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THE LADIES LINDORES

BY MRS OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I.

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"Two of the sweet'st companions in the world."

—*Cymbeline*.

THE LADIES LINDORES.

CHAPTER I.

The mansion-house of Dalrulzian stands on the lower slope of a hill, which is crowned with a plantation of Scotch firs. The rugged outline of this wood, and the close-tufted mass of the tree-tops, stand out against the pale East, and protect the house below and the "policy," as the surrounding grounds are called in Scotland; so that though all the winds are sharp in that northern county, the sharpest of all is tempered. The house itself is backed by lighter foliage—a feathery grove of birches, a great old ash or two, and some tolerably well-grown, but less poetical, elms. It is a house of distinctively local character, with the curious, peaked, and graduated gables peculiar to Scotch rural architecture, and thick walls of the roughest stone, washed with a weather-stained coat of yellow-white. Two wings, each presenting a gabled end to the avenue, and a sturdy block of building retired between them,—all strong, securely built, as if hewn out of the rock, formed the homely house. It had little of the beauty which a building of no greater pretensions would probably have had in England. Below the wings, and in front of the hall-door, with its two broad flat stone steps, there was nothing better than a gravelled square, somewhat mossy in the corners, and marked by the trace of wheels; but round the south wing there swept a sort of terrace, known by no more dignified name than that of "The Walk," from which the ground sloped downwards, broken at a lower level by the formal little parterres of an old-fashioned flower-garden. The view from the Walk was of no very striking beauty, but it had the charm of breadth and distance—a soft sweep of undulating country, with an occasional glimpse of a lively trout-stream gleaming here and there out of its covert of crags and trees, and a great, varied, and ever-changing world of sky,—not a prospect which captivated a stranger, but one which, growing familiar day by day and year by year, was henceforth missed like something out of their lives by the people who, being used to it, had learned to love that silent companionship of nature. It was the sort of view which a man pauses, not to look at but to see, even when he is pacing up and down his library thinking of John Thomson's demand for farm improvements, or, heavier thought, about his balance at his bankers: and which solaces the eyes of a tired woman, giving them rest and refreshment through all the vicissitudes of life. People sought it instinctively in moods of reflection, in moments of watching, at morning and at twilight, whenever any change was going on in that great exhaustless atmosphere, bounded by nothing but the pale distance of the round horizon,—and when was it that there was no change in that atmosphere?—clouds drifting, shadows flying, gleams of light like sudden revelations affording new knowledge of earth and heaven.

On the day on which the reader is asked first to visit this house of Dalrulzian, great things were happening in it. It was the end of one *régime* and the beginning of another. The master of the house, a young man who had been brought up at a distance, was coming home, and the family which had lived in it for years was taking its leave of the place.

The last spot which they visited and on which they lingered was the Walk. When the packing was over, the final remnants gathered up, the rooms left in that melancholy bareness into which rooms relapse when the prettinesses and familiarities of habitation have been swept away, the remaining members of the family came out with pensive faces, and stood together gazing somewhat wistfully upon the familiar scene. They had looked on many that were more fair. They were going to a landscape of greater beauty further south—brighter, richer, warmer in foliage and natural wealth; but all this did not keep a certain melancholy out of their eyes. The younger of the party, Nora Barrington, cried a little, her lip quivering, a big tear or two running over. "It is foolish to feel it so much," her mother said. "How is it one feels it so much? I did not admire Dalrulzian at all when we came."

"Out of perversity," said her husband; but he did not smile even at the cleverness of his own remark.

Nora regarded her father with a sort of tender rage. "It is all very well for you," she said; "one place is the same as another to you. But I was such a little thing when we came here. To you it is one place among many; to me it is home."

"If you take it so seriously, Nora, we shall have you making up to young Erskine for the love of his house."

"Edward," cried Mrs Barrington in a tone of reproof, "I feel disposed to cry too. We have had a great many happy days in it. But don't let old Rolls see you crying, Nora. Here he is coming to say good-bye. When do you expect Mr Erskine, Rolls? You must tell him we were sorry not to see him; but he will prefer to find his house free when he returns. I hope he will be as happy at Dalrulzian as we have been since we came here."

"Wherefore would he no' be happy, mem? He is young and weel off: and you'll no' forget it's his own house."

Rolls had stepped out from one of the windows to take farewell of the family, whom he was sorry to lose, yet anxious to

get rid of. There was in him the satisfied air of the man who remains in possession, and whose habits are unaffected by the coming and going of ephemeral beings such as tenants. The Barringtons had been at Dalrulzian for more than a dozen years; but what was that to the old servant who had seen them arrive and saw them go away with the same imperturbable aspect? He stood relieved against the wall in his well-brushed black coat, concealing a little emotion under a watchful air of expectancy just touched with impatience. Rolls had condescended more or less to the English family all the time they had been there, and he was keeping up his *rôle* to the last, anxious that they should perceive how much he wanted to see them off the premises. Mrs Barrington, who liked everybody to like her, was vexed by this little demonstration of indifference; but the Colonel laughed. "I hope Mr Erskine will give you satisfaction," he said. "Come, Nora, you must not take root in the Walk. Don't you see that Rolls wishes us away?"

"Dear old Walk!" cried Nora; "dear Dalrulzian!" She rolled the *r* in the name, and turned the *z* into a *y* (which is the right way of pronouncing it), as if she had been to the manner born; and though an English young lady, had as pretty a fragrance of northern Scotland in her voice as could be desired. Rolls did not trust himself to look at this pretty figure lingering, drying wet eyes, until she turned round upon him suddenly, holding out her hands: "The moment we are off, before we are down the avenue, you will be wishing us back," she cried with vehemence; "you can't deceive *me*. You would like to cry too, if you were not ashamed," said the girl, with a smile and a sob, shaking the two half-unwilling hands she had seized.

"Me cry! I've never done that since I came to man's estate," cried Rolls indignantly, but after a suspicious pause. "As for wishing you back, Miss Nora, wishing you were never to go,—wishing you would grow to the Walk, as the Cornel says ——" This was so much from such a speaker, that he turned, and added in a changed tone, "You'll have grand weather for your journey, Cornel. But you must mind the twa ferries, and no' be late starting,"—a sudden reminder which broke up the little group, and made an end of the scene of leave-taking. It was the farewell volley of friendly animosity with which Rolls put a stop to his own perverse inclination to be soft-hearted over the departure of the English tenants. "He could not let us go without that parting shot," the "Cornel" said, as he put his wife into the jingling "coach" from the station, which, every better vehicle having been sent off beforehand, was all that remained to carry them away.

The Barringtons during their residence at Dalrulzian had been received into the very heart of the rural society, in which at first there had sprung up a half-grudge against the almost unknown master of the place, whose coming was to deprive them of a family group so pleasant and so bright. The tenants themselves, though their turn was over, felt instinctively as if they were expelled for the benefit of our intruder, and entertained this grudge warmly. "Mr Erskine might just as well have stayed away," Nora said. "He can't care about it as we do." Her mother laughed and chid, and shared the sentiment. "But then it's 'his ain place,' as old Rolls says." "And I daresay he thinks there is twice as much shooting," said the Colonel, complacently: "I did, when we came. He'll be disappointed, you'll see." This gave him a faint sort of satisfaction. In Nora's mind there was a different consolation, which yet was not a consolation, but a mixture of expectancy and curiosity, and that attraction which surrounds an unconscious enemy. She was going to make acquaintance with this supplanter, this innocent foe, who was turning them out of their home because it was his home—the most legitimate reason. She was about to pay a series of visits in the country, to the various neighbours, who were all fond of her and reluctant to part with her. Perhaps her mother had some idea of the vague scheme of match-making which had sprung up in some minds, a plan to bring the young people together; for what could be more suitable than a match between John Erskine, the young master of Dalrulzian, who knew nothing about his native county, and Nora Barrington, who was its adopted child, and loved the old house as much as if she had been born in it? Mrs Barrington, perhaps, was not quite unconscious of this plan, though not a word had been said by any of these innocent plotters. For indeed what manner of man young Erskine was, and whether he was worthy of Nora, or in the least likely to please her, were things altogether unknown to the county, where he had not been seen for the last dozen years.

Anyhow he was coming as fast as the railway could carry him, while Nora took leave of her parents at the station. The young man then on his way was not even aware of her existence, though she knew all about him—or rather about his antecedents; for about John Erskine himself no one in the neighbourhood had much information. He had not set foot in the county since he was a boy of tender years and unformed character, whose life had been swallowed up in that of an alien family, of pursuits and ideas far separated from those of his native place. It almost seemed, indeed, as if it were far from a happy arrangement of Providence which made young John Erskine the master of this small estate in the North; or rather, perhaps, to mount a little higher, we might venture to say that it was a very embarrassing circumstance, and the cause of a great deal of confusion in this life that Henry Erskine, his father, should have died when he did. Whatever might be the consequences of that step to himself, to others it could scarcely be characterised but as a mistake. That young man had

begun to live an honest, wholesome life, as a Scotch country gentleman should; and if he had continued to exist, his wife would have been like other country gentlemen's wives, and his child, brought up at home, would have grown like the heather in adaptation to the soil. But when he was so ill advised as to die, confusion of every kind ensued. The widow was young, and Dalrulzian was solitary. She lived there, devoutly and conscientiously doing her duty, for some years. Then she went abroad, as everybody does, for that change of air and scene which is so necessary to our lives. And in Switzerland she met a clergyman, to whom change had also been necessary, and who was "taking the duty" in a mountain caravansary of tourists. What opportunities there are in such a position! She was pensive and he was sympathetic. He had a sister, whom she invited to Dalrulzian, "if she did not mind winter in the North;" and Miss Kingsford did not mind winter anywhere, so long as it was for her brother's advantage. The end was that Mrs Erskine became Mrs Kingsford, to the great though silent astonishment of little John, now eleven years old, who could not make it out. They remained at Dalrulzian for a year or two, for Mr Kingsford rather liked the shooting, and the power of asking a friend or two to share it. But at the end of that time he got a living—a good living; for events, whether good or evil, never come singly; and, taking John's interests into full consideration, it was decided that the best thing to be done was to let the house. Everybody thought this advisable, even John's old grand-aunt in Dunearn, of whom his mother was more afraid than of all her trustees put together. It was with fear and trembling that she had ventured to unfold this hesitating intention to the old lady. "Mr Kingsford thinks"—and then it occurred to the timid little woman that Mr Kingsford's opinion as to the disposal of Henry Erskine's house might not commend itself to Aunt Barbara. "Mr Monypenny says," she added, faltering; then stopped and looked with alarm in Miss Erskine's face.

"What are you frightened for, my dear? Mr Kingsford has a right to his opinion, and Mr Monypenny is a very discreet person, and a capital man of business."

"They think—it would be a good thing for—John;—for, Aunt Barbara, he is growing a big boy,—we must be thinking of his education——"

"That's true," said the old lady, with the smile that was the grimmest thing about her. It was very uphill work continuing a laboured explanation under the light of this smile.

"And he cannot—be educated—here."

"Wherefore no? I cannot see that, my dear. His father was educated in Edinburgh, which is what I suppose you mean by *here*. Many a fine fellow's been bred up at Edinburgh College, I can tell you; more than you'll find in any other place I ever heard of. Eh! what ails you at Edinburgh? It's well known to be an excellent place for schools—schools of all kinds."

"Yes, Aunt Barbara. But then you know, John:—they say he will have such a fine position—a long minority and a good estate—they say he should have the best education that—England can give."

"You'll be for sending him to that idol of the English," said the old lady, "a public school, as they call it. As if all our Scotch schools from time immemorial hadn't been public schools! Well, and after that——"

"It is only an idea," said little Mrs Kingsford, humbly—"not settled, nor anything like settled; but they say if I were to let the house——"

Aunt Barbara's grey eyes flashed; perhaps they were slightly green, as ill-natured people said. But she fired her guns in the air, so to speak, and once more grimly smiled. "I saw something very like all this in your wedding-cards, Mary," she said. "No, no, no apologies. I will not like to see a stranger in my father's house; but that's nothing, that's nothing. I will not say but it's very judicious; only you'll mind the boy's an Erskine, and here he'll have to lead his life. Mind and not make too much of an Englishman out of a Scotch lad, for he'll have to live his life here."

"Too much of an Englishman!" Mr Kingsford cried, when this conversation was reported to him. "I am afraid your old lady is an old fool, Mary. How could he be too much of an Englishman? Am *I* out of place here? Does not the greater breeding include the less?" he said, with his grand air. His wife did not always quite follow his meaning, but she always believed in it as something that merited understanding; and she was quite as deeply convinced as if she had understood. And accordingly the house was let to Colonel Barrington, who had not a "place" of his own, though his elder brother had, and the Kingsfords "went South" to their rectory, with which John's mother in particular was mightily pleased. It was in a far richer country than that which surrounded Dalrulzian,—a land flowing with milk and cheese, if not honey,—full of foliage and flowers. Mrs Kingsford, having been accustomed only to Scotland, was very much elated with the

luxuriant beauty of the place. She spoke of "England" as the travelled speak of Italy,—as if this climate of ours, which we abuse so much, was paradise. She thought "the English" so frank, so open, so demonstrative. To live in "the South" seemed the height of happiness to her. Innocent primitive Scotch gentlewomen are prone to talk in this way. Mr Kingsford, who knew better, and who himself liked to compare notes with people who winter in Italy, did what he could to check her exuberance, but she was too simple to understand why.

