm. All just as it used to be—only that he was now the husband of another. Only!

It was a warm, lovely June night, not moonlight, but bright with the summer twilight. They went down the park into the road, which they crossed, and soon came to a stile. From that stile led a path through the fields which would pass the back of Justice Hare's. Barbara stopped.

"Would you choose the field way to-night, Barbara? The grass will be damp. And this is the longest way."

"But we shall escape the dust of the road."

"Oh! very well, if you prefer it. It will not make three minutes' difference."

"He is very anxious to get home to *her!*" mentally exclaimed Barbara. "I shall fly out upon him presently, or my heart will burst."

Mr. Carlyle crossed the style, helped over Barbara, and then gave her his arm again. He had taken her parasol; he had taken it the last night they had walked together; an elegant little parasol, this of blue silk and white lace, and he did not switch the hedges with it. That night was present to Barbara now, with all its words and its delusive hopes; terribly present to her was their bitter ending.

There are moments in a woman's life when she is betrayed into forgetting the ordinary rules of conduct and propriety; when she is betrayed into making a scene. It may not often occur; perhaps never to a cold, secretive nature, where impulse, feeling, and above all, temper, are under strict control. Barbara Hare's temper was not under strict control. Her love, her jealousy, the never-dying pain always preying on her heart-strings since the marriage took place, her keen sense of the humiliation which had come home to her, were all rising fiercely, bubbling up with fiery heat. The evening she had just passed in their company, their evident happiness, the endearments she had seen him lavish upon his wife, were working her up to that state of nervous excitement when temper, tongue, and imagination fly off at a mad tangent. She felt as one isolated for ever, shut out from all that could make life dear; *they* were the world, she was out of it: what was her existence to him? A little self-control and Barbara would not have uttered words that must remain on her mind hereafter as an incubus, dyeing her cheeks red whenever she recalled them. It must be remembered too (if anything in the shape of excuse can be admitted) that she was upon terms of close intimacy with Mr. Carlyle. Independently of her own sentiments for him, they had been reared in freedom one with the other, almost as brother and sister. Mr. Carlyle walked on, utterly unconscious of the storm that was raging within her; more than that, he was unconscious of having given cause for one; and he dashed into topics, indifferent and commonplace, in the most provoking manner.

"When does the justice begin haymaking, Barbara?"

There was no reply; Barbara was trying to keep down her emotion. Mr. Carlyle tried again:

"Barbara, I asked you which day your papa cuts his hay!"

Still no reply. Barbara was literally incapable of making one. Her throat was working, the muscles of her mouth began to twitch, and a convulsive sob, or what sounded like it, broke from her. Mr. Carlyle turned his head hastily.

"Barbara! are you ill? What is it?"

On it came, passion, temper, wrongs, and nervousness, all boiling over together. She was in strong hysterics. Mr. Carlyle half carried, half dragged her to the second stile, and placed her against it, his arm supporting her; and an old cow and two calves, wondering what the disturbance could mean at that sober time of night, walked up and stared at them.

Barbara struggled with her emotion, struggled bravely, and the sobs and hysterical symptoms subsided; not the excitement or the passion, She put away his arm, and stood with her back to the stile, leaning against it. Mr. Carlyle felt inclined to fly to the pond for water, only he had nothing but his hat to bring it in.

"Are you better, Barbara? What can have caused all this?"

"What can have caused it!" she burst forth in passionate uncontrol. "*You* can ask me that?"

Mr. Carlyle was dumbfounded: but, by some inexplicable law of sympathy, a dim and very unpleasant consciousness of the truth began to steal over him.

"I don't understand you, Barbara. If I have offended you in any way, I am truly sorry."

"Truly sorry, no doubt! What do you care for me? If I go under the sod to-morrow," stamping it with her foot, "you have your wife to care for: what am I?"

"Hush!" he interposed, glancing round, more mindful for her than she was for herself.

"Hush, yes! what is my misery to you? I would rather be in my grave, Archibald Carlyle, than endure the life I lead. My pain is greater than I know how to bear."

"I cannot affect to misunderstand you," he said, feeling extremely annoyed and vexed. "But, my dear Barbara, I never gave you cause to think that I—that I—cared for you more than I did care."

"Never gave me cause!" she gasped. "When you have been coming to our house constantly, almost as my shadow; when you gave me this"—dashing open her mantle, and holding up the locket to his view; "when you have been more intimate with me than a brother!"

"Stay, Barbara. There it is—a brother. I have been nothing else: it never occurred to me to be anything else," he added, in his straightforward truth.

"Ay, as a brother, nothing else!" and her voice rose once more with her excitement; it seemed that she would not long control it. "What cared you for my feelings? what recked you that you gained my love?"

"Barbara, hush!" he implored; "do be calm and reasonable. If I ever gave you cause to think I regarded you with deeper feeling, I can only express to you my deep regret, and assure you it was done unconsciously."

She was growing calmer. The passion was fading, leaving her face still and white. She lifted it towards Mr. Carlyle.

"If *she* had not come between us, should you have loved me?"

"I don't know. How can I know? Do I not say to you, Barbara, that I only thought of you as a friend, as a sister? I cannot tell what might have been."

"I could bear it better, but that it was known," she murmured. "All West Lynne had coupled us together in their prying gossip, and they have only pity to cast to me now. I would far rather you had killed me, Archibald."

"I can only express to you my deep regret," he repeated. "I can only hope you will soon forget it all. Let the remembrance of this conversation pass away with to-night; let us still be to each other as friends—as brother and sister. Believe me," he concluded, in a deeper tone, "the confession has not lessened you in my estimation."

He made a movement as though he would get over the stile, but Barbara did not stir: the tears were silently coursing down her pallid face. At that moment there was an interruption.

"Is that you, Miss Barbara?"

Barbara started as though she had been shot. On the other side of the stile stood Wilson, their upper maid. How long might she have been there! She began to explain that Mr. Hare had sent Jasper out, and Mrs. Hare had thought it better to wait no longer for the man's return, so had despatched her, Wilson, for Miss Barbara. Mr. Carlyle crossed the stile, and handed over Barbara.

"You need not come any further now," she said to him, in a low tone.

"I shall see you home," was his reply: and he held out his arm. Barbara took it.

They walked on in silence. Arrived at the back gate of the Grove, which gave entrance to the kitchen-garden, Wilson went forward. Mr. Carlyle took both Barbara's hands in his.

"Good night, Barbara. God bless you."

She had had time for reflection; and the excitement gone, she saw her outbreak in all its shame and folly. Mr. Carlyle noticed how subdued and white she looked.

"I think I have been mad," she groaned. "I must have been mad to say what I did. Forget that it was uttered."

"I told you I would do so."

"You will not betray me to—to—your wife?" she panted.

"Barbara!"

"Thank you. Good night."

But he still retained her hands. "In a short time, Barbara, I trust you will find one more worthy to receive your love than I have been."

"Never," she impulsively answered. "I do not love and forget so lightly. In the years to come, in my old age, I shall still be nothing but Barbara Hare."

Mr. Carlyle walked away in a fit of musing. The revelation had given him pain (and possibly a little flattery), for he was fond of pretty Barbara. Fond in his way; not in hers; not with the sort of fondness he felt for his wife. He asked his conscience whether his manner to her in past days had been a tinge warmer than we bestow upon a sister, and he decided that it might have been, but that he most certainly had never cast a suspicion to the mischief it was doing.

"I heartily hope she will soon find some one to her liking, and forget me," was his concluding thought. "As to living and dying Barbara Hare, that is all moonshine; the sentimental rubbish that girls like to——"

"Archibald!"

He was passing the very last tree in the park, the nearest to his house, and the interruption came from a dark form standing under it.

"Is it you, my dearest?"

"I came out to meet you. Have you not been very long?"

"I think I have," he answered, as he drew his wife to his side, and walked on with her. "We met one of the servants at the second stile, but I went all the way."

"You have been intimate with the Hares?"

"Quite so. Cornelia is related to them."

"Do you think Barbara pretty?"

"Very."

"Then—intimate as you were—I wonder you never fell in love with her."

Mr. Carlyle laughed; a very conscious laugh, considering the recent interview.

"Did you, Archibald?"

The words were spoken in a low tone, almost, or he fancied it, a tone of emotion, and he looked at her in amazement. "Did I what, Isabel?"

"You never loved Barbara Hare?"

"Loved *her!* What is your head running on, Isabel? I never loved but one woman: and that one I made my wife."

CHAPTER XVII.

DEATH OR LIFE.

ANOTHER year came in. Isabel would have been altogether happy but for Miss Carlyle: that lady still inflicted her presence upon East Lynne, and was the bane of its househould. She deferred outwardly to Lady Isabel as mistress; but the real mistress was herself, Isabel little more than an automaton. Her impulses were checked, her wishes frustrated, her actions tacitly condemned by the imperiously willed Miss Carlyle. Poor Isabel, with her refined manners and her timid and sensitive temperament, stood no chance against the strong-minded woman, and she was in a state of galling subjection in her own house. Mr. Carlyle suspected it not. At home only morning and evening, and then generally alone with his wife, and becoming gradually more absorbed with the cares of his business, which increased upon him, he saw not that anything was wrong. Once, certain counter-orders of the two ladies had clashed with each other, and caused a commotion: Miss Carlyle immediately withdrew hers, but, in doing so, her peculiarly ungracious manner was more ungracious than ever. Isabel had then hinted to her husband that they might be happier if they lived alone; hinted it with a changing cheek and beating heart, as if she were committing a wrong upon Miss Carlyle. He proposed to his sister that she should return to her own home; she turned round and accused him of speaking for Isabel. In his truthful open way, he acknowledged the fact, making no secret of it. Miss Carlyle bounced off and presented herself before Lady Isabel, demanding what offence she had committed, and why the house was not large enough for her to have a corner in it. Isabel, shrinkingly tenacious of hurting the feelings even of an enemy, absolutely made a sort of apology, and afterwards begged her husband to think no more of what she had said. He did not; he was easy and unsuspicious; but had he only gained the faintest inkling of the truth, he would not have lost a moment in emancipating his wife from the thraldom of Miss Corny.

Not a day passed but Miss Carlyle, by dint of hints and innuendoes, contrived to impress upon Lady Isabel the unfortunate blow to his own interests that Mr. Carlyle's marriage had been, the ruinous expense she had entailed upon the family. It struck a complete chill to Isabel's heart, and she became painfully imbued with the incubus she must be to Mr. Carlyle—so far as his purse was concerned. Lord Mount Severn, with his little son, had paid them a short visit at Christmas, and Isabel had asked him, apparently with unconcern, whether Mr. Carlyle had put himself very much out of the way to marry her; whether it had entailed on him an expense and a style of living he would not otherwise have deemed himself justified in affording. Lord Mount Severn's reply was an unfortunate one. He said his opinion was that it had, and that Isabel ought to feel grateful to him for his generosity. She sighed as she listened, and from thenceforth determined to *put up* with Miss Carlyle. That lady contributed a liberal share to the maintenance of the household, and *would* do it; quite as much as would have kept up her establishment at home. She was not at East Lynne to save her own pocket, and there lay a greater difficulty in getting rid of her. Whether she spent her money at East Lynne or not, it would come to the same in the end, for it was known that all she had would go to Archibald.

More timid and sensitive by nature than many would believe or can imagine, reared in seclusion more simply and quietly than falls to the general lot of peers' daughters, completely inexperienced, Isabel was unfit to battle with the world, totally unfit to battle with Miss Carlyle. The penniless state in which she was left at her father's death: the want of a home, except that accorded her at Castle Marling, even the hundred-pound note left in her hand by Mr. Carlyle, all had imbued her with a deep consciousness of humiliation; and, far from rebelling at or despising the small establishment (comparatively speaking) provided for her by Mr. Carlyle, she felt thankful to him for it. But to be told continually that this was more than he could afford, that she was in fact a blight upon his prospects, was enough to turn her heart to bitterness. Oh, that she had had the courage to speak openly to her husband! that he might, by a single word of earnest love and assurance, have taken the weight from her heart, and rejoiced it with the truth—that all these miserable complaints were but the phantoms of his narrow-minded sister. But Isabel never did so; when Miss Corny lapsed into her grumbling mood, she would hear in silence, or gently bend her aching forehead in her hands, never retorting.

One day—it was in the month of February—after a tolerably long explosion of wrath on Miss Corny's part, not directed against Isabel, but at something which had gone wrong amongst the servants, silence supervened. Isabel, who was sitting listless and dispirited, suddenly broke it, speaking more to herself than to Miss Carlyle.

"I wish evening had come!"

"Why do you wish that?"

"Because Archibald would be at home."

Miss Carlyle gave an unsatisfactory grunt. "You seem tired, Lady Isabel."

"I am very tired."

"I don't wonder at it. I should be tired to death if I sat doing nothing all day. Indeed, I think I should soon drop into my grave."

"There's nothing to do," returned Lady Isabel.

"There's always something to do when people like to look for it. You might help me with these new table napkins, rather than do nothing."

"I make table napkins!" exclaimed Lady Isabel.

"You might do a worse thing, ma'am," snapped Miss Corny.

"I don't understand that sort of work," said Isabel, gently.

"Neither does anyone else till they try. For my part, I'd rather set on and make and mend shoes, than I'd sit with my hands before me. It's a sinful waste of time."

"I never feel very well now," answered poor Isabel, in an apologetic tone. "I am not equal to exertion."

"Then I'd go out for a drive, and take the air. Moping indoors all day does invalids no good."

"But, since the ponies started last week and alarmed me, Archibald will not allow me to go out, unless he drives me himself."

"There's nothing the matter with John's driving," returned Miss Corny, in her spirit of contradiction. "And in the matter of experience, he has had quite as much as your husband, ma'am."

"John was driving when the ponies took fright."

"If ponies take fright once, it's no reason why they should a second time. Ring the bell, and order John to bring the carriage round: it is what I should advise."

Isabel shook her head decisively. "No: Archibald bade me not go out without him, unless it was in the close carriage. He is so careful of me just now; and he knows that I should not be alarmed with him, if the ponies did start, as I should be with a servant."

"It occurs to me that you have grown a little fanciful of late, Lady Isabel."

"I suppose I have," was the meek answer. "I shall be better when baby is born: and I shall never feel at a loss then; I shall have plenty to do."

"So will most of us, I expect," returned Miss Corny, with a groan. "Why, what on earth—why, if I don't believe here's Archibald! What brings him home at this time of day?"

"Archibald!" Out she flew in her glad surprise, meeting him in the hall, and falling upon him in her delight. "Oh, Archibald, my darling, it is as if the sun had shone! What have you come home for?"

"To drive you out, love," he whispered, as he took her back with him and rang the bell.

"You never told me this morning."

"Because I was not sure of being able to come. Peter, let the pony-carriage be brought round without delay. I am waiting for it."

"Why, where are you going with the pony-carriage?" exclaimed Miss Carlyle, as Isabel left the room to dress.

"Only for a drive."

"A drive!" repeated Miss Corny, looking at him in bewilderment.

"To take Isabel for one. I shall not trust her to John again, at present."

"*That's* the way to get on with your business!" retorted Miss Corny, when she could find temper to speak. "Deserting the office in the middle of the day!"

"Isabel's health is of more consequence, just now, than business," he returned, good-humouredly. "And you really speak Cornelia, as if I had neither Dill to replace me, nor plenty of clerks under him."

"John is a better driver than you are."

"He is as good a one. But that is not the question."

Isabel came down, looking radiant, all her listlessness gone. Mr. Carlyle placed her in the carriage, and drove away, Miss Corny gazing after them with an expression of face enough to turn a whole dairy of milk sour.

There were many such little episodes as these, so you need not wonder that Isabel was not altogether happy. But never, before Mr. Carlyle, was the lady's temper vented upon her; plenty fell to his own share when he and his sister were alone; and he had been so accustomed to the sort of thing all his life, had grown so used to it, that it made no impression upon him: he never dreamt that Isabel also received her portion.

It was a morning early in April. Joyce sat, in its grey dawn, over a large fire in the dressing-room of Lady Isabel Carlyle, her hands clasped to pain, and tears coursing down her cheeks. Joyce was frightened: she had had some experience in illness; but illness of this nature she had never witnessed, and she was fervently hoping never to witness it again. In the adjoining room was Lady Isabel, lying between life and death.

The door from the corridor softly opened, and Miss Carlyle entered. She had probably never walked with so gentle a step in all her life, and she had a thick wadded mantle over her head and ears. She sat down in a chair quite meekly, and Joyce saw that her face looked grey as the early morning.

"Joyce," whispered she, "is there danger?"

"Oh, ma'am, I trust not! But it's hard to witness, and it must be awful to bear."

"It is our common curse, Joyce. You and I may congratulate ourselves that we have not chosen to encounter it. Joyce," she added, after a pause, "I trust there's no danger: I should not like her to die."

Miss Carlyle spoke in a low, dread tone. Was she fearing that if her poor young sister-in-law did die, a weight would rest on her conscience for all time?—a heavy, everpresent weight, whispering that she might have rendered her short year of marriage more happy, had she chosen; and that she had not so chosen, but had deliberately steeled every crevice of her heart against her? Very probably: she looked anxious and apprehensive in the dusky twilight.

"If there's danger, Joyce——"

"Why do you think there is danger, ma'am?" interrupted Joyce. "Are other people not as ill as this?"

"It is to be hoped they are not," rejoined Miss Carlyle. "And why is the express gone to Lynneborough for Dr. Martin?"

Up started Joyce awe-struck. "An express for Dr. Martin! Oh, ma'am! Who sent it? When did it go?"

"All I know is that it's gone. Mr. Wainwright went to your master, and he came out of his room and sent John galloping to the telegraph-office at West Lynne: where could your ears have been not to hear the horse tearing off? *I* heard it, I know that, and a nice fright it put me into. I went to Mr. Carlyle's room to ask what was amiss, and he said he did not know himself; nothing, he hoped. And then he shut his door again in my face, instead of stopping to speak to me as any other Christian would."

Joyce did not answer: she was faint with apprehension; and there was a silence broken only by the sounds from the next room. Miss Carlyle rose, and a fanciful person might have thought she was shivering.

"I can't stand this, Joyce; I shall go. If they want coffee, or anything, it can be sent in. Ask."

"I will presently; in a few minutes," answered Joyce, with a real shiver. "You are not going in, are, you, ma'am?" she uttered in apprehension, as Miss Carlyle began to steal on tiptoe to the inner door, and Joyce had a lively consciousness that her sight would not be an agreeable one to Lady Isabel. "They want the room free, and sent me out."

"No," answered Miss Corny. "I could do no good; and those, who cannot are bettei away."

"Just what Mr. Wainwright said, when he dismissed me," murmured Joyce. And Miss Carlyle finally passed into the corridor and withdrew.

Joyce sat on: the time seemed to her interminable. And then she heard the arrival of Dr. Martin; heard him go into the next room. By-and-by Mr. Wainwright came out of it, into the room where Joyce was sitting. Her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, and before she could bring out the ominous words, "Is there danger?" he had passed through it.

Mr. Wainwright was on his way to the apartment where he expected to find Mr. Carlyle. The latter was pacing it: he had so paced it the whole night. His pale face flushed as the surgeon entered.

"You have little mercy of my suspense, Wainwright. Dr. Martin has been here these twenty minutes. What does he say?"

"Well, he cannot say any more than I did. The symptoms are critical, but he hopes she will do well. There's nothing for it but patience."

Mr. Carlyle resumed his weary walk.

"I come now to suggest that you should send for Little. In these protracted cases——"

The speech was interrupted by a cry from Mr. Carlyle, half horror, half despair. For the Reverend Mr. Little was the incumbent of St. Jude's, and his apprehensions had flown—he hardly knew to what they had not flown.

"Not for your wife!" hastily rejoined the surgeon. "I spoke for the child. Should it not live, it may be satisfactory to you and Lady Isabel to know that it was baptized."

"I thank you, I thank you," said Mr. Carlyle, grasping his hand in his inexpressible relief. "Little shall be sent for."

"You jumped to the conclusion that your wife's soul was flitting. Please God, she may yet live to bear you other children, if this one should die."

"Please God!" was the inward aspiration of Mr. Carlyle.

"Carlyle," added the surgeon, in a musing sort of tone, as he laid his hand on Mr. Carlyle's shoulder, which his own head scarcely reached, "I am sometimes at death-beds where the clergyman is sent for, in this desperate need, to the fleeting spirit: and I am tempted to ask myself what good another man, priest though he be, can do at the twelfth hour, where the accounts have not previously been made up?"

It was hard upon midday. The Reverend Mr. Little, Mr. Carlyle, and Miss Carlyle were gathered in the dressing-room, round a table on which stood a rich china bowl, containing water for the baptism. Joyce, her pale face working with emotion, came into the room, carrying what looked like a bundle of flannel. Little cared Mr. Carlyle for that bundle, in comparison with his care for his wife.

"Joyce," he whispered, "is all well still?"

"I believe so, sir."

The service commenced. The clergyman took the child. "What name?" he asked.

Mr. Carlyle had never thought about the name. But he replied pretty promptly.

"William." For he knew it was the name revered and loved by Lady Isabel.

The minister dipped his fingers into the water. Joyce interrupted, in much confusion, looking at her master.

"It is a little girl, sir. I beg your pardon, I'm sure I thought I had said so. but I am flurried as I never was before."

There was a pause, and then the minister spoke again. "Name this child."

"Isabel Lucy," said Mr. Carlyle. Upon which a strange sort of resentful sniff was heard from Miss Corny. She had probably thought to hear him mention her own; but he had named it after his wife and his mother.

Mr. Carlyle was not allowed to see his wife until the evening. His eyelashes glistened as he looked down at her. She detected his emotion, and a faint smile parted her lips.

"I fear I bore it badly, Archibald; but let us be thankful that it is over. How thankful, none can know, save those who have gone through it."

"I think they can," he murmured. "I never knew what thankfulness was until this day."

"That the baby is safe?"

"That *you* are safe, my darling; safe and spared to me. Isabel," he whispered, hiding his face upon hers, "I never until to-day knew what prayer was—the prayer of a heart in its sore need."

"Have you written to Lord Mount Severn?" she asked, after awhile.

"This afternoon," he replied.

"Why did you give baby my name—Isabel?"

"Do you think I could have given it a prettier one? I don't."

"Why do you not bring a chair and sit down by me?"

He smiled and shook his head. "I wish I might. But they limited my stay with you to four minutes, and Wainwright has posted himself outside the door with his watch in his hand."

Quite true. There stood the careful surgeon: and the short interview was over almost as soon as it had begun.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WILSON'S GOSSIP.

THE baby lived, and appeared likely to live, and of course the next thing was to look out for a maid for it. Isabel did not grow strong very quickly; fever and weakness had a struggle with each other, and with her. One day when she was dressed and sitting in her easy-chair Miss Carlyle entered.

"Of all the servants in the neighbourhood, who should you suppose has come up after the place of nurse?" she said to Lady Isabel.

"Indeed I cannot guess."

"Why, Wilson, Mrs. Hare's maid. Three years and five months she has been with them, and now leaves in consequence of a quarrel with Barbara. Will you see her?"

"Is she likely to suit? Is she a good servant?"

"She's not a bad servant, as servants go," responded Miss Carlyle. "She's steady and respectable; but she has a tongue as long as from here to Lynneborough."

"That won't hurt baby," said Lady Isabel. "But if she has lived as lady's-maid, she probably does not understand the care of infants."

"Yes, she does. She was upper nurse at Squire Pinner's, before going to Mrs. Hare's. She lived there five years."

"I will see her," said Lady Isabel.

Miss Carlyle left the room to send the servant in, but came back first alone.

"Mind, Lady Isabel, don't you engage her. If she is likely to suit you, let her come again for the answer, and meanwhile I will go down to Mrs. Hare's and learn the ins and outs of her leaving. It is all very plausible for her to put it upon Barbara, but that is only one side of the question. Before engaging her, it may be as well to hear the other."

Of course this was only right. Isabel acquiesced, and the servant was introduced: a tall, pleasant-looking woman, with black eyes. Lady Isabel inquired why she was leaving Mrs. Hare's.

"My lady, it was through Miss Barbara's temper. Latterly—oh, for this year past—nothing has pleased her; she has grown nearly as imperious as the justice himself. I have threatened many times to leave, and last evening we came to another outbreak, and I left this morning."

"Left entirely?"

"Yes, my lady. Miss Barbara provoked me so, that I said last night I would leave as soon as breakfast was over. And I did so. I should be very glad to take your situation, my lady, if you would please to try me."

"You have been the upper maid at Mrs. Hare's?"

"O h yes, my lady."

"Then possibly this situation might not suit you so well as you imagine. Joyce is the upper servant here, and you would, in a manner, be under her. I have great confidence in Joyce; and in case of my illness or absence, Joyce would superintend the nursery."

"I should not mind that," was the applicant's answer. "We all like Joyce, my lady."

A few more questions, and then the woman was told to come again in the evening for her answer. Miss Carlyle went to the Grove for the "ins and outs" of the affair, when Mrs. Hare frankly stated that she had nothing to urge against Wilson, except her hasty manner of leaving, of which she believed the chief blame to be due to Barbara. Wilson was therefore engaged, and was to enter upon her new service the following morning.

In the afternoon succeeding to it, Isabel was lying on the sofa in her bedroom, asleep, as was supposed. In point of fact, she was in that state, half sleep, half wakeful delirium, which those who suffer from weakness and fever know only too well. Suddenly she was aroused from it by hearing her own name mentioned in the adjoining room, where sat Joyce and Wilson, the latter holding the sleeping infant on her knee, the former sewing, the door between the rooms being ajar.

"How ill she looks," observed Wilson.

"Who?" asked Joyce.

"Her ladyship. She looks as if she'd never get over it."

"She is getting over it quickly, now," returned Joyce. "If you had seen her a week ago, you would not say she was looking ill now—speaking by comparison."

"My goodness! would not somebody's hopes be up again if anything should happen?"

"Nonsense!" crossly returned Joyce.

"You may cry out 'nonsense' for ever, Joyce, but they would," went on Wilson. "And she would snap him up, to a dead certainty: she'd never let him escape her a second time. She is as much in love with him as she ever was."

"It was all talk and fancy," said Joyce. "West Lynne must be busy. Mr. Carlyle never cared for her."

"That's more than you know. I have seen a little, Joyce; I have seen him kiss her."

"A pack of rubbish!" remarked Joyce. "That tells nothing."

"I don't say it does: he gave her that locket and chain she wears."

"Who wears?" retorted Joyce, determined not graciously to countenance the subject. "I don't want to hear anything about it."

"'Who,' now! Why, Miss Barbara. She has hardly had it off her neck since: my belief is, she wears it in her sleep."

"More simpleton she!" echoed Joyce.

"The night before he left West Lynne to marry Lady Isabel—and didn't the news come upon us like a thunderclap!—Miss Barbara had been at Miss Carlyle's, and he brought her home. A lovely night it was, the moon rising, and nearly as light as day. He somehow broke her parasol in coming home, and when they reached our gate there was a love scene."

"Were you a third in it?" sarcastically demanded Joyce.

"Yes—without meaning to be. That skinflint old justice won't allow followers indoors, and there's no seeing anybody on the sly in that conspicuous kitchen-garden, where there's nothing higher than a cauliflower, so the only chance we have is to get half an hour's chat amidst the grove trees in front, if a friend comes up. I was expecting somebody that evening—a horrid faithless fellow he turned out, and went, three months after, and married the barmaid at the Buck's Head—and I was in the trees waiting for him. Up came Mr. Carlyle and Miss Barbara. She wanted him to go in, but he would not, and they stood there. Something was said about the locket, and about his giving her a piece of his hair to put in it: I could not catch the words distinctly, and I did not dare to stir nearer, for fear of their hearing me. It was a regular love scene; I could hear enough for that. If ever anybody thought to be Mrs. Carlyle, Barbara Hare did that night."

"Why, you great gaby! You have just said it was the night before he went to be married:"

"I don't care; she did. After he was gone, I saw her lift up her hands and her face in ecstasy, and say he could never know how much she loved him until she was his wife. Be you very sure, Joyce, many a love passage had passed between them two; but I suppose when my lady was thrown in his way he couldn't resist her rank and her beauty, and the old love was cast over. It is in the nature of man to be fickle, especially those that can boast of their own good looks, like Mr. Carlyle."

"Mr. Carlyle's not fickle."

"I can tell you some more yet. Two or three days after that, Miss Corny came up to our house with the news of his marriage. I was in mistress's bedroom, and they were in the room underneath, the windows open, and I heard Miss Corny tell the tale, for I was leaning out. Up came Miss Barbara upon an excuse and flew into her room, and I went into the corridor. A few moments, and I heard a noise; it was a sort of wail, or groan, and I opened the door softly, fearing she might be fainting. Joyce, if my heart never ached for anybody before, it ached then. She was lying on the floor, her hands writhed together, and her poor face all white, like one in mortal agony. I'd have given a quarter's wages to be able to say a word of comfort to her; but I didn't dare interfere with such sorrow as that. I came out again and shut the door without her seeing me."

"How thoroughly stupid she must have been," uttered Joyce, "to go caring for one who did not care for her!"

"I tell you, Joyce, you don't know that he did not care. You are as obstinate as the justice! And I wish to goodness you wouldn't interrupt me. They came up here to pay the wedding visit, master, mistress, and she; came in state in the grand chariot, with the coachman and Jasper; if you have any memory at all, you can't fail to recollect it. Miss Barbara remained behind at East Lynne to spend the rest of the day."

"I remember it."

"I was sent to attend her home in the evening, Jasper being out. I came the field way; for the dust by the road was enough to smother one, and at the last stile but one, what do you think I came upon?"

Joyce lifted her eyes. "A snake, perhaps."

"I came upon Miss Barbara and Mr. Carlyle. What had passed, nobody knows but themselves. She was leaning against the stile, crying; sobs breaking from her, like one might expect to hear from a breaking heart. It seemed as if she had been reproaching him, as if some explanation had passed, and I heard him say that from henceforth they could only be brother and sister. I spoke soon, for fear they should see me, and Mr. Carlyle got over the stile. Miss Barbara said to him that he need not come any farther, but he just held out his arm and came with her to our back gate. I went on then to open the door, and I saw him with his head bent down to her, and her two hands held in his. We don't know how it was between them, I tell you."

"At any rate, she is a downright fool to suffer herself to love him still!" uttered Joyce, indignantly.

"So she is, but she does do it. She'll often steal out of the gate about the time she knows he'll be passing, and watch him by, not letting him see her. It is nothing but her unhappiness, her jealousy of Lady Isabel, that makes her cross: I assure you, Joyce, in this past year she has so changed that she's not like the same person. If Mr. Carlyle should ever get tired of my lady, and——"

"Wilson!" harshly interrupted Joyce. "Have the goodness to recollect yourself."

"What have I said now? Nothing but truth. Men are shamefully fickle; husbands worse than sweethearts, and I'm sure I'm not thinking of anything wrong. But to go back to the argument that we began with—I say that if anything happened to my lady, Miss Barbara, as sure as fate, would step into her shoes."

"Nothing is going to happen to her," returned Joyce, with composure.