John, her son, did not share her feelings at first. John was generally confused and disturbed in his mind by all that had happened. He had not got over his wonder at the marriage, when he was carried off to this new and alien home. He did not say much. There was little opening by which he could communicate his feelings. He could not disapprove, being too young; and now that Mr Kingsford was always there, the boy had no longer the opportunity to influence his mother as, young as he was, he had hitherto done—"tyrannise over his mother," some people called it. All that was over. Much puzzled, the boy was dropped back into a properly subordinate position, which no doubt was much better for him; but it was a great change. To do him justice, he was never insubordinate; but he looked at his mother's husband with eyes out of which the perplexity never died. There was a permanent confusion ever after in his sense of domestic relationships, and the duty he owed to his seniors and superiors; for he never quite knew how it was that Mr Kingsford had become the master of his fate, though a certain innate pride, as well as his love of his mother, taught him to accept the yoke which he could not throw off. Mr Kingsford was determined to do his duty by John. He vowed when he gave the somewhat reluctant, proud little Scotsman—feeling himself at eleven too old to be kissed—a solemn embrace, that he would do the boy "every justice." He should have the best education, the most careful guardianship; and Mr Kingsford kept his word. He gave the boy an ideal education from his own point of view. He sent him to Eton, and, when the due time came, to Oxford, and considered his advantage in every way; and it is needless to say, that as John grew up, the sensation of incongruity, the wonder that was in his mind as to this sudden interference with all the natural arrangements of his life, died away. It came to be a natural thing to him that Mr Kingsford should have charge of his affairs. And he went home to the rectory for the holidays to find now and then a new baby, but all in the quiet natural way of use and wont, with no longer anything that struck him as strange in his relationships. And yet he was put out of the natural current of his life. Boy as he was, he thought sometimes, not only of special corners in the woods, and turns of the stream, where he nibbled as a boy at the big sports, which are the life of men in the country—but above all, of the house, the landscape, the great sweep of land and sky, of which, when he shut his eyes, he could always conjure up a vague vision. He thought of it with a sort of grudge that it was not within his reach—keen at first, but afterwards very faint and slight, as the boy's sentiments died away in those of the man.

Meanwhile it was an excellent arrangement, who could doubt, for John's interest—instead of keeping up the place, to have a rent for it; and he had the most excellent man of business, who nursed his estate like a favourite child; so that when his minority was over, and Colonel Barrington's lease out, John Erskine was in a more favourable position than any one of his name had been for some generations. The estate was small. When his father died, exclusive of Mrs Erskine's jointure, there was not much more than a thousand a-year to come out of it; and on fifteen hundred a-year his father had thought himself very well off, and a happy man. In the meantime, there had been accumulations which added considerably to this income, almost making up the sum which Mrs Kingsford enjoyed for her life. And John had always been treated at the rectory as a golden youth, happily exempted from all the uncertainty and the need of making his own way, which his stepfather announced, shaking his head, to be the fate of his own boys. Her eldest son, who was in "such a different position," was a great pride to Mrs Kingsford, even when it seemed to her half an injury that her other children should have no share in his happiness. But indeed she consoled herself by reflecting, an eldest son is always in a very different position; and no elder brother could have been kinder—voluntarily undertaking to send Reginald to Eton, "which was a thing we never could have thought of with no money," as soon as he came of age; and in every way comporting himself as a good son and brother.

There were, however, points in this early training which were bad for John. He acquired an exaggerated idea of the importance of this position of his. He was known both at school and college as a youth of property, the representative of a county family. These words mean more at Eton and Oxford than they require to do at Edinburgh or St Andrews. And in these less expensive precincts, Erskine of Dalrulzian would have been known for what he was. Whereas in "the South" nobody knew anything about the dimensions of his estate, or the limits of his income, and everybody supposed him a young north-country potentate, with perhaps a castle or two and unlimited "moors,"—who would be an excellent fellow to know as soon as he came into his own. This was John's own opinion in all these earlier days of youth. He did not know what his income was; and had he known, the figures would not have meant anything particular to him. A thousand a-year seems to imply a great deal of spending to a youth on an allowance of three hundred; and he accepted everybody's

estimate of his importance with pleased satisfaction. After all the explanations which followed his coming of age, he had indeed a touch of disenchantment and momentary alarm, feeling the details to be less splendid than he had expected. But Mr Monypenny evidently considered them anything but insignificant—and a man of his experience, the youth felt, was bound to know. He had gone abroad in the interval between leaving Oxford and coming "home" to take possession of his kingdom. He was not dissipated or extravagant, though he had spent freely. He was a good specimen of a young man of his time—determined that everything about him should be in "good form," and very willing to do his duty and be *bon prince* to his dependants. And he anticipated with pleasure the life of a country gentleman, such as he had seen it in his mother's neighbourhood, and in several houses of his college friends to which he had been invited. Sometimes, indeed, it would occur to him that his recollections of Dalrulzian were on a less extensive scale; but a boy's memory is always flattering to a home which he has not seen since his earliest years. Thus it was with a good deal of pleasant excitement that he set out from Milton Magna, his stepfather's rectory, where he had gone to see his mother and the children for a week or two on his return from the Continent. The season was just beginning; but John, full of virtue and hope, decided that he would not attempt to indulge in the pleasures of the season. Far better to begin his real life, to make acquaintance with his home and his "people," than to snatch a few balls and edge his way through a few crowded receptions, and feel himself nobody. This was not a thing which John much liked. He had been somebody all his life. Easter had been early that year, and everything was early. He stayed in town a week or two, saw all that was going on at the theatres, got all the last information that was to be had at the club on parliamentary matters, waited a day more "to see the pictures," and then set off on his homeward way. He had everything a young man of fortune requires, except a servant, for his habits were independent. He had been "knocking about," and there was no room at the rectory for such an appendage. So he took his own ticket, and himself saw his multifarious portmanteaus placed in the van which was to go "through." There were a great many mingled elements in his pleasure,—the satisfaction of "coming to his kingdom;" the pleasure of renewing old associations, and taking his natural place; the excitement of novelty—for it would all be as new to him, this home which he had not seen for a dozen years, as if he had never been there before. From thirteen to five-and-twenty, what a difference! He began to look about him with a new sensation as the morning rose after that long night-journey, and he felt himself approaching home.

CHAPTER II.

Old Rolls had been butler at Dalrulzian since John Erskine was a child. He had "stayed on" after Mrs Erskine's second marriage with reluctance, objecting seriously to a step-master at all, and still more to one that was an "English minister;" but the house had many attractions for him. He liked the place; his sister was the cook, a very stationary sort of woman, who had the greatest disinclination to move. She was a sort of human cat, large and smooth and good-natured, almost always purring, satisfied with herself and all who were moderately good to her; and, as was natural, she made the butler very comfortable, and was extremely attentive to all his little ways. When Colonel Barrington took the house, Rolls once more expressed his determination to leave. "What for?" said the placid Bauby; "the gentleman was keen to have a' the servants—a' the servants that would bide." "A' the servants! there's so many of us," said Rolls, derisively. There was indeed only himself, the cook, and one housemaid; the other, who had charge of John in his earlier days, and still was attached to him more or less, had gone with the family—and so, of course, had Mrs Kingsford's maid. "We'll mak' a grand show in the servants' hall—we're just a garrison," Rolls said. "We're plenty for a' the work there is the now," said the mild woman, "and they'll bring some with them. What ails ye to bide? You're real well aff—and me that kens exactly how you like your meat. Where would you be studied as I study you? You may just be thankful it's in your power." "It was with the Erskines I took service," said Rolls. "I'm no sure that I could put up with strangers, and them just travelling English. Besides, I've never been clear that service is my vocation. A kent family is one thing, a foreign master another. Him and me would very likely no get on—or them and me would no get on. All went very well in the last reign. Hairy Erskine was a gentleman, like all his forebears before him; but how am I to tell who is this Cornel, or whatever they ca' him—a man I never heard tell of before? I'll give them over the keys, and maybe I'll wait till they're suited, but nobody can ask me to do more."

"Hoot, Tammas!" said his sister: which was the highest height of remonstrance she ever reached. Notwithstanding this, however, year after year Rolls had "stayed on." He was very distinct in pointing out to "the Cornel" the superiority of his native masters, and the disadvantage to Scotland of having so many of the travelling English taking up the houses of the gentry; but he was an excellent servant, and his qualities in this way made up for his defects in the other—if, indeed, those defects did not tell in his favour; for a Scotch servant who is a character is, like a ghost, a credit to any old and respectable house. The Barringtons were proud of old Rolls. They laid temptations in his way and made him talk whenever they had visitors; and his criticisms on the English, and the opinions which he freely enunciated on all subjects, had often kept the party in amusement. Rolls, however, had not been able to defend himself against a certain weakness for the children, specially for Nora, who was very small when the family came to Dalrulzian, and whom he had brought up, as he flattered himself, regretting much all the time that she was not an Erskine and natural-born daughter of the house. Rolls did not by any means see the departure of the Barringtons unmoved, notwithstanding that he hurried them away. He stood for a long time looking after the "coach," which was a sort of rude omnibus, as it jolted down the avenue. The old servant stood in the clear morning air, through which every creak of the jingling harness and every jolt of the wheels sounded so distinctly, and the voice of Jock Beaton apostrophising his worn-out horse, and watched the lingering departure with feelings of a very mingled description. "There's *feenis* put to that chapter," he said to himself aloud. "We're well rid of them." But he lingered as long as the yellow panels could be seen gleaming through the trees at the turn of the road, without any of the jubilation in his face which he expressed in his words. At that last turn, just when the "coach" reached the highroad, something white was waved from the window, which very nearly made an end of Rolls. He uttered something which at first sounded like a sob, but was turned into a laugh, so to speak, before it fell into that tell-tale air which preserved every gradation of sound. "It's that bit thing!" Rolls said, more sentimental than perhaps he had ever been in his life. His fine feeling was, however, checked abruptly. "You're greetin' yourself, Tammas," said a soft round voice, interrupted by sobs, over his shoulder. "Me greetin'!"—he turned round upon her with a violence that, if Bauby had been less substantial and less calm, would have driven her to the other end of the house; "I'm just laughin' to see the nonsense you women-folk indulge in: but it's paardonable in the case of a bit creature like Miss Nora. And I allow they have a right to feel it. Where will they find a bonnie place like Dalrulzian, and next to nothing in the way of rent or keeping up? But I'm thankful mysel' to see the nest cleared out, and the real man in it. What are you whimpering about? It's little you've seen of them, aye in your kitchen." "Me seen little of them!" cried Bauby, roused to a kind of soft indignation; "the best part of an hour with the mistress every day of my life, and as kind a sympathising woman! There'll be nae leddy now to order the dinners—and that's a great responsibility, let alone anything else." "Go away with your responsibility. I'll order your dinners," said Rolls. "Well," said Bauby, not without resignation, "to be a servant, and no born a gentleman, you've aye been awfu' particular about your meat." And she withdrew consoled, though drying her eyes, to wonder if Mr John would be "awfu' particular about his meat," or take whatever was offered to him, after the

fashion of some young men. Meat, it must be explained, to Bauby Rolls meant food of all descriptions—not only that which she would herself have correctly and distinctly distinguished as "butcher's meat."

The house was very empty and desolate after all the din and bustle. The furniture had faded in the quarter of a century and more which had elapsed since Harry Erskine furnished his drawing-room for his bride. That had not been a good period for furniture, according to our present lights, and everything looked dingy and faded. The few cosy articles with which the late tenants had changed its character had been removed; the ornaments and prettinesses were all gone. The gay limp old chintzes, the faded carpet, the walls in sad want of renewal, obtruded themselves even upon the accustomed eye of Rolls. The nest might be cleared, but it looked a somewhat forlorn and empty nest. He stood upon the threshold of the drawing-room, contemplating it mournfully. A little of that "cheeney and nonsense" which he had been highly indignant with Mrs Barrington for bringing, would have been of the greatest consequence now to brighten the walls; and a shawl or a hat thrown on a chair, which had called forth from old Rolls many a grumble in the past, would have appeared to him now something like a sign of humanity in the desert. But all that was over, and the old servant, painfully sensible of the difference in the aspect of the place, began to grow afraid of its effect upon the young master. If, after all, John should not be "struck with" his home! if, terrible to think of, he might prefer some house "in the South" to Dalrulzian! "But it's no possible," said Rolls to himself. He made a survey of all the rooms in the new anxiety that dawned upon him. The library was better; there were a good many books on the shelves, and it had not to Rolls the air of desertion the other rooms had. He lighted a fire in it, though it was the first week in May, and took great pains to restore by it an air of comfort and habitation. Then he took a walk down the avenue in order to make a critical examination of the house from a little distance, to see how it would look to the new-comer. And Rolls could not but think it a most creditable-looking house. The fir-trees on the top of the hill threw up their sombre fan of foliage against the sky; the birches were breathing forth a spring sweetness—the thin young foliage softly washed in with that tenderest of greens against the darker background, seemed to appeal to the spectator, forbidding any hasty judgment, with the promise of something beautiful to come. The ash-trees were backward, no doubt, but they are always backward. In the wood the primroses were appearing in great clusters, and the parterres under the terrace were gay with the same. Rolls took comfort as he gazed. The avenue was all green, the leaves in some sunny corners quite shaken out of their husks, in all bursting hopefully. "It's a bonnie place," Rolls said to himself, with a sigh of excitement and anxiety. Bauby, who shared his feelings in a softened, fat, comfortable way of her own, was standing in the doorway, with her little shawl pinned over her broad chest, and a great white apron blazing in the light of the morning sun. She had a round face, like a full moon, and a quantity of yellow hair smoothed under the white cap, which was decorously tied under her chin. She did not take any of the dignity of a housekeeper-cook upon her, but she was a comfortable creature to behold, folding her round arms, with the sleeves rolled up a little, and looking out with a slight curve, like a shadow of the pucker on her brother's brows, in her freckled forehead. She was ready to cry for joy when Mr John appeared, just as she had cried for sorrow when the Barringtons went away. Neither of these effusions of sentiment would disturb her greatly, but they were quite genuine all the same. Rolls felt that the whiteness of her apron and the good-humour of her face lit up the seriousness of the house. He began to give her her instructions as he advanced across the open space at the top of the avenue. "Bauby," he said, "when ye hear the wheels ye'll come, and the lasses with you; and Andrew, he can stand behind; and me, naturally I'll be in the front: and we'll have no whingeing, if *you* please, but the best curtsey you can make, and 'We're glad to see you home, sir,' or something cheery like that. He's been long away, and he was but a boy when he went. We'll have to take care that he gets a good impression of his ain house."