"I hope it is not, now or later—for the sake of this dear little innocent thing upon my lap," went on the undaunted Wilson. "She would not make a very kind stepmother, for it is certain that where the first wife has been hated, her children won't be loved. She would turn Mr. Carlyle against them——"

"I tell you what it is, Wilson," interrupted Joyce, in a firm, unmistakable tone, "if you think to pursue these sort of topics at East Lynne, I shall inform my lady that you are unsuited to the situation."

"I dare say!"

"And you know that when I make up my mind to a thing, I do it," continued Joyce. "Miss Carlyle may well say you have the longest tongue in West Lynne; but you might have the grace to know that this subject is one more unsuited to it than another, whether you are eating Mr. Hare's bread, or whether you are eating Mr. Carlyle's. Another word, Wilson: it appears to me that you have carried on a prying system in Mrs. Hare's house; do not attempt such a thing in this."

"You were always one of the straitlaced sort, Joyce," cried Wilson, laughing good-humouredly. "But now that I have had my say out, I shall stop; and you need not fear I should be such a simpleton as to go prattling of this kind of thing to the servants."

Now just fancy this conversation penetrating to Lady Isabel. She heard it, every word. It is all very well to oppose the argument, "Who attends to the gossip of servants?" Let me tell you it depends upon what the subject may be, whether the gossip is attended to or not. It might not, and indeed would not, have made so great an impression upon her had she been in strong health, but she was weak, feverish, in a state of partial delirium: and she hastily took up the idea that Archibald Carlyle had never loved her, that he had admired her and made her his wife in his ambition, but that his heart had been given to Barbara Hare.

A pretty state of excitement she worked herself into as she lay there; jealousy and fever, ay, and love too, playing pranks with her brain. It was near the dinner-hour, and when Mr. Carlyle entered, he was startled to see her: her pallid cheeks were burning with a hectic flush, and her eyes glistened with fever.

"Isabel, you are worse!" he uttered. approaching her with a quick step.

She partially rose from the sofa, and clasped him in her emotion. "Oh, Archibald! Archibald!" she uttered, "don't marry her! I could not rest in my grave."

Mr. Carlyle, in his puzzled astonishment, believed her to be labouring under some temporary hallucination, the result of weakness. He attempted to soothe her, but it seemed that she could not be soothed. She burst into a storm of tears, and began again: wild words.

"She would ill-treat my child; she would draw your love from it, and from my memory. Archibald, you must not marry her."

"You must be speaking from the influence of a dream, Isabel," he soothingly said; "you have been asleep, and are not yet awake. Be still, and recollection will return to you. There, love; rest upon me."

"To think of her as your wife brings pain enough to kill me," she continued to reiterate. "Promise me that you will not marry her: Archibald, promise it!"

"I will promise you anything in reason," he replied, bewildered by her words, "but I do not know what you mean. There is no possibility of my marrying any one, Isabel: you are my wife."

"But if I die? I may; you know I may; and many think I shall—do not let her usurp my place."

"Indeed she shall not—whoever you may be talking of. What have you been dreaming? Who is it that is troubling your mind?"

"Archibald, do you need to ask? Did you love no one before you married me? Perhaps you have loved her since—perhaps you love her still?"

Mr. Carlyle began to discern "method in her madness." He changed his cheering tone to one of grave earnestness. "Of whom do you speak, Isabel?"

"Of Barbara Hare."

He knitted his brow; he was both annoyed and vexed. What had put this bygone nonsense into his wife's head? He quitted the sofa where he had been supporting her, and stood upright before her, calm, dignified, almost solemn in his seriousness.

"Isabel, what notion you can possibly have picked up about myself and Barbara Hare, I am unable to conceive. I never loved Barbara Hare; I never entertained the faintest shadow of love for her; either before my marriage or since. You must tell me what has given rise to this idea in your mind."

"But she loved you."

A moment's hesitation; for of course Mr. Carlyle was conscious that she had; but, taking all the circumstances into consideration, more especially how he learnt the fact, he could not in honour acknowledge it even to his wife. "If it was so, Isabel, she was more reprehensibly foolish than I should have given Barbara's good sense credit for: a woman may almost as well lose herself, as suffer herself to love unsought. If she did give her love to me, I can only say I was utterly unconscious of it. Believe me, you have as much cause to be jealous of Cornelia, as you have of Barbara Hare."

Isabel sighed. It was a sigh of relief, and her breath grew calmer. She felt inexpressibly reassured. Mr. Carlyle bent his head, and spoke in a tender, though a pained tone.

"I had not thought that the past year was quite thrown away. What proof can a man give of true and earnest love, that I have not given to you?"

She looked up, her eyelashes wet with contrition, took his hand and held it between hers. "Don't be angry with me, Archibald: the trouble and the doubt would not have arisen had I cared for you less."

He smiled again, his own fond smile, and bent lower. "And now tell me what put this into your brain?"

An impulse arose within her that she would tell him all; the few words dropped by Susan and Joyce twelve months before; the conversation she had just overheard; but in that moment of renewed confidence it appeared to her that she must have been very foolish to attach importance to it—that a sort of humiliation, in listening to the converse of servants, was reflected on her; and she remained silent.

"Has any one been striving to bias your mind against me?" he resumed.

"Archibald! no. Would any one dare to do it?"

"Then did you dream?—and could not forget it on awaking?"

"I do sometimes dream strange things, especially in my feverish afternoon sleeps. I think I am a little delirious at times, Archibald, and do not know what is real, and what is fancy."

The answer, while expressing correctly her physical state, was an evasive one, but not evasively did it fall upon the ear of Mr. Carlyle. It presented to him the only probable solution to the enigma, and he never questioned it.

"Don't have any more of these dreams if you can help it," he said. "Regard them for what they are—illusions, neither pleasant for you, nor fair to me. I am bound to you by fond ties as well as by legal ones, remember, Isabel; and it is out of Barbara Hare's power to step in between us."

There never was a passion in this world, there never will be one, so fantastic, so delusive, so powerful as jealousy. Mr. Carlyle dismissed the episode from his thoughts; he believed his wife's emotion to have arisen simply from a feverish dream, and never supposed but that, with the dream, its recollection would pass away from her. Not so. Implicitly relying upon her husband's words at the moment, feeling quite ashamed of her own suspicion, Lady Isabel afterwards suffered the unhappy fear to regain its influence; the ill-starred revelations of Wilson reasserted their power, over-mastering the denial of Mr. Carlyle. Shakespeare calls jealousy yellow and green: I think it may be called black and white, for it most assuredly views white as black, and black as white. The most fanciful surmises wear the aspect of truth, the greatest improbabilities appear as consistent realities. Isabel said not another word to her husband; and the feeling—you will understand this if you have ever been foolish enough to sun yourself in its delights—only caused her to grow more attached to him, to be more eager for his love. But certain it is that Barbara Hare dwelt on her heart as an incubus.

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTAIN THORN AT WEST LYNNE.

"BARBARA, how fine the day seems!"

"It is a beautiful day, mamma."

"I think I should be all the better for going out."

"I am sure you would be, mamma," was Barbara's answer. "If you went out more, you would find the benefit of doing so: every fine day you ought to do so."

"But I have not spirits for it, dear," sighed Mrs. Hare. "The first bright days of spring, the first warm days of summer, always have an exhilarating effect upon me. I think I must go out to-day. There's your papa in the garden: ask him if it will be convenient to him."

Barbara was darting off, but arrested her steps for a moment. "Mamma, you have been talking these three weeks of buying the new dresses and other things that we require: why not do so to-day?"

"Well—I don't know," hesitated Mrs. Hare, in the irresolution natural to her.

"Yes, yes; you will not find a better opportunity." And away went Barbara.

Justice Hare was in his front garden, imperiously pointing out to his servant, Benjamin, something which had not been done according to his directions. Benjamin fulfilled the duties of coachman and groom at the Grove, filling up his spare time with gardening. He was a married man, and slept at home, though he took his meals in the house; coming to it early, and going away late. The justice was in his dressing-gown and wig, and was working himself into a passion when Barbara approached. She was the only one of the three children not afraid of her father: Barbara stood in awe of him, but not so utterly as the others.

"Papa."

"What do you want?" said the justice, turning round his portly person.

"Mamma thinks that it would do her good to go out this fine day. Can we have the carriage?"

The justice paused before he answered, and looked up at the sky. "Where does she want to be off to?"

"We wish to do some shopping, please, papa. Only in West Lynne," hastily added Barbara, seeing a cloud rise on the paternal countenance. "Not at Lynneborough."

"And your mamma thinks I am going to drive her!" cried Justice Hare. "I'd see the shops further, first. The last time you and she went into one, you kept me waiting an hour and a half."

"Benjamin can drive us, papa."

Mr. Hare strode pompously across the grass to the dining-room window, threw it up, and addressed his wife. Barbara drew close, and stood timidly at his side.

"Do you say you want to go shopping to-day, Anne?"

"Not particularly to-day," was the meek answer, meekly delivered; "any day will do for it. Do you think of using the carriage yourself?"

"I don't know," replied the justice. The fact is, he had not thought about it at all; but he liked every scheme, every movement to be proposed by himself, to be regulated by his own will.

"The day is so fine that I think I should like to take advantage of it," said Mrs. Hare. "And Barbara must have her summer dresses bought."

"She's always having dresses bought," growled the justice.

"Oh, papa! I——"

"Silence, young lady; you have twice as many as you need."

"Perhaps, Richard, I might manage to walk in and back again, without being much fatigued, if you cannot spare me the carriage," said Mrs. Hare, gently.

"And have you laid up for a week! What next! The idea of your walking into West Lynne and back again! that would be a piece of folly."

The justice shut down the window, and strode back to Benjamin, leaving Mrs. Hare and Barbara at an uncertainty: were they to go, or were they not? Barbara went indoors to her mother.

"Barbara, dear, I wonder where your papa was thinking of going in the carriage?"

"I don't believe he was going anywhere," replied independent Miss Barbara.

"Oh, child!"

"Well, I don't. Only he always must oppose everybody. Mamma, I do think you might walk in, and we could come back in one of Coke's flys."

Mrs. Hare shook her head. "I have no doubt I could walk quite well one way, Barbara: but I should not think of doing so, unless your papa approved."

Barbara was looking from the window. She saw Benjamin gather up his garden tools and put them away. He then crossed to the narrow side-path which led down by the house to the back, where the stables were situated. Barbara ran through the hall and intercepted him.

"Has papa given any orders about the carriage, Benjamin?"

"Yes, miss. I am to drive you and mistress into West Lynne. I was to get ready directly," he said.

Back waltzed Barbara. "Mamma, it is all right: Benjamin has gone to get the carriage ready. You would like luncheon before you go? I will order in the tray."

"Anything you please, my dear," said the sweet-tempered, gentle woman. "I don't know why, but I feel glad to go out to-day: perhaps because it is so lovely."

Benjamin made ready his carriage and himself, drove out of the yard, and brought the carriage round to the front gate. As Mrs. Hare and Barbara went down the path, Mr. Hare was in the garden still.

"Thank you, Richard," she said, as she passed him, a loving smile lighting her delicate face.

"Mind you are home by dinner-time, and don't let Barbara spend too much money," cried the justice, in return. But he was not polite enough to go and hand them in.

The carriage—or phaeton, as it was often called—was a somewhat old-fashioned concern, as many country things often are. A small box in front for the driver, and a wide seat with a head behind, accommodating Barbara well between them when Mr. and Mrs. Hare both sat in it. Mr. Hare, however, generally drove himself, taking no servant. The head was down to-day, but it was found useful in rainy weather; and there were a double set of poles, so that one horse or a pair might be driven in it. Very rarely, never unless they were going a distance, was a pair used; the long-tailed, black coach-horses were taken out in turn, for the justice kept only that pair, and a saddle-horse for himself.

Benjamin drew the rug carefully over his mistress's knees—the servants did not like Mr. Hare, but would have laid down their lives for her—ascended to his box, and drove them to their destination, the linendraper's. It was an excellent shop, situated a little beyond the office of Mr. Carlyle, and Mrs. Hare and Barbara were soon engaged in that occupation said to possess a fascination for all women. They had been deep in it about an hour, when Mrs. Hare discovered that her bag was missing.

"I must have left it in the carriage, Barbara. Go and bring it, will you, my dear? the pattern of that silk is in it."

Barbara went out. The carriage and Benjamin, and the sleek old horse were all waiting drowsily together. Barbara could not see the bag, and she appealed to the servant.

"Find mamma's bag, Benjamin. It must be somewhere in the carriage."

Benjamin got off his box, and began to search. Barbara waited, gazing listlessly down the street. The sun was shining brilliantly, and its rays fell upon the large cable chain of a gentleman who was sauntering idly up the pavement, making its gold links and its drooping seal and key glitter, as they crossed his waistcoat. It shone also upon the enamelled gold studs of his shirt front, and as he suddenly raised his ungloved hand, a white hand, to stroke his moustache—by which action you may know a vain man—a diamond ring gleamed with a light that was positively dazzling. Involuntarily Barbara thought of the description her brother Richard had given of certain dazzling jewels worn by another.

She watched him advance. He was a handsome man of, perhaps, seven or eight and twenty, tall, slender, and well made, his eyes and hair black. A very pleasant expression sat upon his countenance, and on the left hand he wore a light buff kid glove, and was swinging its fellow by the fingers, apparently in deep thought, as he softly whistled to himself. But for the great light cast at that moment by the sun, Barbara might not have noticed the jewellery, or connected it in her mind with the other jewellery in that unhappy secret.

"Halloa! Thorn, is that you? Just step over here!"

The speaker was Otway Bethel, who was on the opposite side of the street; the spoken-to, the gentleman with the jewellery. But the latter was in a brown study, and did not hear. Bethel called out again, louder.

"Captain Thorn!"

That was heard. Captain Thorn nodded, and turned short off across the street. Barbara stood as one in a dream, her brain, her mind, her fancy all a confused mass together.

"Here's the bag, Miss Barbara. It had got among the folds of the rug."

Benjamin held it out to her, but she took no notice of it: she was unconscious of all external things, save one. That she beheld the real murderer of Hallijohn she entertained no manner of doubt. In every particular he tallied with the description given by Richard: tall, dark, vain, handsome, delicate hands, jewellery, and—Captain Thorn! Barbara's cheeks grew white, and her heart turned sick.

"The bag, Miss Barbara."

But Barbara was gone, leaving Benjamin and the bag. She had caught sight of Mr. Wainwright, the surgeon, at a little distance, and sped towards him.

"Mr. Wainwright," began she, forgetting ceremony in her agitation, "you see that gentleman talking to Otway Bethel. Who is he?"

Mr. Wainwright had to put his glasses across the bridge of his nose before he could answer, for he was short-sighted. "That? Oh, it is a Captain Thorn. He is visiting the Herberts, I believe."

"Where does he come from? Where does he live?" reiterated Barbara, in her eagerness.

"I don't know anything about him. I saw him this morning with young Smith, and he told me he was a friend of the Herberts. You are not looking well, Miss Barbara."

She made no answer. Captain Thorn and Mr. Bethel came walking down the street, and the latter saluted her, but she was too confused to respond to it. Mr. Wainwright then wished her good day, and Barbara walked slowly back. Mrs. Hare was appearing at the shop door.

"My dear, how long you are! Cannot the bag be found?"

"I went to speak to Mr. Wainwright," answered Barbara, mechanically taking the bag from Benjamin and giving it to her mother, her whole heart and eyes still absorbed with that one object moving away in the distance.

"You look pale, child. Are you well?"

"Oh yes, quite. Let us get our shopping over, mamma."

She moved on to their places at the counter as she spoke, eager to "get it over" and be at home, that she might have time for thought. Mrs. Hare wondered what had come to her; the pleasant interest previously displayed in their purchases was now gone, and she sat inattentive and absorbed.

"Now, my dear, it is only waiting for you to choose. Which of the two silks will you have?"

"Either. Any. Take which you like, mamma."

"Barbara, what *has* come to you?"

"I believe I am tired," said Barbara, with a forced laugh, as she compelled herself to pay some sort of attention. "I don't like the green: I will take the other."

They arrived at home. Barbara was five minutes alone in her chamber, before dinner was on the table. All the conclusion she could come to, was that *she* could do nothing, except tell the facts to Archibald Carlyle.

How could she contrive to see him? The business might admit of no delay. She supposed she must go to East Lynne that evening; but where would be her excuse for it at home? Puzzling over it, she went down to dinner. During the meal, Mrs. Hare began talking of some silk she had purchased for a mantle. She should have it made like Miss Carlyle's new one. When Miss Carlyle was at the Grove the other day, about Wilson's character, she had offered her the pattern, and she, Mrs. Hare, would send one of the servants up for it, after dinner.

"Oh, mamma, let me go!" burst forth Barbara. She spoke so vehemently, that the justice paused in his carving, and demanded what ailed her. Barbara made some timid excuse.

"Her eagerness is natural, Richard," smiled Mrs. Hare. "Barbara thinks she shall get a peep at the baby, I expect. All young folks are fond of babies."

Barbara's face flushed: but she did not contradict the opinion. She could not eat her dinner, for she was too full of poor Richard: she played with it and then sent away her plate, almost untouched.

"That's through the finery she has been buying," pronounced Justice Hare. "Her head is stuffed with it."

No opposition was offered to Barbara's going to East Lynne. She reached it just as dinner was over. It was for Miss Carlyle she asked.

"Miss Carlyle is not at home, miss. She is spending the day out; and my lady does not receive visitors yet."

It was a sort of checkmate. Barbara was compelled to say she would see Mr. Carlyle. Peter ushered her into the drawing-room, and Mr. Carlyle came to her.

"I am so very sorry to disturb you; to have asked for you," began Barbara, with a burning face, for a certain evening interview of hers with him, twelve months before, was disagreeably present to her. Never, since that evening of agitation, had Barbara suffered herself to betray emotion to Mr. Carlyle: her manners to him had been calm, courteous, and indifferent. And she now more frequently called him "Mr. Carlyle" than "Archibald."

"Take a seat, take a seat, Barbara."

"I asked for Miss Carlyle," she continued, "for mamma is in want of a pattern that she promised to lend her; but, in point of fact, it was you I wished to see. You remember the Lieutenant Thorn, whom Richard spoke of as being the real criminal?"

"Yes."

"I think he is at West Lynne."

Mr. Carlyle was aroused to eager interest. "He! That same Thorn?"

"It can be no other. Mamma and I were shopping to-day, and I went out for her bag which she had left in the carriage. While Benjamin was finding it, I saw a stranger coming up the street: a tall, good-looking, dark-haired man, with a conspicuous gold chain and studs. The sun was full upon him, causing the ornaments to shine, especially a diamond ring he wore, for he had one hand raised to his face. The thought flashed over me, 'That is like the description Richard gave of the man Thorn.' Why the idea should have occurred to me in that strange manner I do not know, but it most assuredly did occur, though I did not really suppose him to be the same. Just then I heard him spoken to by some one on the other side of the street; it was Otway Bethel, and he called him *Captain Thorn*."

"That is curious indeed, Barbara. I did not know any stranger was at West Lynne."

"I saw Mr. Wainwright, and asked him who it was. He said a Captain Thorn, a friend of the Herberts. A Lieutenant Thorn four or five years ago would probably be Captain Thorn now."

Mr. Carlyle nodded, and there was a pause.

"What can be done?" asked Barbara.

Mr. Carlyle was passing one hand over his brow; it was a habit of his when deep in thought. "It is hard to say what is to be done, Barbara. The description you give of this man certainly tallies with that given by Richard. Did he look like a gentleman?"

"Very much so. A remarkably aristocratic-looking man, as it struck me."

Mr. Carlyle again nodded assentingly. He remembered Richard's words, when describing the other: "an out-and-out aristocrat." "Of course, Barbara, the first thing must be to try and ascertain whether it is the same," he observed. "If we find that it is, then we must deliberate upon future measures. I will see what I can find out, and let you know."

Barbara rose. Mr. Carlyle escorted her across the hall, and then strolled down the park by her side, deep in the subject; and quite unconscious that Lady Isabel's jealous eyes were watching them from her dressing-room window.

"You say he seemed intimate with Otway Bethel?"

"As to being intimate, I do not know. Otway Bethel spoke as though he knew him."

"This must have caused excitement to Mrs. Hare."

"You forget that mamma was not told anything about Thorn," was Barbara's answer. "The uncertainty would have worried her to death. All Richard said to her was, that he was innocent, that it was a stranger who did the deed, and she asked for no particulars: she has implicit faith in Richard's truth."

"True; I did forget," replied Mr. Carlyle. "I wish we could find out some one who knew the other Thorn. To ascertain that they were the same would be a great point gained."

He went as far as the park gates with Barbara, shook hands, and wished her good evening. Scarcely had she departed, when Mr. Carlyle saw two gentlemen advancing from the opposite direction, in one of whom he recognized Tom Herbert, and the other—instinct told him—was Captain Thorn. He waited until they came up.

"If this isn't lucky, seeing you," cried Mr. Tom Herbert, who was a free-and-easy sort of gentleman, the second son of a brother-justice of Mr. Hare's. "I wish to goodness you'd give us a draught of your cider, Carlyle. We went up to Beauchamp's for a stroll, but found them all out; and I'm awfully thirsty. Captain Thorn, Carlyle."

Mr. Carlyle invited them to his house, and ordered refreshments. Young Herbert coolly threw himself into an arm-chair and lit a cigar. "Come, Thorn," cried he, "here's a weed for you."

Captain Thorn glanced towards Mr. Carlyle: he appeared of a far more gentlemanly nature than Tom Herbert.

"You'll have one too, Carlyle," said Herbert, holding out his cigar-case. "Oh, I forgot; you are a muff; don't smoke one twice in a year. I say, how's Lady Isabel?"

"Very ill still."

"By Jove! is she, though? Tell her I am sorry to hear it, will you, Carlyle? But—I say! will she smell the smoke?" asked he, with a mixture of alarm and concern in his face.

Mr. Carlyle reassured him upon that point, and turned to Captain Thorn.

"Are you acquainted with this neighbourhood?"

Captain Thorn smiled. "I only reached West Lynne yesterday.

"You were never here before, then?" continued Mr. Carlyle, setting down the last as a probably evasive answer.

"No."

"He and my brother Jack, you know, are in the same regiment," put in Tom Herbert, with scant ceremony. "Jack had invited him down for some fishing, and Thorn arrives. But he never sent word he was coming. Jack had given him up, and is off on some Irish expedition, the deuce knows where. Precious unlucky that it should have happened so. Thorn says he shall cut short his stay, and go again."

The conversation turned upon fishing, and in the heat of argument the stranger mentioned a certain pond, and its famous eels—"the Low Pond." Mr. Carlyle looked at him, speaking, however, in a careless manner.

"Which do you mean? We have two ponds not far apart, each called the 'Low Pond.'"

"I mean the one on an estate about three miles from here: Squire Thorpe's, unless I am mistaken."

Mr. Carlyle smiled. "I think you must have been in the neighbourhood before, Captain Thorn. Squire Thorpe is dead, and the property has passed to his daughter's husband, and that Low Pond was filled up three years ago."

"I have heard a friend mention it," was Captain Thorn's reply, spoken in an indifferent tone, though he evidently wished not to pursue the subject.

Mr. Carlyle, by easy degrees, turned the conversation upon Swainson, the place whence Richard Hare's Captain Thorn was suspected to have come. The present Captain Thorn said he knew it "a little;" he had once been "staying there a short time." Mr. Carlyle became almost convinced that Barbara's suspicions were correct. The descriptions certainly agreed, as far as he could judge, in the most minute particulars. The man before him wore two rings, a diamond—and a very beautiful diamond, too—on the one hand, a seal ring on the other; his hands were delicate to a degree, and his handkerchief, a cambric one of unusually fine texture, was not quite guiltless of scent: a mark of dandyism, which, in the other Captain Thorn, used considerably to annoy Richard. Mr. Carlyle quitted the room for a moment, and summoned Joyce to him.

"My lady has been asking for you, sir," said Joyce.

"Tell her I will be up the moment these gentlemen leave. Joyce," he added, "find an excuse for coming into the room presently; you can bring something or other in; I want you to look at this stranger who is with young Mr. Herbert. Notice him well; I fancy you may have seen him before."

Mr. Carlyle returned to the room, leaving Joyce surprised. But she presently followed, taking in some water, and lingered a few minutes, apparently placing the things on the table in better order.

When the two departed, Mr. Carlyle called Joyce, before proceeding to his wife's room. "Well?" he questioned, "did you recognize him?"

"Not at all, sir. He seemed quite strange to me."

"Cast your thoughts back, Joyce. Did you never see him in years gone by?"

Joyce looked puzzled, but she replied in the negative.

"Is he the man, think you, who used to ride over from Swainson to see Afy?"

Joyce's face flushed crimson. "Oh, sir!" was all she uttered.

"The name is the same, Thorn: I thought it possible the man might be the same also," observed Mr. Carlyle.

"Sir, I cannot say. I never saw that Captain Thorn but once, and I don't know—I don't know"—Joyce spoke slowly and with consideration—"that I should at all know him again. I did not think of him when I looked at this gentleman; but, at any rate, no appearance in this one struck upon my memory as being familiar to me."

So, from Joyce Mr. Carlyle obtained no clue, one way or the other. The following day he sought out Otway Bethel.

"Are you intimate with that Captain Thorn who is staying with the Herberts?" asked he.

"Yes," answered Bethel, derisively, "if passing a couple of hours in his company can constitute intimacy. That's all I have seen of Thorn."

"Are you sure?" pursued Mr. Carlyle.

"Sure!" returned Bethel; "why, what are you driving at now? I called in at Herberts' the night before last, and Tom asked me to stay the evening. Thorn had just arrived. A jolly bout we had: cigars and cold punch."

"Bethel," said Mr. Carlyle, dashing to the point, "is it the Thorn who used to go after Afy Hallijohn? Come, you can tell if you like."

Bethel remained dumb for a moment, apparently with amazement. "What a confounded lie!" uttered he, at length. "Why, it's no more that Thorn than—What Thorn?" he broke off, abruptly.

"You are equivocating, Bethel. The Thorn who was mixed up—or said to be—in the Hallijohn affair. Is this the same man?"

"You are a fool, Carlyle: which is what I never took you to be yet," was Mr. Bethel's rejoinder, spoken in a savage tone. "I have told you that I never knew there was any Thorn mixed up with Afy, and I should like to know why my word is not to be believed? I never saw Thorn in my life till I saw him the other night at the Herberts', and that I would take an oath to, if put to it."

Bethel quitted Mr. Carlyle with the last word, and the latter gazed after him, revolving points in his brain. The mention of Thorn's name (the one spoken of by Richard Hare) appeared to excite some sore feeling in Bethel's mind, rousing it to irritation. Mr. Carlyle remembered that it had done so previously, and now it had done so again: and yet, Bethel was an easy-natured man in general, far better tempered than principled. That there was something hidden, some mystery connected with the affair, Mr. Carlyle felt sure, but he could not attempt so much as a guess at what it might be; and his interview with Bethel brought him no nearer the point he wished to find out—whether this Thorn was the same man. In walking back to his office, he met Mr. Tom Herbert.

"Does Captain Thorn purpose making a long stay with you?" he stopped him to inquire.

"He's gone: I have just seen him off by the train," was the reply of Tom Herbert. "It seemed rather slow work for him without Jack, so he shortened his visit, and says he will pay us one when Jack's to the fore."

As Mr. Carlyle went home to dinner that evening, he entered the Grove, ostensibly to make a short call on Mrs. Hare. Barbara, on the tenter-hooks of impatience, accompanied him outside when he departed, and walked down the path.

"What have you learned?" she eagerly asked.

"Nothing satisfactory," was the reply of Mr. Carlyle. "The man is gone."

"Gone!" said Barbara.

Mr. Carlyle explained. He told her how they had come to his house the previous evening after Barbara's departure, and his encounter with Tom Herbert that day: he mentioned, also, his interview with Bethel.

"Can he have gone away on purpose, fearing consequences?" wondered Barbara.

"Scarcely: or why should he have come?"

"You did not suffer any word to escape you last night, causing him to suspect that he was doubted?"

"Not any. You would make a bad lawyer, Barbara."

"Who or what is he?"

"An officer in her Majesty's service, in John Herbert's regiment. I ascertained no more. Tom said he was of good family. But I cannot help suspecting that it is the same man."

"Can nothing more be done?"

"Nothing, in the present stage of the affair," concluded Mr. Carlyle, as he passed through the gate to continue his way. "We can only wait on again with what patience we may, hoping that time will bring about its own elucidation."

Barbara pressed her forehead down on the cold iron of the gate as his footsteps died away. "Ay, to wait on," she murmured, "to wait on in dreary pain; to wait on, perhaps for years, perhaps for ever! And poor Richard—wearing out his days in poverty and exile!"

Lady Isabel recovered, and grew strong; and a few years passed smoothly on, no special event occurring to note them.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

GOING FROM HOME.

A FEW years had passed.

"I should recommend a complete change of scene, Mr. Carlyle. Say, some place on the French or Belgian coast. Sea-bathing might do wonders."

"Should you think it well for her to go so far from home?"

"I should. Where there is any chronic or confirmed disorder, one we can grapple with, I don't care a straw for change of scene or air; a patient is as well at his own home as away from it. A certain treatment must be gone through, surgical or physical, and it is of little moment whether it is pursued on a mountain in Switzerland or in a vale in Devonshire. But in these cases of protracted weakness, where you can do nothing but try to coax the strength back again, change of air and scene are of immense benefit."

"I will propose it to her," said Mr. Carlyle.

"I have just done so," replied Dr. Martin, who was the other speaker. "She met it with objection. This I expected, for invalids naturally feel a disinclination to move from home. But it is necessary that she should go."

The object of their conversation was Lady Isabel. There were three children now at East Lynne: Isabel, William, and Archibald; the latter twelve months old. Lady Isabel had, a month or two ago, been attacked with illness: she recovered from it; that is, she recovered from the disorder; but it had left her in an alarming state of prostration. Mr. Wainwright tried in vain to grapple with the weakness; she seemed to grow worse, rather than better; and Dr. Martin was summoned from Lynneborough. The best thing he could recommend—as you have heard—was change of scene and air.

Lady Isabel was unwilling to take the advice; more especially to go so far as the "French coast," and, but for a circumstance that seemed to have happened purposely to induce her to decide, would probably never have gone. Mrs. Duc.e—tne reader may not have forgotten her name—had, in conjunction with her husband, the Honourable Augustus, somewhat run herself out at elbows, and found it desirable to enter for a time on the less expensive life of the Continent. For eighteen months she had been staying in Paris, the education of her younger daughters being the plea put forth for the sojourn: and a very convenient plea it is, and serves hundreds. Isabel had had two or three letters from her during her absence, and she now received another, saying that they were going to spend a month or two at Boulogne-sur-Mer. Dr. Martin and Mr. Wainwright declared that this must remove all Lady Isabel's unwillingness to go from home, for Mrs. Ducie's society would do away with the loneliness she had anticipated: a loneliness which had been the ostensible reason of her objection.

"Boulogne-sur-Mer, of all places in the world!" remonstrated Lady Isabel. "It is said to be crowded and vulgar."

Mr. Carlyle also demurred at Boulogne-sur-Mer. It did not stand well in his estimation. It was not a place he cared to send his wife to: more esoecially as he could not remain there with her. Trouville, a pleasant, retired watering-place, near Harfleur, and little known in those days, had been the one chosen. Lady Isabel probably would have found it dull and depressing.