"That's true," said Bauby. "Tammas, I've heard of them that after a long absence have just taken a kind o' scunner——"

"Hold your tongue with your nonsense. A scunner at Dalrulzian!" cried Rolls; but the word sank into the depths of his heart. A scunner—for we scorn a footnote—is a sudden sickening and disgust with an object not necessarily disagreeable—a sort of fantastic prejudice, which there is no struggling against. But Rolls repeated his directions, and would not allow himself to entertain such a fear.

It was not, however, with any sound of wheels, triumphal or otherwise, that young Erskine approached his father's house. It was all new and strange to him; the hills—the broad and wealthy carses through which he had passed—the noble Firth, half sea half river, which he had crossed over in his way,—all appeared to him like landscapes in a dream, places he had seen before, though he could not tell how or when. It was afternoon when he reached Dunearn, which was the nearest place of any importance. He had chosen to stop there instead of at the little country station a few miles farther on, which was proper for Dalrulzian. This caprice had moved him, much in the same way as a prince had sometimes been moved to wander about *incognito*, and glean the opinions of his public as to his own character and proceedings. Princes

in fiction are fond of this diversion; why not a young Scotch laird just coming into his kingdom, whose person was quite unknown to his future vassals? It amused and gently excited him to think of thus arriving unknown, and finding out with what eyes he was looked upon: for he had very little doubt that he was important enough to be discussed and talked of, and that the opinions of the people would throw a great deal of light to him upon the circumstances and peculiarities of the place. He was curious about everything,—the little grey Scotch town, clinging to its hillside—the freshness of the spring colour—the width of the wistful blue sky, banked and flecked with white clouds, and never free, with all its brightness, from a suspicion of possible rain. He thought he recollected them all like things he had seen in a dream; and that sense of travelling *incognito* and arriving without any warning in the midst of a little world, all eagerly looking for his arrival, but which should be innocently deceived by his unpretending appearance, tickled his fancy greatly. He was five-and-twenty, and ought to have known better; but there was something in the circumstances which justified his excitement. He skimmed lightly along the quiet country road, saying to himself that he thought he remembered the few clusters of houses that were visible here and there, one of them only big enough to be called a village, where there was "a merchant's" shop, repository of every kind of ware, and a blacksmith's smithy. Two or three times he stopped to ask the way to Dalrulzian out of pure pleasure in the question! for he never lost sight of that line of fir-trees against the horizon, which indicated his native hill; but after he had put this question once or twice, it must be added that young Erskine's satisfaction in it failed a little. He ceased to feel the excitement of his *incognito*, the pleasure of entering his dominions like a young prince in disguise. The imagination of the women at the village doors, the chance passengers on the way, were not occupied with the return of John Erskine; they were much more disposed to think and talk of the others who had no right, it seemed to him, to occupy their thoughts.

"Dalrulzian! you'll find nobody there the day," said a countryman whom he overtook and accosted on the road. "The family's away this morning, and a great loss they will be to the country-side."

"The family!" said John, and he felt that his tone was querulous in spite of himself. "I did not understand that there was a family."

"Ay was there, and one that will be missed sore; both gentle and simple will miss them. Not the real family, but as good, or maybe better," the man said, with a little emphasis, as if he meant offence, and knew who his questioner was.

The young man reddened in spite of himself. This was not the kind of popular report which in his *incognito* he had hoped to hear.

"The laird is what they call in Ireland an absentee," said his companion. "We're no minding muckle in Scotland if they're absentees or no; they can please themsels. But there's nae family of the Erskines—nothing but a young lad; and the Cornel that's had the house was a fine, hearty, weel-spoken man, with a good word for everybody; and the ladies very kind, and pleasant, and neighbour-like. Young Erskine must be a young laird past the ordinar if he can fill their place."

"But, so far as I understand, the estate belongs to him, does it not?" Erskine asked, with an involuntary sharpness in his voice.

"Oh ay, it belongs to him; that makes but sma' difference. Ye're no bound to be a fine fellow," said the roadside philosopher, with great calmness, "because ye're the laird of a bit sma' country place——"

"Is it such a small place?" cried the poor young prince *incognito*, appalled by this revelation. He felt almost childishly annoyed and mortified. His companion eyed him with a cool half-satirical gaze.

"You're maybe a friend of the young man? Na, I'm saying nae ill of the place nor of him. Dalrulzian's a fine little property, and a' in good order, thanks to auld Monypenny in Dunearn. Maybe you're from Dunearn? It's a place that thinks muckle of itself; but nae doubt it would seem but a poor bit town to you coming from the South?"

"How do you know I come from the South?" said John.

"Oh, I ken the cut of ye fine," said the man. "I'm no easy deceived. And I daur to say you could tell us something about this new laird. There's different opinions about him. Some thinks him a lad with brains, that could be put up for the county and spite the Earl. I've no great objection mysel to the Earl or his opinions, but to tak' another man's nominee, if he was an angel out of heaven, is little credit to an enlightened constituency. So there's been twa-three words. You'll no know if he has ony turn for politics, or if he's a clever lad, or——"

"You don't seem to mind what his politics are," said the unwary young man.

His new friend gave him another keen glance. "The Erskines," he answered quietly, "are a' on the right side."

Now John Erskine was aware that he did not himself possess political opinions sufficiently strenuous to be acknowledged by either side. He agreed sometimes with one party, sometimes with another, which, politically speaking, is the most untenable of all positions. And so ignorant was he of the immediate traditions of his family, that he could not divine which was "the right side" on which the Erskines were sure to be. It was not a question upon which his mother could have informed him. As Mr Kingsford's wife, an orthodox Church of England clergywoman, she was, of course, soundly Conservative, and thought she hated everything that called itself Liberal—which word she devoutly believed to include all kinds of Radical, revolutionary, and atheistical sentiments. John himself had been a good Tory too when he was at Eton, but at Oxford had veered considerably, running at one time into extreme opinions on the other side, then veering back, and finally settling into a hopeless eclectic, who by turns sympathised with everybody, but agreed wholly with nobody. Still it was whimsical not even to know the side on which the Erskines were declared with so much certainty to be. It pleased him at least to find that they had character enough to have traditionary politics at all.

"You must excuse me as a stranger," he said, "if I don't quite know what side you regard as the—right side."

His friend looked at him with a sarcastic gaze—a look John felt which set him down not only as devoid of ordinary intelligence, but of common feeling. "It's clear to see you are not of that way of thinking," he said.

As he uttered this contemptuous verdict they came opposite to a gate, guarded by a pretty thatched cottage which did duty for a lodge. John felt his heart give a jump, notwithstanding the abashed yet amused sensation with which he felt himself put down. It was the gate of Dalrulzian: he remembered it as if he had left it yesterday. A woman came to the gate and looked out, shielding her eyes with her hand from the level afternoon sun that shone into them. "Have you seen anything of our young master, John Tamson?" she said. "I'm aye thinking it's him every sound I hear."

"There's the road," said the rural politician, briefly addressing John; then he turned to the woman at the gate. "If it's no him, I reckon it's a friend. Ye had better pit your questions here," he said.

"John Thomson," said John, with some vague gleam of recollection. "Are you one of the farmers?" The man looked at him with angry, the woman with astonished, eyes.

"My freend," said John Thomson, indignantly, "I wouldna wonder but you have plenty of book-learning; but you're an ignorant young fop for a' that, if you were twenty times the laird's freend."

John for his part was too much startled and amused to be angry. "Am I an ignorant young fop?" he said. "Well, it is possible—but why in this particular case——"

"Noo, noo," said the woman, who left the lodge, coming forward with her hands spread out, and a tone of anxious conciliation. "Dear bless me! what are you bickering about? He's no a farmer, but he's just as decent a man—nobody better thought of for miles about. And, John Tamson, I'm astonished at you! Can you no let the young gentleman have his joke without taking offence like this, that was never meent?"

"I like nae such jokes," said John Tamson, angrily; and he went off swinging down the road at a great pace. John stood looking after him for a moment greatly perplexed. The man did not touch his hat nor the woman curtsey as they certainly would have done at Milton Magna. He passed her mechanically without thinking of her, and went in at his own gate—not thinking of that either, though it was an event in his life. This little occurrence had given an impulse in another direction to his thoughts.

But the woman of the lodge called after him. She had made a slightly surprised objection to his entrance, which he did not notice in his preoccupation. "Sir, sir!" she cried—"you're welcome to walk up the avenue, which is a bonnie walk; but you'll find nobody in the house. The young laird, if it was him you was wanting to see, is expected every minute; but there's no signs of him as yet—and he canna come now till the four o'clock train."

"Thank you. I'll walk up the avenue," said John, and then he turned back. "Why did you think I was making a joke? and why was your friend offended when I asked if he was one of the farmers?—it was no insult, I hope."

"He's a very decent man, sir," said the woman; "but I wouldna just take it upon me to say that he was my freend."

"That's not the question!" cried John, exasperated—and he felt some gibe about Scotch caution trembling on the tip of his tongue; but he remembered in time that he was himself a Scot and among his own people, and he held that unruly member still.

"Weel, sir," said the woman, "if ye will ken—but, bless me! it's easy to see for yourself. The farmers about here are just as well put on and mounted and a' that as you are. John Tamson! he's a very decent man, as good as any of them—but he's just the joiner after a', and a cotter's son. He thought you were making a fool of him, and he's not a man to be made a fool o'. We're no so civil-like—nor may be so humble-minded, for anything I can tell—as the English, sir. Baith the Cornel and his lady used to tell me that."

It was with a mixture of irritation and amusement that John pursued his way after this little encounter. And an uncomfortable sensation, a chill, seemed to creep over his mind, and arrest his pleasurable expectations as he went on. The avenue was not so fine a thing as its name implied. It was not lined with noble trees, nor did it sweep across a green universe of parks and lawns like many he had known. It led instead up the slope of the hill, through shrubberies which were not more than copsewood in some places, and under lightly arching trees not grand enough or thick enough to afford continuous shade. And yet it was sweet in the brightness of the spring tints, the half-clothed branches relieved against that variable yet smiling sky, the birds in full-throated chorus, singing welcome with a hundred voices,—no nightingales there, but whole tribes of the "mavis and the merle," north-country birds and kindly. His heart and mind were touched alike with that half-pathetic pleasure, that mixture of vague recollections and forgetfulness, with which we meet the half-remembered faces, and put out our hands to meet the grasp of old friends still faithful though scarcely known. A shadow of the childish delight with which he had once explored these scanty yet fresh and friendly woods came breathing about him: "The winds came to me from the fields of sleep." He felt himself like two people: one, a happy boy at home, familiar with every corner; the other a man, a spectator, sympathetically excited, faltering upon the forgotten way, wondering what lay round the next curve of the road. It was the strangest blending of the known and the unknown.

But when John Erskine came suddenly, as he turned the corner of that great group of ash-trees, in sight of his house, these vague sensations, which were full of sweetness, came to an end with a sharp jar and shock of the real. Dalrulzian was a fact of the most solid dimensions, and dispersed in a moment all his dreams. He felt himself come down suddenly through the magical air, with a sensation of falling, with his feet upon the common soil. So that was his home! He felt in a moment that he remembered it perfectly,—that there had never been any illusions about it in his mind,—that he had known all along every line of it, every step of the gables, the number of the little windows, the slopes of the grey roof. But it is impossible to describe the keen sense of disenchantment which went through his mind as he said this to himself. It was not only that the solid reality dispersed his vision, but that it afforded a measure by which to judge himself and his fortunes, till now vaguely and pleasantly exaggerated in his eyes. It is seldom indeed that the dim image of what was great and splendid to us in our childhood does not seem ludicrously exaggerated when we compare it with the reality. He who had felt himself a young prince in disguise, approaching his domains *incognito*, in order to enjoy at his leisure the incense of universal interest, curiosity, and expectation! John Erskine blushed crimson though nobody saw him, as he stood alone at the corner of his own avenue and recognised the mistake he had made, and his own unimportance, and all the folly of his simple over-estimate. Fortunately, indeed, he had brought nobody with him to share in the glories of his entry upon his kingdom. He thanked heaven for that, with a gasp of horror at the thought of the crowning ridicule he had escaped. It was quite hard enough to get over the first startling sensation of reality alone.

And yet it was the same house upon which the Barringtons had looked back so affectionately a few hours before—which the county regarded with approval, and which was visited by the best families. It would be hard to say what its young master had expected,—a dream-castle, a habitation graceful and stately, a something built out of clouds, not out of old Scotch rubble-work and grey stone. It was not looking its best, it must be added. The *corps du logis* lay in gloom, thrown into shade by the projecting rustic gable, upon the other side of which the setting sun still played; the yellowish walls, discoloured here and there by damp, had no light upon them to throw a fictitious glow over their imperfections. The door stood open, showing the hall with its faded fittings, gloomy and unattractive, and, what was more, deserted, as if the house had been abandoned to dreariness and decay—not so much as a dog to give some sign of life. When the young man, rousing himself with an effort, shook off the stupor of his disappointment and vexation, and went on to the open door, his foot on the gravel seemed to wake a hundred unaccustomed echoes: and nobody appeared. He walked in unchallenged, unwelcomed, going from room to room, finding all equally desolate. Was there ever a more dismal coming home? When he reached the library, where a little fire was burning, this token of human life quite went to the young fellow's heart. He was standing on the hearth very gloomy, gazing wistfully at the portrait of a gentleman in a periwig

over the mantelpiece, when the door was pushed open and old Rolls appeared with his coat off, carrying a basket of wood. Rolls was as much startled as his master was disappointed, and he was vexed to be seen by a stranger in so unworthy an occupation. He put down his basket and glanced at his shirt-sleeves with confusion. "I was expecting nobody," he said in his own defence. "And wha may ye be," he added, "that comes into the mansion-house of Dalrulzian without speering permission, or ringing a bell, or chapping at a door?" John smiled at the old man's perplexity, but said nothing. "You'll be a friend of our young master's?" he said, tentatively; then after an interval, in a voice with a quiver in it, "Your no meaning, sir, that you're the laird himself?"