Dr. Martin strongly urged its being changed for Boulogne. "What did it matter if Boulogne were crowded and vulgar?" he asked: "there would be the more amusement for Lady Isabel. He had had his doubts of Trouville before, as regarded its dullness: by all means let her go to Boulogne and join Mrs. Ducie."

Mr. Carlyle yielded the point, and ended by approving it; and Lady Isabel, finding she had no chance against them all, consented to go, and plans were hastily decided upon.

She certainly looked very ill: her features were white and attenuated, her sweet, sad eyes had grown larger and darker; her hands were hot and sickly. Though warm weather, she had generally a shawl folded round her, and would sit for hours without rousing herself, as those suffering from great weakness like to do; would sit gazing out on the calm landscape, or watching her children at play. She went out once a day in the close carriage, and that was all: no other exertion could she be aroused to make.

In this illness the old trouble had returned—the sore feeling touching her husband and Barbara Hare. It had lain pretty dormant in the last few years, nothing having occurred to excite it; but Lady Isabel was in that state of weakness, where grievances, let them be old or new, grow upon the mind. Her thoughts would wander to the unsatisfactory question of whether Mr. Carlyle had ever truly loved her; or whether, lured by her rank and her beauty, he had married her, loving Barbara. Mr. Carlyle's demonstrative affection, shown so greatly for her in the first twelve months or so of their married life, had subsided into calmness. Is not a similar result arrived at by every husband that the Church ever made one with woman? It was not that his love had faded, but that time and custom had wrought their natural effects. Look at children with their toys; a boy with a new drum, a girl with a new doll. Are not the playthings kissed, and hugged, and clasped in arms, and never put down? Did ever playthings seem like them? Are not all other things neglected, while the new toy is all in all? But, wait a little time, and the drum is consigned to some dark closet; the doll to its cradle; and neither of them is visited or looked at. Tell the children to go and find their lately cherished playthings, to make them their evening's amusement; and they will go unwillingly, for they are tired of them. It is of no use scolding the children for being fickle: it is in their nature to be fickle, for they are human. Are grown children otherwise? Do we not all, men and women, become indifferent to our toys when we hold them securely in possession? Young lady, when he, who is soon to be your lord and master, protests to you that he shall always be as ardent a lover as he is now, believe him if you like, but don't reproach him when disappointment comes. He does not wilfully deceive you; he only forgets that it is in the constitution of man to change, the very essence of his nature. The time will arrive when his manner must settle down into a calmness, which to you, if you are of an exacting temperament, may look like indifference or coldness; but you will do well to put up with it, for it will never now be otherwise. Never: the heyday of early love, of youth, and of novelty is past.

Lady Isabel did not understand the even manner, the quiet calmness into which her husband's once-passionate love had subsided, and in her fanciful jealousy she attributed it to the influence Barbara held upon his memory. She looked for the little tender episodes of daily life: she would fain have had him hang over her chair as she sang, and draw her face to his, and feel his kisses on her lips, as when she first came, a wife, to East Lynne. It has been seen that Lady Isabel did not love Mr. Carlyle; but his tenderness, his anxious care for her in their early married days, caused her to lift up her heart to him with gratitude, and to try earnestly to love him. But—to try to love! Vain effort: Love never yet came for *trying:* it is a capricious passion, and generally comes without the knowledge and against the will. It is possible that she thought she had succeeded, for her whole esteem, her respect, and her admiration were his. When she compared him with other men, and saw how far he surpassed them, how noble and how good he was, how little the rest looked beside him, her heart rose up with pride at the consciousness of being his wife: a princess might have deemed it an honour to be the chosen of such a man as Archibald Carlyle. Spare one single corner of *his* heart to Barbara Hare! No indeed; Isabel could not afford that.

On the day that the journey was finally decided upon, Lady Isabel was in the drawing-room with her three children; even the little fellow was sitting on the carpet. Isabel was a delicate, pretty child in her fifth year, William was the very image of his mother, Archibald was like Mr. Carlyle.

"Come hither, my darlings," she cried.

Isabel and William ran to her, and she placed an arm round each. Master Archie was kicking his heels on the carpet at a distance. They looked up at their mother.

"Would my little dears like to go a great way with mamma? Over the sea in a boat?"

Isabel—who had inherited the refined, sensitive feelings of her mother—replied only by a smile and vivid blush. William clapped his hands. "Oh yes, in a boat! Arty too, mamma?"

"Archie and all," answered Lady Isabel. "And Joyce, and Wilson, and——"

Miss Carlyle, who was seated near one of the windows, sewing, turned sharply round to interrupt the gladness. Miss Carlyle, though not openly dissenting, did not inwardly approve of the proposed emigration. What did people want with change of air? thought she. *She* had never wanted any. A pack of new-fangled notions that doctors had got into, recommending change of air for everything! They would order it, next, for a cut finger. If Lady Isabel would make an effort, she'd get strong fast enough at home.

"The children are not going to the seaside," said she. "They are not ordered there."

"But they must go with me," replied Lady Isabel. "Of course they are not expressly ordered to it. Why should they not go?"

"Why should they not?" retorted Miss Corny. "Why, on account of the expense, to be sure. I can tell you what it is, Lady Isabel, what with one expense and another, your husband will soon be on the road to ruin. Your journey with Joyce and Peter will cost enough, ma'am, without taking a van-load of nurses and children."

Lady Isabel's heart sank within her.

"Besides, your object in going is to recover health, and how can you do that, if you are to be worried with the children?" pursued Miss Corny. "People who go abroad for pleasure, or invalids in search of health, won't find much of either if they carry their cares with them."

Lady Isabel rose, and, with difficulty, lifted Archibald from the carpet; sat down with him on her knee, and pressed his little face to hers.

"Would my baby like mamma to go away and leave him?" she asked, the tears falling fast on her fair curls. "Oh! I could not leave them behind me!" she added, looking imploringly at Miss Carlyle. "I should grow no better if you send me there alone; I should ever be yearning for my children."

"Alone, Lady Isabel! Is your husband nothing?"

"But he will only take me; he will not remain."

"Well, you can't expect his business to go to rack and ruin," snapped Miss Corny. "How can he stay away from it? With all these heavy expenses upon him, there's more need than ever for his sticking to it closely. And, before the children are gallivanted over the water, it might be as well to sit down and calculate the cost. Of course, Lady Isabel, I only offer my opinion; you are Archibald's wife, and sole mistress, and will do as you please."

Do as she pleased! Poor Lady Isabel laid her head meekly down upon her children, effectually silenced, and her heart breaking with pain. Joyce, who was then in the room, heard a little, and conjectured much of what had passed.

In the evening Mr. Carlyle carried little Isabel up to the nursery on his shoulder. Joyce happened to be there, and thought it a good opportunity to speak.

"My lady wishes to take the children with her to France, sir."

"Does she?" replied Mr. Carlyle.

"And I fear she will make herself very unhappy if they do not go, sir."

"Why should they not go?" asked Mr. Carlyle.

He went back to the drawing-room, where his wife was alone. "Isabel, do you wish to take the children with you?"

"Oh, I did so wish it!" she replied, the hectic of hope lighting her pale cheeks. "If they might only go, Archibald?"

"Of course they may go. It will be a change for them, as well as for you. Why should you hesitate?"

"The expense," she timidly whispered, the hectic growing deeper.

He looked into her eyes with his pleasant smile. "Expense is no concern of yours, Isabel: it is mine. Never let the word expense trouble you, until I tell you that it must do so."

"It will not increase the cost so very much," she returned, her eyes smiling with happiness. "And I shall get well all the sooner for having them with me."

"And, to further that, you should take them, if it were to the end of the world. Why should you study aught but your own wishes and comfort?"

She took his hand in her love and gratitude—for every tone of his voice spoke of care and tenderness for her; all jealous fancies were forgotten, all recollection, in that moment, that his manner was calmer than of old. "Archibald! I do believe you care for me as much as you ever did?"

He did not understand the words, but he held her to him as in days gone by, and kissed her tenderly. "More precious, far more precious to me than of yore, Isabel!"

Miss Carlyle flew out when she heard the decision, and frightened her brother to repentance, assuring him that his sending the children was the certain way to preclude all chance of his wife's recovery. Mr. Carlyle was sorely puzzled between Isabel's wishes and Isabel's welfare: he would promote both if he could, but if they clashed—? He feared his own judgment, he feared his wife's; and he appealed to the medical men. But Miss Corny had forestalled him there: she had contrived so to impress those gentlemen with the incessant worry the children would prove to Lady Isabel, that they pronounced their veto, and forbade the children's going. So, after all, Lady Isabel had to resign herself to the disappointment.

"Joyce," said she to her waiting-maid, "I shall leave you at home; I must take Wilson instead."

"Oh, my lady! what have I done?"

"You have done all that you ought, Joyce, but you must stay with the children. If I may not take them, the next best thing will be to leave them with you. I shall give them into your charge, not into Miss Carlyle's," she said, sinking her voice. "If Wilson remained, I could not do that."

"My lady, I must do whatever you think best. I wish I could attend you and stay with them, but of course I cannot do both."

"I am sent away to recover health and strength, but it may be I shall die, Joyce. If I never return, will you promise to remain with my children?"

Joyce felt a creeping sensation in her veins: sobs rose in her throat, but she swallowed them down, and constrained her voice to calmness. "My lady, I hope you will come back to us as well as you used to be. I trust you will hope so too, my lady, and not give way to low spirits."

"I sincerely hope and trust I shall," answered Lady Isabel, fervently. "Still, there is no knowing, for I am very ill. Joyce, give me your promise in case of the worst, that you will remain with the children."

"I will, my lady—as long as I am permitted."

"And be kind to them, and love them, and shield them from—from —any unkindness that may be put upon them," she added, her head full of Miss Carlyle. "And talk to them sometimes of their poor mother who is gone."

"I will, I will: oh, my lady, I will!" And Joyce sat down in the rocking-chair as Lady Isabel quitted her, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER II.

FRANCIS LEVISON.

MR. CARLYLE and Lady Isabel, with Wilson and Peter in attendance, arrived at Boulogne, and proceeded to the Hôtel des Bains. It may be as well to mention that Peter had been transferred from Miss Carlyle's service to theirs, when the establishment was first formed at East Lynne. Upon entering the hotel, they inquired for Mrs. Ducie, and then a disappointment awaited them. A letter was handed to them, which had arrived that morning from Mrs. Ducie, expressing her regret that certain family arrangements prevented her visiting Boulogne; she was proceeding to some of the baths in Germany instead.

"I might almost have known it," remarked Isabel. "She was always the most changeable of women."

Mr. Carlyle proposed that they should, after all, go on to Trouville, but Isabel said now that she had come to Boulogne, she would stay there. He went out in search of lodgings, Isabel objecting to remain in the bustling hotel. He succeeded in finding some excellent ones in the Rue de l'Ecu, near the port, and they moved into them. He thought the journey had done her good, for she looked better, and said she already felt stronger. Mr. Carlyle remained with her three days; he had promised only one, but he was pleased with Isabel's returning glimpses of health, and amused with the scenes of the busy town.

"I shall make no acquaintances here," Isabel observed to him, as they sat together at the end of the first division of the pier, which she had reached without much fatigue, and watched the gay idlers flocking past them.

"It would not be wise to do so indiscriminately," he replied, "but you may chance to find some you know. All sorts of people come over here: some respectable, and from respectable motives; others the contrary. Some of these men, going by now, are here because they have kites flying in England."

"Kites!" echoed Lady Isabel.

"Kites, and bills, and ghosts of renewed acceptances," returned Mr. Carlyle. "And well for them if they are over here for nothing else. The worse a man's conduct has been at home, the more assurance he puts on abroad, and is the first to rush and proclaim his arrival at the consulate. To hear these men boast, we might think they were millionaires in England, and had led the lives of saints."

"You have never stayed in these continental towns, Archibald: how do you know this?"

"I have had plenty to do with those who have stayed in them. There goes Buxton!" he suddenly exclaimed; "he sees me, too. Look at him, Isabel. He does not know whether to come on, or to turn and make a run for it."

"Who? Which?" cried Isabel, confused by the many passers by.

"That stout, well-dressed man, with the light hair, and a bunch of seals hanging to his watch-chain. He thinks better of it, and comes on. All safe, my good sir, on Boulogne pier, but if they catch you on the other side the water—. Here comes his wife, following with some ladies. Look at her satins, and her chains, and her bracelets—all swindled out of credulous tradespeople. There's not a doubt they are playing at being grand people in the English society here. It must be as good as a comedy to be behind the scenes in this Anglo-French town, and watch the airs and graces of some of its sojourners. Are you tired, Isabel?"

"A little. I should like to return."

Mr. Carlyle rose, and giving his arm to his wife, they walked slowly down the pier. Many an eye was turned to look at them; at his tall, noble form; at her young beauty; at the unmistakable air of distinction which enshrined both. They were not like the ordinary visitors at Boulogne-sur-Mer.

The tide served at eight o'clock the following morning, and Mr. Carlyle left by the Folkestone boat. Wilson made his breakfast, and after swallowing it in haste, he returned to his wife's room to say farewell.

"Good-bye, my love," he said, stooping to kiss her. "Take care of yourself."

"Give my dear love to the darlings, Archibald. And—and——"

"And what?" he asked. "I have not a moment to lose."

"Do not get making love to Barbara Hare while I am away."

She spoke in a tone half jest, half serious—could he but have seen how her heart was beating! Mr. Carlyle took it wholly as a jest, and went away laughing. Had he believed she was serious, he could have been little more surprised had she charged him not to go about the country on a dromedary.

Isabel rose later, and lingered listlessly over her breakfast. She was wondering how she could pass away the next few weeks: what she should do with her time. She had taken two sea-baths since her arrival, but they had appeared not to agree with her, leaving her low and shivering afterwards, so that it was not thought advisable to attempt any more. It was a lovely morning, and she determined to venture on to the pier, where they had been the previous evening. She had not Mr. Carlyle's arm, but it was not far, and she could take a long rest at the end of it.

She went, attended by Peter, took her seat, and told him to come for her in an hour. She watched the strollers on the pier; not in crowds now, but stragglers, coming on at intervals. There came a gouty man, in a list shoe; there came three young ladies and their governess; there came two fast puppies in shooting-jackets and eye-glasses, which they turned with a broad stare on Lady Isabel; but there was something about her which caused them to drop their glasses and their ill manners together. After an interval, there appeared another; a tall, handsome, gentlemanly man. Her eyes fell upon him; and—what was it that caused every nerve in her frame to vibrate, every pulse to quicken? *Whose* form was it that was thus advancing, and changing the monotony of her mind into tumult? It was that of one who, she was soon to find, had never been entirely forgotten.

Captain Levison came slowly on, approaching the part of the pier where she sat. He glanced at her, not with the hardihood displayed by the two young men, but with quite sufficiently evident admiration.

"What a lovely girl!" thought he to himself. "Who can she be, sitting there alone?" All at once a recollection flashed into his mind: he raised his hat and extended his hand, his fascinating smile in full play.

"I certainly cannot be mistaken. Have I not the honour of once more meeting Lady Isabel Vane?"

She allowed him to take her hand, answering a few words at random, for her wits seemed to have gone wool-gathering.

"I beg your pardon—I should have said Lady Isabel Carlyle. Time has elapsed since we parted, and in the pleasure of seeing you again so unexpectedly, I thought of you as you were then."

She sat down again, the brilliant flush of emotion dying away on her cheeks. It was the loveliest face Francis Levison had seen since he had last seen hers, and he thought so as he gazed at it.

"What can have brought you to this place?" he inquired, taking a seat by her.

"I have been ill, she explained, "and am ordered to the seaside. We should not have come here but for Mrs. Ducie; we expected to meet her. Mr. Carlyle only left me this morning."

"Mrs. Ducie is off to Ems. I see them occasionally. They have been fixtures in Paris for some time. You do indeed look ill!" he abruptly added, in a tone of sympathy; "alarmingly ill. Is there anything I can do for you?"

She was aware that she looked unusually ill at that moment, for the agitation and surprise of meeting him were fading away, leaving her face of an ashy whiteness. She was exceedingly vexed and angry with herself, that meeting him should have had power to call forth emotion. Until that moment she was unconscious that she retained any sort of feeling for Captain Levison.

"Perhaps I have ventured out too early," she said, in a tone that would seem to apologize for her looks; "I think I will return. I shall meet my servant, no doubt. Good morning, Captain Levison."

"But indeed you do not appear fit to walk alone," he remonstrated. "You must allow me to see you safely home."

Drawing her hand within his arm quite as a matter of course, as he had done many a time in the days gone by. he proceeded to assist her down the pier. Lady Isabel, conscious of her own feelings, felt that it was not quite the thing to walk thus familiarly with him, but he was a sort of relative of the family—a connection at any rate, and she could find no ready excuse for declining.

"Have you seen Lady Mount Severn lately?" he inquired.

"I saw her when I was in London this spring with Mr. Carlyle. The first time we have met since my marriage: we do not correspond. Lord Mount Severn has paid us some visits at East Lynne. They are in town yet, I believe."

"For all I know. I have not seen them, or England either, for ten months. I have been staying in Paris, and got here yesterday."

"A long leave of absence," she observed.

"Oh, I have left the army. I sold out. The truth is, Lady Isabel—for I don't mind telling you—things are rather down with me at present. My old uncle has behaved shamefully: he has married again."

"I heard that Sir Peter had married."

"He is seventy-three—the old simpleton! Of course this materially alters my prospects, for it is just possible he may have a son of his own now; and my creditors all came down upon me. They allowed me to run into debt with complacency when I was heir to the title and estates, but as soon as Sir Peter's marriage appeared in the papers, myself and my consequence dropped a hundred per cent.; credit was stopped, and I was dunned for payment. So I sold out and came abroad."

"Leaving your creditors behind you?"

"What else could I do? My uncle would not pay them, or increase my allowance."

"What are your prospects, then?" resumed Lady Isabel.

"Prospects? Do you see that little ragged boy, throwing stones into the harbour?—it is well if the police don't drop upon him. Ask him what his prospects are, and he would stare in your face, and say, 'None.' Mine are on a par with his."

"You may succeed Sir Peter yet."

"I may: but I may not. When these old idiots marry a young wife——"

"Have you quarrelled with Sir Peter?" interrupted Lady Isabel.

"I should quarrel with him, as he deserves, if it would do any good: but I might get my allowance stopped. Self-interest, you see, Lady Isabel, is the order of the day with most of us."

"Do you purpose staying long in Boulogne?"

"I don't know. As I may find amusement. Paris is a fast capital, with its heated rooms and its late hours, and I came down for the refreshment of a few sea-dips. Am I walking too fast for you?"

"You increased your pace alarmingly when you spoke of Sir Peter's marriage. And I am not sorry for it," she added, good-naturedly, "for it has proved to me how strong I am growing. A week ago I could not have walked so fast."

He interrupted with eager apologies, and soon they reached her home. Captain Levison entered with her—uninvited. He probably considered that between connections great ceremony might be dispensed with, and he sat a quarter of an hour, chatting to amuse her. When he rose, he inquired what she meant to do with herself in the afternoon.

"To lie down," replied Lady Isabel. "I am not strong enough to sit up all day."

"Should you be going out again afterwards, you must allow me to take care of you," he observed. "I am glad that I happen to be here, for I am sure you ought not to wander out only followed by a servant. When Mr. Carlyle comes, he will thank me for my pains."

What was she to urge in objection? Simply nothing. He spoke, let us not doubt, from a genuine wish to serve her, in a plain, easy tone, as any acquaintance might speak. Lady Isabel schooled herself severely; if those old feelings were not quite dead within her, why, she must smother them down again as effectually as if they were: the very fact of recognizing them to her own heart, brought its glow of shame to her brow. She would meet Captain Levison and suffer his companionship as she would that of the most indifferent stranger.

It was just the wrong way for her to go to work.

As the days passed on, Lady Isabel improved wonderfully. She was soon able to go to the sands in a morning and sit there to enjoy the sea-air, watching the waves come up or recede with the tide. She made no acquaintances whatever in the place, and when she had a companion it was Captain Levison. He would frequently join her there, sometimes take her, almost always give her his arm home. She disliked having to take his arm: her conscience whispered it might be better if she did not do so. One day she said, in a joking sort of manner—she would not say it in any other—that now she was strong she had no need of his arm and his escort. He demanded, in evident astonishment, what had arisen that he might not still afford it, as her husband was not with her to give her his. She had no answer to give to this, no excuse to urge, and, in default, took his arm as usual. In the evening, he was always ready to take her to the pier, but they sat apart, mixing not with the bustling crowd, he lending to his manner, as he conversed with her, all that it could call up of fascination—and fascination, such as Francis Levison's, might be dangerous to any ear in the sweet evening twilight. The walk over, he left her at her own door. In the evening she never asked him in, and he did not intrude without permission, as he sometimes would in a morning.

Now, where was the help for this? You may say that she should have remained indoors, and not have subjected herself to his companionship. But remaining indoors would not have brought her health, and it was health that she was staying in Boulogne to acquire, and the sooner it came the better pleased she would be, for she w.·nted to be at home with her husband and children.

In a fortnight from the period of his departure, Mr. Carlyle was expected in Boulogne. But what a marvellous change had this fortnight wrought in Lady Isabel! She did not dare to analyze her feelings, but she was conscious that all the fresh emotions of her youth had come again. The blue sky seemed of the clearest sapphire, the fields and the waving trees were emerald, the perfume of the flowers was more fragrant than any perfume had yet seemed. She knew that all these things were only as they had ever been; and she knew that the change, the sensation of ecstasy, was in her own heart. No wonder that she shrank from self-examination.

The change from listless langour to her present feelings brought the hue and contour of health to her face far sooner than anything else could have done. She went down with Captain Levison to meet Mr. Carlyle the evening he came in, and when Mr. Carlyle saw her behind the cords, as he was going to the custom-house, he scarcely knew her. Her features had lost their sharpness, her cheeks wore a rosy flush, and the light of pleasure at meeting him again shone in her eyes.

"What can you have been doing to yourself, my darling?" he uttered in delight, as he emerged from the custom-house and took her hands in his. "You look almost well."

"Yes, I am much better, Archibald, but I am warm now and flushed. We have waited here some time; and the setting sun was full upon us. How long the boat was coming in."

"The wind was dead against us," replied Mr. Carlyle, wondering who the exquisite was, at his wife's side. He thought he remembered his face.

"Captain Levison," said Lady Isabel. "I wrote you word in one of my letters that he was here. Have you forgotten it?" Yes, it had slipped from his memory.

"And I am pleased that it happened to be so," said that gentleman, interposing, "for it has enabled me to attend Lady Isabel in some of her walks. She is stronger now, but at first she was unfit to venture out alone."

"I feel much indebted to you," said Mr. Carlyle, warmly.

Lady Isabel had taken her husband's arm, and Francis Levison walked by the side of Mr. Carlyle. "To tell you the truth," he said, dropping his voice so that it reached only Mr. Carlyle's ear, "when I met Lady Isabel, I was shocked to see her. I thought her days were numbered; that a very short period must close them. I therefore considered it a bounden duty to render her any slight service that might be in my power."

"I am sure she has been obliged for your attention," responded Mr. Carlyle. "And as to her visible improvement, it seems little short of a miracle. I expected, from Lady Isabel's letters to me, to find her better, but she is more than better; she looks well. Do you hear, Isabel? I say a miracle must have been wrought, to bring back your bloom, for a fortnight's space of time could scarcely have done it. This must be a famous air for invalids."

The bloom that Mr. Carlyle spoke of deepened to a glowing crimson as she listened. She knew—and she could not stifle the knowledge, however she might wish to do so—that it was not the place or the sea-air which had renovated her heart and her countenance. But she clasped her husband's arm the closer, and inwardly prayed for strength and power to thrust away from her this dangerous foe, that was creeping on in guise so insidious.

"You have not said a word to me about the children," exclaimed Lady Isabel, as she and her husband entered their rooms, Francis Levison not having been invited to enter. "Did they all send me some kisses? Did Archie send me any?"

Mr. Carlyle laughed: he was not a mother, he was only a father. Archie, with his year of age, send kisses!

"Had you been away, as I am, he should have sent some to you," murmured Lady Isabel. "I would have taken a thousand from him, and told him they were for papa."

"I will take a thousand back to him," answered Mr. Carlyle, folding his wife to his heart. "My dearest, the sight of you has made me glad."

The following day was Sunday, and Francis Levison was asked to dine with them: the first meal he had been invited to in the house. After dinner, when Lady Isabel left them, he grew confidential with Mr. Carlyle; laying open all his intricate affairs and his cargo of troubles.

"This compulsory exile abroad is becoming intolerable," he concluded; "and a Paris life plays the very deuce with one. Do you see any chance of my getting back to England?"

"Not the least," was the candid answer; "unless you can manage to satisfy, or partially satisfy, these claims you have been telling me of. Will not Sir Peter assist you?"

"I believe he would were the case fairly represented to him; but how am I to get over to do it? I have written several letters to him lately, and for some time I had no reply. Then came an epistle from Lady Levison; not short and sweet, but short and sour. It was to the effect that Sir Peter was ill, and could not at present be troubled with business matters."

"He cannot be very ill," remarked Mr. Carlyle. "He passed through West Lynne in his open carriage a week ago."

"He ought to help me," grumbled Captain Levison. "I am his heir, so long as Lady Levison does not give him one. I do not hear that she has expectations."

"You should contrive to see him."

"I know I should: but it is not possible, under present circumstances. With these thunder-clouds hanging over me, I dare not set foot in England, and run the risk of being dropped upon. I can stand a few things, but I shudder at the bare idea of a prison. Something peculiar in my idiosyncrasy I take it, for those who have tried it say that it's nothing when you're used to it."

"Some one might see him for you."

"Some one!—who? I have quarrelled with my lawyers, Sharp and Steel, of Lincoln's Inn."

"Keen practitioners," put in Mr. Carlyle.

"Too keen for me. I'd send them over the herring-pond if I could. They have used me shamefully since my uncle's marriage. If ever I do come into the Levison estates, they'll be ready to eat their ears off. They would like a finger in the pie with such a property as that."

"Shall I see Sir Peter Levison for you?"

"*Will* you?" returned Captain Levison, his dark eyes lighting up.

"If you like; as your friend, you understand, not as your solicitor: that I should decline. I have a slight knowledge of Sir Peter; my father was well acquainted with him: and if I can render you any little service, I shall be happy to do so, in return for your attetion to my wife. I cannot promise to see him for these two or three weeks," resumed Mr. Carlyle, "for we are terribly busy. Otherwise I should be staying here with my wife."

Francis Levison expressed his gratitude, and the prospect, however remote, of being enabled to return to England, increased his spirits to exultation. Whilst they continued to converse, Lady Isabel sat at the window in the adjoining room, listlessly looking out on the French, who were crowding to and from the port in their Sunday attire: looking at them with her eyes, not with her senses; her senses were holding commune with herself, and it was not altogether satisfactory. She was aware that a sensation all too warm, a feeling of attraction towards Francis Levison, was working within her; not a voluntary one; she could no more repress it than she could repress her own sense of being; and, mixed with it was the stern voice of conscience, overwhelming her with the most lively terror. She would have given all she possessed to be able to overcome it; she would have given half the years of her future life to separate herself at once and for ever from the man.

But, do not mistake the word terror; or suppose that Lady Isabel Carlyle applied it here in the vulgar acceptation of the term. She did not fear for herself; none could be more securely conscious of their own rectitude of principle and conduct: and she would have believed it as impossible for her ever to forsake her duty as a wife, a gentlewoman, and a Christian, as for the sun to turn from the west to the east. That was not the fear which possessed her; it had never presented itself to her mind. What she did fear was, that further companionship, especially lonely companionship, with Francis Levison might increase the sentiments she entertained for him to a height, that her life, for perhaps years to come, would be one of unhappiness and concealment. More than all, she shrank from the consciousness of the bitter wrong that these sentiments cast upon her husband.

"Archibald, I have a favour to ask you," she timidly began, as they sat together after Captain Levison's departure. "You must promise to grant it me."

"What is it?"

"But that is not promising."

"I will grant it, Isabel; if it be in my power."

"I want you to remain with me for the rest of the time that I must stay here."

Mr. Carlyle looked at her in surprise. "My dear, how could you think of wishing anything so unlikely? It is circuit time."

"Oh, Archibald, you must remain."

"I wish I could: but it is impossible; you must know it to be so, Isabel. A few weeks later in the year, and I could have stayed the whole time with you. As it is I did not know how to get away for these two or three days."

"And you go back to morrow?"

"Necessity has no law, my darling."

"Then take me with you."

Mr. Carlyle smiled. "No, Isabel: not while I find the change is doing you so much good. I took these rooms for six weeks; you must remain certainly until the end of the term, if not longer."

The colour came flowing painfully into her cheek. "I cannot stay without you, Archibald."

"Tell me why," smiled Mr. Carlyle.

Tell him why! "I am so dull without you," was the best argument she could offer; but her voice faltered, for she felt that it would not be listened to.

Neither was it. Mr. Carlyle left the following day, and when he was departing, commended his wife to the further attention of Captain Levison. Not the faintest suspicion that it might be unwise to do so ever crossed his mind. How should it? Perfectly correct and honourable himself, it never occurred to him that Captain Levison might be less so. And as to his wife—he would fearlessly have left her alone with him, or with any one else, on a desert island, so entire was his confidence in her.

CHAPTER III.

QUITTING THE DANGER.

LADY ISABEL was seated on one of the benches of the Petit Camp, as it is called, under the ramparts of the upper town. A week or ten days had passed away since the departure of Mr. Carlyle, and in her health there was a further visible improvement. In her strength, the change was almost beyond credence. She had walked from her home to the cemetery, had lingered there, reading the inscriptions on the English graves, and now on her departure sat down to rest; tired, it must be owned, but not much more so than many a lady would be, rejoicing in rude health. Captain Levison was her companion, as he usually was in her walks; shake him off she could not. She had attempted a few stratagems; going out at unusual hours, or choosing unfrequented routes; but he was sure to trace her steps and come upon her. Isabel thought he must watch her; probably he did so. She would not take more decided steps, or say to him, you shall not join me; he might have asked for an explanation, and Isabel, in her conscious state of feeling, avoided that above all things. It will be only for a little time, she reflected; I shall soon be gone, and leave him, I hope, for ever. But meanwhile, she felt that this prolonged intercourse with him was bearing fruit; that her cheek blushed at his approach, her heart beat with something too like rapture. She tried to suppress it. Why did she not try to arrest the breeze as it filled the sails of the passing vessels? It would not have been a more hopeless task.

It was a still evening, cool for July. No sound was heard save the hum of the summer insects, and Lady Isabel sat in silence with her companion, her rebellious heart beating with a sense of its own happiness. But for the voice of conscience, strong within her; but for the sense of right and wrong; but for existing things; in short, but that she was a wife, she might have been content so to sit by his side for ever, never to wish to move, or to break the silence. Did he read her feelings? He told her, months afterwards, that he did so: but it might have been only a vain boast.

"Do you remember the evening, Lady Isabel, just such a one as this, that we all passed at Richmond?" he suddenly asked. "Your father, Mrs. Vane, you, I, and others?"

"Yes, I remember it. We had spent a pleasant day: the two Miss Challoners were with us. You drove Mrs. Vane home, and I went with papa. You drove recklessly, I recollect; and Mrs. Vane said when we reached home that you should never drive her again."

"Which meant, not until the next time. Of all capricious, vain, exacting women, Emma Vane was the worst; and Emma Mount Severn is no improvement upon it: she's a systematic flirt, and nothing better. I drove recklessly on purpose to frighten her, and pay her off."

"What had she done to you?"

"Put me into a rage. She had saddled herself upon me when I wanted—I wished for—another to be my companion."

"Blanche Challoner."

"Blanche Challoner!" echoed Captain Levison, in a mocking tone: "what did I care for Blanche Challoner?"

Isabel remembered that he had been supposed in those days to care a great deal for Blanche Challoner—a most lovely girl of seventeen. "Mrs. Vane used to accuse you of caring too much for her," she said aloud.

"She accused me of caring for some one else more than for Blanche Challoner," he significantly returned, "and for once her jealous surmises were not misplaced. No, Lady Isabel, it was not Blanche Challoner I wished to drive home. Could you not have given a better guess than that at the time?" he added, turning to her

There was no mistaking the tone of his voice or the glance of his eye. Lady Isabel felt a crimson flush rising, and turned her face away.

"The past is gone, and cannot be recalled," he continued, "but we both played our cards like simpletons. If ever two beings were formed to love each other, you and I were. I sometimes thought you read my feelings——"

Surprise had kept her silent, but she interrupted him now, haughtily enough.

"I must speak, Lady Isabel: a few words, and then I am silent for ever. I would have declared myself had I dared, but my uncertain position, my debts, my inability to keep a wife, weighed me down; and instead of appealing to Sir Peter, as I hoped to do, for the means to assume a position that would justify me in asking for Lord Mount Severn's daughter, I crushed my hopes within me, and suffered you to escape——"

"I will not hear this, Captain Levison," she cried, rising from her seat in anger.

He touched her arm to place her on it again. "One single moment yet, I pray you. I have for years wished that you should know why I lost you; a loss that tells upon me yet. I have bitterly worked out my own folly since. I knew not how pa-sionately I loved you, until you became the wife of another. Isabel, I love you passionately still."

"How dare you presume so to address me?"

She spoke in a cold dignified tone of hauteur, as it was her bounden duty to speak. But nevertheless she was conscious of an undercurrent of feeling, whispering that under other auspices the avowal would have brought to her heart the most intense bliss.

"What I have said can do no harm now," resumed Captain Levison; "the time has gone by for it; for neither you nor I are likely to forget that you are a wife. We have each chosen our path in life, and must abide by it; the gulf between us is impassable; but the fault was mine. I ought to have avowed my affection, and not have suffered you to throw yourself away upon Mr. Carlyle."

"Throw myself away!" she indignantly uttered, roused to the retort. "Mr. Carlyle is my dear husband; esteemed, respected, beloved. I married him of my own free choice, and I have never repented it. I have grown more attached to him day by day. Look at his noble nature, his noble form: what are *you* by his side? You forget yourself, Francis Levison."

He bit his lips. "No, I do not."

"You are talking to me as you have no right to talk," she exclaimed in her agitation. "Who, but you, would so insult me, or take advantage of my momentarily unprotected condition? Would you dare to do it, were Mr. Carlyle within reach? I wish you good evening, sir."

She walked away as quickly as her tired frame would permit. Captain Levison strode after her. He took forcible possession of her hand, and placed it within his arm.

"I pray you forgive and forget what has escaped me, Lady Isabel. Suffer me to be as before, the kind friend, the anxious brother, endeavouring to be of service to you in the absence of Mr. Carlyle."

"It is what I have suffered you to be, looking upon you as—I may say—a relative," she coldly rejoined, withdrawing her hand from his contact. "Not else should I have permitted your incessant companionship: and this is how you have repaid it! My husband thanked you for your attention to me; could he have read what was in your false heart, he had offered you a different sort of thanks, I fancy."

"I ask you for pardon, Lady Isabel; I have acknowledged my fault; and I can do no more. I will not so offend again; but there are moments when our dearest feelings break through the rules of life, and betray themselves, in spite of our sober judgment. Suffer me to support you down this steep hill," he added, for they were then going over the sharp stones of the Grand' Rue; "you are not strong enough to proceed alone, after this evening's long walk."

"You should have thought of that before," she said, some sarcasm in her tone. "No. I have declined."

So he had to put his arm back, which he was holding out, and she walked on unsupported, with what strength she had, he continuing to walk by her side. Arrived at her own door, she wished him a cold good evening, and he turned away in the direction of his hotel.

Lady Isabel brushed past Peter, and flew upstairs, startling Wilson, who had taken possession of the drawing-room to air her smart cap at its windows in the absence of her lady.

"My desk, Wilson, immediately," cried she, tearing off her gloves, her bonnet, and her shawl. "Tell Peter to be in readiness to take a letter to the post; and he must walk fast, or he will not catch it before the English mail is closed."

The symptoms of sinful happiness throbbing at her heart, while Francis Levison told her of his love, spoke plainly to Lady Isabel of the expediency of withdrawing entirely from his society and his dangerous sophistries. She would go away from the very place that contained him; put the sea between them. So she dashed off a letter to her husband; an urgent summons that he should come for her without delay, for, remain away longer, she *would not*. It is probable that she would have started alone, without waiting for Mr. Carlyle, but for the fear of not having sufficient funds for the journey, after the rent and other things were paid.

Mr. Carlyle, when he received the letter and marked its earnest tone, wondered much. In reply, he stated he would be with her on the following Saturday, and then her returning, or not, with him could be settled. Fully determined not to meet Captain Levison again, Isabel, in the intervening days, only went out in a carriage. He called once, and was shown into the drawing-room: but Lady Isabel, who happened to be in her own chamber, sent out a message, which was delivered by Peter. "My lady's compliments, but she must decline to receive visitors."

Sunday morning—it had been impossible for him to get away before—brought Mr. Carlyle. He strongly combated her wish to return home until the six weeks should have expired; he almost said he would not take her; and she grew earnest over it, almost to agitation.

"Isabel," he said, "let me know your motive, for it appears to me that you have one. The sojourn here is evidently doing you a great deal of good, and what you urge about 'being dull' sounds very like nonsense. Tell me what it is."

A sudden impulse flashed over her that she *would* tell him the truth. Not tell him that she loved Francis Levison, or that he had spoken to her as he did: she valued her husband too greatly to draw him into any unpleasantness of which the end could not be seen; but own to him that she had once felt a passing fancy for Francis Levison, and preferred not to be subjected to his companionship now. Oh, that she had done so! her kind, her noble, her judicious husband! Why did she keep silence? The whole truth, as to her present feelings, it was not expedient that she should tell, but she might have confided sufficient to him. He would only have cherished her the more deeply, and sheltered her under his fostering care, safe from harm.

Why did she not speak? In the impulse of the moment she was about to do so, when Mr. Carlyle, who had been taking a letter from his pocket-book, put it into her hand. Upon such slight threads do the events of life turn! Her thoughts diverted, she remained silent while she opened the letter. It was from Miss Carlyle, who had handed it to her brother in the moment of his departure, to carry to Lady Isabel and save postage. Mr. Carlyle had nearly dropped it into the Folkestone post-office.

A letter as stiff as Miss Corny herself. The children were well, and the house was going on well, and she hoped Lady Isabel was better. It filled three sides of note-paper, but that was all the news it contained, and it wound up with the following sentence: "I would continue my epistle, but Barbara Hare, who is to spend the day with us, has just arrived."

Barbara Hare spending the day at East Lynne! That item was quite enough for Lady Isabel; and her heart and her confidence closed to her husband. "She must go home to her children," she urged; she could not remain longer away from them; and she urged it at length with tears.

"Nay, Isabel," said Mr. Carlyle; "if you are so much in earnest as this, you shall certainly go back with me."

Then she was as a child let loose from school. She laughed; she danced in her excess of content; she showered kisses on her husband, thanking him in her happy gratitude. Mr. Carlyle set it down to her love for him; he arrived at the conclusion that, in reiterating that she could not bear to be away from him, she spoke the fond truth.

"Isabel," he said, smiling tenderly upon her, "do you remember, in the first days of our marriage, you told me you did not love me, but that the love would come? I think this is it."

Her face flushed nearly to tears at the word; a bright, glowing, all too conscious flush. Mr. Carlyle mistook its source, and caught her to his heart.

One day more, and then they—she and that man—should be separated by the broad sea. The thought caused her to lift up her heart in thankfulness. She knew that to leave him would be as though she left the sun behind her; that the other side might for a time be somewhat dreary; nevertheless, she fervently thanked Heaven. Oh, reader! never doubt the principles of poor Lady Isabel, her rectitude of mind, her wish and endeavour to do right, her abhorrence of wrong; her spirit was earnest and true, her intentions were pure.

Captain Levison paid a visit to Mr. Carlyle, and inquired if he had had time to see Sir Peter. Not yet; Mr. Carlyle had been too busy to think of it; but he should soon have more leisure on his hands, and would not fail him. Such was the reply; the reply of an honourable man to a man of dishonour: but, of the dishonour, Mr. Carlyle suspected nothing.

It was high water in the afternoon, and the Folkestone boat was announced to start at one o'clock. The Carlyles and their servants went on board in good time, and Captain Levison greeted them and said farewell as they stepped on to the steamer. Lady Isabel took her seat on deck, her husband standing by her; the ropes were unloosened, and the boat moved slowly down the harbour. On the shore stood Francis Levison, watching its progress, watching *her*. He was a bold, unscrupulous man; and there was little doubt that the more refined feelings, both of the past and present, he had thought fit to avow for Lady Isabel, were all assumed to serve a purpose. However, he had received his checkmate.

As he receded from Isabel's view, a sensation of relief thrilled through her whole frame, causing it to shudder, and involuntarily she clasped the hand of Mr. Carlyle.

"You are not cold, Isabel?" he said, bending over her.

"Oh no: I am very comfortable; very happy."

"But you were surely shivering?"

"At the thought of what I should have done with myself, had you come away, and left me there still, all alone. Archibald," she continued in an impassioned whisper, "never let me go away from you again; keep me near you always."

He smiled as he looked down into her pleading eyes, and a whole world of tender response and love might be detected in his earnest tone. "Always and always, Isabel. It is greater pain to me than to you, to have you away from me."

How could she ever doubt him?

CHAPTER IV.

THE FRACTURED ANKLE.

LADY ISABEL had returned home to health, to the delight of meeting her children, to the glad sensation of security. But, as the days went on, a miserable feeling of apathy stole over her: a feeling as if all whom she had loved in the world had died, leaving her living and alone. It was a painful depression, this vacuum in her heart which was making itself felt in its keen intensity. She strove to drive that bad man away from her thoughts; but even while she so strove, he was again in them. Too frequently she caught herself thinking that if she could only see him once again, for ever so short a period, one hour, one day, she could compose her spirit afterwards to rest. She did not encourage these reflections: from what you know of her, you may be sure of that: but they thrust themselves continually forward. The form of Francis Levison was ever present with her; not a minute of the day but it gave the colouring to her thoughts, and at night it made the subject of her dreams. Oh, those dreams! they were painful to awake from; painful from the contrast they presented to reality; and equally painful to her conscience, in its striving after what was right. She would have given much not to have these dreams; never to see or think of him in her sleep. But, how prevent it? There was no prevention; for when the mind (or the imagination, if you prefer the word) is thoroughly imbued with a subject of this nature, especially if unhappiness mingles with it, then the dreams follow necessarily the bent of the waking thoughts. Poor Lady Isabel would awaken to self-reproach, restless and feverish; wishing that this terrible disease could be driven away, root and branch: but Time, the great healer, must, she knew, pass over her, before that could be.

Mr. Carlyle mounted his horse one morning and rode over to Levison Park. He asked for Sir Peter, but was shown into the presence of Lady Levison: a young and pretty woman, showily dressed. She inquired his business.

"My business, madam, is with Sir Peter."

"But Sir Peter is not well enough to attend to business. It upsets him; worries him."

"Nevertheless, I am here by his own appointment. He mentioned twelve o'clock; and the hour has barely struck."

Lady Levison bit her lip and bowed coldly; and at that moment a servant appeared to conduct Mr. Carlyle to Sir Peter. The matter which had taken Mr. Carlyle thither was entered upon immediately—Francis Levison, his debts, and his gracelessness. Sir Peter, an old gentleman in a velvet skull-cap, particularly enlarged upon the latter.

"I would pay his debts to-day and set him upon his legs again, but that I know I should have to do the same thing over and over again to the end of the chapter—as I have done before," cried Sir Peter. "His grandfather was my only brother, his father my dutiful and beloved nephew; but he is just as bad as they were estimable. He is a worthless fellow, and nothing else, Mr. Carlyle."

"His tale drew forth my compassion, and I promised I would see you and speak for him," returned Mr. Carlyle. "Of Captain Levison's personal virtues or vices I know nothing."

"And the less you know of them the better," growled Sir Peter. "I suppose he wants me to clear him and start him afresh?"

"Something of the sort, I conclude."

"But how is it to be done? I am at home, and he is over there. His affairs are in a state of confusion, and no one can come to the bottom of them without an explanation from him. Certain liabilities, for which I have furnished the money, the creditors swear have not yet been liquidated. He must come over if he wants anything done."

"Where is he to come to? He must be in England *sub rosâ*."

"He can't be here," hastily rejoined Sir Peter. "Lady Levison would not have him for a day."

"He might be at East Lynne," good-naturedly observed Mr. Carlyle. "No one would dream of looking for him there. I think it is a pity that you should not meet, if you do feel inclined to help him."

"You are a great deal more considerate to him than he deserves, Mr. Carlyle. May I ask if you intend to act for him in a professional capacity?"

"I do not."

A few more words, and it was decided that Captain Levison should be immediately sent for. As Mr. Carlyle left Sir Peter's presence, he encountered Lady Levison.

"I can scarcely be ignorant that your conference with my husband has reference to his grand-nephew," she observed.

"It has," replied Mr. Carlyle.

"I have a very bad opinion of him, Mr. Carlyle: at the same time I do not wish you to carry away a wrong impression of me. Francis Levison is my husband's nephew, his heir presumptive; it may therefore appear strange that I set my face so determinedly against him. Two or three years ago, before my marriage with Sir Peter, in fact before I knew Sir Peter, I was brought into contact with Francis Levison. He was acquainted with some friends of mine, and at their house I met him. He behaved shamefully ill; he repaid their hospitality with gross ingratitude: other details and facts, regarding his conduct, also became known to me. Altogether, I believe him to be a base and despicable man, both by nature and by inclination, and that he will remain so to the end of time."

"I know very little indeed of him," observed Mr. Carlyle. "May I inquire the nature of his ill conduct in the instance you mention?"

"He ruined them. He ruined them, Mr. Carlyle. They were simple, unsuspicious country people, understanding neither fraud nor vice, nor the ways of an evil world. Francis Levison persuaded them to put their names to bills, 'as a simple matter of form, to accommodate him for a month or so,' as he stated, and as they believed. They were not rich: they lived in comfort upon their own small estate, but with no superfluous money to spare, and when the time came for them to pay—as come it did—it brought them ruin, and they had to leave their home. He deliberately did it: I am certain that Francis Levison deliberately did it, knowing what would be the end. And I could tell you of other things. Sir Peter may have informed you that I object to receive him here. I do. My objection is to the man, to his character; not owing, as I hear it has been said, to any jealous or paltry feeling touching his being the heir. I must lose my own self-respect before I admit Francis Levison to my house, an inmate. Sir Peter may assist him and welcome, may pay his debts and get him out of his scrapes as often as he pleases; but I will not have him here."

"Sir Peter said you declined to receive him. But it is necessary he should come to England—if his affairs are to be set straight—and also that he should see Sir Peter."

"Come to England?" interrupted Lady Levison. "How can he come to England under present circumstances? Unless, indeed, he comes *en cachette*."

"*En cachette*, of course," replied Mr. Carlyle. "There is no other way. I have offered to let him stay at East Lynne. He is, you may be aware, a connection of Lady Isabel's."

"Take care that he does not repay ***your*** hospitality with ingratitude," warmly returned Lady Levison. "It would only be in accordance with his usual practice."

Mr. Carlyle laughed. "I do not well see what harm he could do me, allowing that he had the inclination. He would not scare my clients from me; or beat my children; and I can take care of my purse. A few days, no doubt, will be the extent of his sojourn with us."

Lady Levison smiled too, and shook hands with Mr. Carlyle. "In your house perhaps there may be no field for his vagaries; but rely upon it, where there is one, he is sure to be at some mischief or other."

This visit of Mr. Carlyle's to Levison Park took place on a Friday morning, and on his return to his office he despatched an account of it to Captain Levison at Boulogne, telling him to come over. But Mr. Carlyle, like many another man whose brain has its share of work, was sometimes forgetful of trifles, and it quite slipped his memory to mention the expected arrival at home. The following evening, Saturday, he and Lady Isabel were dining in the neighbourhood, when the conversation at table turned upon the Ducies and their embarrassments. The association of ideas led Mr. Carlyle's thoughts to Boulogne, to Captain Levison and ***his*** embarrassments, and it immediately occurred to him that he had not told his wife of the anticipated visit. He kept it in mind, and spoke as soon as they were in the chariot returning home.

"Isabel," he began, "I suppose we have always rooms ready for visitors. Because I am expecting one."

"Oh yes. Or, if not, they are soon made ready."

"Ay, but to-morrow is Sunday, and I have no doubt that is the day he will take advantage of to come. I am sorry I forgot to mention it yesterday."

"Who is coming?"

"Captain Levison."

"Who?" repeated Lady Isabel in a sharp tone of consternation.

"Captain Levison. Sir Peter consents to see him, with a view to the settlement of his liabilities, but Lady Levison declines to receive him at the park. So I offered to give him house room at East Lynne for a few days."

There is an old saying about the heart leaping into the mouth; and Lady Isabel's heart leaped into hers. She grew dizzy at the words; her senses seemed for the moment to desert her: her first sensation was as if the dull earth had opened and shown her a way to paradise; her second was a lively consciousness that Francis Levison ought not to be suffered to come again into companionship with her. Mr. Carlyle continued to converse of the man's embarrassments, of his own interview with Sir Peter, of Lady Levison; but Isabel was as one who heard not. She was debating the question, how could she prevent his coming?

"Archibald," she presently said, "I do not wish Francis Levison to stay at East Lynne."

"It will only be for a few days; perhaps only a day or two. Sir Peter is in the humour to discharge his claims; and, the moment his resolve is known, the ex-captain may walk her Majesty's dominions, an unmolested man; free to go where he will."

"That may be," interrupted Lady Isabel, in an accent of impatience, "but why should he come to our house?"

"I proposed it myself. I had no idea you would dislike his coming. Why should you?"

"I don't like Francis Levison," she murmured. "That is, I don't care to have him at East Lynne."

"My dear, I fear there is no help for it now: he is most likely on his road, and will arrive to-morrow: I cannot turn him out again, after my own voluntary invitation. Had I known it would be disagreeable to you, I should not have proposed it."

"To-morrow!" she exclaimed, the only word that caught her ear. "Is he coming to-morrow?"

"As it is Sunday, a free day, he will be sure to take advantage of it. What has he done, that you should object to his coming? You did not say in Boulogne that you disliked him."

"He has done nothing," was her faltering answer, feeling that her grounds of opposition must melt under her, one by one.

"Lady Levison appears to possess a very bad opinion of him," resumed Mr. Carlyle. "She says she knew him in years gone by. She mentioned one or two things which, if true, were bad enough: but possibly she may be prejudiced."

"She is prejudiced," said Isabel. "At least, so Francis Levison told me in Boulogne. There appeared to be no love lost between them."

"At any rate, his ill doings or well doings cannot affect us for the short time he is likely to remain at East Lynne. You have taken a prejudice against him also, I suppose, Isabel?"

She suffered Mr. Carlyle to remain in the belief, and sat with clasped hands and a despairing spirit, feeling that Fate was against her. How could she accomplish her task of forgetting this man, if he was thus to be thrown into her home and her companionship? Suddenly she turned to her husband, and laid her cheek upon his shoulder.

He thought she was tired. He passed his arm round her waist, drew her face to a more comfortable position, and bent his own lovingly upon it. It came into her mind as she lay there, to tell him a portion of the truth, as it had done once before. It was a strong arm of shelter round her; a strong pillar of protection, he upon whom she leaned; why did she not confide herself to him as trustingly as a little child? Simply because her courage failed. Once, twice, the opening words were upon her lips, but come forth they did not; and then the carriage stopped at East Lynne, and the opportunity was over. Oh, how many a time, in after years, did Lady Isabel recall that midnight drive with her husband, and wish, in her vain repentance, that she had opened his eyes to that dangerous man!

The following morning proved a wet one, but it cleared up in the middle of the day. In the afternoon, however, whilst they were at church, rain came on again.

"Cornelia," whispered Mr. Carlyle, approaching his sister when service was over, "it is raining heavily: you had better return with us in the pony carriage. John can walk."

Not she. Had it poured cats and dogs Miss Carlyle would not have gone to or from church otherwise than on her legs, and off she started with her large umbrella. Mr. Carlyle and Isabel soon passed her, striding along the footpath, some of the servants behind her. *Not* in attendance upon Miss Carlyle: she would have scorned such attendance more than she scorned the pony carriage. No matter what might be the weather, this adventurous lady would be seen pushing through it; through the summer's heat, and the winter's snow; through the soft shower and the impetuous storm; that great umbrella (it might have covered a moderate haystack) her almost constant companion, for Miss Corny was one of those prudent spirits who like to be prepared for contingencies and to be on the safe side; those who act up to the maxim, "When it's fine take an umbrella; when it rains, do as you like." In fine weather she chose the pathway through the fields, but not in wet weather, for the damp grass did not agree with her petticoats.

Mr. Carlyle had driven through the gates and was winding up the avenue, when sounds of distress were heard, and they saw little Isabel flying towards them from the slopes, crying and sobbing in the greatest agitation. Mr. Carlyle jumped out and met the child.

"Oh, papa, papa! oh come, pray come! I think she is dead."

He took the child in his arms to soothe her. "Hush, my little darling, you will alarm mamma. Don't tremble so. Tell me what it is."

Isabel told her tale. She had been a naughty child, she freely confessed, and had run out in the rain for fun because Joyce told her not. She had run into the wet grass of the park, down the slopes, Joyce after her. And Joyce had slipped and was lying at the foot of the slopes with a white face, never moving.

"Take care of her, Isabel," said Mr. Carlyle, placing the agitated and repentant child by his wife's side. "She says Joyce has fallen by the slopes. No, do not come: I will go first and see what has happened."

Joyce was lying just as she fell, at the foot of the slopes. But her eyes were open now, and if she had fainted—as might be inferred from the little girl's words—she had recovered consciousness.

"Oh, sir, don't try to move me! I fear my leg is broken."

He did, however, essay gently to raise her, but she screamed with pain, and he found he must wait for assistance. "I trust you are not much hurt," he kindly said. "How did it happen?"

"Miss Isabel ran out, sir, in all the rain and wet, and I went after her to bring her back again. But the slopes are slippery, and down I went, and just at first I remembered nothing more."

Mr. Carlyle despatched John and the pony carriage back for Mr. Wainwright, and with the aid of the servants, who were soon up from church, Joyce was carried in, and laid on a bed, dressed as she was. Mr. Carlyle and Lady Isabel remained with her. Miss Carlyle also was there, fidgeting and banging about, getting things ready that she fancied might be wanted, and pressing cordials upon Joyce which the latter could not take. Miss Carlyle's frame of mind, between sympathy and anger, was rather an explosive one: altogether, she did more harm than good. Little Isabel stole in and drew her mother away from the bed.

"Mamma," she whispered, "there is a strange gentleman downstairs. He came in a chaise. He has a portmanteau, and he is asking for you and papa."

Lady Isabel turned sick with apprehension. Had he really come?

"Who is it, Isabel?" she said, by way of making some answer: she guessed only too well.

"I don't know. I don't like him, mamma. He took hold of me and held me, and there was an ugly look in his eyes."

"Go round the bed and tell your papa that a stranger is downstairs," said Lady Isabel.

"Mamma," shivered the child, before she stirred to obey, "will Joyce die?"

"No, dear; I hope not."

"Because you know it will be my fault. Oh, mamma, I am so sorry! what can I do?"

"Hush! If you sob, it will make Joyce worse. Go and whisper to papa about the gentleman."

"But will Joyce ever forgive me?"

"She has forgiven you already, I am sure, Isabel; but you must be all the more obedient to her for the future. Go to papa, my dear, as I tell you."

The stranger was of course Captain Levison. Mr. Carlyle went down to receive and entertain him. Lady Isabel did not, the accident to her maid being put forth as an excuse.

Mr. Wainwright pronounced the injury to be a simple fracture of the ankle-bone. It might have been much worse, he observed, but Joyce would be confined to her bed for three or four weeks.

"Joyce," whispered Isabel, "I'll come and read my Bible-stories to you always; always and always; I know mamma will let me, and then you won't be dull. And there's that beautiful new book of fairy-tales with the pictures; you'll like to hear them; there's about a princess who was locked up in a castle with nothing to eat."

Joyce faintly smiled, and took the child's eager little hand in hers.

Later in the evening, Isabel and William were in the room with Mr. Carlyle. "These are fine children," observed Francis Levison. "Beautiful faces!"

"They resemble their mother much, I think," was the reply of Mr. Carlyle. "She was a very lovely child."

"Did you know Lady Isabel as a child?" inquired Francis Levison, some surprise in his tone.

"I frequently saw her. She used to stay here with Lady Mount Severn."

"Ah, by the way, this place was Mount Severn's property then. What a reckless man he was! Young lady, I must take possession of you," continued Captain Levison, extending his hand and drawing Isabel towards him. "You ran away from me when I first came, and would not tell me what your name was."

"I ran away to tell mamma that you were here. She was with Joyce."

"Joyce! Who is Joyce?"

"Lady Isabel's maid," interposed Mr. Carlyle. "The one to whom, as I told you, the accident had just happened. A particularly valued servant in our family, is Joyce."

"It is a curious name," remarked Captain Levison. "Joyce—Joyce! I never heard such a name. Is it a Christian or surname?"

"She was baptized Joyce. It is not so very uncommon. Her name is Joyce Hallijohn. She has been with us several years."

At this moment Isabel, having been trying in vain to escape from Captain Levison, burst into tears. Mr. Carlyle inquired what was amiss.

"I don't like him to hold me," was the response of Miss Isabel, ignoring ceremony.

Captain Levison laughed and held her tighter. But Mr. Carlyle rose, and with quiet authority drew away the child, and placed her on his own knee. She hid her face upon him, and put up her little hand round his neck.

"Papa, I don't like him," she whispered softly; "I am afraid of him. Don't let him take me again."

Mr. Carlyle's only answer was to press her to him. "You are not accustomed to children, Captain Levison," he observed. "They are curious little plants to deal with, capricious and sensitive."

"They must be a great worry," was the rejoinder. "This accident to your servant must be a serious one. It will confine her to her bed for some time, I presume?"

"For weeks, the doctor says. And no possibility of her getting up from it."

Captain Levison rose, caught hold of William in apparent glee, and swung him round. Unlike his sister, the boy laughed, and seemed to enjoy the fun.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. HARE'S DREAM.

THE next day rose bright, warm, and cloudless, and the morning sun streamed into the bedroom of Mrs. Hare. That lady lay in bed, a flush on her delicate cheeks, and her soft eyes rather glistening, as if with a touch of fever. The justice, in a cotton nightcap with a tassel, sat on a chair tying his drawers at the knee, preparatory to inducting his legs into his pantaloons—if any single damsel in years, who may read this, will forgive this slight revelation as to the mysteries of a gentleman's toilette. The pantaloons assumed, and the braces fastened, the justice threw his nightcap on to the bed and went up to the wash-stand, where he splashed away for a few minutes at his face and hands: he never shaved until after breakfast. Mr. and Mrs. Hare were of the old-fashioned class who knew nothing about dressing-rooms; their bedroom was very large, and they had never used a dressing-room in their lives, or found the need of one. The justice rubbed his face to brilliancy, settled into his morning wig and his dressing-gown, and then turned to the bed.

"What will you have for breakfast?"

"Thank you, Richard, I do not think that I can eat anything. I shall be glad of my tea; I am very thirsty."

"All nonsense," responded the justice, alluding to the intimation of not eating. "Have a poached egg."

Mrs. Hare smiled at him and gently shook her head. "You are very kind, Richard, but I could not take it this morning. Barbara may send up the smallest bit of dry toast."

"My belief is, that you just *give way* to this notion of feeling ill, Anne," cried the justice. "It's half fancy, I know. If you'd get up and shake it off, and come down, you would enjoy your breakfast and be set up for the day. Whereas you lie here, taking nothing but trashy tea, and get up afterwards weak, shaky, and fit for nothing."

"It is ever so many weeks, Richard, since I lay in bed to breakfast," remonstrated poor Mrs. Hare. "I really don't think I have done so once, since—since the spring."

"And have been all the better for it."

"But indeed I am not equal to getting up this morning. Would you please throw this window open before you go down. I should like to feel the air."

"You will get the air too near from this window," replied Mr. Justice Hare, opening the further one. Had his wife requested the further one to be opened, he would have opened the other; his own will and opinions were ever paramount. Then he descended.

A minute or two, and up ran Barbara, looking bright and fair as the morning, her pink muslin dress with its ribbons and its open white lace sleeves as pretty as she was. She leaned over to kiss her mother.

Barbara had grown more gentle and tender of late years. The bitterness of her pain had passed away, leaving all that had been good in her love to mellow and fertilize her nature. Her character had been greatly improved by sorrow.

"Mamma, are you ill? And you have been so well lately: you went to bed so well last night! Papa says——"

"Barbara, dear," interrupted Mrs. Hare, glancing round the room with dread, and speaking in a deep whisper: "I have had one of those dreadful dreams again."

"Oh, mamma, how *can* you!" exclaimed Barbara, starting up in vexation. "How can you suffer a foolish dream so to overcome you as to make you ill? You have good sense in other matters; but, in this, you seem to put all sense away from you."

"Child, will you tell me how I am to help it?" returned Mrs. Hare, taking Barbara's hand and drawing her to her again. "I do not give myself these dreams; I cannot prevent their making me sick, prostrate, feverish. I was as well yesterday as I could be; I went to bed quite comfortable; in excellent spirits; I do not know that I had even once thought of poor Richard during the day. And yet the dream came. There were no circumstances to lead to or induce it, either in my thoughts or in absolute facts; but, come it did. How can I help these things, I ask?"

"And it is so long since you had one of these disagreeable dreams! Why, how long is it, mamma?"

"So long, Barbara, that the dread of them had nearly left me. I scarcely think I have had one since that stolen visit of Richard's, years ago."

"Was it a very bad dream, mamma?"

"Oh, child, yes. I dreamt that the real murderer came to West Lynne: that he was with us here, and we——"

At this moment the bedroom door was flung open, and the face of the justice, especially stern and cross, was pushed in. So startled was Mrs. Hare, that she shook until she shook the pillow, and Barbara sprang away from the bed. Surely he had not distinguished their topic of conversation!

"Are you coming to make breakfast to-day, or not, Barbara? Do you expect me to make it?"