"For want of a better," said John, amused in spite of himself. "And you're old Rolls. I should have known you anywhere. Shake hands, man, and say you're glad to see me. It's like a house of the dead."

"Na, sir, no such things; there's no death here. Lord bless us! wha was to think you would come in stealing like a thief in the night, as the Bible says?" said Rolls, aggrieved. He felt that it was he who was the injured person. "It was all settled how you were to be received as soon as the wheels were heard in the avenue,—me on the steps, and the women behind, and Andrew,—the haill household, to wit. If there's any want of respect, it's your ain fault. And if you'll just go back to the avenue now and give us warning, I'll cry up the women in a moment," the old servant said.

CHAPTER III.

That night dispersed illusions from the mind of John Erskine which it had taken all his life to set up. He discovered in some degree what his real position was, and that it was not a great one. He got rid of many of his high notions as he walked about the pleasant, comfortable, but somewhat dingy old house, which no effort of the imagination could make into a great house. He made acquaintance with the household. Mrs Rolls the cook, who curtseyed and cried for pleasure at the sight of him, and two smiling, fair-haired young women, and old Andrew the gardener—a quite sufficient household for the place, he felt, but very different from the army of servants, all so noiseless, punctilious, carefully drilled, whom he had seen at country-houses, with which he had fondly hoped his own might bear comparison. What a fool he had been! These good honest folk have little air of being servants at all. Their respect was far less than their interest in him; and their questions were more like those of poor relatives than hired attendants. "I hope your mammaw is well, Mr John," Bauby the cook had said. "Let the master alone with your Mr Johns," Rolls had interrupted; "he's come to man's estate, and you must learn to be more respectful. The women, sir, are all alike; you can never look for much sense from them." "Maybe you're right, Tammas," said Bauby; "but for all that I cannot help saying that its an awfu' pleasure to see Mr John, that was but that height when I saw him last, come home a braw gentleman like what I mind his father." John could do nothing but stand smiling between them, hearing himself thus discussed. They made it very clear that he had come home where he would be taken ample care of—but how different it was from his thoughts! He thought of the manor-house at Milton Magna, and laughed and blushed at the ridiculous comparisons he had once made. It was a keen sort of self-ridicule, sharp and painful. He did not like to think what a fool he had been. Now he came to think of it, he had quite well remembered Dalrulzian. It was not his youthful imagination that was to blame, but a hundred little self-deceits, and all the things that he had been in the habit of hearing about his own importance and his Scotch property. His mother had done more than any one else to deceive him, he thought; and then he said to himself, "Poor mother!" wondering if, perhaps, her little romance was all involved in Dalrulzian, and if it was a sacred place to her. To think that the Kingsford household was prose, but the early life in which she had been Harry Erskine's wife and little John's mother, the poetry of her existence, was pleasant to her son, who was fond of his mother, though she was not clever, nor even very sensible. John thought, with a blush, of the people whom he had invited to Dalrulzian under that extraordinary mistake—some of his friends at college, young fellows who were accustomed to houses full of company and stables full of horses. There was nothing in the stables at Dalrulzian but the hired horse which had been provided by Rolls in a hired dogcart to bring him up from the station; and as he looked round upon the room in which he sat after dinner, and which was quite comfortable and highly respectable, though neither dignified nor handsome, poor John burst into a laugh, in which there was more pain than amusement. He seemed to himself to be stranded on a desert shore. What should he do with himself, especially during the long summer, when there could be no hunting, no shooting,—the summer which he had determined to occupy, with a fine sense of duty, in making acquaintance with his house and his surroundings, and in learning all his duties as a country gentleman and person of importance? This thought was so poignant, that it actually touched his eyelids with a sense of moisture. He laughed—but he could have cried. There would turn out, he supposed, to be about three farms on this estate of his; and Scotch farmers were very different people from the small farmers of the South. To talk about his tenants would be absurd. Three pragmatical Scotchmen, much better informed in all practical matters at least than himself, and looking down upon him as an inexperienced young man. What a fool he had been! If he had come down in August for the shooting,—if there was any shooting,—and let his friends understand that it was a mere shooting-box—a "little place in Scotland," such as they hired when they came to the moors,—all would have been well. But he had used no disparaging adjectives in speaking of Dalrulzian. He had called it "my place" boldly, and had believed it to be a kind of old castle—something that probably had been capable of defence in its day. Good heavens! what a fool he had been!

He had thought he would be glad to get to bed, and felt pleased that he was somewhat tired with his journey; but he found that, on the contrary, the night flew by amidst these thoughts,—fathomless night, slow and dark and noiseless. Rolls had made repeated attempts to draw him into conversation in what that worthy called the fore-night; but by ten o'clock or so, the house was as still as death, not a sound anywhere, and the hours passed over him while he sat and thought. A little fire crackled and burned in the grate, with little *pétillements* and bursts of flame. There were a good many books on the shelves; that was always something: and Mrs Rolls had given him an excellent dinner, which he ought to have considered also as a very great alleviation of the situation. John scarcely knew what hour it was when, starting suddenly up in the multitude of his thoughts, he threw open the window which looked upon the Walk, and gazed out moodily upon the night. The night was soft and clear, and the great stretch of the landscape lay dimly defined under a half-veiled poetic sky, over which light floating vapours were moving with a kind of gentle solemnity. There was not light enough to

distinguish the individual features of the scene, save here and there a pale gleam of water, a darkness of wood, and the horizon marked by that faint silvery edge which even by night denotes the limit of human vision. The width, the freshness, the stillness, the dewy purity of the air, soothed the young man as he stood and looked out. What was he, a human unit in the great round of space, to be so disconcerted by the little standing-ground he had? He felt abased as he gazed, and a strange sense of looking out upon his life came over him. His future was like that—all vague, breathing towards him a still world full of anticipations, full of things hidden and mysterious—his, and yet not his, as was the soil and the fields. He could mortgage it as he could his estate, but he could not sell it away from him, or get rid of what was in it, whether it carried out his foolish expectations or not. Certainly the sight of this wide scenery, in which he was to perform his part, did him good, though he could not see it. He closed the window, which was heavy, almost with violence, as he came back to the ascertained,—to the limited walls with their books, the old-fashioned original lamp, and crackling fire.

But this sound was very unusual in the house in the middle of the night. Bauby, whose room was next her brother's, knocked upon the wall to rouse him. "D'ye hear that, Tammas? There's somebody trying to get into the house." Her voice came to Rolls faintly muffled by the partition between. He had heard the noise as well as she, but he did not think fit to answer save by a grunt. Then Bauby knocked again more loudly. "Tammas! Man, will ye no put on your breeks and go down and see what it is?" Rolls, for his part, was already in the midst of a calculation. So much plate as there was in the house he had brought up with him to his room. "They cannot steal tables and chairs," he said to himself; "and as for the young laird, if he's not able to take care of himself, he'll be none the better of me for a defender." Audibly he answered, "Hold your tongue, woman. If the master likes to take the air in the sma' hours, what's that to you or me?" There was a pause of dismay on Bauby's part, and then a faint ejaculation of "Lord bless us! take the air!" But she was less easily satisfied than her brother. When John went up-stairs with his candle, he saw a light glimmering in the gallery above, and a figure in white, far too substantial to be a ghost, leaning over the banisters. "Eh, sir! is it you, Mr John?" Bauby said. "I was feared it was robbers;" and then she added in her round, soft, caressing voice, "but you mustna take the air in the middle of the night: you'll get your death of cold, and then, what will your mammaw say to me, Mr John?" John shut himself up in his room, half laughing, half affronted. It was many years since he had been under the sway of his "mamma" in respect to his hours and habits; and nothing could be more droll than to go back to the kind annoyance of domestic surveillance just at the moment when his manhood and independence were most evident. He laughed, but the encounter brought him back, after he had been partly freed from it, to a consciousness of all his limitations once more.

But things were better in the morning. Unless you have something bitter to reproach yourself with, or some calamity impending over you, things are generally better in the morning. John looked about him with more hopeful eyes. He had an excellent, a truly Scotch, breakfast, which, at five-and-twenty, puts a man in good-humour with himself; and there were one or two features about Dalrulzian which, in the morning sunshine, looked more encouraging. The stables were tolerably good, made habitable, and furnished with some of the latest improvements by Colonel Barrington; and "the policy" was in admirable order,—the turf faultless, the shrubberies flourishing, the trees—well, not like the trees at Milton Magna, but creditable performances for the North. John's countenance cleared as he inspected everything. Rolls led or followed him about with great importance, introducing and explaining. Had he been an English butler, John would have dismissed him very summarily to his pantry; but it was part of the natural *mise en scène* to have a Caleb Balderstone attached to an old Scotch house. He was half proud of this retainer of the family, though he threatened to be something of a bore; even Bauby, and her care for his health, and her sense of responsibility to his "mammaw," was tolerable in this light. When one is born a Scotch laird, one must accept the natural accompaniments of the position; and if they were sometimes annoying, they were at least picturesque. So John put up with Rolls, and "saw the fun" of him with a kind of feeling that Dalrulzian was a Waverley novel, and he himself the hero. He had been seeing things so much through the eyes of his problematical visitors, that he was glad to see this also through their eyes. To them, these servants of his would be altogether "characteristic," and full of "local colour." And then the subtle influence of property began to affect the young man and modify his disappointment. "A poor thing, sir, but mine own," he said to himself. These were "my plantations" that crested the hill; the fishing on the river was said to be excellent, and belonged to Dalrulzian; the moorland on the eastern side of the hill was "my moor." Things began to mend. When he went back again after his examination to the room from which he had started, John found a luncheon spread for him, which was not inferior to the breakfast, and Rolls, in his black coat, having resumed the butler, and thrown off the factotum, but not less disposed to be instructive than before.

"You may as well," young Erskine said, eating an admirable cutlet, "tell me something about my neighbours, Rolls."

"I'll do that, sir," said Rolls, with cordiality; and then he made a pause. "The first to be named is no to call a neighbour; but I hope, sir, you'll think far mair of her than of any neighbour. She's your ain best blood, and a leddy with a great regard for Dalrulzian, and not another friend so near to her as you. It came from Dalrulzian, and it'll come back to Dalrulzian with careful guiding," said Rolls, oracularly; "not to say that blood's thicker than water, as the auld Scots byword goes."

This address gave John some sense of perplexity; but after an interval he discovered what it meant. "It is my old Aunt Barbara of whom you are speaking," he said. "Certainly, I shall see her first of all."

"She is an excellent lady, sir; careful of her money. It will be real good for the estate when——But, bless me! I wadna have you to be looking forward to what may never come,—that is to say, that auld Miss Barbara, being real comfortable, sir, in this life, will not go out of it a moment sooner than she can help: and for a' that we ken o' heaven, I wouldna blame her; for, grand as it may be, it will aye be a strange place. There's nobody more thought upon in the county than Miss Barbara Erskine at Dunearn. Weel, sir, and the neighbours. There's the Earl of Lindores first of a'. We maun give him the paw, as the French say. Maybe you've met with some of the family in London? You'll see plenty and hear plenty of them here. The Earl he is a very pushing man. He would like to take the lead in a' the county business; but there's many of the gentry that are not exactly of that opinion. And my lady Countess, she's of the booky kind, with authors, and painters, and that kind of cattle aye about the place. I'm not that fond of thae instructed leddies. Weemen are best no to be ower clever, in my poor opinion. Young Rintoul, that's the son, is away with his regiment; I ken nothing of him: and there's two young leddies——"

"Now I remember," said John. "You are the most concise of chroniclers, Rolls. I like your style. I once knew some of the Lindores family—cousins, I suppose. There were young ladies in that family too. I knew them very well." Here he paused, a smile stealing about the corners of his mouth.

"I ken nothing about their relations," said Rolls. "It was an awfu' melancholy story; but it's an ill wind that blaws nobody good. The late Earl was liked by everybody. But I'm saying nothing against this family. One of the young daughters is married, poor thing! The other one at hame, my Lady Edith, is a bonnie bit creature. She was great friends with *oor* young lady. But if you were to ask my opinion, sir—which is neither here nor there," said Rolls, in insinuating tones—"I would say there was not one that was fit to hold the candle to Miss Nora. We had our bits of tiffs, the Cornel and me. There were some things he would never see in a proper light; but they were much thought o', and saw a' the best company. When you let a place, it's a grand thing to have tenants that never let down the character of the house."

"You mean the Barringtons," said John. He was not much interested in this subject. They had been unexceptionable tenants; but he could scarcely help regarding them with a little jealousy, almost dislike, as if they had been invaders of his rights.

"And they were awfu' fond of it," said Rolls, watching his young master's countenance. "Miss Nora above a'. You see she's grown up at Dalrulzian. It was all they could do to get her away from the Walk this last morning. I thought she would have grown till't. If you and Miss Nora was ever to meet," the old servant added, in his most engaging tones, "I cannot but believe you would be real good—freends——"

"I see you have provided for every contingency," said the young laird, with a laugh. His Caleb Balderstone, he said to himself, was almost better, if that was possible, than Scott's. But John's mind had been set afloat on a still more pleasant channel, and he let the old man maunder on.

"It's true she's English," said Rolls; "but that matters nothing in my opinion, on what they call the side of the distaff. I'll no say but it's offensive in a man: putting up so long with the Cornel and his ways of thinking, I'm no a bad authority on that. But weemen are a different kind of creatures. A bit discrepancy, if ye may so call it—a kind of a different awkcent, so to speak, baith in the soul and the tongue, is just a pleasant variety. It gives new life to a family sometimes, and mends the breed, if you'll no think me coarse. A little of everything is good in a race. And besides being so good and so bonnie, Miss Nora will have a little siller of her ain, which spoils nothing. Not one of your great fortunes, but just a little siller —enough for their preens and rubbitch—of her ain."

Here, however, the pleasant delusion with which Nora's humble champion was delighting himself was suddenly dispersed by a question which proved his young master to be thinking nothing about Nora. "I used to know some of the Lindores family," John repeated, "a brother of the Earl. I wonder if they ever come here?"