"She is coming this instant, Richard," said Mrs. Hare, her voice more faint than usual. And the justice turned and stamped down again.

"Barbara, could your papa have heard me mention Richard?"

"No, no, mamma, impossible; the door was shut. I will bring up your breakfast myself, and then you can tell me about the dream."

Barbara flew after Mr. Hare, poured out his coffee, saw him settled at his breakfast, with a plateful of grouse-pie before him, and then returned with her mother's tea and dry toast.

"Go on with the dream, mamma," she said.

"But your own breakfast will be cold, child."

"Oh, I don't mind that. Did you dream of Richard?"

"Not very much of Richard; except that the old and continuous trouble, of his being away and unable to return, seemed to follow it all through. You remember, Barbara, Richard asserted to us, in that short, hidden night visit, that he did not commit the murder; that it was another who did so?"

"Yes, I remember," replied Barbara.

"Barbara, I am convinced he spoke truth: I trust him implicitly."

"I feel sure of it also, mamma."

"I asked him, you may remember, whether it was Otway Bethel who committed it; for I have always doubted Bethel in a vague indefinite manner: Richard replied that it was not Bethel, but a stranger. Well, Barbara, in my dream I thought that stranger came to West Lynne; that he came to this house, here, and we were talking to him of it, conversing as we might with any other visitor. Mind you, we seemed to *know* that he was the one who actually did it; but he denied it; he wanted to put it upon Richard: and I saw him—yes, I did, Barbara—whisper to Otway Bethel. But oh, I cannot tell you the sickening horror that was upon me throughout, and seemed to be upon you also, lest he should make good his own apparent innocence, and crush Richard, his victim. I think the dread and horror awoke me."

"What was this stranger like?" asked Barbara, in a low tone.

"Well, I cannot quite tell you: the recollection of his appearance seemed to pass away from me with the dream. He was dressed as a gentleman, and we conversed with him as an equal."

Barbara's mind was full of Captain Thorn; but his name had not been mentioned to Mrs. Hare, neither would she mention it now. She fell into deep thought, and Mrs. Hare had to speak twice before she could be aroused.

"Barbara, I say, don't you think that this dream, coming uncalled-for, uninduced, must forbode some ill? Rely upon it, something connected with that wretched murder is going to be stirred up again."

"You know, mamma, I do not believe in dreams," was Barbara's answer. "I think when people say, 'This dream is a sign of such and such a thing,' it is the greatest absurdity in the world. I wish you could remember what the man was like in your dream."

"I wish I could," answered Mrs. Hare, breaking off a particle of her dry toast. "All I remember is, that he appeared to be a gentleman."

"Was he tall? Had he black hair?"

Mrs. Hare shook her head. "I tell you, my dear, the remembrance has passed from me; so whether his hair was dark or light, I cannot say. I think he was tall: but he was sitting down, and Otway Bethel stood behind his chair. I seemed to feel that Richard was outside the door, in hiding, trembling lest the man should go out and see him there; and I trembled too. Oh, Barbara, it was a distressing dream!"

"I wish you could avoid having them, mamma, for they seem to upset you very much."

"Why did you ask whether the man was tall, and had black hair?"

Barbara returned an evasive answer. It would not do to tell Mrs.

Hare that her suspicions pointed to one particular quarter: it would have agitated her too greatly.

"So vivid was the dream, so like reality, that even when I awoke I could not for some minutes believe that the murderer was not actually at West Lynne," resumed Mrs. Hare. "The impression that he is here, or is coming here, is upon me still; a sort of undercurrent of impression, you understand, Barbara: of course my own good sense tells me that there is no real foundation for supposing this to be the case. Oh, Barbara, Barbara!" she added, in a tone of wailing, as her head drooped forward, in its pain, until it ested on her daughter's arm, "when will this unhappy state of things end? One year glides away and another comes; year after year, year after year the years drag on, and Richard remains an exile!"

Barbara spoke not: what sympathy or comfort could she offer in words? the case admitted of none: but she pressed her lips upon her mother's pale iorehead.

"Child, I am growing sick, sick to hear of Richard. My heart aches for the sight of him," went on the poor lady. "Seven years next spring, since he stole here to see us. Seven years, and not a look at his beloved face, not a word of news from him to say that he is yet in life! Was any mother ever tried as I am tried?"

"Dear mamma, don't! You will make yourself ill."

"I am ill already, Barbara."

"Yes; but this grief and emotion will make you worse. People say that the seventh year always brings a change: it may bring one as regards Richard. It may bring him clearance, mamma, for all we know. Do not despair."

"Child! I do not despair. Despondency I cannot help at times feeling, but it has not reached despair. I believe, I truly believe that God will some time bring the right to light; how can I despair, then, while I trust in Him?"

There was a pause, which Barbara broke. "Shall I bring you up some more tea, mamma?"

"No, my dear. *Send* me some up, for I am still thirsty; but you must remain below and take your own breakfast. What may your papa not be suspecting, if you do not? Guard your very countenance. I always dread lest, if we appear sad, he should suppose we are thinking of Richard."

"And what if he did, mamma? Surely thoughts are free."

"Hush, Barbara! hush!" repeated Mrs. Hare, in a whispered tone of warning. "You know the oath he has taken to bring Richard to justice; you know how determined he is; and you know that he fully believes Richard to be guilty. If he found we dwelt upon his innocence, he might be capable of scouring the whole land from one end of it to the other in search of him, to deliver him up to trial. Your papa is so very——"

"Pig-headed," put in Barbara, saucily, though it was not precisely a young lady's word, and her cherry lips pouted after uttering it.

"Barbara!" remonstrated Mrs. Hare. "I was going to say so very just."

"Then I say he would be cruel and unnatural, rather than just, if he were to search the country that he might deliver up his own son to death," returned Barbara, boldly, but with wet eyelashes. Very carefully did she dry them, before entering the breakfast-room.

The dinner-hour of the Hares, when they were alone, was four o'clock, and it arrived that day as usual, and they sat down to table. Mrs. Hare was better then; the sunshine and the business of stirring life had in some measure effaced the visions of the night, and restored her to her wonted frame of mind. The justice mentioned the accident to Joyce: they had not heard of it; but they had not been out during the day, and had received no visitors. Mrs. Hare was full of concern: Joyce was a universal favourite.

The cloth was removed, and the justice sat only a little while over his port wine, for he was engaged to smoke an after-dinner pipe with a brother magistrate, Mr. Justice Herbert.

"Shall you be home to tea, papa?" inquired Barbara.

"Is it any business of yours, young lady?"

"Oh, not in the least," answered Miss Barbara. "Only, if you had been coming home to tea, I suppose we must have waited for you."

"I thought you said, Richard, that you were going to spend the evening with Mr. Herbert," observed Mrs. Hare.

"So I am," responded the justice. "But Barbara has a great liking for the sound of her own tongue."

The justice departed, striding pompously down the gravel-walk. Barbara waltzed round the large room to a merry song, as if she felt his absence a relief. Perhaps she did so. "You can have tea now, mamma, at any time you please, without waiting until seven," said she.

"Yes, dear. Barbara."

"What, mamma?"

"I am sorry to hear of this calamity which has fallen upon Joyce. I should like to walk to East Lynne this evening and inquire after her; and see her, if I may. It would be only neighbourly."

Barbara's heart beat more quickly. Hers was indeed a true and lasting love, one that defied time and change. Having to bury it wholly within her, had perhaps only added to its force and depth. Who could suspect, under Barbara's sometimes cold, sometimes playful exterior, that *one* was hidden in her heart, filling up its every crevice? one who had no right there. The intimation that she might soon possibly be in his presence, sent every pulse throbbing.

"Walk, did you say, mamma? Should you do right to walk?"

"I feel quite equal to it. Since I have accustomed myself to take more exercise I feel better for it, and we have not been out to-day. Poor Joyce! What time shall we go, Barbara?"

"If we were to get up there by—by seven, I should think they will have dined."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Hare with alacrity, who was always pleased when some one else decided for her. "But I should like some tea before we start, Barbara."

Barbara took care that her mamma should have some tea, and then they proceeded towards East Lynne. It was a lovely evening. The air was warm, and the humming gnats sported in it, as if anxious to make the most of the waning summer. Mrs. Hare enjoyed it at first, but ere she reached East Lynne she became aware that the walk was too much for her. She did not usually venture upon so long a one; and probably the fever and agitation of the morning had somewhat impaired her day's strength. She placed her hand upon the iron gate as they were turning into the park, and stood still.

"I did wrong to come, Barbara."

"Lean on me, mamma. When you reach those benches, you can rest before proceeding to the house. It is very warm, and that may have fatigued you."

They gained the benches, which were placed under some of the dark trees, in view of the gates and the road, but not of the house, and Mrs. Hare sat down. Another minute, and they were surrounded. Mr. Carlyle, his wife and sister, who were taking an after-dinner stroll amidst the flowers with their guest, Francis Levison, discerned them and came up. The children, except the youngest, were of the party. Lady Isabel warmly welcomed Mrs. Hare: she had become quite attached to the delicate and suffering woman.

"I am a pretty one, am I not, Archibald, to come inquiring after an invalid, when I am so much of an invalid myself that I have to stop half way!" exclaimed Mrs. Hare, as Mr. Carlyle took her hand. "I am greatly concerned to hear of poor Joyce."

"You must stay the evening now you are here," cried Lady Isabel. "It will afford you a rest, and tea will refresh you."

"Oh, thank you, but we have taken tea," said Mrs. Hare.

"That is no reason why you should not take some more," she laughed. "Indeed, you seem too fatigued to be anything but a prisoner with us for this next hour or two."

"I fear I am," answered Mrs. Hare.

"Who are they?" Captain Levison was muttering to himself, as he contemplated the guests from a distance. "A deuced lovely girl, whoever she may be. I think I'll approach; they don't look formidable."

He did approach, and the introduction was made. "Captain Levison, Mrs. Hare, and Miss Hare." A few formal words, and Captain Levison disappeared again, challenging little William Carlyle to a foot-race.

"How very ill your mamma looks!" Mr. Carlyle exclaimed to Barbara, when they were beyond the hearing of Mrs. Hare, who was busy talking with Lady Isabel and Miss Carlyle. "She has appeared so much stronger lately; altogether better."

"The walk here has fatigued her; I feared it would be too long; so that she looks unusually pale," replied Barbara. "But what do you think has upset her again, Mr. Carlyle?"

He turned his inquiring eyes on Barbara.

"Papa came downstairs this morning saying mamma was ill with one of her old attacks of fever and restlessness. As papa spoke, I thought to myself, could mamma have been dreaming some foolish dream again—for you remember how ill she used to be after them. I ran up, and the first thing mamma said to me was, that she had had one of those dreadful dreams."

"I fancied she must have outlived her fear of them; that her own good sense had come to her aid long ago, showing her how futile dreams are, even if hers do occasionally touch upon that—that unhappy mystery."

"You may just as well reason with a post as reason with mamma, when she is suffering from the influence of one of those dreams," returned Barbara. "I tried it this morning; I asked her to call up—as you observe—good sense to her aid. All her answer was, 'How could she help her feelings? She did not induce the dream by thinking of Richard, or in any other way, and yet it came and shattered her.' Of course, so far, mamma is right, for she cannot help the dreams coming."

Mr. Carlyle made no immediate reply. He picked up a ball belonging to one of the children, which lay in his path, and began tossing it gently in his hand. "It is a singular thing," he observed, presently, "that we do not hear from Richard."

"Oh, very; very. And I know mamma distresses herself about it. A few words, which she let fall this morning, betrayed it plainly. I am no believer in dreams," continued Barbara, "but I cannot deny that these, which take such hold upon mamma, bear upon the case in a curious maner. The one she had last night especially."

"What was it?" asked Mr. Carlyle.

"She dreamt that the real murderer was at West Lynne. She thought he was at our house—as a visitor, she said, or as one making a morning call—and that she and I were conversing with him about the murder. He wanted to deny it; to put it upon Richard; and he turned and whispered to Otway Bethel, who stood behind his chair. That is another strange thing," added Barbara, lifting her blue eyes in their deep earnestness to the face of Mr. Carlyle.

"What is strange? You speak in riddles, Barbara."

"I mean, that Otway Bethel should invariably appear in her dreams. Until that stolen visit of Richards we had no idea that Bethel was near the spot at the time, and yet **he** had always made a prominent feature in these dreams. Richard assured mamma that Bethel had nothing to do with the murder, could have had nothing to do with it; but I do not think he shook mamma's belief that he *had;* that he was in some way connected with the mystery, though not, perhaps, the actual perpetrator. Well, Archibald, mamma has not dreamt of it, as she believes, since that visit of Richard's until last night; when again there was Bethel prominently in the dream. It certainly is singular."

Barbara, in the heat of her subject, in forgetfulness of the past, had called him by the old familiar name, "Archibald:" it was only when she was on the stilts of propriety and coldness that she said "Mr. Carlyle."

"And who was the murderer—in your mamma's dream?" continued Mr. Carlyle, speaking as gravely as though he were upon a subject that men ridicule not.

"She cannot remember; except that he seemed a gentleman, and that we held intercourse with him as one. Now, that again is remarkable. We never told her, you know, our suspicions of Captain Thorn: Richard said 'another' had done it, but he did not give mamma the faintest indication of who that other might be, or what sphere of life he moved in. It seems to me that it would be more natural for mamma to have taken up the idea that he was an obscure man; we do not generally associate the notion of gentlemen with murderers: and yet, in her dream, she saw that he was a gentleman."

"I think you must be becoming a convert to the theory of dreams yourself, Barbara; you are so very earnest," smiled Mr. Carlyle.

"No, not to dreams; but I am earnest for my dear brother Richard's sake. Were it in *my* power to do anything to elucidate the mystery, I would spare no pains, no toil; I would walk barefooted to the end of the earth to bring the truth to light. If ever that Thorn should come to West Lynne again, I will hope, and pray, and strive, to be able to bring it home to him."

"That Thorn does not appear in a hurry, again to favour West Lynne with his——"

Mr. Carlyle paused, for Barbara had hurriedly laid her hand upon his arm with a warning gesture. In talking, they had wandered across the park to its ornamental grounds, and were now in a quiet path, overshadowed on either side by a chain of imitation rocks. Seated astride on the summit of these rocks, right above where Mr. Carlyle and Barbara were standing, was Francis Levison. His face was turned from them, and he appeared intent upon a child's whip, winding leather round its handle. Whether he heard their footsteps or not, he did not turn. They quickened their pace, and left the walk, bending their steps backwards towards the group of ladies.

"Could he have heard what we were saying?" ejaculated Barbara, below her breath.

Mr. Carlyle looked down on the concerned, flushed cheeks with a smile. Barbara was evidently disturbed. But for a certain episode in their lives, some years ago, he might have soothed her.

"I think he must have heard a little, Barbara: unless his own wits were wool-gathering: he might not have been attending. What if he did hear? it is of no consequence."

"I was speaking, you know, of Captain Thorn—of his being the murderer."

"You were not speaking of Richard or his movements, so never mind. Levison is a stranger to the whole; it is nothing to him: if he heard the name of Thorn mentioned, or could even have distinguished the subject, it would bear for him no interest; would, as the saying runs, go in at one ear and out at the other. Be at rest, Barbara."

He really did look somewhat tenderly upon her as he spoke—and they were near enough to Lady Isabel for her to note the glance. She need not have been jealous: it bore no treachery to her. But she did note it: she had noted also their wandering away together, and she jumped to the conclusion that it was premeditated—that they had gone beyond her sight to enjoy each other's society for a few stolen moments. Wonderfully attractive looked Barbara that evening for Mr. Carlyle or any one else to steal away with. Her elegant, airy summer attire, her bright blue eyes, her charming features, and her lovely complexion. She had untied the strings of her pretty white bonnet, and was restlessly playing with them, more in thought than nervousness.

"Barbara, love, how are we to get home?" asked Mrs. Hare. "I fear I shall never be able to walk. I wish I had told Benjamin to bring the phaeton."

"I can send to him," said Mr. Carlyle.

"But it is too bad of me, Archibald, to take you and Lady Isabel by storm in this unceremonious manner, and to give your servants trouble besides."

"A great deal too bad, I think," returned Mr. Carlyle, with mock gravity. "As to the servants, the one who has to go will never recover from the trouble, depend upon it. You always were more concerned for others than for yourself, dear Mrs. Hare."

"And you were always kind, Archibald, clearing away difficulties for all, and making a trouble of nothing. Ah, Lady Isabel, were I a young woman, I should envy you your good husband: there are not many like him."

Possibly the sentence reminded Lady Isabel that another, who was young, might be envying her. Isabel's cheeks flushed crimson. Mr. Carlyle held out his strong arm to Mrs. Hare.

"If sufficiently rested, I fancy you would be more comfortable on a sofa indoors. Allow me to support you thither."

"And you can take my arm on the other side," cried Miss Carlyle, placing her tall form by Mrs. Hare. "Between us both we will pull you bravely along: your feet need scarcely touch the ground."

Mrs. Hare laughed, but said she thought Mr Carlyle's arm would be sufficient. She took it, and they were turning towards the house, when her eye caught the form of a gentleman passing along the road by the park gates.

"Barbara, run!" she hurriedly exclaimed. "There's Tom Herbert going towards our house: he will call in and tell them to send the phaeton, if you ask him, which will save trouble to Mr. Carlyle's servants. Haste, child; you will be up with him in half a minute."

Barbara, thus urged, set off, on the spur of the moment, towards the gates, before the rest of the party well knew what was being done. It was too late for Mr. Carlyle to stop her and repeat that a servant should go, for Barbara was already up with Mr. Tom Herbert. The latter had seen her running towards him, and waited at the gate.

"Are you going past our house?" inquired Barbara, perceiving then that Otway Bethel also stood there, but just beyond view of the avenue.

"Yes. Why?" replied Tom Herbert, who was not famed for politeness, being blunt by nature and "fast" by habit.

"Mamma would be so much obliged to you if you would call in and leave word that Benjamin is to bring up the phaeton. Mamma walked here, intending to walk home, but she finds herself so fatigued as to be unequal to it."

"All right: I'll call and send him. What time?"

Nothing had been said to Barbara about the time, so that she was at liberty to name her own. "Ten o'clock. We shall be home then before papa."

"That you will," responded Tom Herbert. "He and the governor and two or three more old codgers are blowing clouds till you can't see across the room: and they are sure to be at it again after supper. I say, Miss Barbara, are you good for a few picnics!"

"Good for a great many," returned Barbara.

"Our girls want to get up some in the next week or two. Jack is at home, you know."

"Is he?" said Barbara, in surprise.

"We had the letter yesterday, and he arrived to-day, a brother-officer with him. Jack vows if the girls don't cater well for them in the way of amusement, he'll never honour them by spending his leave at home again: so mind you keep yourself in readiness for any fun that may turn up. Good evening."

"Good evening, Miss Hare," added Otway Bethel. As Barbara was returning their salutation, she became conscious of other footsteps, advancing from the same direction that they had come, and moved her head hastily round. Two gentlemen, walking arm-in-arm, were close upon her, in one of whom she recognized "Jack," otherwise Major Herbert. He stopped and held out his hand.

"It is some years since we met, but I have not forgotten the pretty face of Miss Barbara," he cried. "A young girl's face it was then, but it is a stately young lady's now."

Barbara laughed. "Your brother told me you had arrived at West Lynne; but I did not know you were so close to me. He has been asking me if I am ready for some pic——"

Barbara's voice faltered, and the rushing crimson of emotion dyed her face. Whose face was *that*, who was he, standing opposite to her, side by side with John Herbert? She had seen the face but once, yet it had implanted itself upon her memory in characters of fire. Major Herbert continued to talk, but Barbara for once lost her self-possession. She could not listen; she could not answer; she could only stare at that face as if fascinated to the gaze, looking herself something like a simpleton, her shy blue eyes anxious and restless, and her lips turning to an ashy whiteness. A strange feeling of wonder, of superstition, was creeping over Barbara. Was that man before her in sober reality?—or was it but a phantom, called up in her mind by the associations arising from her mother's dream; or by the conversation held not many moments ago with Mr. Carlyle?

Major Herbert may have thought that Barbara, who was not attending to him, but to his companion, wished for an introduction, and he accordingly made it. "*Captain Thorn;* Miss Hare."

Then Barbara roused herself; her senses were partially coming back to her, and she became alive to the fact that they must deem her behaviour unorthodox for a young lady.

"I—I—looked at Captain Thorn, for I thought I remembered his face," she stammered.

"I was in West Lynne for a day or two some five years ago," he observed.

"Ah—yes," returned Barbara. "Are you going to make a long stay now?"

"We have several weeks' leave of absence. Whether we shall remain here the whole time I cannot say."

Barbara parted from them. Thought upon thought crowded upon her brain as she flew back to East Lynne. She ran up the steps to the hall, gliding towards a group which stood near its further end—her mother, Miss Carlyle, Mr. Carlyle, and little Isabel; Lady Isabel she did not see. Mrs. Hare was then going up to see Joyce. In the agitation of the moment she stealthily touched Mr. Carlyle, and he stepped away from the rest to speak to her. She drew back towards the door of one of the reception rooms, and motioning him to approach.

"Oh, Archibald, I must speak to you alone. Could you not come out again for a little while?"

He nodded, and walked out openly by her side. Why should he not do so? What had he to conceal? But, unfortunately, Lady Isabel, who had only gone into that same room for a minute and was coming out again to join Miss Hare, both saw Barbara's touch upon her husband's arm, marked her agitation, and heard her words. She went to one of the hall windows and watched them saunter towards the more retired parts of the grounds: she saw her husband send back Isabel. Never, since her marriage, had Lady Isabel's jealousy been excited as it was excited that evening.

"I—I feel—I scarcely know whether I am awake or dreaming," began Barbara, putting up her hand to her brow, and speaking in a dreamy tone. "Pardon me for bringing you out in this unceremonious manner."

"What state secrets have you to disclose?" asked Mr. Carlyle, in a jesting manner.

"We were speaking of mamma's dream. She said the impression it left upon her mind—that the murderer was at West Lynne—was so vivid that, in spite of common sense, she could not persuade herself to the contrary. Well—just now——"

"Barbara, what *can* be the matter?" said Mr. Carlyle, perceiving that her agitation was so great as to impede her words.

"*I have just seen him*," she rejoined.

"Seen him?" echoed Mr. Carlyle, looking at her fixedly, a doubt crossing his mind whether Barbara's mind might be as wandering as her manner.

"What were almost my last words to you? That if ever that Thorn did come to West Lynne again, I would leave no stone unturned to bring it home to him. He is here, Archibald. When I went to the gates to speak to Tom Herbert, his brother Major Herbert was also there, and with him Captain Thorn; Bethel also. Do you wonder, I say, that I know not whether I am awake or dreaming? They have some weeks' holiday, and are here to spend it."

"It is a singular coincidence," exclaimed Mr. Carlyle.

"Had anything been wanting to convince me that Thorn is the guilty man, this would have done it," went on Barbara in her excitement. "Mamma's dream, with the steadfast impression it left upon her that Hallijohn's murderer was now at West Lynne——"

In turning the sharp corner of the covered walk, they came into contact with Captain Levison, who appeared to be either standing or sauntering there, his hands under his coat-tails. Again Barbara felt vexed, wondering how much he had heard, and beginning in her heart to dislike the man. He accosted them familiarly, and appeared as if he would have turned with them but none could put down presumption more effectually than Mr. Carlyle, calm and gentlemanly though he always was.

"I will join you presently, Captain Levison," he said, with a wave of the hand. And he turned back with Barbara towards the open parts of the park.

"Do you like that Captain Levison?" she abruptly inquired, when they were beyond hearing.

"I cannot say that I do," was Mr. Carlyle's reply. "He is one who does not improve upon acquaintance."

"To me, it looks as though he had placed himself in our way to hear what we were saying."

"No, no, Barbara. What interest could it bear for him?"

Barbara did not contest the point: she turned to the one nearer at heart. "What must be our course with regard to Thorn?"

"It is more than I can tell you," replied Mr. Carlyle. "I cannot go up to the man and unceremoniously accuse him of being Hallijohn's murderer. In the first place, Barbara, we are not positively sure that he is the man spoken of by Richard."

"Oh, Archibald, how can you doubt? The extraordinary fact of his appearing here at this moment, coupled with mamma's dream, might assure us of it."

"Not quite," smiled Mr. Carlyle. "All we can do is to go cautiously to work, and endeavour to ascertain whether he is the same or not."

"And there is no one but you to do it!" wailed Barbara. "How vain and foolish are our boastings! I said I would not cease striving to bring it ome to him, did he come again to West Lynne; and now he is here, even as the words were in my mouth, and what can I do? Nothing."

They took their way to the house, for there was nothing further to discuss. Captain Levison had entered before them, and saw Lady Isabel standing at the hall window. Yes, she was standing and looking; brooding over her fancied wrongs.

"Who is that Miss Hare?" he demanded in a cynical tone. "They appear to have a pretty good understanding together: twice this evening I have met them in secret conversation."

"Did you speak to me, sir?" sharply and haughtily returned Lady Isabel.

"I did not mean to offend you: I spoke of Mr. Carlyle and Miss Hare," he replied in a gentle voice. He knew she had distinctly heard his first remark in spite of her question.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN THORN IN TROUBLE.

In talking over a bygone misfortune, we sometimes make the remark, or hear it made, "Circumstances worked against it." Such and such a thing might have turned out differently, we say, had the surrounding circumstances been more in favour, but they were in opposition: they were dead against it. Now, if ever attendant circumstances can be said to have borne a baneful influence upon any person in this world, they most assuredly did at the present time upon Lady Isabel Carlyle.

Coeval, you see, with the arrival of the ex-captain, Levison, at East Lynne, all the jealous feeling touching her husband and Barbara Hare, was renewed, and with greater force than ever. Barbara: painfully anxious that something should be brought to light by which her brother should be exonerated from the terrible charge under which he lay, fully believing that Frederick Thorn, Captain in her Majesty's service, was the man who had committed the crime, as asserted by Richard: was in a state of excitement bordering on frenzy. Too keenly she felt the truth of her own words, that she was powerless, and could, of herself, do nothing. When she rose in the morning, after a night passed in troubled reflection more than in sleep, her thoughts were, "Oh, that I could this day find out something certain!" She was often at the Herberts; frequently invited there, sometimes going uninvited. She and the Miss Herberts were intimate, and they pressed Barbara into all the impromptu fêtes got up for their brother now he was at home. There she of course saw Captain Thorn, and now and then she was enabled to pick up scraps of his past history. Eagerly were these scraps carried to Mr. Carlyle. Not to his office; Barbara would not appear there. It may be, that she feared, if seen haunting Mr. Carlyle's office, Captain Thorn might come to hear of it, and suspect the agitation that was afloat—for who could know better than he the guilt that was falsely attaching to Richard? Therefore she chose rather to go to East Lynne, or to waylay Mr. Carlyle as he passed to and from business. It was very little that she gathered to tell him. One evening she met him with the news that Thorn *had* been in former years at West Lynne, though she could not fix the date: another time she went boldly to East Lynne in eager anxiety, ostensibly to make a call on Lady Isabel—and a very restless one it was—contriving to make Mr. Carlyle understand that she wanted to see him alone. He went out with her when she departed, and accompanied her as far as the park gates, the two evidently absorbed in earnest converse: Lady Isabel's jealous eyes saw that. The communication Barbara had to make was, that Captain Thorn had let fall the avowal that he had once been "in trouble," though of its nature no indication was given. Another journey of hers took the scrap of news, that she had discovered he knew Swainson well. Part of all this, nay, perhaps the whole of it, Mr. Carlyle had found out for himself; nevertheless he always received Barbara with vivid interest. Richard Hare was related to Miss Carlyle, and if his innocence could be made clear in the sight of men, it would be little less gratifying to them than to the Hares. Of Richard's innocence, Mr. Carlyle now entertained little, if any, doubt, and he was becoming impressed with the guilt of Captain Thorn. The latter spoke mysteriously of a portion of his past life—when he could be brought to speak of it at all—and he bore evidently some secret that he did not care to allude to.

But now, look at the treachery of that man, Francis Levison! The few meetings that Lady Isabel witnessed between her husband and Barbara would have been quite enough to excite her anger and jealousy, and to trouble her peace; but, in addition, Francis Levison took care to tell her of those she did not see. It pleased him—he best knew his own motive—to watch the movements of Mr. Carlyle and Barbara. There was a hedged pathway through the fields on the opposite side of the road to the residence of Justice Hare, and as Mr. Carlyle walked down the road to business, in his unsuspiciousness (not one time in fifty did he choose to ride: he said the walk to and fro kept him in health), Captain Levison would be strolling down like a serpent behind the hedge, watching all his movements, watching his interviews with Barbara, if any took place, watching Mr. Carlyle turn into the Grove, as he sometimes did, and perhaps watching Barbara run out of the house to meet him. It was all retailed, with miserable exaggeration, to Lady Isabel, whose jealousy, as a natural sequence, grew feverish in its extent.

It is scarcely necessary to explain that of Lady Isabel's jealousy Barbara knew nothing: not a shadow of suspicion had ever penetrated to her mind that Lady Isabel was jealous of her. Had she been told that this was the fact she would have laughed in derision at her informant. Mr. Carlyle's happy wife, proudly secure in her position and in his affection, jealous of *her*; of her, to whom he never gave an admiring look or a loving word! It would have taken a great deal to make Barbara believe that.

How different were the facts in reality. These meetings of Mr. Carlyle's and Barbara's, instead of being episodes of love-making and tender speeches, were positively painful to Barbara, from the unhappy nature of the subject to be discussed. Far from feeling a reprehensible pleasure in seeking the meetings with Mr. Carlyle, Barbara shrank from them. But that she was urged by dire necessity, in the interests of Richard, she would wholly have avoided them. Poor Barbara, in spite of that explosion years ago, was a lady, possessed of a lady's ideas and feelings, and—remembering that explosion—it did not at all accord with her pride to be thrusting herself into what might be called secret meetings with Archibald Carlyle. But Barbara, in her love for her brother, repressed all thoughts of self, and went perseveringly forward for Richard's sake.

Mr. Carlyle was seated one morning in his private room at his office, when his head clerk, Mr. Dill, came in. "A gentleman is asking to see you, Mr. Archibald."

"I am too busy to see any one for this hour to come. You know that, Dill."

"So I told him, sir, and he says he will wait. It is that Captain Thorn who is staying here with John Herbert."

Mr. Carlyle raised his eyes, and they encountered those of the old man: a peculiar expression was in the face of both. Mr. Carlyle glanced down at the parchments he was perusing, as if calculating his time. Then he looked up again and spoke.

"I will see *him*, Dill. Send him in."

The business, leading to the visit, was very simple. Captain Frederick Thorn had got himself into some trouble and vexation about a "bill"—as too many other captains do on occasions, and he had come to crave advice of Mr. Carlyle.

Mr. Carlyle felt dubious as to giving it. This Captain Thorn was a pleasant, attractive man, who won much on acquaintance; one whom Mr. Carlyle would have been pleased, in a friendly point of view, and setting professional interests apart, to help out of his difficulties; but if he were the villain they suspected him to be, the man with crime upon his hand, then Mr. Carlyle would have ordered his office door held wide that he might slink out of it.

"Cannot you advise me as to what my course ought to be?" he inquired, detecting Mr. Carlyle's hesitation.

"I could advise you, certainly. But—you must excuse my plain speaking, Captain Thorn—I like to know who my clients are, before I take up their cause or accept them as clients."

"I am able to pay you," was Captain Thorn's reply. "I am not short of ready money; only this bill——"

Mr. Carlyle laughed out, after having bit his lip with annoyance.

"It was a natural inference of yours," he said, "but I assure you I was not thinking of your purse. My father held it right never to undertake business for a stranger: unless a man was good, and his cause good, he did not entertain it: and I have acted on the same principle. By these means, the position and character of our business is such as is rarely obtained by a solicitor. Now, in saying that you are a stranger to me, I am not casting any doubt upon you, Captain Thorn; I am merely upholding my ordinary practice."

"My family is well connected," was Captain Thorn's next venture.

"Excuse me; family has nothing to do with it. If the poorest day labourer, if a pauper out of the workhouse came to me for advice, he should be heartily welcome to it, provided he were an honest man in the face of day. Again I repeat, you must take no offence at what I say, for I cast no reflection on you: I only urge that you and your character are unknown to me."

Curious words from a lawyer to a client-aspirant, and Captain Thorn found them so. But Mr. Carlyle's tone was so courteous, his manner so affable, in fact, he was so thoroughly the gentleman, that it was impossible to feel hurt.

"Well—how can I convince you that I am respectable? I have served my country ever since I was sixteen, and my brother-officers have found no cause of complaint. My position as an officer and a gentleman would be generally deemed a sufficient guarantee. Inquire of John Herbert. The Herberts, too, are friends of yours, and they have not disdained to give me house-room amidst their family."

"True," returned Mr. Carlyle, feeling that he could not well object further; and also that all men should be considered innocent until proved guilty. "At any rate, I will advise you as to what must be done at present," he added, "though if the affair must go on, I do not promise that I can continue to act for you. I am very busy just now."

Captain Thorn explained his dilemma, and Mr. Carlyle told him what to do in it. "Were you not at West Lynne some ten years ago?" he suddenly inquired at the close of the conversation. "You denied it to me once at my house, but I concluded, from an observation you let fall, that you had been here."

"Yes, I was," replied Captain Thorn, in a confidential tone. "I don't mind owning it to you in confidence, but I do not wish it to get abroad. I was not at West Lynne, but in its neighbourhood. The fact is, when I was a careless young fellow, I was stopping a few miles from here, and got into a scrape, through a—a—in short, it was an affair of gallantry. I did not show out very well at the time, and I don't care that it should be known that I am in the county again."

Mr. Carlyle's pulses—for Richard Hare's sake—beat a shade quicker. The avowal "an affair of gallantry" was almost a confirmation of his suspicions.

"Yes," he pointedly said. "The girl was Afy Hallijohn."

"Afy—who?" repeated Captain Thorn, opening his eyes, and fixing them on Mr. Carlyle's.

"Afy Hallijohn."

Captain Thorn continued to look at Mr. Carlyle, an amused expression, rather than any other, predominant on his features. "You are mistaken," he observed. "Afy Hallijohn? I never heard the name before in my life."

"Did you never hear, or know, that a dreadful tragedy was enacted in this place about that period?" returned Mr. Carlyle, in a low, meaning tone. "That Afy Hallijohn's father——"

"Oh, stay, stay, stay," hastily interrupted Captain Thorn. "I am telling a story in saying I never heard the name. Afy Hallijohn? Why, that's the girl Tom Herbert was telling me about: who—what was it?—disappeared, after her father was murdered."

"Murdered in his own cottage; almost in Afy's presence; murdered by—by——" Mr. Carlyle recollected himself: he had spoken more impulsively than was his custom. "Hallijohn was my father's faithful clerk for many years," he more calmly concluded.

"And he who committed the murder, was young Hare, son of Justice Hare, and brother to that attractive girl, Barbara. Your speaking of this has brought what they told me to my recollection. The first evening I was at the Herberts', Justice, Hare and others were there, smoking—half a dozen pipes were going at once; I also saw Miss Barbara that evening at your park gates; and Tom told me of the murder. An awful calamity for the Hares. I suppose that is the reason the young lady is Miss Hare still. One, with her fortune and good looks, ought to have changed her name ere this"

"No, it is not the reason," resumed Mr. Carlyle.

"What is the reason, then?"

A faint flush tinged Mr. Carlyle's brow. "I know more than one who would be glad to have Barbara, in spite of the murder. Do not depreciate Miss Hare."

"Not I, indeed; I like the young lady too well," replied Captain Thorn. "The girl Afy has never been heard of since, has she?"

"Never," said Mr. Carlyle. "Did you know her well?" he deliberately added.

"I never knew her at all, if you mean Afy Hallijohn. Why should you think I did? I never heard of her till Tom Herbert amused me with the history."

Mr. Carlyle devoutly wished he could tell whether the man before him was speaking truth or falsehood. He continued:

"Afy's favours—I mean her smiles and her chatter—were pretty freely dispersed, for she was heedless and vain. Amidst others who had the credit for occasionally basking in her rays, was a gentleman of the name of Thorn. Was it not yourself?"

Captain Thorn stroked his moustache with an air that seemed to say he *could* boast of his share of such baskings; in short, as if he felt half inclined to do it. "Upon my word," he simpered, "you do me too much honour: I cannot confess to having been favoured by Miss Afy."

"Then she was not the—the damsel you speak of, who drove you—if I understood aright—from the locality?" resumed Mr. Carlyle, fixing his eyes upon him, so as to take in every tone of the answer, and shade of the countenance, as he gave it.

"I should think not, indeed. It was a married lady, more's the pity; young, pretty, vain, and heedless, as you represent this Afy. Things went smoother after a time, and she and her husband—a stupid country yeoman—became reconciled. But I have been ashamed of the affair ever since; doubly ashamed of it since I have grown wiser, and I do not care ever to be recognized as the actor in it, or to have it raked up against me."

Captain Thorn rose, and took a somewhat hasty leave. Was he, or was he not the man? Mr. Carlyle could not solve the doubt.

Mr. Dill came in as he disappeared, closed the door and advanced to his master, speaking in an undertone.

"Mr. Archibald, has it struck you that the gentleman just gone out may be the Lieutenant Thorn you once spoke to me about?—he who had used to gallop over from Swainson to court Afy Hallijohn"

"It has struck me so most forcibly," replied Mr. Carlyle. "Dill, I would give five hundred pounds out of my pocket this moment, to be assured of the fact—if he is the same."

"I have seen him several times since he has been staying with the Herberts," pursued the old gentleman, "and my doubts have naturally been excited, as to whether it could be the man in question. Curiously enough, Bezant, the doctor, was over here yesterday from Swainson; and, as I was walking with him arm-in-arm, we met Captain Thorn. The two recognized each other and bowed, but merely as distant acquaintances. 'Do you know that gentleman?' said I to Bezant. 'Yes,' he answered, 'it is Mr. Frederick.' 'Mr. Frederick with something added to it,' said I. 'his name is Thorn.' 'I know that,' returned Bezant, "but when he was in Swainson some years ago, he chose to drop the Thorn, and the town in general knew him only as Mr. Frederick.' 'What was he doing there, Bezant?' I asked. 'Amusing himself and getting into mischief,' was the answer: 'nothing very bad; only the random scrapes of young men.' 'Was he often on horseback, riding to a distance?' was my next question. 'Yes, that he was,' replied Bezant; 'none more fond of galloping across country than he: I used to tell him he'd ride his horse's tail off.' Now, Mr. Archibald, what do you think?" concluded the old clerk : " and so far as I could make out, this was about the very time of the tragedy at Hallijohn's."

"Think?" replied Mr. Carlyle, "what can I think but that it is the same man? I am convinced of it now."

And, leaning back in his chair, he fell into a deep reverie, regardless of the parchments that lay before him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET SCRAP OF PAPER.

THE weeks went on; two or three of them : and things seemed to be progressing backwards rather than forwards—if that is not an Irishism. Francis Levison's affairs—that is, the adjustment of them—did not advance : creditors were obstinate. He had been three times over to Levison Park, securely boxed up in Mr. Carlyle's close carriage from prying eyes; but Sir Peter seemed to be turning as obdurate as the creditors. Captain Levison had deceived him, he found out : inasmuch as certain sums of money, handed over by Sir Peter some time back to settle certain claims, had been by the gentleman appropriated to his own purposes. Sir Peter did not appear inclined to forgive the deceit, and vowed he would do nothing further for the present. There was nothing for him but to return to the Continent, Captain Levison observed. And the best place for him; plenty of scamps congregated there, was the retort of Sir Peter. He apparently meant what he said, for when Francis Levison rose to leave, Sir Peter took out of his pocket-book notes to the value of £100, told him that would pay the expense he had been put to in coming, and that his allowance would be continued as usual.

"How did you get on to-day with Sir Peter?" inquired Mr. Carlyle, that evening at dinner, when his guest was back at East Lynne.

"Middling," replied Francis Levison. "I did not do much with him. These old stagers like to take their own time over things."

An answer false as he was. It did not suit his plans to quit East Lynne yet; and, had he told the truth, he would have had no plea for remaining.

Another thing that was going on fast to bad, instead of to good, was the jealousy of Lady Isabel. How could it be otherwise, kept up, as it was, by Barbara's frequent meetings with Mr. Carlyle, and by Captain Levison's comments and false insinuations regarding them? Discontented with herself and with every one about her, Isabel was living now in a state of excitement; a dangerous resentment against her husband working in her heart. That very day, the one of Captain Levison's visit to Levison Park, in driving through West Lynne in the pony carriage, she had come upon her husband in close converse with Barbara Hare. So absorbed were they that they never saw her, though her carriage passed close to the pavement on which they stood.

On the following morning, as the Hare family were seated at breakfast, the postman was seen coming towards the house. Barbara sprang from her seat to the open window, and the man advanced to her.

"Only one, miss. It is for yourself."

"Who is it from?" began the justice, as Barbara returned to her chair. In letters, as in other things, he was curious to know their contents, whether they were addressed to himself or not.

"It is from Anne, papa," replied Barbara, as she placed the letter by her side on the table.

"Why don't you open it and see what she says?"

"I will, directly. I am just going to pour out some more tea for mamma."

Barbara handed her mother the tea, and then took up her letter. As she opened it, a small bit of folded paper fell upon her lap. Fortunately, most fortunately, Justice Hare, who at the moment had his nose in his coffee-cup, did not see it, but Mrs. Hare did.

"Barbara, you have dropped something."

Barbara had seen it also, and was clutching stealthily at the "something" with almost a guilty movement. She had no answer at hand, but bent her eyes upon her letter, and Mrs. Hare spoke again.

"My love, something dropped on to your lap."

"Don't you hear your mamma, young lady?" pursued the justice. "What is it you have dropped?"

Barbara, with a crimson face, rose from her chair and shook out her pretty muslin dress—somehow, Barbara's dresses were always pretty. "There's nothing at all, papa, nothing that I can see." And, in sitting down, she contrived to give her mother a warning look, which silenced Mrs. Hare. Then Barbara read her sister's letter, and laid it open on the table for the benefit of any one who might like to do the same.

The justice snatched it up, taking first benefit to himself—as he was sure to do. He threw it down, grumbling.

"Not much in it. There never is in Anne's letters: she won't set the Thames on fire as a correspondent. As if any one cared to hear about the baby's being 'short-coated!' I think I'll have a cup more coffee, Barbara."

Finally the justice finished his breakfast and strolled out into the garden. Mrs. Hare turned to Barbara.

"My dear, why did you give me that mysterious look? And what was it that dropped into your lap? It seemed to fall from Anne's letter."

"Well, mamma, it did fall from Anne's letter. You know how exacting papa is—always will see and inquire into everything—so, when Anne wants to tell me any bit of news that she does not care the whole world to know, she writes it on a separate bit of paper and puts it inside her letter. I suppose it was one of those bits that fell out."

"Child, I cannot let you insinuate that your papa has no right to look into your letters."

"Of course not, mamma," was Miss Barbara's rejoinder. "But if he had a grain of common sense, he might know that I and Anne may sometimes have little private matters to say to each other, not necessary or expedient for him to pry into."

Barbara had produced the scrap of paper as she spoke, and was opening it. Mrs. Hare watched her movements, and her countenance. She saw the latter flush suddenly and vividly, and then become deadly pale: she saw Barbara crush the note in her hand when read.

"Oh, mamma!" she uttered.

The flush of emotion came also into Mrs. Hare's delicate cheeks. "Barbara! is it bad news?"

"Mamma,—it—it—is about Richard!" she whispered, glancing at the door and window, to see that none might be within sight or hearing. "I never thought of him: I only fancied Anne might be sending me some bit of news concerning her own affairs. Good Heavens! how fortunate—how providential that papa did not see the paper fall; and that you did not persist in your inquiries! If he——"

"Barbara, you are keeping me in suspense," interrupted Mrs. Hare, who had also grown white. "What should Anne know about Richard?"

Barbara smoothed out the writing and held it before her mother. It was as follows:

"I have had a curious note from R. It was without date or signature, but I knew his handwriting. He tells me to let you know, in the most sure and secret manner, that he will soon be paying you another night visit. You are to watch the grove every evening when the present moon grows bright."

Mrs. Hare covered her face for some minutes. "Thank God for all His mercies," she murmured.

"Oh, mamma, but it is an awful risk for him to run!"

"But to know that he is in life—to know that he is in life! And as for the risk—Barbara, I dread it not. The same good God who protected him through the last visit, will protect him through this. He will not forsake the oppressed and the innocent. Destroy that paper, child."

"Archibald Carlyle must first see it, mamma. I will destroy it afterwards."

"Then seek him to-day and show it him. I shall not be easy until it is destroyed, Barbara."

Braving the comments of the gossips, hoping the visit would not reach the ears or eyes of the justice, Barbara went that day to the office of Mr. Carlyle. He was not there: he was not at West Lynne: he had gone to Lynneborough on business, and Mr. Dill thought it doubtful whether he would be at the office again that day. If so, it would be late in the afternoon. Barbara, as soon as their own dinner was over, took up he. patient station at the gate, hoping to see him pass; but the time wen. by, and he did not do so. She had little doubt that he had returned home without going again to West Lynne.

What should she do? Go up to East Lynne and see him, said her conscience. Barbara's mind was in a strangely excited state. It appeared to her that this visit of Richard's must have been especially designed by Providence, that he might be confronted with Thorn. That they must be confronted the one with the other, or rather, that Richard must have the opportunity given him of seeing Thorn, was a matter of course; though how it was to be brought about, Barbara could not guess. For all action, all plans, she must depend upon Mr.

Carlyle; he ought to be put into immediate possession of the news, for the moon was already three or four days old, and there was no knowing when Richard might appear.

"Mamma," she said, returning indoors, after seeing the justice depart upon an evening visit to the Buck's Head, where he and certain other justices and gentlemen sometimes congregated to smoke and chat: "I shall go up to East Lynne if you have no objection. I must see Mr. Carlyle."

"What objection can I have, my dear? I am all anxiety for you to see him. It was so unfortunate that he was out to-day when you ventured to his office. Mind you tell him all: and ask him what is best to be done."

Away went Barbara. It had struck seven when she arrived at East Lynne.

"Is Mr. Carlyle disengaged?"

"Mr. Carlyle is not yet home, miss. My lady and Miss Carlyle are waiting dinner for him."

A check for Barbara. The servant asked her to walk in, but she declined, and turned from the door. She was in no mood for paying visits.

Lady Isabel had been standing at the window watching for her husband, wondering what made him so late: she observed Barbara approach the house, and saw her walk away again. Presently the servant who had answered the door entered the drawing-room.

"Was not that Miss Hare?"

"Yes, my lady," was the man's reply. "She wanted my master. I said your ladyship was at home, but she would not enter."

Isabel said no more. She caught the eyes of Francis Levison fixed on her with as much compassionate meaning as they dared express. She clasped her hands in pain, and turned again to the window.

Barbara was slowly walking down the avenue, Mr. Carlyle was then in sight, walking quickly. Lady Isabel saw their hands meet in greeting.

"Oh, I am so thankful to have met you!" exclaimed Barbara, impulsively. "I actually went to your office to-day, and I have been now to your house. We have great news!"

"Ay! What? About Thorn?"

"No, about Richard," replied Barbara, taking the scrap of paper from the folds of her dress. "This came to me this morning, from Anne."

Mr. Carlyle took the document, and Barbara looked over him whilst he read it: neither of them thinking that Lady Isabel's jealous eyes, and Captain Levison's evil ones, were strained on them from the distant windows. Miss Carlyle's also, for the matter of that.

"Archibald, it seems to me that Providence must be directing him hither at this moment. Our suspicions, with regard to Thorn, can now be set at rest. You must contrive that Richard shall see him. What can he be coming again for?"

More money, was the supposition of Mr. Carlyle. "Does Mrs. Hare know of this?"

She does, unfortunately. I opened the paper before her, never dreaming it was connected with Richard. I wish I could have spared mamma the news, until he was actually here: the expectation and suspense I fear will make her ill. It terrifies me to such an extent that I don't know what I am about," she continued. "Not a moment's rest or peace shall I have until he has been and is gone again. Poor, wandering, unhappy Richard! and not to be guilty!"

"He acted as though he were guilty, Barbara. And that line of conduct often entails as much trouble as real guilt."

"You do not believe him guilty?" she almost passionately uttered.

"I do not. I have little doubt of the guilt of Thorn."

"Oh, if it could but be brought home to him!" reiterated Barbara; "so that Richard might be cleared in the sight of day. How can you contrive that he shall see Thorn?

"I cannot tell; I must think it over. Let me know the instant he arrives, Barbara."

"Of course I shall. It may be that he does not want money; that his errand is only to see mamma. He was always so fond of her."

"I must leave you," said Mr. Carlyle, taking her hand in token of farewell. Then, as the thought occurred to him, he turned and walked a few steps with her, without releasing it. He was probably quite unconscious that he retained it: she was not so.

"You know, Barbara, if he should want money and it should not be convenient to Mrs. Hare to supply it at so short a notice, I can give it him, as I did before."

"Thank you, thank you, Archibald. Mamma felt sure you would."

She lifted her eyes to his with an expression of gratitude: but for the habitual control to which she had schooled herself, a warmer feeling might have mingled with it. Mr. Carlyle nodded pleasantly, and then set off rapidly towards the house.

Five minutes in his dressing-chamber, and he entered the drawing-room, apologizing for having kept them waiting, and explaining that he had been compelled to go to his office to give some orders, after his return from Lynneborough. Lady Isabel's lips were pressed together, and she preserved an obstinate silence. Mr. Carlyle, in his unsuspicion, did not notice it.

"What did Barbara Hare want?" demanded Miss Carlyle, during dinner.

"She wanted to see me on business," was his reply, given in a tone that certainly did not invite his sister to pursue the subject. "Will you take some more fish, Isabel?"

"What was that you were reading over with her?" pursued the indefatigable Miss Corny. "It looked like a note."

"Ah, that would be telling," returned Mr. Carlyle, willing to turn it off with gaiety. "If young ladies choose to make me privy to their love-letters, I cannot betray confidence, you know."

"What rubbish, Archibald!" quoth she. "As if you could not say outright what Barbara wants, without making a mystery of it. And she seems to be always wanting you now."

Mr. Carlyle glanced at his sister, a quick, peculiar look: it seemed, to her, to speak both of seriousness and warning. Involuntarily her thoughts—and her fears—flew to the past.

"Archibald! Archibald!" she uttered, repeating the name as if she could not get any further, in her dread. "It—it—is never—that old affair is never being reaped up again?"

Now, Miss Carlyle's "old affair" referred to one sole and sore point—Richard Hare: and so Mr. Carlyle understood it. Lady Isabel unhappily believed that any "old affair" could only have reference to the bygone loves of her husband and Barbara.

"You will oblige me by going on with your dinner, Cornelia," gravely responded Mr. Carlyle. Then—assuming a more laughing tone—"I tell you it is unreasonable to expect me to betray a young lady's secrets, although she may choose to confide them professionally to me. What say you, Captain Levison?"

Captain Levison bowed; a smile of mockery, all too perceptible to Lady Isabel, on his lip. And Miss Carlyle bent her head over her plate, and went on with her dinner, as meek as a lamb.

That same evening, Lady Isabel's indignant and rebellious heart condescended to speak of it when alone with her husband.

"What is it that she wants with you so much, that Barbara Hare?"

"It is private business, Isabel. She has to bring me messages from her mother."

"Must the business be kept from me?"

He was silent for a moment, considering whether he might tell her. But it was impossible he could speak, even to his wife, of the suspicion they were attaching to Captain Thorn; it would have been unfair and wrong: neither could he betray that a secret visit was expected from Richard. To no one would he betray that: unless Miss Corny, with her questioning, drew it out of him: and she was safe and true.

"It would not make you happier to know it, Isabel. There is a dark secret, you are aware, touching the Hare family: it is connected with that."

She did not put faith in a word of the reply. She believed he could not tell her because her feelings, as his wife, would be outraged by the confession: and it goaded her anger into recklessness. Mr. Carlyle on his part, never gave a thought to the supposition that she might be jealous: he had believed that nonsense at an end years ago. He was perfectly honourable and true, giving her no shadow of cause or reason to be jealous of him: and, being a practical, matter-of-fact man, it did not occur to him that she could be so.

Lady Isabel was sitting the following morning, moody and out of sorts. Captain Levison had accompanied Mr. Carlyle in the most friendly manner possible to the park gates on his departure, and then stolen along the hedge-walk. He returned to Lady Isabel with the news of an "ardent" interview with Barbara, who had been watching for Mr. Carlyle at the gate of the Grove. She sat, sullenly digesting the tidings, when a note was brought in. It proved to be an invitation to dinner for the following Tuesday, at a Mrs. Jeafferson's—for Mr. and Lady Isabel Carlyle and Miss Carlyle.

She drew her desk towards her petulantly, to answer it on the spur of the moment, first of all passing the note across the table to Miss Carlyle.

"Do you go?" asked Miss Carlyle.

"Yes," replied Lady Isabel. "Mr. Carlyle and I both want a change of some sort," she added, in a mocking sort of spirit; "it may be as well to have it, if only for an evening." In truth, this unhappy jealousy, this distrust of her husband, appeared to have altered Lady Isabel's very nature.

"And leave Captain Levison alone?" returned Miss Carlyle.

Lady Isabel bent over her desk, making no reply.

"What will you do with him, I ask?" persisted Miss Carlyle.

"He can remain here, and dine by himself. Shall I accept the invitation for you?"

"No; I shall not go," said Miss Carlyle.

"Then, in that case, there can be no difficulty with regard to Captain Levison," coldly spoke Lady Isabel.

"I don't want his company: I am not fond of it," cried Miss Carlyle. "I would go to Mrs. Jeafferson's, but that I should require a new dress."

"That's easily had," said Lady Isabel. "I shall want one myself."

"*You* want a new dress!" uttered Miss Carlyle. "Why, you have dozens!"

"I don't know that I could count a dozen in all," returned Isabel, chafing at the remark and the continual thwarting put upon her by Miss Carlyle, which had latterly seemed to be more than usually hard to endure. Trifling ills try the temper more than great ones.

Lady Isabel concluded her note, folded, sealed it, and then rang the bell. As the man left the room with it, she desired that Wilson might be sent to her.

"Is it this morning, Wilson, that the dressmaker comes to try on Miss Isabel's dress?" she inquired.

Wilson hesitated and stammered, and glanced from her mistress to Miss Carlyle. The latter looked up from her work.

"The dressmaker's not coming," spoke she, sharply. "I countermanded the order for the frock, for Isabel does not require it."

"She does require it," answered Lady Isabel, in perhaps the most displeased tone she had ever used to Miss Carlyle. "I am a competent judge of what is necessary for my own children."

"She no more requires a new frock than that table requires one, or than you require the one you are longing for," stoically persisted Miss Carlyle. "She has ever so many lying by: and her striped silk, turned, will make up as handsome as ever."

Wilson backed out of the room and closed the door softly, but her mistress caught a compassionate look directed towards her. Her heart felt bursting with indignation and despair: there seemed to be no side on which she could turn for refuge. Pitied by her own servants!

She re-opened her desk, and dashed off a haughty, peremptory note for the attendance of the dressmaker at East Lynne, commanding its immediate despatch.

Miss Corny groaned in her wrath. "You will be sorry for not listening to me, ma'am, when your husband shall be brought to poverty. He works like a horse now; and, with all his slaving, can scarcely, I fear, keep expenses down."

Poor Lady Isabel, ever sensitive, began to think they might, what

with one thing and another, be spending more than Mr. Carlyle's means would justify; she knew that their expenses were considerable. The same tale had been dinned into her ear ever since she married him. She gave up in that moment all thought of the new dress for herself and for Isabel: but her spirit, in her deep unhappiness, felt sick and faint within her.

Wilson meanwhile had flown to Joyce's room, and was exercising her dearly-beloved tongue in an exaggerated account of the matter: how Miss Carlyle put upon my lady, and had forbidden a new dress to her, as well as the frock to Miss Isabel.

Joyce, sitting up that day for the first time, was gazing from the window at Captain Levison as Wilson spoke.

"He's a handsome man—to look at him from here," she observed.

And yet a few more days passed on.

CHAPTER VIII.

RICHARD HARE AT MR. DILL'S WINDOW.

BRIGHT was the moon on that genial Monday night; bright were the evening stars as they shone upon a solitary wayfarer who walked on the shady side of the road, with his head down, as though he cared not to court observation. A labourer apparently, for he wore a smock frock and hobnailed shoes; but his whiskers were large and black, hiding the lower part of his face, and his broad-brimmed "wide-awake" came far over his brows. He drew near the dwelling of Justice Hare, plunged rapidly over some palings (after looking well to the right and left) into a field, and thence over the side wall into Mr. Hare's garden, where he remained amidst the trees.

Now, by some mischievous spirit of intuition or contrariety, Justice Hare was spending this evening at home, a thing which did not happen once in six months, unless he had friends with him. Barbara, anxious, troubled, worn out with the suspense of watching for her brother, would have given her head for her father to go out. But no: there sat the stern justice in full view of the garden and the grove, his chair drawn precisely in front of the window, his wig awry, and a long pipe in his mouth.

"Are you not going out, Richard?" Mrs. Hare ventured to say.

"No."

"Mamma, shall I ring for the shutters to be closed?" asked Barbara, by-and-by.

"Shutters closed!" said the justice. "Who'd shut out this bright moon? You have the lamp at the far end of the room, young lady, and can go to it."

Barbara ejaculated an inward prayer for patience—for safety for Richard, if he did come, and waited on, watching the grove in the distance. The signal came; her quick eye caught it; a movement as if some person or thing had stepped out beyond the trees and stepped back again. Barbara's face turned white and her lips dry.

"I am so hot!" she ejaculated, in her confused eagerness for an excuse. "I must take a turn in the garden."

She stole out, throwing a dark shawl over her shoulders, that it might render her less conspicuous to the justice; and her dress that evening was a dark silk. She did not dare to stand still when she reached the trees, or to penetrate them, but she caught glimpses of Richard's face, and her heart ached at the change in it. It was white, thin, and full of care; and his hair, he told her, was turning grey.

"Oh, Richard, darling, I may not stop and talk to you!" she wailed, in a deep whisper. "Papa is at home, you see, of all nights in the year."

"Can't I see my mother?"

"How can you? You must wait until to-morrow night."

"I don't like waiting a second night, Barbara. There's danger in every inch of ground this neighbourhood contains."

"But you must wait, Richard; for other reasons. That man who caused all the mischief, Thorn——"

"Hang him!" gloomily interrupted Richard.

"Is at West Lynne. At least, there is a Thorn here whom we, I and Mr. Carlyle, believe to be the same, and we want you to see him."

"Let me see him," panted Richard, whom the news appeared to agitate. "Let me see him! Barbara—I say——"

Barbara had passed on again, returning presently. "You know, Richard, I must keep moving, with papa's eyes there. He is a tall man, very good-looking, very fond of dress and ornaments, especially of diamonds."

"That's he," cried Richard, eagerly.

"Mr. Carlyle will contrive that you shall see him," she continued, stooping as if to tie her shoe. "Should it prove to be the same, perhaps nothing can be immediately done towards clearing you, but it will be a great point ascertained. Are you sure you should know him again?"

"Sure that I should know *him!*" uttered Richard Hare. "Should I know my own father? Should I know you? And you are not engraven on my heart in letters of blood, as he is. How and when am I to see him, Barbara?"

"I can tell you nothing until I have consulted Mr. Carlyle. Be here to-morrow as soon as ever the dusk will permit you: perhaps Mr. Carlyle will contrive to bring him here. If——"

The window was thrown open, and the stentorian voice of Justice Hare was heard from it.

"Barbara, are you wandering about there to take cold? Come in. Come in, I say."

"Oh, Richard, I am so sorry!" she lingered to whisper. "But papa is sure to be out to-morrow might: he would not stay in two evenings running. Good night, dear."

There must be no delay now, and the next day Barbara, braving comments, appeared once more at the office of Mr. Carlyle. Terribly did the rules of contrary seem in action just then: Mr. Carlyle was not in, and the clerks did not know when to expect him: he had gone out for some hours, they believed.

"Mr. Dill," urged Barbara, as the old gentleman came to the door to greet her, "I *must* see him."

"He will not be in till late in the afternoon, Miss Barbara. I expect him then. Is it anything I can do for you?"

"No, no," sighed Barbara.

At that moment Lady Isabel and her little girl passed in the chariot. She saw Barbara at her husband's door; what should she be doing there, unless paying him a visit? A slight, haughty bow to Barbara, a pleasant nod and smile to Mr. Dill, and the carriage bowled on.

It was four o'clock before Barbara could see Mr. Carlyle. She communicated her tidings, that Richard had arrived.

Mr. Carlyle held deceit and all underhand doings in especial abhorrence: yet he deemed that he was acting right, under the circumstances, in allowing Captain Thorn to be secretly seen by Richard Hare. In haste he arranged his plans. It was the evening of his own dinner engagement at Mrs. Jeafferson's; but that he must give up. Telling Barbara to despatch Richard to his office as soon as he should make his appearance in the grove, and to urge him to come boldly, for that none would know him in his disguise, he wrote a hurried note to Thorn, requesting him also to be at his office at eight o'clock that evening, as he had something to communicate to him. The latter plea was no fiction, for he had received an important communication that morning relative to the business on which Captain Thorn had consulted him, and his own absence from the office had alone prevented his sending for him earlier.

Other matters were demanding the attention of Mr. Carlyle, and it was five o'clock ere he departed for East Lynne: he would not have gone so early, but that he must inform his wife of his inability to keep his dinner engagement. Mr. Carlyle was one who never hesitated to sacrifice personal gratification to friendship or to business.

The chariot was at the door, and Lady Isabel was dressed and waiting for him in her dressing-room. "Did you forget that the Jeaffersons dine at six?" was her greeting.

"No, Isabel; but it was impossible for me to get here before. And I should not have come so soon, but to tell you that I cannot accompany you. You must make my excuses to Mrs. Jeafferson."

A pause. Strange thoughts were running through Lady Isabel's mind. "Why so?" she inquired.

"Some business has arisen which I am compelled to attend to this evening. As soon as I have snatched my dinner at home, I must hasten back to the office."