"I ken nothing about their relations, sir," said Rolls, promptly. "It's thought the Earl's awfu' ambitious. They're no that rich, and he has an eye to everything that will push the family on. There's one of them marriet, poor thing!"

"I am afraid you are a fierce old bachelor," said John, rising from the table; "this is the second time you have said 'poor thing.'"

"That's my Lady Caroline, sir," said Rolls, with a grave face, "that's married upon Torrance of Tinto, far the richest of all our neighbour gentlemen. You'll no remember him? He was a big mischievous callant when you were but a little thing, begging your pardon, sir, for the freedom," said the old servant, with a little bow of apology; but the gravity of his countenance did not relax. "It's not thought in the country-side that the leddy was very fain of the marriage—poor thing!"

"You are severe critics in the country-side. One must take care what one does, Rolls."

"Maybe, sir, that's true; they say public opinion's a grand thing: whiles it will keep a person from going wrong. But big folk think themselves above that," Rolls said. And then, having filled out a glass of wine, which his master did not want; he withdrew. Rolls was not quite satisfied with the young laird. He betook himself to the kitchen with his tray and a sigh, unburdening himself to Bauby as he set down the remains of the meal on the table. "I wouldna wonder," he said, shaking his head, "if he turned out mair English than the Cornel himsel'."

"Hoot, Tammas!" said Bauby, always willing to take the best view, "that's no possible. When ye refleck that he was born at Dalrulzian, and brought up till his thirteenth year——"

"Sic bringing up!" cried old Rolls; "and a step-faither that never could learn so much as to say the name right o' the house that took him in!"

Meanwhile John, left alone with his own thoughts, found a curious vein of new anticipations opened to him by the old man's talk. The smile that had lighted on the corners of his mouth came back and settled there, betraying something of the maze of pleased recollections, the amused yet tender sentiment, which these familiar yet half-forgotten names had roused again. Caroline and Edith Lindores! No doubt they were family names, and the great young ladies who were his neighbours were the cousins of those happy girls whom he remembered so well. The Lindores had been at a Swiss mountain inn where he and some of his friends had lived for six weeks under pretence of reading. They had made friends on the score of old family acquaintance "at home;" and he never remembered so pleasant a holiday. What had become of the girls by this time? Carry, the eldest, was sentimental and poetical, and all the young men were of opinion that Beaufort the young University Don, who was at the head of the party, had talked more poetry than was good for him with that gentle enthusiast. Beaufort had gone to the Bar since then, and was said to be getting on. Had they kept up their intercourse, or had it dropped, John wondered, as his own acquaintance with the family had dropped? They were poor people, living abroad for economy and education, notwithstanding that Mr Lindores was brother to an earl. Surely sometimes the Earl must invite his relations, or at least he would be sure to hear of them, to come within the circle of their existence again. Young Erskine had almost forgotten, to tell the truth, the existence of the Lindores; yet when they were thus recalled to him, and the possibility of a second meeting dawned on his mind, his heart gave a jump of pleasure in his bosom. On the instant there appeared before him the prettiest figure in short frocks, with an aureola of hair about the young head—a child, yet something more than a child. Edith had been only sixteen, he remembered; indeed he found that he remembered everything about her as soon as her image was thus lightly called back. What might she be now, in her grown-up condition? Perhaps not so sweet, perhaps married—a contingency which did not please him to think of. And what if he should be on the eve of seeing her again!

The smile of pleasure, of amusement, even of innocent vanity with which in this airy stage a young man contemplates such a possibility, threw a pleasant light over his face. He went out with that smile half hidden under his fair moustache, which gave it a kind of confidential character between him and himself so to speak. As he had nothing else to do, it occurred to him to take a walk on the road to Dunearn, where he had seen the French-Scotch *tourelles* of Lindores Castle through the trees the day before, and "take a look at" the place—why, he did not know—for no particular reason, merely to amuse himself. And as he went down the avenue, that old episode came back to him more and more fully. He remembered all the little expeditions, the little misadventures, the jokes, though perhaps they were not brilliant. Carry lingering behind with Beaufort, talking Shelley, with a flush of enthusiasm about her: Edith always foremost, chidden and petted, and made much of by everybody, with her long hair waving, and those fine little shoes which he had tied once—thick mountain shoes—but such wonderful Cinderella articles! All these recollections amused him like a story as he went down the avenue, taking away his attention from external things; and it was not till he was close upon the gate that

he was aware of the presence of two ladies, who seemed to have paused on their walk to speak to Peggy Burnet, the gardener's wife, who inhabited the lodge. His ear was caught by his own name, always an infallible means of rousing the most careless attention. He could not help hearing what Peggy was saying, for her voice was somewhat high-pitched, and full of rural freedom. "Oh ay, my leddy; the young maister, that's Mr John, that's the laird, came hame yestreen," Peggy was saying, "before he was expectit. The carriage—that's the bit dogcart, if you can ca' it a carriage, for there's nothing better left, nor so much as a beast to draw it that we can ca' oor ain—was sent to the station to meet him. When, lo! he comes linking along the road on his ain twa legs, and no so much as a bag or a portmanty behind him, and asks at the gate, Is this Dalrulzian? kenning nothing of his ain house! And me, I hadna the sense to think, This is him; but just let him in as if he had been a stranger. And no a creature to take the least notice! Mr Rolls was just out o' himsel, with vexation, to let the young maister come hame as if he had been ony gangrel body; but it couldna be called my fault."

"Surely it could not be your fault; if he wanted a reception, he should have come when he was expected," said a softer voice, with a little sound of laughter. Surely, John thought, he had heard that voice before. He hurried forward wondering, taking off his hat instinctively. Who were they? Two ladies, one elder, one younger, mother and daughter. They looked up at him as he approached. The faces were familiar, and yet not familiar. Was it possible? He felt himself redden with excitement as he stood breathless, his hat off, the blood flushing to the very roots of his hair, not able to get out a word in his surprise and pleasure. They on their side looked at him smilingly, not at all surprised, and the elder lady held out her hand. "After so long a time you will scarcely know us, Mr Erskine," she said; "but we knew you were expected, and all about you, you see."

"Know you?" cried John, almost speechless with the wonder and delight. "Mrs Lindores! The thing is, can I venture to believe my eyes? There never was such luck in the world! I think I must be dreaming. Who would have expected to meet you here, and the very first day?"

Peggy Burnet was much disturbed by this greeting. She pushed forward, making an anxious face at him. "Sir! sir! you maun say my leddy," she breathed, in a shrill whisper, which he was too much excited to take any notice of, but which amused the ladies. They cast a laughing look at each other. "Didn't you know we were here?" the mother said. "Then we had the advantage of you. We have been speculating about you for weeks past—whether you would be much changed, whether you would come at once to Lindores to renew old acquaintance——"

"That you may be sure I should have done," said John, "as soon as I knew you were there. And are you really at Lindores? living there? for good? It seems too delightful to be true."

They were both changed. And he did not know why they should look at each other with such a laughing interchange of glances. It made him somewhat uncomfortable, though his mind was too full of the pleasure of seeing them to be fully conscious of it. It was Edith, as was natural, who was most altered in appearance. She had been a tall girl, looking more than her age; and now she was a small, very young woman. At that period of life such changes happen sometimes; but the difference was delightful, though embarrassing. Yes, smaller, she was actually smaller, he said to himself,—"as high as my heart," as Orlando says: yet no longer little Edith, but an imposing stately personage at whom he scarcely ventured to look boldly, but only snatched shy glances at, abashed by her soft regard. He went on stammering out his pleasure, his delight, his surprise, hardly knowing what he said. "I had just begun to hope that you might come sometimes, that I might have a chance of seeing you," he was saying; whereupon Edith smiled gravely, and her mother gave a little laugh aloud.

"I don't believe he knows anything about it, Edith," she said.

"I was sure of it, mamma," Edith replied; while between them John stood dumb, not knowing what to think.

CHAPTER IV.

The explanation which was given to John Erskine on the highroad between Dalrulzian and Lindores, as it is still more important to us than to him, must be here set forth at more length. There are some happy writers whose mission it is to expound the manners and customs of the great. To them it is given to know how duchesses and countesses demean themselves in their *moments perdus*, and they even catch as it flies that airy grace with which the chit-chat of society makes itself look like something of consequence. Gilded *salons* in Belgravia, dainty boudoirs in Mayfair, not to speak of everything that is gorgeous in the rural palaces, which are as so many centres of light throughout England—are the scenery in which they are accustomed to enshrine the subjects of their fancy. And yet, alas! to these writers when they have done all, yet must we add that they fail to satisfy their models. When the elegant foreigner, or what is perhaps more consonant with the tastes of the day, the refined American, ventures to form his opinion of the habits of society from its novels, he is always met with an amused or indignant protestation. As if these sort of people knew anything about society! Lady Adeliza says. It is perhaps as well, under these circumstances, to assume a humility, even if we have it not; and indeed the present writer has always been shy of venturing into exalted regions, or laying profane hands upon persons of quality. But when a family of rank comes in our way by necessity, it would be cowardice to recoil from the difficulties of the portraiture. Should we fail to represent in black and white the native grace, the air noble, the exalted sentiments which belong by right to members of the aristocracy, the reader will charitably impute the blame rather to the impression made upon our nerves by a superiority so dazzling than to any defect of goodwill. Besides, in the present case, which is a great aid to modesty, the family had been suddenly elevated, and were not born in the purple. Lady Lindores was a commoner by birth, and not of any very exalted lineage—a woman quite within the range of ordinary rules and instincts; and even Lady Edith had been Miss Edith till within a few years. Their honours were still new upon them: they were not themselves much used to these honours any more than their humble chronicler; with which preface we enter with diffidence upon the recent history of the noble house of Lindores.

The late earl had been a man unfortunate in his children. His sons by his first marriage had died one after another, inheriting their mother's delicate health. His second wife had brought him but one son, a likely and healthy boy; but an accident, one of those simplest risks which hundreds are subject to, and escape daily, carried this precious boy off in a moment. His father, who had been entirely devoted to him, died afterwards of a broken heart, people said. The next brother, who was in India with his regiment, died there almost at the same time, and never knew that he had succeeded to the family honours. And thus it was that the Honourable Robert Lindores, a poor gentleman, living on a very straitened income, in a cheap French town, with his wife and daughters, and as little expecting any such elevation as a poor curate expects to be made Archbishop of Canterbury, became Earl of Lindores and the head of the family, without warning or preparation. It does not perhaps require very much preparation to come to such advancement; and the new earl was to the manner born. But Mrs Lindores, who was a woman full of imagination, with nerves and ideas of her own, received a considerable shock. She had no objection to being a countess; the coronet, indeed, was pleasant to her as it is to most people. She liked to look at it on her handkerchiefs: there is no such pretty ornament. But it startled her mind and shook her nerves just at first. And it made a great, a very great, change in the family life. Instead of strolling about as they had done for years, with one maid for the mother and daughters, and a shabby cheap French servant, who was valet and factotum; going to all kinds of places; living as they liked; and though, with many a complaint, getting a great deal of pleasure out of their lives: there was an immediate shaking of themselves together—a calling in of stray habits and fancies,—a jump into their new place, as of an inexperienced and half-alarmed rider, not at all sure how he was to get on with his unaccustomed steed. This at least was the mood of Lady Lindores. The Earl knew all about it better than she did. Even to be merely the "honourable" had fluttered her senses a little; and it had never occurred to her that anything further was possible. The family was poor—still poor, even when thus elevated as it were to the throne; but the poverty of the Honourable Robert was very different from that of the right honourable Earl. In the one case it was actual poverty, in the other only comparative. To be sure it was, when one had time to think, distressing and troubling not to have money enough to refurnish the Castle (the taste of the late lord had been execrable) and make many improvements which were quite necessary. But that was very different from not having money enough to possess a settled home of your own anywhere, which had been their previous condition. The Earl took his measures without a moment's delay. He dismissed the servants who had followed them in their poverty, and engaged others in London, who were more proper to the service of a noble family. They travelled quite humbly, indeed, in their old half-Bohemian way, until they reached London, and then all at once cast their slough. The ladies put on their clothes, which they had stopped to procure in Paris, and suddenly blossomed out (though in deep mourning) into the likeness of their rank. It was a thing to make the steadiest heart beat. Young Robin was at Chatham, a lieutenant in a marching regiment—a young nobody, pleased to be

noticed even by the townsfolk; and lo! in a moment, this insignificant lieutenant became Lord Rintoul. It was like a transformation scene; he came to meet his people when they passed through London, and they could scarcely speak to each other when they met in their mutual wonder. "Poor little Rintoul, all the same, poor little beggar!" Robin Lindores said. To think of the poor boy, cut off in a moment, whose death had purchased them all these honours, affected the young people with a strange awe, and almost remorseful pain. They felt as if somehow, without knowing it, they had been the cause of that terrible sudden removal of all the hopes that had rested on their little cousin's head. Lady Lindores herself declared that she dared not think of her predecessor, the mother of that poor boy, "the dowager," alas! poor lady. The dowager was younger than her successor in the family honours, having been a second wife. They were all silent with respectful awe when her name was mentioned; but the Earl said pshaw! and thought this superfluous. He was more used to it; he had been born in the purple, and now that he had come, though unexpectedly, to his kingdom, he knew how to fill that exalted place.

The Earl was a man of a character which never, up to this time, had been estimated as it deserved. He had been quite an easy-going sort of person in his former estate. In his youth he was said to have been extravagant. Since his marriage—which had been an imprudent marriage, in so far that he might perhaps have got a richer wife had he tried, but which was wise so far that the income upon which they lived chiefly came from that wife—he had let himself go quietly enough upon the current, there being no motive to struggle against it. The very best that they could make of it was simply to "get along;" and get along they did without putting any force upon their inclinations. He was always able to secure his comforts, such as were indispensable; and as he liked the easier routine of a wandering life, he did not object, as he said, to make a sacrifice for the education of his children and their amusement, by living in places where the pleasures were cheap and there was no dignity to keep up. He had in this sense been very complying, both as a husband and a father, and had allowed himself to be guided, as his family thought, by their wishes quite as much, at least, as by his own. He had not in these days been in the least a severe father, or shown marks of a worldly mind. What was the use? The girls were too young as yet to have become valuable instruments of ambition, and he had not learnt to think of them as anything but children. But when this extraordinary change came in their existence, the easy *dilettante*—whose wants were limited to a few graceful knick-knacks, an elegant little meal, good music, when procurable, and a life undisturbed by vulgar cares—altered his very nature, as his family thought. Hitherto his wife and his girls had done everything for him, aided by the ubiquitous, the handy, the all-accomplished Jean or François, who was half-a-dozen men in one—cook, valet, footman, pattern man-of-all-work. They arranged the rooms in every new place they went to, so that the fact that these rooms were those of a hotel or lodging-house should be masked by familiar prettinesses, carried about with them. They gave a careful supervision to his meals, and arranged everything, so that papa should get the best out of his limited existence, and none of its troubles. And as there was nothing against Mr Lindores—no bad repute, but with an honourable at his name—every English club, every *cercle*, was open to him. He always dressed carefully; now and then he helped a wealthier friend to a bargain in the way of art. He saw a great deal of society. On the whole, perhaps, for a man without ambition, and upon whom neither the fate of his children nor the use of his own life pressed very heavily, he got as much satisfaction out of his existence as most men; and so might have lived and died, no man knowing what was really in him, had not poor young Rintoul broken his neck over that fence, and drawn his father with him into the grave. From the moment when the letter, placed calmly by Mr Lindores's plate at breakfast, as though it meant nothing particular, had its black seals broken, he was another man. How distinctly they all recollected that scene!—a lofty French room, with bare white walls and long large windows, the green Persians closed to keep out the sunshine, one long line of light falling across the polished floor, where one of these shutters had got unfastened; the spacious coolness in the midst of heat, which is characteristic of such houses, like the atmosphere in M. Alma Tadema's pictures; the white-covered table with its flowers and pretty arrangements; the girls in their white cool dresses; and François lifting the small silver cover from his master's favourite dish. All the composure and quiet of this interior had been broken in a moment. There had been a sudden stifled cry, and Mr Lindores, pushing the table from him, disordering the dishes, oversetting his heavy chair as he sprang to his feet, had finished reading his letter standing upright, trembling with excitement, his face flushed and crimson. "What is it?" they had all cried. "Robin?" Naturally, the son who was away was the first thought of the women. For a minute the father had made no reply, and their anxiety was beyond words. Then he put down the letter solemnly, and went to his wife and took her hand. "There is nothing wrong with Robin," he said; "but it comes by trouble to others, if not to us. My dear, you are the Countess of Lindores." It was some minutes before the real meaning of this communication penetrated their astonished minds; and the first proof of understanding which the new Lady Lindores gave was to cover her face and cry out, "Oh, poor boy! oh, poor Jane, poor Jane!" with a pang at her heart. It was not all grief for the other—could any one expect that?—but the poignant state of emotion which this strange terrible good fortune caused her, had a sharpness of anguish in it for the moment. The girls went away hushed and

silenced, unable to eat their breakfasts, to find some black ribbons instead of the bright ones they wore. They wept a few tears as they went to their rooms over poor young Rintoul; but they had known very little of the boy, and the strange excitement of the change soon crept into their veins. Lady Caroline and Lady Edith! instead of the humble Miss Lindores. No wonder that it went to their heads.

And from that moment the new Earl was a different man. He threw off all his languor, took everything into his own hands. Those little economies which it had been so necessary to insist upon yesterday were now absurd, notwithstanding that the Earls of Lindores were far from rich—comparatively. The family came home rapidly, as has been said; pausing in Paris to get their dresses, to dismiss the faithful servants of their poverty, who would be of no use, the Earl decided, in the change of circumstances. He behaved very well, everybody said, to poor Lady Lindores, his brother's young widow, who had thus been left at once widowed and childless. He showed "every consideration;" would not allow her to be hurried; waited her convenience and her pleasure in every way. But, naturally, that poor lady was glad to take refuge with her own family in her desolation; and within a few months, the wandering exile-family, familiar with all the cheap watering-places and centres of genteel emigration on the Continent, were settled in the greatness of their new position, as if they had never known any less elevated circumstances. There was a great deal of excitement in the change; and though it was sad at first, no doubt there was a pleasure in hearing Robin addressed by the name of Rintoul, and accustoming themselves to their ladyships. But yet, when all was over, it was not perhaps to the girls so great an improvement as it appeared on the old life. They were not dull—oh no—but still there was a great deal less to do and to see than there used to be; and though they felt, as their mother said, that girls with so many resources ought to be occupied and happy wherever they went, still the calm of the Castle was very different from the stir and movement to which they had been used.

Up to this time, however, nothing had happened to them except that which was determined by another will than theirs, the inevitable result of other events. But they had not been long settled in their new and elevated life when it became apparent that other changes had happened which were not evoked by any external fate, and which were yet more profoundly to affect their life. That Swiss holiday had been more important to Carry than any one out of the family knew. It had ended in a kind of vague engagement, only half sanctioned, yet only half opposed by her family, and which it was possible, had Mr Beaufort been rich enough to marry, would not have been opposed at all. Had he possessed income enough or courage enough to make the venture, the result in all likelihood would, years before, have been out of the reach of evil fate; but while it remained only an engagement, Mr Lindores had refused his official sanction to it. And it had seemed to Carry, in whose mind the first conscious thought after the news of this extraordinary change was to communicate it to Edward, that from that very day her father's aspect had changed towards her. He had met her running out to the post with her letter in the afternoon, and had given a suspicious glance at it, and stopped her, telling her it was not fit she should go out on a day so serious. Not a word had been said for weeks and even months after, but she knew very well that things were not as before. All reference to Beaufort was somehow stopped; even her mother managed to arrest upon her lips all mention of her lover. She was herself too timid to open the subject, and gradually a chill certainty that he was to be ignored and pushed aside out of her life, came upon the poor girl. How it was that further dangers dawned upon her, it would be hard to tell; but it is certain that she had divined a something—a tightening coil about her helpless feet, a design upon her freedom and happiness—before the family had been long at Lindores. One of the consequences of their great honour and increased stateliness of living was, that the two sisters were partially separated, as they felt, from each other. They no longer occupied the same room as they had done all their lives. They had now what with their foreign habits they called an *appartement*—a suite of rooms set apart for them; and as Edith was full of curiosity and excitement about the new life, and Carry was discouraged and depressed, and felt it odious to her, they fell a little apart without any mutual intention or consciousness. It was in the beginning of their first winter, when the dark days were closing in, that this semi-estrangement first became apparent to the younger sister. She awoke all at once to the consciousness that Carry was pale; that she shut herself up very much, and more than ever devoted herself to her writing; that she composed a great many little poems (for she was the genius of the family), and often had a suspicion of redness about her eyes. This discovery was instantaneous. Edith had never been awakened to any but the most simple troubles of life, and it had not occurred to her to imagine that there was anything beneath the headache which her sister so often took refuge in. But her mind, when it began to act, was rapid and keen. It became apparent to her that she had been losing sight of Carry, and that Carry was not happy. The progress from one step to another of her solicitude for her sister was rapid as lightning. She remembered everything in a moment, though these causes of sorrow had been altogether out of her thoughts before. She remembered that not a word had been said of Mr Beaufort for months; that Carry had ceased altogether to speculate as to anything that might happen in the future; that all this was as a closed book between them nowadays. As soon as she arrived at this conviction, Edith found herself ready to interfere for good or

evil. She went into the room where Carry was writing her little poetries, with something of the effect of a fresh light wind, carrying refreshment, but also a little disturbance, with her. She stooped over her sister with a caressing arm round her neck, and plunged at once into the heart of the subject. It was a still, dull afternoon of early winter, and nobody was by. "Carry," she said, all at once—"Carry, it is so long since we have said anything to each other! I wanted to ask you about—Edward!" Upon this, for all answer, Carry fell a-crying, but after a while sobbed forth, "I will never give him up!"

"Give him up!" cried Edith, surprised. She had what her mother called a positive nature, much less romantic, much less sensitive, than her sister. The idea of giving up had never entered her mind. "Give him up!—no, of course not. I never thought of such a thing; but I am afraid it will be harder than ever with papa."

"Oh, Edith, it will be *impossible*," Caroline said. And then the two sisters looked at each other—the one astonished, indignant, full of resistance; the other pale, drooping, without vigour or hope.

"What does impossible mean?" said the younger, not with any affectation or grandiloquence; for probably she had never heard of any heroic utterance on the subject. "You mean very, very hard. So it will be. I have wanted to speak to you since ever we came here. I want to know what he says himself, and if papa has said anything, and what mamma thinks. We don't seem to live together now," she added, with a clouded countenance. "It's always, 'Oh, Lady Caroline has gone out,' or, 'Her ladyship is in the library with my lord,' It seemed very nice at first, but I begin to hate ladyships and lordships with all my heart."

"So do I," said Caroline, with a sigh.

"If you marry a man without a title, couldn't you give it up? Perhaps one wouldn't like that either, now," said the girl, candidly. "It was far, *far* nicer, far more natural, in the old days; but perhaps one wouldn't like to go back."

"I suppose not," said Carry, drearily. She was not a beautiful girl, as in her romantic position she ought to have been. Her nose was too large; her complexion deficient; her eyes were grey, sweet, and thoughtful, but not brilliant or shining. Her figure had the willowy grace of youth, but nothing more imposing. She had a very sweet radiant smile when she was happy; this was the chief attraction of her face: but at present she was not happy, and her pale gentle countenance was not one to catch the general eye.

"But I hope you are going to make a stand, Carry," said the energetic little Edith. "You won't, surely—you can't be so *lâche* as to give in? *I* would not!—not if it cost me my life!"

"Ah, if it was a question of one's life! but no one wants your life," said Carry, shaking her head. "No one will touch us, or lock us up, or any of these old-fashioned things. If they only would! The poets say 'I could die for you,' as if that was difficult! Oh no, it is far harder, far harder to live."

"Carry! you have been thinking a great deal about it, then?"

"What else could I think about? Since the first moment papa looked at me that day—you remember that day?—I knew in a moment what he meant. He gave me just one glance. You know he never said that he would consent."

Edith's youthful countenance gathered a sympathetic cloud. "Papa has been so changed ever since," she said.

"He never would allow that he had consented even before,—and while we were all poor, what did it matter? So long as he does not ask me to——"

"To what?" Edith asked, with a wondering perception of the shudder which ran over her sister's slight figure. "Are you cold, Car?"

"To—marry some one else," cried poor Caroline, with a heavy sigh,—so heavy that it was almost a groan.

Edith sprang to her feet with indignant vehemence. "*That* is not possible; nobody could be so cowardly, so cruel, as that," she said, clasping her hands together. "Carry, you speak as if papa was a bad man; you slander him; it is not true, it is not true!"

"He would not think it cruel," said Caroline, shaking her head sadly. "He would not mean any harm; he would say to himself that it was for my good."

Her despondency quenched the passion and energy of the younger girl. Carry's drooping head and heavy eyes were enough to damp even the liveliest courage. "Are you thinking of—any one in particular?" Edith said in hushed and tremulous tones.

Carry put out her hands as if to push some spectre away. "Oh, don't ask me, don't ask me; I don't know; I can't tell you," she cried.

What could Edith say? she was appalled. The fresh inexperienced heart received a first lesson in the mysterious evils of life. She who had fretted and chafed so at the partial separation that had arisen between them, she was glad of a pretext to leave her sister. She could scarcely believe this to be possible, and yet so it was. Nor did she wish to run to her mother with her discovery, to appeal to her against Carry's misconception, against the monstrous character of the suggestion altogether, as would have been her first impulse in any other case. No; she was convinced of the reality of it, little as she desired to be convinced. A gleam of painful light seemed to fall across the new tenor of their life. She thought for a moment that she saw the very earth, solid and unyielding, break into dangerous pits and chasms before her feet. The pain of this discovery was two-fold—both poignant, yet one worse than the other. To think that her father, whom she had hitherto loved and trusted, not with any excess of devotion, but yet with an honest confidence that he would ask nothing wrong, nothing unreasonable from his children, should thus threaten to become a domestic tyrant, an enemy of truth, was terrible; but still more terrible was the conviction which overwhelmed the girl that Carry, with all her imagination and feeling—Carry, the poet of the family, the first one to have a romance and a lover—would not have strength to resist any attempted coercion. Oh, if it had only been me! Edith said to herself, clenching her hands tight. But then she had no Edward, no romance—she was fancy free: even were it possible to force her into any connection she disliked (which Edith did not think it would be), at all events she could not be made false to another. But Carry—Carry, who was all heart—to force her to deny that heart would be doubly cruel. Little Edith woke out of her careless youth to see this wonderful and great danger at her very side, with all that bewilderment of feeling which attends the first disclosure of the evils in life. She could not believe it, and yet she knew it was true. She remembered tones in her father's voice, lights in his eyes, which she never seemed to have understood before. Was this what they meant? that when his time and opportunity came, he would be a tyrant, a remorseless and unfaltering ruler, suffering no rebellion? Edith trembled a little. Perhaps she, too, might fall under that despotism one day. But she did not feel afraid for herself. Oh, if it had only been me! she said, ungrammatical, as excitement generally is. It would be hard to say what ground she had for her self-confidence. Carry was the genius of the family, and little Edith only the youngest, the household pet, whom nobody regarded as in a position to make decisions or form opinions for herself. Why was it to her eyes that this sudden insight had been given? It is not usually a happy gift. Blessed are they, we may rather say, who can deceive themselves—whose eyes are made blind, and not more fatally clear, by love. Edith hastened out of doors, out of sight or speech of any one, to try if she could escape from this revelation which had opened upon her, so much against her will. It was a misty dull day, with a great deal of moisture in the air—moisture which seemed to communicate itself to Edith's eyes, and get into her throat. She hastened down the path which wound through the birches, the poetical "birks of Lindores," to the river lying far below, and already sending a soft sound of running water to soothe her. About half-way down was a great beech-tree, round which a seat had been placed. Here there was a view, not of the wide champaign, like that at Dalrulzian, but of a portion of the highroad, just where it began to mount the hill towards the Castle. On the other side lay the river, visible at the foot of the bank, and running somewhat strong and wild under the cliffs on the opposite side, which threw it into deep shadow. But it was not the river, though so much the more beautiful of the two, it was the highroad which attracted Edith's attention. As she stood looking out upon it, some one passed, riding slowly along, but turning his head to catch the first glimpse of the Castle. His appearance seemed to throw a sudden light upon her thoughts. He was a heavy, large man, upon a powerful black horse,—an apparition big enough to be identified, even at that distance. The ladies had all been very free in their remarks upon this representative of their county neighbours. They had not given him a very encouraging reception, yet he had repeated his visits, too stolid, they had thought, to perceive that he was not wanted. As Edith stood and gazed at him, with the blood curdling about her heart, it flashed upon her that her father had given no countenance to their criticisms. He had told them that Mr Torrance was one of the richest commoners in Scotland, and Tinto such a house as any one might be proud to possess. She had paid little attention to these words at the time, but they seemed to repeat themselves in the very air now. It was a day of revelation to Edith. She saw all that it meant, and foresaw all it was coming to, with a gleam of terrible insight. Oh no, no! she moaned to herself in a kind of helpless protest against fate.