Was he making this excuse to spend the hours of her absence with Barbara Hare? The idea that it was so took firm possession of her mind, and remained there. Her face expressed a variety of feelings, the most prominent that of resentment. Mr. Carlyle saw it.

"You must not be vexed, Isabel. I assure you it is no fault of mine. It is important private business which cannot be put off, and which I cannot delegate to Dill. I am sorry it should so have happened."

"You never return to the office in an evening," she remarked, with pale lips.

"No: because, if anything arises to take us there after hours, Dill officiates. But the business to-night must be done by myself."

Another pause. Lady Isabel suddenly broke it. "Shall you join us later in the evening?"

"I believe I shall not be able to do so."

She drew her light shawl round her shoulders, and swept down the staircase. Mr. Carlyle followed, to place her in the carriage. When he said farewell she never answered, but looked straight out before her with a stony look.

"What time, my lady?" inquired the footman, as she alighted at Mrs. Jeafferson's.

"Early. Half-past nine."

A little before eight o'clock, Richard Hare, in his smock frock, his slouching hat, and his false whiskers, rang dubiously at the outer door of Mr. Carlyle's office. That gentleman instantly opened it. He was quite alone.

"Come in, Richard," said he, grasping his hand. "Did you meet many whom you knew?"

"I never looked whom I met, sir," was the reply. "I thought if I looked at people, they might look at me, so I came straight ahead with my eyes before me. How the place is altered! There's a new brick house at the corner where old Morgan's shop used to be."

"That's the new police station: West Lynne, I assure you, is becoming grand in public buildings. And how have you been, Richard?"

"Ailing and wretched," answered Richard Hare. "How can I be otherwise, Mr. Carlyle, with so false an accusation attaching to me; and working like a slave, as I have to do?"

"You may take off that disfiguring hat, Richard. No one is here."

Richard slowly lifted it from his brows, and his fair face, so like his mother's, was disclosed. But the moment he was uncovered, he turned shrinkingly towards the door. "If any one should come in, sir!"

"Impossible," replied Mr. Carlyle. "The front door is fast, and the office is supposed to be empty at this hour."

"For, if I should be seen and recognized, it might come to hanging, you know, sir. You are expecting that accursed Thorn here, Barbara told me."

"Directly," replied Mr. Carlyle, observing the mode of addressing him: "sir." It told plainly of the scale of society in which Richard must be mixing: that he was with those who said it habitually; that he used it habitually himself. "From your description of the Lieutenant Thorn who destroyed Hallijohn, we believe this Captain Thorn to be the same man," pursued Mr. Carlyle. "In person he appears to tally exactly; and I have ascertained that some years ago he was a great deal at Swainson, and fell into some sort of scrape. He is in John Herbert's regiment, and is here with him on a visit."

"But what an idiot he must be to venture here!" uttered Richard. "Here, of all places in the world."

"He counts, no doubt, upon not being known. So far as I can find out, Richard, no one here knew him, except you and Afy. I shall put you in Mr. Dill's room—you may remember the little window in it—

and from thence you can take full view of Thorn, whom I shall keep in the front office. "You are sure you would recognize him, at this distance of time?"

"I should know him if it were fifty years to come; I should know him if he were disguised as I am disguised. We cannot," Richard sank his voice, "forget a man who has been the object of our frenzied jealousy."

"What has brought you to West Lynne again, Richard? Any particular object?"

"Chiefly a hankering within me that I could not get rid of," replied Richard. "It was not so much to see my mother and Barbara—though I have longed to see them since my illness—but a feeling was within me that I could not rest away from it. So I said I'd risk it again just for a day."

"I thought you might possibly want some assistance, as before."

"I do want that also," said Richard. "Not much. My illness has run me into debt, and if my mother can let me have a little I shall be thankful."

"I am sure she will," answered Mr. Carlyle. "You shall have it from me to-night. What has been the matter with you?"

"The beginning of it was a kick from a horse, sir. That was last winter, and it laid me up for six weeks. Then, in the spring, after I had got well and was at work again, I caught some sort of fever, and down again I was for six weeks. I have not been to say well since."

"How is it you have never written, or sent me your address?"

"Because I dare not," answered Richard, timorously. "I should always be in fear; not of you, Mr. Carlyle, but of its becoming known in some way or other. The time is getting on, sir: is that Thorn sure to come?"

"He sent me word that he would, in reply to my note. And—there he is!" said Mr. Carlyle, as a ring was heard at the bell. "Now, Richard, come this way. Bring your hat."

Richard complied by putting the hat on his head, pulling it so low down that it almost touched his nose. He felt himself safer in it. Mr. Carlyle showed him into Mr. Dill's room, and then turned the key upon him, and put it into his pocket. Whether this precautionary measure was intended to prevent any possibility of Captain Thorn's finding his way in, or of Richard finding his way out, was best known to himself.

Mr. Carlyle went to the front door, opened it, and admitted Captain Thorn. He brought him into the clerks' office, which was bright with gas, keeping him in conversation for a few minutes standing, and then asking him to be seated: all in full view of the little window.

"I must beg your pardon for being late," Captain Thorn observed. "I am half an hour beyond the time you mentioned, but the Herberts had two or three friends at dinner, and I could not get away. I hope, Mr. Carlyle, you have not come to your office to-night purposely for me."

"Business must be attended to," somewhat evasively answered Mr. Carlyle: "I have been out myself nearly all day. We received a communication from London this morning relative to your affair, and I am sorry to say it is anything but satisfactory. They will not wait."

"But I am not liable, Mr. Carlyle. Not liable in justice."

"No—if what you tell me be correct. But justice and law are sometimes opposed to each other, Captain Thorn."

Captain Thorn sat in perplexity. "They will not have me arrested here, will they?"

"They would have done it, beyond doubt; but I have caused a letter to be written and despatched to them, which must bring forth an answer before any violent proceedings are taken. That answer will be here the morning after to-morrow."

"And what am I to do then?"

"I think it probable there may be a way then of checkmating them. But I am not sure, Captain Thorn, that I can give my attention further to this affair."

"I hope and trust you will," was the reply.

"You have not forgotten that I told you, at first, I could not promise to do so," rejoined Mr. Carlyle. "You shall hear from me to-morrow. If I carry it on for you, I will then appoint an hour for you to be here the following day: if not—why, I dare say you will find a solicitor as capable of assisting you as I am."

"But why will you not? What is your reason?"

"I cannot always give reasons for what I do," was the response. "You shall hear from me to-morrow."

He rose as he spoke; Captain Thorn also rose. Mr. Carlyle detained him yet a few moments, and then saw him out at the front door and fastened it.

He returned and released Richard. The latter took off his hat as he advanced into the blaze of light.

"Well, Richard, is it the same man?"

"No, sir. Nor in the least like him."

Mr. Carlyle felt a strange relief; relief for Captain Thorn's sake. He had rarely seen one whom he could so little associate with the notion of a murderer as Captain Thorn, and he was a man who exceedingly won upon his regard. He could heartily help him out of his dilemma now.

"Excepting that they are both tall, with nearly the same coloured hair, there is no resemblance whatever between them," proceeded Richard. "Their faces, their figures are as opposite as light is from dark. That other, in spite of his handsome features, has the expression at times of a demon; but the expression of this one is the best part of his face. Hallijohn's murderer had a curious look here, sir."

"Where?" questioned Mr. Carlyle, for Richard had only pointed to his face generally.

"Well—I cannot say precisely where it lay, whether in the eyebrows or the eyes: I could not tell when I used to have him before me: but it was in one of them. Ah, Mr. Carlyle, I thought when Barbara told me Thorn was here, it was too good news to be true; depend upon it he won't venture to West Lynne again. This man is no more like that other villain than you are like him."

"Then—as that is set at rest—we had better be going, Richard.

You have to see your mother, and she must be waiting in anxiety. How much money do you want?"

"Twenty-five pounds would do, but——" Richard stopped in hesitation.

"But what?" asked Mr. Carlyle. "Speak out, Richard."

"Thirty would be more welcome. Thirty would put me at ease."

"You shall have thirty," said Mr. Carlyle, counting over the notes to him. "Now—will you walk with me to the grove, or will you walk alone? I mean to see you there in safety."

Richard thought he would prefer to walk alone: every one they met might be speaking to Mr. Carlyle. The latter inquired why he chose moonlight nights for his visits.

"It is pleasanter for night travelling. And, had I chosen dark nights, Barbara could not have seen my signal from the trees," was Richard's answer.

They went out, and proceeded unmolested to the house of Justice Hare. It was past nine then. "I am so much obliged to you, Mr. Carlyle," whispered Richard, as they walked up the path.

"I wish I could help you more effectually, Richard, and clear up the mystery. Is Barbara on the watch? Yes; the door is slowly opening."

Richard stole across the hall and into the parlour to his mother. Barbara approached and softly whispered to Mr. Carlyle, standing just outside the portico: her voice trembled with the suspense of what the answer might be.

"Is it the same man? The same Thorn?"

"No. Richard says this man bears no resemblance to the real one."

"Oh!" uttered Barbara, in her surprise and disappointment. "Not the same! and for the best part of poor Richard's evening to have been taken up for nothing."

"Not quite for nothing," said Mr. Carlyle. "The question is now set at rest."

"Set at rest!" repeated Barbara. "It is left in more uncertainty than ever."

"Set at rest as regards Captain Thorn. And whilst our suspicions were concentrated upon him, we did not look to other quarters."

When they entered the sitting-room, Mrs. Hare was crying over Richard, and Richard was crying over her: but she seized Mr. Carlyle's hand.

"You have been very kind: I don't know what we should do without you. And I want to tax your kindness yet further. Has Barbara mentioned it?"

"I could not talk in the hall, mamma: the servants might have overheard."

"Mr. Hare is not well, and we terribly fear he will be home early in consequence: otherwise we should have been quite safe until ten, for he is gone to the Buck's Head, and they never leave, you know, till that hour has struck. Should he come in and see Richard—the very thought sends me into a fever—Barbara and I have been discussing it all the evening, and we can only think of one plan. It is, that you will kindly stay in the garden near the gate; and, should he come in, stop him and keep him in conversation. Barbara will be with you, and will run in with the warning, and Richard can go inside the closet in the hall, till Mr. Hare has entered and is safe in this room, and then he can make his escape. Will you do this, Archibald?"

"Certainly I will."

"I cannot part with him before ten o'clock, unless I am obliged to do so," she whispered, pressing Mr. Carlyle's hands in her earnest gratitude. "You don't know what it is, Archibald, to have a lost son home for an hour but once in seven years. At ten o'clock we will part."

Mr. Carlyle and Barbara began to pace the path, in compliance with the wishes of Mrs. Hare, keeping near the entrance gate. When they were turning the second time, Mr. Carlyle offered her his arm: it was an act of mere politeness. Barbara took it: and there they waited and waited, but the justice did not come.

Punctually to the minute, half after nine, Lady Isabel's carriage arrived at Mrs. Jeafferson's, and she came out immediately, a headache being the plea for her early departure. She had not far to go to reach East Lynne: only about two miles; it was a by-road nearly all the way. They could emerge into the open road if they pleased, but it was a little further. Suddenly a gentleman approached the carriage as it was bowling along, and waved his hand to the coachman to pull up. In spite of the moonlight, Lady Isabel did not at first recognize him, for he wore a disfiguring fur cap, the ears of which were tied over his ears and cheeks. It was Francis Levison. She put down the window.

"I thought it must be your carriage. How early you are returning! Were you tired of your entertainers?"

"Why, he knew what time my lady was returning," thought John to himself; "he asked me. A false sort of chap, that, I've a notion."

"I came out for a stroll, and have tired myself," he proceeded. "Will you take compassion on me and give me a seat home?"

She acquiesced; she could not well do otherwise. The footman sprang from behind, to open the door, and Francis Levison took his place beside Lady Isabel. "Take the high road," he put out his head to say to the coachman, and the man touched his hat. The high road would cause them to pass Mr. Hare's.

"I did not know you," she began, gathering herself into her own corner. "What ugly thing is that you have on? It is like a disguise."

He was taking off the "ugly thing" as she spoke, and began to twirl it round on his hand. "Disguise? Oh no; I have no creditors in the immediate neighbourhood of East Lynne."

False as ever. It *was* worn as a disguise, and he knew it.

"Is Mr. Carlyle at home?" she inquired.

"No." Then after a pause—"I expect he is more agreeably engaged."

The tone brought the tingling blood to the cheeks of Lady Isabel. She wished to preserve a dignified silence; and did so for a few moments: but the jealous question broke out.

"Engaged in what manner?"

"As I came by Hares' house just now, I saw two people, a gentleman and a young lady, coupled lovingly together, enjoying a *tête-à-tête* by moonlight. They were your husband and Miss Hare."

Lady Isabel almost gnashed her teeth : the jealous doubts which had been tormenting her all the evening were confirmed. That the man whom she hated—yes, in her blind anger, she hated him then—should so impose upon her, should excuse himself by lies, lies base and false, from accompanying her, on purpose to pass the hours with Barbara Hare! Had she been alone in the carriage, a torrent of passion had probably escaped her.

She leaned back, panting in her emotion, but concealed it from Captain Levison. As they came opposite to Justice Hare's, she deliberately bent forward, and scanned the garden with eager eyes.

There, in the bright moonlight, all too bright and clear, slowly paced, arm in arm, drawn close to each other, her husband and Barbara. With a choking sob, that could no longer be controlled or hidden, Lady Isabel sank back again.

He, that bold bad man, dared to put his arm round her ; to draw her to his side ; to whisper that *his* love was left her, if another's was withdrawn.

She was most assuredly out of her senses that night, or she never would have listened.

A jealous woman is mad ; an outraged woman is doubly mad ; and the ill-fated Lady Isabel truly believed that every sacred feeling which ought to exist between man and wife, was betrayed by Mr. Carlyle.

"Be avenged on that false hound, Isabel. He was never worthy of you. Leave your life of misery, and come to happiness."

In her bitter distress and wrath, she broke into a storm of sobs. Were they caused by passion against her husband, or by these bold and shameless words! Alas! alas! Francis Levison applied himself to soothe her with all the sweet and dangerous sophistry of his crafty nature.

CHAPTER IX.

NEVER TO BE REDEEMED.

THE minutes flew on. A quarter to ten ; ten ; a quarter past ten ; and still Richard Hare lingered on with his mother, and still Mr. Carlyle and Barbara paced patiently the garden path. At half-past ten Richard came forth, having taken his last farewell. Then came Barbara's tearful farewell, which Mr. Carlyle witnessed ; then a hard grasp of that gentleman's hand, and Richard plunged into the trees, to depart the way he had come.

"Good night, Barbara," said Mr. Carlyle.

"Will you not come in, and say good night to mamma?"

"Not now ; it is late. Tell her how glad I am things have gone off so well."

He set off at a rapid pace towards his home, and Barbara leaned on the gate to indulge her tears. Not a soul passed to interrupt her, and the justice did not return. What could have become of him? What could the Buck's Head be thinking of, to detain respectable elderly justices from their beds, who ought to go home early and set a good example to the parish? Barbara knew, the next day, that Justice Hare, with a few more gentlemen, had been seduced from the staid old inn to a friend's house, to an entertainment of supper, pipes, and whist, two tables, sixpenny points, and it was between twelve and one ere the party rose from the fascination. So far, well—as it happened.

Barbara knew not how long she lingered at the gate; ten minutes it may have been. No one summoned her; Mrs. Hare was indulging her grief indoors, giving no thought to Barbara, and the justice did not make his appearance. Exceedingly surprised was Barbara to hear fast footsteps, and to find that they were Mr. Carlyle's.

"The more haste, the less speed, Barbara," he called out as he came up. "I had reached half way home, and have had to return again. When I went into your sitting-room, I left a small parcel, containing a parchment, on the sideboard. Will you find it for me?"

Barbara ran indoors and brought forth the parcel; and Mr. Carlyle, with a brief word of thanks, sped away with it.

She leaned on the gate as before, the ready tears flowing again. Her heart was aching for Richard: it was aching for the disappointment the night had brought forth respecting Captain Thorn. Still no one passed; still the steps of her father were not heard, and Barbara stayed on. But—what was that figure cowering under shadow of the hedge at a distance, and apparently watching her? Barbara strained her eyes, while her heart beat as if it would burst its bounds. Surely, surely, it was her brother! Why had he ventured there again?

It was Richard Hare. When fully assured that Barbara was standing there, he knew the justice must be still absent, and ventured to advance. He appeared to be in a strange state of emotion, his breath laboured, his whole frame trembling.

"Barbara! Barbara!" he ejaculated, "I have seen Thorn."

Barbara thought him demented. "I know you saw him," she slowly said; "but it was not the right Thorn."

"Not he," breathed Richard: "not the man I saw to-night in Carlyle's office. I have seen the fellow himself. Why do you stare so at me, Barbara?"

Barbara was in truth scanning his face keenly. It appeared to her a strange tale that he was telling.

"When I left here, I cut across into Bean-lane, which is more private for me than this road," proceeded Richard. "Just as I reached that clump of trees—you know it, Barbara—I saw somebody coming towards me, from a distance. I stepped back behind the trees, into the shade of the hedge, for I don't care to be seen, though I am disguised. He came along the middle of the lane, going towards West Lynne, and I looked out upon him. I knew him long before he came up: it was Thorn."

Barbara made no comment: she was digesting the news.

"Every drop of blood within me began to tingle, and an impulse came upon me to spring upon him and accuse him of the murder of Hallijohn," went on Richard, in the same excited manner. "But I restrained it: or, perhaps, my courage failed. One of the reproaches against me used to be that I was a physical coward, you know, Barbara," he added, his tone changing to bitterness. "In a struggle

Thorn would have had the best of it: he is taller and more powerful, than I, and might have battered me to death. A man who can commit one murder, won't hesitate at a second."

"Richard, do you think you could have been deceived?" she urged. "You have been talking of Thorn, and your thoughts were, naturally, bearing upon him. Imagination——"

"Be still, Barbara!" he interrupted, in a tone of pain. "Imagination, indeed! Did I not tell you he was stamped here?" touching his breast. "Do you take me for a child, or an imbecile, that I should fancy I see Thorn in every shadow, or meet people where I do not? He had his hat off as if he had been walking fast and was hot—he was walking fast, and he carried the hat in one hand, and what looked like a small parcel. With the other hand he was pushing his hair from his brow—in this way; a peculiar way," added Richard, slightly lifting his own hat, and pushing back his hair. "By that action alone I should have known him, for he was always doing it in the old days. And there was his white hand, adorned with his diamond ring, Barbara, and the diamond glittered in the moonlight."

Richard's voice and manner were singularly earnest, and a conviction of the truth of his assertion flashed upon his sister.

"I saw his face as plainly as I ever saw it; every feature: he is scarcely altered, except for a haggardness in his cheeks now. Barbara, you need not doubt me: I swear it was Thorn."

She grew excited as he was. Now that she believed the news, it was telling upon her: reason left its place, and impulse succeeded. Barbara did not wait to weigh her actions.

"Richard, Mr. Carlyle ought to know this. He has only just gone; we may overtake him if we try."

Forgetting the strange appearance it would have, at that hour of the night, should she meet any one who knew her, forgetting what the consequences might be, should Justice Hare return and find her absent, Barbara set off with a fleet foot, Richard more stealthily following her, his eyes cast in all directions. Fortunately Barbara wore a bonnet and mantle, which she had put on to pace the garden with Mr. Carlyle; fortunately also, they met no one. She succeeded in reaching Mr. Carlyle before he turned into the East Lynne gates.

"Barbara!" he exclaimed, in the extreme of astonishment. "Barbara!"

"Archibald! Archibald!" she panted, gasping for breath. "I am not out of my mind; but do come and speak to Richard! He has just seen the real Thorn."

Mr. Carlyle, amazed and wondering, turned back. They passed over the stile nearly opposite the gates, drew behind the hedge, and there Richard told his tale. Mr. Carlyle did not appear to doubt it, as Barbara had done: perhaps he could not do so, in the face of Richard's agitated and intense earnestness.

"I am sure there is no one named Thorn in the neighbourhood, except the gentleman you saw in my office to-night, Richard," observed Mr. Carlyle, after some deliberation. "It is very strange."

"He may be staying here under a feigned name," replied Richard. "There can be no mistake that it is Thorn whom I have just met."

"How was he dressed? As a gentleman?"

"Catch him dressing as anything else," returned Richard. "He was in an evening suit, with a sort of thin overcoat thrown on, but it was flung back from the shoulders, and I distinctly saw his clothes. As I have told Barbara, I should have known him by this action of the hand," imitating it, "as he pushed his hair off his forehead: it was the delicate white hand of the days gone by, Mr. Carlyle, and the flashing diamond ring."

Mr. Carlyle was silent; Barbara also; but the thoughts of both were busy. "Richard," observed the former, "I should advise you to remain a day or two in the neighbourhood, and look out for this man. You may see him again, and may track him home; it is very desirable to find out who he really is, if it can be done."

"But the danger?" urged Richard.

"Your fears magnify that. I am quite certain that no one would know you in broad daylight, disguised as you are now. So many years have flown since, that people have forgotten to think about you, Richard."

But Richard could not be persuaded; he was full of fears. He described the man as accurately as he could to Mr. Carlyle and Barbara, and told them *they* must look out. With some trouble Mr. Carlyle drew from him an address in London to which he might write, in case anything turned up, and Richard's presence should be needed. He then once more said farewell, and quitted them, his way lying past East Lynne.

"And now to see you home again, Barbara," said Mr. Carlyle.

"Indeed you shall not do it, late as it is, and tired as you must be. I came here alone: Richard did not keep near me."

"I cannot help your having come here alone, but you may rely upon it I do not suffer you to go back so. Nonsense, Barbara! Allow you to go along the high road by yourself at eleven o'clock at night! What are you thinking of?"

He gave Barbara his arm, and they pursued their way. "How late Lady Isabel will think you!" observed Barbara.

"I do not know that Lady Isabel has yet returned home. My being late once in a way is of no consequence."

Not another word was spoken, except by Barbara. "What excuse can I make, should papa be at home again?" Both were buried in their own reflections. "Thank you very greatly," she said as they reached the gate, and Mr. Carlyle finally turned away. Barbara stole in, and found the coast clear: her father had not arrived.

Lady Isabel was in her dressing-room when Mr. Carlyle entered; she was seated at a table, writing. A few questions as to her evening's visit, which she answered in the briefest manner possible, and then he asked her if she was not going to bed.

"By-and-by. I am not sleepy."

"I must go at once, Isabel, for I am dead tired."

"You can go," was her answer.

He bent down to kiss her, but she dexterously turned her face away. He supposed she felt hurt that he had not gone with her to the party, and placed his hand on her shoulder with a pleasant smile.

"You foolish child to be aggrieved at that! It was no fault of mine, Isabel. I could not help myself. I will talk to you in the morning: I am too tired to-night. I suppose you will not be long."

Her head was bent over her writing again, and she made no reply. Mr. Carlyle went into the bedroom and closed the door. Some time after, Lady Isabel went softly upstairs to Joyce's room. Joyce, in her first sleep, was suddenly aroused from it. There stood her mistress, a waxlight in her hand. Joyce rubbed her eyes and collected her senses, and finally sat up in bed.

"My lady! Are you ill?"

"Ill? Yes; and wretched," answered Lady Isabel: and ill she looked, for she was perfectly white. "Joyce, I want a promise from you. If anything should happen to me, remain at East Lynne with my children."

Joyce stared in amazement, too astonished to make any reply.

"Joyce, you promised it once before: promise it again. Whatever betide, you will remain with my children when I am gone."

"I will stay with them. But, oh, my lady, what can be the matter with you? Are you taken suddenly ill?"

"Good-bye, Joyce," murmured Lady Isabel, gliding from the chamber as softly as she had entered it. And Joyce, after an hour of perplexity, dropped asleep again.

Joyce was not the only one whose rest was disturbed that eventful night. Mr. Carlyle himself awoke, and to his surprise found that his wife had not come to bed. He wondered what the time was, and struck his repeater. A quarter-past three!

Rising, he made his way to the door of his wife's dressing-room. It was in darkness; and so far as he could judge by absence of sound, unoccupied.

"Isabel."

No reply. Nothing but the echo of his own voice in the silence of the night.

He struck a match and lighted a taper, partially dressed himself, and went out to look for her. He feared she might have been taken ill or else that she had fallen asleep in one of the rooms. But nowhere could he find her, and, feeling perplexed, he proceeded to his sister's chamber door and knocked.

Miss Carlyle was a light sleeper, and rose up in bed at once. "Who's that?" called out she.

"It is only I, Cornelia," said Mr. Carlyle.

"You!" ejaculated Miss Corny. "What in the name of fortune do you want? You can come in."

Mr. Carlyle opened the door, and met the keen eyes of his sister, bent on him from the bed. Her head was surmounted by a remarkable nightcap, at least a foot high.

"Is any one ill?" she demanded.

"I think Isabel must be. I cannot find her."

"Not find her!" echoed Miss Corny. "Why, what's the time? Is she not in bed?"

"It is three o'clock. She has not been to bed. I cannot find her in the sitting-rooms; neither is she in the children's room."

"Then I'll tell you what it is, Archibald; she's gone worrying after Joyce. Perhaps the girl may be in pain to-night."

Mr. Carlyle was in full retreat towards Joyce's room, at this suggestion, when his sister called to him.

"If anything is wrong with Joyce, come and tell me, Archibald, for I shall get up and see after her. The girl was my servant before she was your wife's."

He reached Joyce's room and softly unlatched the door, fully expecting to find a light there, and his wife sitting by the bedside. There was no light, however, except that which came from the taper he held, and he saw no signs of his wife. *Where* was she? Was it probable that Joyce could tell him? He stepped into the room and called to her.

Joyce started up in a fright, which changed to astonishment when she recognized her master. He inquired whether Lady Isabel had been there, and for a few moments Joyce did not answer. She had been dreaming of Lady Isabel, and could not at first detach the dream from the visit which had probably given rise to it.

"What did you say, sir? Is my lady worse?"

"I ask if she has been here. I cannot find her."

"Why, yes," said Joyce, now fully aroused. "She came here and woke me. That was just before twelve, for I heard the clock strike. She did not stay here a minute, sir."

"Woke you!" repeated Mr. Carlyle. "What did she want? what did she come here for?"

Thoughts are quick; imagination is quicker; and Joyce was giving the reins to both. Her mistress's gloomy and ambiguous words were crowding on her brain, Three o'clock! and she had not been in bed, and was not to be found in the house! A nameless horror struggled to Joyce's face, her eyes were dilating with it: she seized and threw on a large flannel gown which lay on a chair by the bed, and forgetful of her ailing foot, forgetful of her master who stood there, out she sprang to the floor. All minor considerations faded to insignificance beside the terrible dread which had taken possession of her. Clasping the flannel gown tightly round her with one hand, she laid the other on the arm of Mr. Carlyle.

"Oh, master, master! she has destroyed herself! I see it all now."

"Joyce!" sternly interrupted Mr. Carlyle.

"She has destroyed herself, sir, as true as that we two are living here!" persisted Joyce, her own face livid with emotion. "I can understand her words now; I could not before. She came here—and her face was like a corpse as the light fell upon it—saying she had come to get a promise from me to stay with her children when she was gone. I asked whether she was ill, and she answered, 'Yes, ill and wretched.' Oh, sir, may Heaven support you under this dreadful trial!"

Mr. Carlyle felt bewildered; perplexed. Not a syllable did he believe of this. He was not angry with Joyce, for he thought she had lost her reason.

"It is so, sir, incredible as you may deem my words," pursued Joyce, wringing her hands. "My lady has been miserably unhappy: and that has driven her to it."

"Joyce, are you in your senses or out of them?" demanded Mr. Carlyle, a certain sternness in his tone. "Your lady miserably unhappy! what do you mean by such an assertion?"

Before Joyce could answer, an addition was received to the company in the person of Miss Carlyle, who appeared in black stockings and a shawl, and the lofty nightcap. Hearing voices in Joyce's room, which was above her own, and full of curiosity, she ascended, not choosing to be shut out from the conference.

"Whatever's up?" cried she. "Is Lady Isabel found?"

"She is not found, and she never will be found but in her winding-sheet," returned Joyce, whose lamentable and unusual state of excitement completely overpowered her customary quiet respect and plain good sense. "And, ma'am, I am glad that you have come up; for what I was about to say to my master I would prefer to say in your presence. When my lady is brought into this house, and laid down before us, dead, what will your feelings be? My master has done his duty by her in love; but you—you have made her life a misery. Yes, ma'am, you have."

"Highty tighty!" uttered Miss Carlyle, staring at Joyce in consternation. "What is all this? Where's my lady?"

"She has gone and taken the life that was not hers to take," sobbed Joyce; "and I say she has been driven to it. She has not been allowed to indulge a will of her own, poor thing, since she came to East Lynne: in her own house she has been less free than any one of her servants. You have curbed her, ma'am, and snapped at her, and made her feel that she was but a slave to your caprices and temper. All these years she has been crossed and put upon; everything, in short, but beaten—ma'am, you know she has!—and she has borne it all in silence, like a patient angel, never, as I believe, complaining to my master: he can say whether she has or not. We all loved her, we all felt for her, and my master's heart would have bled, had he suspected what she had to put up with day after day, and year after year."

Miss Carlyle's tongue was glued to her mouth. Her brother, confounded at the rapid words, could scarcely gather in their sense.

"What is that you are saying, Joyce?" he asked, in a low tone. "I do not understand."

"I have longed to say it to you many a hundred times, sir: but it is right that you should hear it, now things have come to this dreadful ending. Since the very night Lady Isabel came home here, your wife, she has been taunted with the cost she has brought to East Lynne and to you. If she wanted but the simplest thing, she was forbidden to have it, and told that she was bringing her husband to poverty. For this very dinner party that she went to to-night, she wished for a new dress, and your cruel words, ma'am, forbade her having it. She ordered a new frock for Miss Isabel, and you countermanded it. You have told her that master worked like a dog to support her extravagances when you know that she never was extravagant: that none were less inclined to go beyond proper limits than she. I have seen her, ma'am, come away from your reproaches with the tears in her eyes, and her hands meekly clasped upon her bosom, as though life was heavy to bear. A gentle-spirited, high-born lady, as she was, could not fail to be driven to desperation; and I know that she has been."

Mr. Carlyle turned to his sister. "Can this be true?" he inquired, in a tone of deep agitation.

She did not answer. Whether it was the shade cast by the nightcap or the reflection of the wax taper, her face looked grey and ghostly: and for the first time probably in Miss Carlyle's life, words failed her.

"May God forgive you, Cornelia!" he murmured, as he went out of the chamber.

He descended to his own. That his wife had laid violent hands upon herself, his reason utterly repudiated: she was one of the least likely to commit so great a sin. He believed that, in her unhappiness, she might have wandered out in the grounds, and was lingering there. By this time the house was aroused, and the servants were astir. Joyce—surely a supernatural strength was given her, for though she had been able to put her foot to the ground, she had not yet walked upon it—crept downstairs, and went into Lady Isabel's dressing-room. Mr. Carlyle was hastily assuming the articles of attire he had not yet put on, to go out and search the grounds, when Joyce limped in, holding out a note. Joyce did not stand on ceremony that night.