CHAPTER V.

Mr Torrance of Tinto was the representative of an old county family, but he would not have been the richest commoner in Scotland if he had been no more than this. A variety of other circumstances, however, had combined to bring about this effect, and elevate a man who was no better, at the best that could be said for him, than a rude yeoman-sportsman at soul, into a person of the greatest local importance and almost national notability. The previous Torrance of Tinto, a man of some rough practical power, had allied himself to some degree in business, and to a much greater degree in life, with a great railway contractor—one of the men who, coming from nothing, have made colossal fortunes, and found admittance for their children, if not for themselves, into the foremost ranks of society. Mr Torrance married this man's daughter, and all the money which the original navvy had quarried out of the bowels of the earth, or gathered from its surface, went to increase the lands and the power of Tinto, where this daughter, his only child, a woman with the magnificent ideas of expenditure which enormous wealth so naturally brings along with it, disposed herself to reign like a princess, making her husband's old house the centre of a new palace, fit for a duke at least. The old man, her father, always thrifty and sparing in his own person, would have her stinted in nothing; and perhaps, had she lived long, her husband would have had little enough left him of the huge fortune which she had brought into the family. But fortunately (for the family), after she had alarmed him beyond measure by unbounded expenditure for a few years, and had completed the new house and filled it with costly furniture, in all of which her father encouraged her, the death of both within a year of each other relieved the owner of Tinto of his fears, and left him free to complete the training of his son as he pleased. He made him much such a man as he had himself been, but without the brains, which are not transmitted so easily as money. Patrick Torrance had indeed been sent to Oxford to have the regulation mark stamped upon him as an educated man: but those were days in which so much as this meant was easier than now; and it is not very hard even now, as may be seen. He came back more horsey, more doggy than he had been before, if possible,—a man without an intellectual taste or higher instinct, bored to death, as he himself avowed, with the grand house, full of pictures, and statues, and marble, and porcelain, which the taste of his mother had accumulated. Never was such a magnificent place in the quietude of such a homely country. The daughter of the railway man was as extreme in her taste for art as the daughter of one of her father's navvies might have been in dress. There was not a wall, not a passage or staircase, that was not laden with decoration. Great artists had designed the chimney-pieces and cornices. The velvet, the satin, the embroidery, were all the most costly, and, according to the lights of that period, the most correct that money could buy. The old man, whose money had bought all this, went about the gorgeous rooms rubbing his hands with a continual chuckle of satisfaction so long as he lived; and the poor woman who had created the luxurious house swept through in dresses to correspond, with satisfaction not less than if she had been a daughter of the Medici,—who, to be sure, made their money in business too. But when that fine Renaissance lady died, and all her friends were scattered, and the place fell back into the possession of the commonplace country laird and his boy, coming in ruddy from the fields or damp from the hill, afraid to tread in their shooting boots on the luxurious carpets or throw themselves down in the satin chairs, the incongruity of the establishment was manifest to every eye. Mr Torrance, the father, had been deeply impressed by the cost of everything his wife had bought and planned. He had been horrified and indignant in the first instance; but when it had been proved that he had no power to resist, and that the money must be expended for all these luxuries, he had taken what satisfaction he could from the price. "Do you know what she gave for that?" he would say; "it's all dash'd extravagance. I cannot away with it; but it was her doing, and as she had plenty, she had to please herself." It was in this way that he spoke of his wife. And when she died, the splendid house she had built was shut up,—not from sentiment, but because the set of rooms still remaining, which belonged to the old house of Tinto, was much more in harmony with the habits of the master of the house.

Now that he too was dead, his son followed his example in preferring the old den of the race. But he had more appreciation of the dignity of owning a house such as no one in the country could "hold a candle" to. The fine decorations had not all stood the neglect of twenty years, but still there was enough of magnificence to overawe the district; and Patrick Torrance had enough of his mother's blood in him to enjoy the consciousness of so much luxury and costliness. He lived in the old library, which was low and dingy, and looked out upon the dark bit of shrubbery behind the house and the road that led to the stables; but periodically he threw the grand empty rooms open, and had a great dinner-party or a ball, which excited all the gentry for miles round. It would be vain to say that there was not on these occasions more excitement than was natural solely in view of a great entertainment. While society is constituted as it is, it will not be possible that a great matrimonial prize, such as Mr Patrick Torrance unquestionably was, should thus be shown, as open to public competition, without a certain excitement. If a great post worth thousands a-year could be won by the most attractive and brilliant appearance in a ball-room, what a flutter there would be among the golden youth of society! and

the master of Tinto was more valuable than most of the very finest appointments. He was as good as a Viceroyship of India without the necessity of expatriation. Consequently it is not to be supposed that the young ladies of the neighbourhood could prepare for their appearance in these gilded if somewhat tarnished halls of his without a good deal of agitation, or that the mothers, or even the fathers of possible competitors, could escape some share of the same excitement. Some of the girls, let us do them the justice to say, were as much alarmed lest Pat Torrance, as he was called, should cast his big projecting eyes upon them, as others were anxious for that notice. He was not in himself much adapted to please a maiden's eye. He was very dark, strongly bearded, with large eyes *à fleur de tête* and somewhat bloodshot. His friends maintained that he had "a good figure," and it certainly was tall and strong. His voice was as large as his person, and somewhat hoarse—a deep bass, which made a vibration in the air. He was an excellent shot, and hunted indefatigably, though it was beginning to be said, notwithstanding his youth, that Pat was too heavy for distinction in the hunting-field. With all these qualities he had an eye to his interest, rich though he was; and, though not clever, was said to be very fortunate in his investments, and to keep a careful hand over his money. Now and then he would be lavish, outdoing all that was known in these parts in the way of extravagance; but for the most part he lived as his father had done before him, in the old rooms of the old mansion-house of Tinto, where not a carpet or a curtain had been removed since the time of his grandfather. There was perhaps a touch of humour, somehow struck out by the contact of the two races, which made the contrast of these two manners of living pleasant to his fancy and to his rude and elementary pride; or perhaps it was mere instinct, and had no meaning in it at all—the habits of the limited and uncultured countryman, diversified by that delight in an occasional "blow out," which is the compensation of the navvy for his rude toils. There was no doubt that from the time of his father's death, which occurred when he was about twenty-eight, Pat Torrance had made up his mind to marry. And he had inspected all the marriageable girls in the country with a serious intention which disgusted some and amused others, and filled a few with breathless hope. In the latter class were ladies of very different pretensions indeed, from Miss Webster of Thrums, who was the greatest rider in the country, and never wanting when anything was going on, down to the bold, handsome, black-eyed daughter of the landlord of the Bear at Dunearn, which was the inn Mr Torrance used when he went into the county town. He was just as likely, people thought, to make such a match as any other; his style of courtship was more in harmony with a bar-room than a drawing-room. This conviction made the balls at Tinto less exciting to the feminine community generally as time went on; but still there is never any telling what caprice may sway a sultan's choice.

And alas! it is a fact that, whether by their own will or by that of their parents, Pat Torrance might have married almost any lady in the county. He was not himself to them, but such a cluster of worldly advantages as scarcely any mortal woman could resist. He was, as we have said, far beyond in value the best of the appointments for which they could not, and their brothers could try. He meant a fine position, a magnificent house, a great fortune. To be sure there was a drawback to this, which only a few acknowledged. When Mrs Sempill pointed out to her daughter Agnes, whom he had honoured with some passing notice, that in case she married him she would have "everything that heart could desire—at least everything that money could buy,"—Agnes, who was a clever girl, put forth a condition. "I should have just as much as Pat Torrance thought proper of the things that money can buy," the young woman said, with sudden insight. I am afraid, however, that Agnes Sempill would have married him all the same, her family being so poor, if he had put himself at her disposal. But he did not, and she was glad. Indeed he made himself of all the greater importance in the county that he came to no decision, but went on giving his balls three or four times a-year, and examining with a critical eye every girl who appeared on the horizon, every new *débutante*. And he was asked everywhere in those days. His importance was fully recognised.

This was the condition in which things were when the new family came to the Castle. Mr Torrance was one of the first callers, partly because his pride as at once the head of an old family and the richest man in the county made him eager to assert his position with the new Earl as a leader of the local society—a position which not even the chances their daughters might have of sharing it would have prevailed on the other county magnates to permit him,—and partly because of the new candidates for his favour who were to be found in the family of Lindores. Notwithstanding the prevalent idea that Bessie Runciman at the Black Bear in Dunearn had just as good a chance for the prize as any competitor, nothing could be further from the fact or the intentions of the hero. His determination all along had been to procure himself a wife who should be in harmony, not so much with himself as with the grandeur of his house and what he believed to be his position; and the hunting lady and the publican's daughter had been equally out of the question. For himself, he might have liked either of them well enough; but as a matter of fact, it was not too much refinement, but not refinement enough, which this rude squire found among his country neighbours. None of them was fine enough for Tinto. He wanted somebody who would be at home in the grand rooms overloaded with decoration—who would be, if possible, superior to the killing splendour which made himself feel so small. And no woman yet had impressed Pat as

sufficiently magnificent for this purpose. He wanted some one more imposing,—a lady of Tinto who might, as he desired in his heart, receive the Prince of Wales on occasion, or even the Queen herself. When he paid his first visit to Lindores, the Earl alone received him, and he had no chance of inspecting the daughters of the house; but he had met them as he rode home again, coming back from their drive in the little pony-carriage, of which they had just become possessed. Edith, new to all these delights, was driving her sister; and her bright little face, full of life and smiles, turned curiously upon him as he stood aside on his big black horse to let them pass. But that was not what caught his eye. Beside her was a pale and gentle countenance, unlike anything which had hitherto been presented to his notice. Pat's heart, if he had a heart, or the big pulse that did service for it, gave a bound as he looked. It seemed to him at the first glance that this new face was more aristocratic, more distinguished, for not being pretty. The lilies and roses of the other were familiar to him. Bright eyes and fine complexions were by no means rare in the county. They were to be found everywhere, in the cottages as well as in the castles. He was not impressed by them. The smiles and animation were common things; but Lady Caroline with her gentle paleness, her slim form pliant and bending,—even her nose, which was a little too long, was the impersonation of refinement and rank, and fine superiority. His imagination, if he had an imagination, took fire. He thought he could see her moving about with languid grace through his fine *salons*, far more fine than they, lending them an air of delicacy and importance which they had never possessed before. He felt himself to be "struck" by Lady Caroline as he never had been "struck" till now. That was rank, he said to himself admiringly. To be sure, rank was what he had wanted; he had never realised it before, but now he perceived it as plain as daylight. He had been wiser than he was aware of in his fastidiousness; and now he saw suddenly presented before him the very object of which he had been in search. Lady Caroline Torrance!—that was what it was.

This chance meeting, and the instant conviction that followed, had taken place some time before the interview between the sisters which we have described. How it was that the suitor communicated his wishes to the Earl, or the Earl to poor Carry, it is impossible to tell—or if, indeed, up to this time, any communication had been made on the subject. Most likely there had been no communication; but the proposal, which turned the light into darkness for Carry, was in the air, overshadowing everything. Her father saw it in the dark face of Pat Torrance, and she surmised it in her father's eyes. Before a word had been said she knew her fate, struggling dumbly against it like a creature fascinated and magnetised in the grip of a monster, but without any possibility or hope of escape. There was something more terrible in this silent certainty than there would have been in any conflict. She felt herself sucked in as to a whirlpool, overpowered,—all her forces taken from her in the giddy rush with which the days and hours were carrying her on, irresistible, to that climax. It was this fatal consciousness which made her cry out, "I will never give him up;" which was the cry, not of resolution, but of despair. All that she could do in her sick and failing soul was to grasp at and cling to the weeds on the bank, while the current carried her wildly on, plucking them out of her hands. Edith, who was of so different a nature, stood by appalled, astonished, not knowing how to account for her sister's helplessness. She was positive, as her mother said, not visionary, incapable either of divining what was going to happen or of yielding to it. Why Carry could not simply make up her mind to refuse, to stand fast, to resist whatever powers might be brought to bear upon her, was a thing which Edith could not understand.

And stranger still, Lady Lindores had not even found it out. She disliked Mr Torrance, and made no secret of her dislike. "If that is your type of a Scotch laird, I cannot say I like the species," she said, eliciting a soft, "Oh, mamma!" from Edith, who remembered very well a statement of an entirely contrary character which her mother had once made. "If young Erskine is a type of a young Scotch laird, I am disposed to fall in love with the class," was what Lady Lindores had then said. Edith remembered it distinctly, but gave her tongue a little malicious bite, and would not recall it to her mother's mind; for was not young Erskine coming back? But Lady Lindores's feeling about Torrance was more than passive. She took care to let him see that he was not a favourite in the house. She wondered audibly, even after the eyes of Edith had been opened, what that odious man wanted here; and indeed did all but refuse to ask him to a *dîner intime*, at which her husband desired his presence. "Torrance of Tinto," she cried, with a cloud on her face; "why Torrance of Tinto? He has already dined here. Why should we have him again?"