"I found this in the dressing-glass drawer, sir. It is my lady's writing."

He took it in his hand and looked at the address. "Archibald Carlyle." Though a calm man, one who had his emotions under his own control, he was no stoic, and his fingers shook as he broke the seal.

"When years go on, and my children ask where their mother is, and why she left them, tell them that you, their father, goaded her to it. If they inquire *what* she is, tell them also, if so you will. But tell them at the same time that you outraged and betrayed her, driving her to the very depth of desperation, ere she quitted them in her despair."

The handwriting, his wife's, swam before the eyes of Mr. Carlyle. All, except the disgraceful fact that she had *flown*—and a horrible suspicion began to dawn upon him with whom—was totally incomprehensible. How had he outraged her? in what manner had he goaded her to it? The discomforts alluded to by Joyce, as the work of his sister, had evidently no part in this; yet, what had *he* done? He read the letter again, more slowly. No, he could not understand it: he had no clue to the mystery.

At that moment the voices of the servants in the corridor outside penetrated to his ears: of course they were peering about, and making their own comments, Wilson, with her long tongue, the busiest. They were saying that Captain Levison was not in his room; that his bed had not been slept in.

Joyce sat on the edge of a chair—she could not stand—watching her master with his blanched face: never had she seen him betray agitation so powerful. Not the faintest suspicion of the dreadful truth had yet dawned upon her. He walked to the door, the open note in his hand, then turned, wavered, and stood still—as if he did not know what he was doing. Probably he did not. Then he took out his pocket-book, put the note inside it, and returned it to his pocket, his hands trembling equally with his livid lips.

"You need not mention this," he said to Joyce, indicating the note. "It concerns myself alone."

"Sir, does it say she's dead?"

"She is not dead," he answered. "Worse than that," he added in his heart.

"Why—who is this?" uttered Joyce.

It was little Isabel, stealing in with a frightened face, in her white nightgown. The commotion had aroused her.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Where's mamma?"

"Child, you'll catch your death of cold," said Joyce. "Go back to bed."

"But I want mamma."

"In the morning, dear," evasively returned Joyce. "Sir, please, must not Miss Isabel go back to bed?"

Mr. Carlyle made no reply to the question; most likely he never heard it. But he touched Isabel's shoulder to draw Joyce's attention to the child.

"Joyce—*Miss Lucy*, in future."

He left the room, and Joyce remained silent from amazement. She heard him go out at the hall door and bang it after him. Isabel—nay, we must say "Lucy" also—went and stood outside the chamber door: the servants, gathered in a group, did not observe her. Presently she came running back again, and disturbed Joyce from her reverie.

"Joyce, is it true?"

"Is what true, my dear?"

"They are saying that Captain Levison has taken away mamma."

Joyce fell back in her chair, with a scream. It changed to a long, low moan of anguish.

"What has he taken her for?—to kill her? I thought it was only kidnappers who took people."

"Child, child, go to bed!"

"Oh, Joyce, I want mamma! When will she come back?"

Joyce hid her face in her hands to conceal its emotion from the motherless child. And just then Miss Carlyle entered on tiptoe and humbly sat down on a low chair, her face, in its grief, its remorse, and its horror, looking nearly as dark as her stockings.

She broke out into a subdued wail.

"God be merciful to this dishonoured house!"

Mr. Justice Hare turned into his gate between twelve and one; turned in with a jaunty air: for the justice was in spirits, having won nine sixpences, and his friend's tap of ale had been unusually good. When he reached his bedroom, he told Mrs. Hare of a chaise and four which had gone tearing past at a furious pace as he was closing the gate, coming from the direction of East Lynne. He wondered where it could be going at that midnight hour, and whom it contained.

CHAPTER X.

CHARMING RESULTS.

NEARLY a year went by.

Lady Isabel Carlyle had spent it on the Continent—that refuge for such fugitives—now removing about from place to place with her companion, now stationary and alone. Half the time—taking one absence with another—he had been away from her, chiefly in Paris, pursuing his own course and his own pleasure.

How fared it with Lady Isabel? Just as it must be expected to fare, and does fare, when a high-principled gentlewoman falls from her pedestal. Never had she experienced a moment's calm, or peace, or happiness, since the fatal night of quitting her home. She had taken a blind leap in a moment of wild passion; when, instead of the garden of roses it had been her persuader's pleasure to promise her (but which, in truth, she had barely glanced at, for that had not been her moving motive), she had found herself plunged into an abyss of horror, from which there was never more any escape; never more, never more. The very hour of her departure she awoke to what she had done: the guilt, whose aspect had been shunned in prospective, assumed at once its true, frightful colour, the blackness of darkness; and a lively remorse, a never-dying anguish, took possession of her soul for ever. Oh, reader, believe me! Lady—wife—mother! should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you awaken! Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the endurance of woman to bear, *resolve* to bear them; fall down upon your knees and pray to be enabled to bear them: pray for patience; pray for strength to resist the demon that would urge you so to escape; bear unto death, rather than forfeit your fair name and your good conscience; for be assured that the alternative, if you rush on to it, will be found far worse than death!

Poor thing! poor Lady Isabel! She had sacrificed husband, children, reputation, home, all that makes life of value to woman; she had forfeited her duty to God, had deliberately broken His commandments, for the one poor miserable sake of flying with Francis Levison. But, the instant the step was irrevocable, the instant she had passed the barrier, repentance set in. Even in the first days of her departure, in the fleeting moments of abandonment, when it may be supposed she might momentarily forget conscience, it was sharply wounding her with its adder-like stings: and she knew that her whole future existence, whether spent with that man or without him, would be one dark course of gnawing, never-ending retribution.

It is possible remorse does not come to all erring wives so immediately as it came to Lady Isabel Carlyle—you need not be reminded that we speak of women in the higher positions of life. Lady Isabel was endowed with sensitively refined delicacy, with an innate, lively consciousness of right and wrong: a nature, such as hers, is one of the last that may be expected to err; and, but for that most fatal misapprehension regarding her husband, the jealous belief, fanned by Captain Levison, that his love was given to Barbara Hare, and that the two were uniting to deceive her, she would never have forgotten herself. The haunting skeleton of remorse had taken up his lodging within her; a skeleton of living fire, that must prey upon her heart-strings for ever. Every taunt to be cast upon her by the world, every slight that would henceforth be her portion, for she had earned it, must tell but too surely upon her crushed spirit.

Nearly a year went by; all but some six or eight weeks; when one morning in July, Lady Isabel made her appearance in the breakfast-room. They were staying now at Grenoble. Taking that town on their way from Switzerland, through Savoy, it had been Captain Levison's pleasure to halt there. He engaged furnished apartments in the vicinity of the Place Grenette; it was a windy old house, full of doors and windows, chimneys and cupboards; and there he said he should remain. Lady Isabel remonstrated; she wished to go farther on, where they might receive quicker news from England; but her will now was as nothing. She looked like the ghost of her former self. If you thought that she looked ill when she took that voyage over the water with Mr. Carlyle, you should have seen her now: misery marks the countenance far more than sickness. Her face was white and worn, her hands were thin, her eyes were sunken and surrounded by a black circle; care was digging hollows for them. A stranger might have attributed these signs to her state of health; *she* knew better; knew that they were the effects of her wretched mind and heart.

It was very late for breakfast: but why should she rise early, only to drag through another endless day? Languidly she took her seat at the table, just as Captain Levison's servant, a Frenchman, whom he had engaged in Paris, entered the room with two letters.

"Point de gazette, Pierre?" she asked.

"Non, miladi."

And all the while the sly fox had the *Times* in his coat-pocket! But he was only obeying the orders of his master. It had been Captain Levison's recent pleasure that the newspapers should not be seen by Lady Isabel until he had looked over them. You will speedily learn his motive.

Pierre departed towards Captain Levison's room, and Lady Isabel took up the letters and examined their superscription with interest. It was known to her that Mr Carlyle had not lost a moment in seeking a divorce, and the announcement, that it was granted, was now daily expected. She was anxious for it; anxious that Captain Levison should render her the only reparation in his power, before the birth of her child: she little knew that there was not the least intention on his part to make her reparation—any more than he had made it to others who had gone before her. She had become painfully aware of the fact that the man for whom she had sacrificed herself, was bad; but she had not learned all his badness yet.

Captain Levison, unwashed, unshaven, a dressing-gown loosely flung on, lounged in to breakfast; these decked-out dandies before the world are frequently the greatest slovens in domestic privacy. He wished her good morning in a careless tone of apathy, and she as apathetically answered to it.

"Pierre says there are some letters," he began. "What a precious hot day it is!"

"Two," was her short reply, her tone sullen as his. For, if you think, my good reader, that the flattering words, the ardent expressions which usually attend the beginning of these promising unions, last out a whole ten months, you are in egregious error. Compliments, the very opposite to honey and sweetness, have generally set in long before.

"Two letters," she continued; "and they are both in the same handwriting: your solicitor's, I believe."

Up went his head at the last word, and he made a snatch at the letters; stalked to the farthest window, opened one, and glanced over its contents.

"SIR,—We beg to inform you that the suit, Carlyle *v.* Carlyle, is at an end: the divorce was pronounced without opposition. According to your request, we hasten to forward you the earliest intimation of the fact.

"We are, sir, faithfully yours,

"F. Levison, Esq." "MOSS & GRAB."

It was over, then. And all claim to the name of Carlyle was declared to have been forfeited by the Lady Isabel for ever. Captain Levison folded up the letter, and placed it securely in an inner pocket.

"Is there any news?" she asked.

"News!"

"Of the divorce, I mean."

"Tush!" was the response of Captain Levison, as if wishing to imply that the divorce was yet a far-off affair: and he proceeded to open the other letter.

"SIR,—After sending off our last, dated to-day, we received tidings of the demise of Sir Peter Levison, your great-uncle. He expired this afternoon in town, where he had come for the benefit of medical advice. We have much pleasure in congratulating you upon your accession to the title and estates: and beg to state that should it not be convenient to you to visit England at present, we shall be happy to transact all necessary matters for you, on your favouring us with instructions.

"And we remain, sir, most faithfully yours,

"Sir Francis Levison, Bart." "MOSS & GRAB."

The letter was superscribed as the other, "F. Levison, Esquire:" no doubt with a view to its more certain delivery.

"At last! thank the pigs!" was the gentleman's euphonious expression, as he tossed the letter open upon the breakfast-table.

"The divorce is granted!" feverishly uttered Lady Isabel.

He made no reply, but seated himself to breakfast.

"May I read the letter? Is it for me to read?"

"For what else should I have thrown it there?" he said.

"A few days ago, you placed a letter, open, upon the table, as I thought, for me: but when I took it up you swore at me. Do you remember it, Captain Levison?"

"You may drop that odious title, Isabel, which has stuck to me all too long. I own a better one now."

"What is it, pray?"

"You can look, and see."

Lady Isabel took up the letter and read it. Sir Francis swallowed his coffee, and rang the hand-bell—the only bell you generally meet with in France. Pierre answered it.

"Put me up a change of things," said he, in French. "I start for England in an hour."

"It was very well," Pierre responded: and departed to do it. Lady Isabel waited till the man was gone, and then spoke, a faint flush of emotion appearing in her cheeks.

"You do not mean what you say? You will not leave me yet?"

"I cannot do otherwise," he answered. "There's a mountain of business to be attended to, now that I have come into power."

"Moss and Grab say they will act for you. Had there been a necessity for your going they would not have offered to do so."

"Ay, they say so—with an eye to feathering their pockets! Go to England I must: it is absolutely essential. Besides, I should not choose the old man's funeral to take place without me."

"Then I must accompany you," she urged.

"I wish you would not talk nonsense, Isabel. Are you in a state to travel night and day? Neither would England be agreeable to you at present."

She felt the force of the objections: resuming, after a moment's pause. "Were you to go to England, you might not be back in time."

"In time for what?"

"Oh, how can you ask?" she rejoined in a sharp tone of reproach; "you know too well. In time to make me your wife when the divorce shall appear."

"I must chance it," coolly observed Sir Francis.

"Chance it! *chance* the legitimacy of the child? You must assure that, before all things. More terrible to me than all the rest would it be, if——"

"Now, don't put yourself into a fever, Isabel. How many times am I to be compelled to beg that of you? It does no good. Is it my fault if I am called suddenly to England?"

"Have you no pity for your child?" she urged, in agitation. "Nothing can repair the injury, if you once suffer it to come upon him. He will be a byword amidst men throughout his life."

"You had better have written to the law lords to urge on the divorce," he retorted. "I cannot help the delay."

"There has been no delay: quite the contrary. But it may be expected hourly now."

"You are worrying yourself for nothing, Isabel. I shall be back in time."

He quitted the room as he spoke, and Lady Isabel remained in it, the image of despair. Nearly an hour passed, when she remembered the breakfast things, and rang for them to be removed. A maid-servant entered, and she thought how ill miladi looked.

"Where was Pierre?" miladi asked.

"Pierre was making himself ready to attend monsieur to England."

Scarcely had she closed the door upon herself and her tray when Sir Francis Levison appeared, equipped for travelling. "Good-bye, Isabel," said he, without further circumlocution or ceremony.

Lady Isabel, excited beyond all self-control, slipped the bolt of the door; and, half leaning against it, half kneeling at his feet, held up her hands in supplication.

"Francis, have you any consideration left for me—any in the world?"

"How can you be so absurd, Isabel? Of course I have," he continued, in a peevish though kind tone, as he took her hands to raise her.

"No, not yet. I will remain here until you say you will wait another day or two. You know that the French Protestant minister is prepared to marry us, the instant news of the divorce shall arrive: if you do care still for me, you will wait."

"I cannot wait," he replied, his tone changing to one of determination. "It is useless to urge it."

"Say that you will not."

"Well, then, I will not; if you would prefer to have it so: anything to please you. Isabel, you are like a child. I shall be back in time."

"Do not think I am urging it for my sake," she panted, growing more agitated with every fleeting moment. "You know that I am not. I do not care what becomes of me. No; you shall not go till you hear me! Oh, Francis, by all I have forfeited for your sake——"

"Get up, Isabel," he interrupted.

"For the child's sake! for the child's sake. A whole long life before it; never to hold up its head, of right; the reproach everlastingly upon it that it was born in sin! Francis! Francis! if you have no pity for me, have pity upon it!"

"I think you are losing your senses, Isabel! There's a month yet, and I promise you to be back ere it shall have elapsed. Nay, ere half of it shall have elapsed: a week will accomplish all I want to do in London. Let me pass, you have my promise, and I will keep it."

She never moved; only stood where she was, raising her supplicating hands. He grew impatient, and by some dexterous sleight of hand got the door open. She seized his arm.

"Not for my sake," she panted still, her dry lips drawn and livid.

"Nonsense about 'not for your sake.' It is for your sake that I will keep my promise. I *must* go. There: good-bye, Isabel, and take care of yourself."

He broke from her and left the room, and in another minute had left the house, Pierre attending him. A feeling, amounting to a conviction, rushed over the unhappy lady, that she had seen him for the last time until it should be too late.

She was right. It was too late by weeks and months.

CHAPTER XI.

MUTUAL COMPLIMENTS.

DECEMBER came in. The Alps were covered with snow; Grenoble borrowed the shade, and looked cold and white, and sleety and sloppy; the wide gutters which run through the middle of certain of the streets, were unusually black, and people crept along, cold and very dismal. Close to the fire, in the barn of a French bedroom, full of windows, and doors, and draughts, with its wide hearth and its wide chimney, shivered Lady Isabel Vane. She wore an invalid's cap, and a thick woollen shawl, and she shook and shivered constantly; though she had drawn so close to the wood fire that there was danger of her dress igniting, and the attendant had frequently to spring up and interpose between it and the crackling logs. Little did it seem to matter to Lady Isabel: she sat in one position, her countenance the picture of stony despair.

So had she sat, so looked, since she began to grow better. She had had a long illness, terminating in low fever; but the attendants whispered amongst themselves that miladi would soon get about if she would only rouse herself. She had so far done so as to sit up in the windy chamber; and it seemed to be to her a matter of perfect indifference whether she ever went out of it or not.

This day she had taken her early dinner—such as it was, for appetite failed her—and had dozed in the arm-chair, when a noise arose from below, as of a carriage driving into the court-yard through the porte-cochère. It instantly aroused her. Had *he* come?

"Who is it?" she asked of the nurse.

"Miladi, it is monsieur: and Pierre is with him. I have begged miladi often and often not to fret, for that monsieur would surely come: and miladi sees I am right."

A strangely firm expression, speaking of severe resolution, overspread the face of Lady Isabel. It would seem to say that she had not "fretted" much after him who had now arrived; or, at any rate, that she was not fretting after him now. "Patience and calmness!" she murmured to herself. "Oh, may they not desert me, now the time has come!"

"Monsieur looks so well!" proclaimed the maid, who had taken up her station at a window that overlooked the court-yard. "He has got out of the carriage: he is shaking himself and stamping his feet."

"You may leave the room, Susanne," said Lady Isabel.

"But if the baby wakes, miladi?"

"I will ring."

The girl departed, closing the door, and Lady Isabel sat looking at it, schooling herself to patience. Another moment and it was flung open.

Sir Francis Levison approached to greet her as he came in. She waved him off, begging him, in a subdued, quiet tone, not to draw too near, as any little excitement made her faint now. He took a seat opposite to her, and began pushing the logs together with his boot, as he explained that he really could not get away from town before.

"Why did you come now?" she quietly rejoined.

"Why did I come?" repeated he. "Are these all the thanks a fellow gets for travelling in this inclement weather? I thought you would at least have been glad to welcome me, Isabel."

"Sir Francis," she rejoined, speaking still with almost unnatural calmness, as she continued to do throughout the interview—though the frequent changes in her countenance, and the movement of her hands, when she laid them from time to time on her chest to keep down its beating, told what an effort the struggle cost her—"Sir Francis, I am glad, for one reason, to welcome you: we must come to an understanding one with the other; and, so far, I am pleased that you are here. It was my intention to have communicated with you by letter as soon as I found myself capable of exertion, but your visit has removed the necessity. I wish to deal with you quite unreservedly, without concealment or deceit: I must request you so to deal with me."

"What do you mean by 'deal'?" he asked, settling the logs to his apparent satisfaction.

"To speak and act. Let there be plain truth between us at this interview, if there never has been before."

"I don't understand you."

"Naked truth, unglossed," she pursued, bending her eyes determinately upon him. "It *must* be."

"With all my heart," returned Sir Francis. "It is you who have thrown out the challenge, mind."

"When you left in July you gave me a sacred promise to come back in time for our marriage: you know what I mean when I say 'in time': but——"

"Of course I meant to do so when I gave the promise," he interrupted. "But no sooner had I set foot in London than I found myself overwhelmed with business, and away from it I could not get. Even now I can only remain with you a couple of days, for I must hasten back to town."

"You are breaking faith already," she said, after hearing him calmly to the end. "Your words are not words of truth, but of deceit. You did not intend to be back in time for the marriage; or, otherwise, you would have caused it to take place ere you went at all."

"What fancies you take up!" uttered Francis Levison.

"Some time subsequent to your departure," she quietly went on, "one of the maids was setting to rights the clothes in your dressing-closet, and she brought me a letter she found in one of the pockets. I saw, by the date, that it was one of those two you received on the morning of your departure. It contained the information that the divorce was pronounced."

She spoke so quietly, so apparently without feeling or passion, that Sir Francis was agreeably astonished. He should have less trouble in throwing off the mask. But he was an ill-tempered man; and, to hear that the letter had been found, to have the falseness of his fine protestations and promises so effectually laid bare, did not improve his temper now. Lady Isabel continued:

"It had been better to have undeceived me then; to have told me that the hopes I was cherishing for the sake of the unborn child, were worse than vain."

"I did not judge so," he replied. "The excited state you then appeared to be in, would have precluded your listening to any sort of reason."

Her heart beat a little quicker: but she stilled it.

"You deem that it was not in reason I should aspire to be made the wife of Sir Francis Levison?"

He rose and began kicking at the logs; with the heel of his boot this time. "Well, Isabel—you must be aware that it is an awful sacrifice for a man in my position to marry a divorced woman."

The hectic flushed into her thin cheeks, but her voice sounded calm as before.

"When I expected, or wished, for the 'sacrifice,' it was not for my own sake: I told you so then. But it was not made: and the child's inheritance is that of sin and shame. There he lies."

Sir Francis half turned to where she pointed, and saw an infant's cradle by the side of the bed. He did not take the trouble to go to look at it.

"I am the representative now of an ancient baronetcy," he resumed, in a tone as of apology for his previous heartless words, "and to make you my wife would so offend all my family, that——"

"Stay," interrupted Lady Isabel; "you need not trouble yourself to find needless excuses. Had you taken this journey for the purpose of making me your wife, were you to propose to do so this day, and bring a clergyman into the room to perform the ceremony, it would be futile. The injury to the child can never be repaired: and, for myself, I cannot imagine any worse fate in life than being compelled to pass it with you."

"If you have taken this aversion to me it cannot be helped," he coolly said; inwardly congratulating himself at being spared the trouble he had anticipated. "You made commotion enough once, about my making you 'reparation.'"

She shook her head. "All the reparation in your power to make, all the reparation that the whole world can invent, could not undo my sin. It, and its effects, must lie upon me for ever."

"Oh—sin!" was the derisive exclamation. "You ladies should think of that beforehand."

"Yes," she sadly answered. "May Heaven help all to do so, who may be tempted as I was."

"If you mean that as a reproach to me, it's rather out of place," chafed Sir Francis, whose fits of ill temper were under no control, and who never, when in them, cared what he said to outrage the feelings of another. "The temptation to sin, as you call it, lay not in my persuasions, half so much as in your jealous anger towards your husband."

"Quite true," was her reply.

"And I believe you were on the wrong scent, Isabel—if it will be any satisfaction to you to hear it. Since we are mutually on this complimentary discourse, it is useless to smooth over facts."

"I do not understand what you would imply," she said, drawing her shawl round her with a fresh shiver. "How 'on the wrong scent'?"

"With regard to your husband and that Hare girl. You were blindly, outrageously jealous of him."

"Go on."

"And I say I think you were on the wrong scent. I do not believe Carlyle ever thought of the girl—in that way."

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"They had a secret between them. Not of love. A secret of business: and those interviews they had together, her dancing attendance upon him everlastingly, related to that; and to that alone."

Her face was more flushed than it had been throughout the interview. He spoke quietly now, quite in an equable tone of reasoning: it was his way when his ill temper was upon him; and the calmer he spoke, the more cutting were his words. He *need* not have told her this.

"What was the secret?" she inquired in a low tone.

"Nay, I can't explain all; they did not take me into their confidence. They did not even take you: better, perhaps, that they had, though, as things have turned out—or seem to be turning. There's some disreputable secret attaching to the Hare family, and Carlyle was acting in it for Mrs. Hare. She could not seek out Carlyle herself, so she sent the young lady. That's all I knew."

"How did you know it?"

"I had reason to think so."

"What reason? I must request you to tell me."

"I overheard scraps of their conversation now and then in those meetings, and so gathered my conclusions."

"You told a different tale to me, Sir Francis," was her remark, as she lifted her indignant eyes towards him.

Sir Francis laughed. "All stratagems are fair in love and war."

She dared not immediately trust herself to reply, and a silence ensued. Sir Francis broke it, pointing with his left thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the cradle.

"What have you named that young article there?"

"The name which ought to have been his by inheritance: 'Francis Levison,'" was her icy answer.

"Let's see—how old is he now?"

"He was born the last day of August."

Sir Francis threw up his arms and stretched himself, as if a fit of idleness had overtaken him; then advanced to the cradle and pulled down the clothes.

"Who is he like, Isabel? My handsome self?"

"Were he like you—in spirit—I would pray that he might die, ere he could speak or think," she burst forth; and then, remembering the resolution she had marked out for herself, subsided outwardly into calmness again.

"What else?" retorted Sir Francis. "You know my disposition pretty well by this time, Isabel, and may be sure that if you deal out small change to me, you will get it back again with interest."

She made no reply. Sir Francis put the clothes again over the sleeping child, returned to the fire and stood a few moments with his back to it.

"Is my room prepared for me, do you know?" he presently asked.

"No, it is not," she quietly rejoined. "These apartments are mine now: they have been transferred into my name, and they can never again afford you accommodation. Will you be so obliging—I am not strong—as to hand me that writing-case?"

Sir Francis walked to the table she indicated, which was at the far end of the great barn of a room; and, taking the writing-case from it, gave it to her.

She reached her keys from the stand at her elbow, unlocked the case, and took from it some bank-notes.

"I received these from you a month ago," she said. "They came by post."

"And you never had the grace to acknowledge them," he returned, in a sort of mock-reproachful tone.

"Forty pounds. That was the amount, was it?"

"I believe so."

"Allow me to return them to you. Count them."

"Return them to me—why!" inquired Sir Francis in amazement.

"I have no longer anything whatever to do with you, in any way. Do not make my arm ache, holding out the notes to you so long! Take them!"

Sir Francis took the notes from her hand and placed them on the stand near to her.

"If it be your wish that all relations should end between us, why, let it be so," he said. "I must confess I think it may be the wisest course, as things have come to this pass, for the cat-and-dog life, which would seemingly be ours, is not agreeable. Remember, that it is your doing; not mine. But you cannot think I am going to see you starve, Isabel. A sum—we will fix upon its amount amicably—shall be placed to your credit half yearly, and——"

"I beg of you to cease!" she passionately interrupted. "What do you take me for?"

"Take you for! Why, how can you live? You have no fortune; you must receive assistance from some one."

"I will not receive it from you. If the whole world denied me, and I could find no help from strangers, or means of earning my own bread, and it was necessary that I should still exist, I would apply to my husband for means, rather than to you. This ought to convince you that the topic may cease."

"Your husband?" sarcastically rejoined Sir Francis. "Generous man!"

A flush, deep and painful, dyed her cheeks. "I should have said my late husband. You need not have reminded me of the mistake."

"If you will accept nothing for yourself, you must for the child. He, at any rate, falls to my share. I shall give you a few hundreds a year with him."

She beat her hands before her, as if beating off the man and his words. "Not a farthing, now or ever: were you to attempt to send money for him, I would throw it into the nearest river. *Whom* do you take me for?—*what* do you take me for?" she repeated, rising in her bitter mortification. "If you have put me beyond the pale of the world, I am still Lord Mount Severn's daughter."

"You did as much towards putting yourself beyond its pale, as——"

"Do I not know it? Have I not said so?" she sharply interrupted. And then she sat, striving to calm herself, clasping together her shaking hands.

"Well, if you will persist in this perverse resolution, I cannot mend it," resumed Sir Francis. "In a little time you may probably wish to recall it: in which case, a line, addressed to me at my bankers', will——"

Lady Isabel drew herself up. "Put away these notes, if you please," she interrupted, not allowing him to finish his sentence.

He took out his pocket-book, and placed the bank-notes within it.

"Your clothes—those you left here when you went to England—you will have the goodness to order Pierre to take away this afternoon. And now, Sir Francis, I believe that is all: we will part."

"To remain mortal enemies from henceforth?" he rejoined. "Is that to be it?"

"To be strangers," she replied, correcting him. "I wish you a good day."

"So! you will not even shake hands with me, Isabel!"

"I would prefer not."

And thus they parted. Sir Francis left the room, but not immediately the house. He went into a distant apartment, and, calling the servants before him—there were only two—gave them each a year's wages in advance. "That they might not have to trouble miladi for money," he said to them. Then he paid a visit to the landlord, and handed him likewise a year's rent in advance, making the same remark. After that, he ordered dinner at an hotel, and the same night he and Pierre departed on their journey home again, Sir Francis thanking his lucky star that he had so easily got rid of a vexatious annoyance.

And Lady Isabel? She passed her evening alone, sitting in the same place, close to the fire and the embers. The attendant remonstrated that miladi was remaining up too late for her strength; but miladi ordered her and her remonstrance into an adjoining room.

Never had her repentance been more keenly vivid to her than it was that evening; never had her position, present and future, loomed out in blacker colours. The facts of her hideous case stood before her, naked and bare. She had wilfully abandoned her husband, her children, her home; she had cast away her good name and her position; and she had deliberately offended God. What had she gained in return? What was she? A poor outcast; one of those whom men pity, and whom women shrink from; a miserable, friendless creature, who had henceforth to earn the bread she. and the other life dependent on her, must eat, the clothes they must wear, the roof that must cover them, the fuel they must burn. She had a few valuable jewels, her mother's or her father's gifts, which she had brought away from East Lynne: she had brought no others; nothing given to her by Mr. Carlyle: and these she now intended to dispose of, and live upon until they were gone. The proceeds, with strict economy, might last her some twelve or eighteen months she calculated: after that she must find out some means of supply for the future. Put the child out to nurse, conceal her name, and go out as governess in a French or German family, was one of her visions in prospective.

A confused idea of revenge had been in her mind, urging her on to desperation, the night she quitted her home; of revenge on Mr. Carlyle for his supposed conduct to her. But what revenge had the step really brought to her heart? As her eyes opened to her folly and to the true character of Francis Levison, so in proportion did they close to the fault by which her husband had offended her. She saw it in fainter colours; she began to suspect—nay, she knew—that her own excited feelings had magnified it in length, breadth, and height—had made a molehill into a mountain: and, long before the scandal of her act had died away in the mouths of men, and Mr. Carlyle had legally put her from him, she had repented of the false step for her husband's sake, and longed—though it could never be—to be back again, his wife. She remembered his noble qualities; doubly noble did they appear to her, now that her interest in them must cease; she remembered how happy they had been together, except for her own self-torment touching Barbara Hare; and, worse than all, her esteem, her admiration, her affection for him, had returned to her fourfold. We never know the full value of a thing until we lose it. Health, prosperity, happiness, a peaceful conscience; what think we of these blessings while they are ours? But, when we lose them, we look back in surprise at our ungrateful apathy. A friend may be very dear; but we don't know how dear until he is gone: let him depart for ever, and the sorrow is almost greater than we can bear. *She* had lost Mr. Carlyle, and by her own act she had thrown him from her; and now she must make the best of her work, spending her whole future life probably in one long yearning for him and for her children. The hint thrown out by Sir Francis that afternoon, that her suspicions had been mistaken, that her jealousy had had no foundation, did not tend to mitigate her repentance. Whether he was right or wrong in his opinion, she did not know; but she dwelt upon it much: it was possible Sir Francis had merely said it to provoke her, for she knew his temper, and that he would be capable of doing so; but, if right, what an utterly blind fool she had been!

Her recent and depressing illness, the conviction of Sir Francis Levison's complete worthlessness, the terrible position in which she found herself, had brought to Lady Isabel *reflection.* Not the reflection, so called, that may come to us who yet live in and for the world, but that which must, almost of necessity, attend one whose part in the world is over, who has no interest left between this and the next. A conviction of her sin ever oppressed her; not only of the one act of it, patent to scandalmongers, but of the long sinful life she had led from childhood; sinful, insomuch as that it had been carelessly indifferent. When thoughts of the future life, and the necessity of preparing for it, had occasionally come over her—there are odd moments when they come over even the worst of us—she had been content to leave it to an indefinite future; possibly to a deathbed repentance. But now the truth had begun to dawn upon her, and was growing more clear day by day.

She leaned her aching head this night and dwelt upon these thoughts.