"Why not?" said the Earl, with a still deeper shadow on his face. Lady Lindores saw very clearly when her attention was aroused; but she was a high-minded woman, slow to be awakened to suspicion, and scorning to think evil. It seemed to her an evidence of a poor nature to suppose any one else capable of an act you would not have done yourself.

"Why not? I think that jumps at the eyes," she said. It was Lady Lindores's weakness to employ idioms which, being translated idioms, sounded very strange to ordinary ears. This was so far comprehensible because she had lived abroad the greater part of her life, and she thought the polyglot chatter which is so common, especially among the English

abroad, vulgar; so she translated her French, and thought it less objectionable. "That jumps at the eyes," she said; "he is not a friend of the house—only a recent acquaintance—and he has dined here already. Why have him again? He is not an attractive person. You cannot care for him, Robert; and he is no favourite with the girls."

"The girls must learn to receive the people I approve of," said the Earl, "or we shall quarrel. You must make them aware of that."

"Quarrel! for the sake of Mr Torrance! That is carrying clanship a great way."

"There is no clanship in it. You ought to know better, my dear. Your English fallacies are quite out of place here. If I had a clan (which I have not—we are purely Norman, not Celtic at all), Pat Torrance could have had as little to do with it as John Smith."

"My dear Robert," said Lady Lindores, for she had not learned to address her husband by his title, "you take it very seriously. I meant your kindness for your own people. But for a kind prejudice, which I admire and respect, for your old neighbours, you never would put up with a being like this Tinto, as they call him,—a rich fox-hunter, with the mind of a ploughman."

"You will oblige me, Mary," said her husband, coldly, "by restraining your opinion—at all events until you have a better right to express it. What do you know of Pat Torrance? I should very much prefer that you did not commit yourself on the subject. You might regret it after."

"Commit myself!—regret it!" Lady Lindores gazed at her husband with consternation. She had absolutely no guide to what he could mean; but as he stood to his point and would not yield, and as one must certainly yield when such a question arises, she found herself unwillingly obliged to give in. She was behind her children in comprehension, strange as it seems to say so. Lady Lindores had not been unfavourable to Beaufort's claims when first he made his suit to Carry; but she had been perhaps a little disappointed in him as the years passed on. He had not shown the energy, the determination, which a man in such circumstances ought to show. He had made no passionate effort to obtain his bride, such as Carry's mother felt her child was worth. And it was a long time now since Lady Lindores had taken any notice of the lingering engagement which her husband had never positively sanctioned, but which had lingered on for a year or two, coming to nothing. She had thought it best not to interfere. Perhaps Mr Beaufort might think it his duty to release Carry, now that her position was so much changed. The mother did not feel that she could ask him to do so; but if anything had happened to the tardy lover—had he been ill, or died, or proved fickle, she would have felt that Providence was interfering on their behalf. In the meantime, she thought it the best policy to say nothing about it. And it was this reticence which she intended for wisdom, which prevented any explanation between them, and kept her ignorant of what even Edith knew. It did not occur to her to connect her child, so delicate and refined, with the rough and coarse squire, whom she could not tolerate. How her husband could put up with him Lady Lindores could not conceive. He certainly meant something by it, she thought; but what did he mean? Was it some scheme of tactics in respect to the next election? which already, she knew, gave Lord Lindores great concern. Perhaps the Earl, who had a devouring ambition, now that he found an opening for it, thought it well to have the richest man in the county under his influence. This was all that she had yet divined. "Your father insists upon having that Mr Torrance," she said to the girls. "What he can see in him, I cannot imagine. But that does not look at us. We are not called upon to make martyrs of ourselves for papa's political friends."

Carry looked up eagerly as her mother spoke. "Political!" she said, with a quiver of hopeful eagerness in her voice. "Is that the reason?" This eager tone and broken question would have made Lady Lindores wonder had she not been full of the subject from her own point of view.

"What else?" she said. "You cannot suppose a man like your father can find anything else in Mr Torrance to attract him. Politics are very entrancing, but, like necessity, they bring you acquainted with strange bedfellows. Papa thinks, no doubt, that he ought to turn his influence to account."

"Oh, if that is the reason!" said Carry, clasping her hands together, with something like an ecstasy of prayer and thankfulness in her face. Lady Lindores, though she thought the emotion excessive—but then Carry was always visionary—understood that her daughter's delicate soul had been wounded by her father's regard for so unattractive a person. She patted her child upon the cheek tenderly.

"You must not consider yourself responsible for all the things we do in the prosecution of our several parts," she said. "I

feel, for my own part, that I take a great deal too much notice of old Gardener. I am getting much too fond of him. This is more innocent, I allow, than your father's fancy for Mr Torrance; for I don't insist on asking old Gardener to dinner."

"That I never should object to!" cried Carry, kissing her mother with sudden enthusiasm. She was cheered beyond measure by the comparison, and by Lady Lindores's absolute ignorance of any other pretension on the part of Torrance. Perhaps she had been deceiving herself, and attributing to her father intentions that had never entered his mind. Carry was too thankful to think that this might be how it was. But Edith, the clear-sighted, avoided her sister's eye. She made no comment on what her mother said. Edith felt that, however others might be deceived, she *knew*.

CHAPTER VI.

Alas! it was not very long before everybody knew. The demeanour of Pat Torrance at the dinner, to which Lady Lindores had been so reluctant to ask him, gave much occasion for thought to the other guests who knew the man and his ways. These said to each other that Pat had put his foot in it at last—that he had made his choice, and thrown his handkerchief at almost the only woman in the county, who was not sure to respond to it. Nothing could have been colder or more repellent than Lady Caroline was to this great matrimonial prize—the idol whom they all bowed down to, though some with minds which rebelled against the rude and ungodlike divinity. Among these interested lookers-on were some who rejoiced to see that he was likely to be made "to see his place" and submit to the humiliation of refusal; and some who, conscious that in their own families there were worshippers who would not have refused to bow down, were angry with poor Carry for "setting up" to be so much better than her neighbours. The most sagacious of these, however, reserved their judgment. There was something in the demonstration with which the Earl brought Pat forward and patted him on the back—something, too, of pain in poor Lady Carry's mild eyes, which made these more profound observers pause. The Lindores were poor. There were two daughters to provide for; and it was not a matter to be settled so easily, or which the parents would allow to turn entirely on a young girl's fancy. And then she was not even pretty, and she had got into the twenties—not a mere girl, with all the world before her. The wise would not give any opinion on the subject. They shook their heads and refused to commit themselves. But this was exactly what Pat Torrance did. He was so satisfied that here at last he had got everything he wanted, that he displayed his decision in Carry's favour from the first day. He made a spectacle of himself to the whole county, looking on with the keenest attention; and oh, how pleased society would have been in the district had he been once for all made an example of, made a fool of, as they said,—held up to public scorn and ridicule as a rejected suitor! As the wooing went on, the desire for such a consummation—the anticipation of it—grew daily in intensity; and it was not very long doubtful. One of the usual great balls was given at Tinto, which was specially in honour of the new-comers, and took place as soon as they were out of their mourning. It was evidently a crisis in the life of the master of the house, and to the greater part of the guests all the interest of a highly exciting drama was mingled with the milder impulses of amusement. Lady Caroline, everybody said, had never looked less well. She was very pale;—it was even said that freckles, caused by her sinful exposure of her face to all the elements during the summer, diminished the sheen of her ordinarily white forehead—her nose was longer than ever. But all this only increased, to her admirer, the charm of her presence. She was independent of beauty. Though she was very simply dressed—too simply for a lady of rank—yet the air with which she moved about these fine rooms was (Pat thought) such as no one else who had ever been there had possessed. She was superior to them, as she was superior to the lilies and the roses, the wreathed smiles and shining eyes of the other girls. He followed her about with demonstrations of devotion which no one could mistake. He would have danced with nobody but her, in the most marked abandonment of all his duties as host, would she have permitted him. Even when he danced with others his eyes followed her, and the only talk he vouchsafed to his partners was about Lady Car, as he called her, with offensive familiarity and a sort of intoxication. As for poor Lady Caroline herself, it was apparent to every one that she retreated continually into out-of-the-way corners—hiding herself behind the old maids and dowagers, who were never left out of such gatherings, and liked to come and look on and criticise the girls, and tell how things had been done in their day. Several of these old ladies, distressed to see a girl not dancing, had betrayed poor Carry's hiding-place by their kind efforts to get her a partner; and the result had been two or three times that she was thus delivered over into the very clutches of the wolf.

"Mr Patrick," one of those kind ladies said, rising from her seat and taking hold of his arm as he prowled about, wondering where Carry could have disappeared to, "do you no think it's discreditable to the county that a young leddy newly come among us, and a person of rank—and, what is better, a sweet young creature—should be left sitting down the whole night and get no dancing?"

It was on this occasion that Miss Barbara Erskine won the heart of the persecuted girl. She said to her in a strong whisper which went through Carry's ear like a—skewer (the simile is undignified, but suits the fact)—"My dear, there's that eediot, Jean Sempill, drawing attention to you. If you want to get out of the way, slip away behind me; there's a door there that leads into the corridor, and so you can get back to your mother. Stay by your mother—that's your safest way." Thus Carry was delivered for the moment. But, alas! her mother could not protect her effectually. When Pat Torrance came boldly up with his dark face glowing, and his projecting eyes ready, as a spectator remarked, to jump out of his head, and said, "This is our dance," what could any one do for her? Lady Lindores had become alarmed, not knowing what to make of Carry's agitation; but even a mother in these circumstances can do so little. "I am afraid she is tired, Mr

Torrance," Lady Lindores said; but Carry's arm was already in his. She had not presence of mind even to take the advantage of such an excuse.

When he brought her back, however, to her mother's side, nobody could have helped seeing that something had happened. Poor Carry was as white as her dress: she seemed scarcely able to hold herself upright, and sank down by her mother's side as if she neither saw nor heard anything that was going on round her. On the other hand, Pat Torrance was crimson, his eyes were rolling in his head. He said almost roughly—"You were right, Lady Lindores. Lady Car is tired; but I make no doubt she will be herself again to-morrow." It was a curious speech to make, and there was a tone of threatening and anger in his somewhat elevated voice which roused the liveliest displeasure in the mind of Lady Lindores; but he was gone before she could say anything. "What is the matter?" she said, taking her daughter's hand. "Rouse yourself, Carry; everybody is staring. What has happened?" "Oh, nothing, nothing! Oh, mamma, let us go home," the poor girl cried. Her lips, her very eyelids, trembled. She looked as if she were about to faint. Lady Lindores was glad to see her husband approaching; but he too had a threatening and stern look. She called him to her, and begged him to ask for the carriage. "Carry is quite ill," she said. "If you will stay with Edith, I can send it back for you;—but poor Car has looked like a ghost all night." "She has looked much more like a fool—as she is," said her father, between his set teeth; but at last he consented that she should be taken home, seeing the state of collapse in which she was. He took her down-stairs, supporting her on his arm, which was necessary, as she could scarcely walk; but when they skirted the dance, in which the master of the house was performing, talking loudly and laughing with forced merriment all the time the Earl, though he was a well-bred man, could not help giving his daughter's arm a sharp pressure, which hurt her. "I might have known you would behave like a fool," he said in a low undertone, which nobody but Carry could hear. She wavered for a moment, like a young tree in the wind, but clung to him and hurried past replying nothing. Lady Lindores following, formed her own conclusions, though she did not hear what her husband said. She took her child into her arms when they were safe in the carriage, rolling along the dark roads in the dimness of the summer night, and Carry cried and sobbed on her mother's breast. "I understand that you have refused him," Lady Lindores said. "But what then? Why should you be so wretched about it, Carry? It is a kind of vanity to be so sorry for the man. You may be sure Mr Torrance will get over it, my love."

Then Carry managed to stammer forth the real source of her terror. She was not thinking of Mr Torrance, but of papa. What would he say to her? would he ever forgive her? And then it was Lady Lindores's turn to be amazed. "My darling, you must compose yourself," she said; "this is greater nonsense than the other. Papa! What can it matter to your father? *He* will never force your inclinations; and how can this coarse bumpkin interest such a man as he is?" She became almost angry at the sight of Carry's tears. "Allow me to know your father a little better than you do," she cried. "Mr Torrance! who is Mr Torrance? I can't believe that he would favour such a suitor for a moment. But supposing that he did so,—supposing he thought, as people are apt to do, that money covers a multitude of sins—your father is not a worldly-minded man, Carry; he is ambitious, but not for money,—supposing just for the sake of argument——Anyhow, my dear, that could only be if the man happened to please you in his own person. We might like the match better because the pretender was rich, nothing more. Can you really think that papa would be a tyrant to you,—that he would compel you to marry any one? Carry, my love, you have got an attack of the nerves; it is your good sense that has given way."

Carry wept abundantly while her mother thus talked to her, and the agitation which she had so long shut up in her heart calmed down. Every word Lady Lindores said was perfectly reasonable, and to have represented her kind father to herself as a domestic tyrant was monstrous, she felt; but yet—she could not tell her mother all the trifling circumstances, the tones, the looks which had forced that conviction upon her. But she was willing, very willing, to allow herself to be persuaded that it was all a mistake, and to accept the gentle reproof and banter with which Lady Lindores soothed her excitement. "To refuse a man is always disagreeable," she said, philosophically, "especially as one must always feel one is to blame in letting him come the length of a proposal, and self-esteem whispers that he will find it hard to console himself. No, my Carry, no; don't distress yourself too much. I don't want to be cynical; but men of Mr Torrance's type soon console themselves. Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love."

"It is not that, it is not that," Carry protested among her tears.

But her mother would hear of nothing more alarming. "It is a wrong to your father to think he would take up the cause of such a man," she said, indignantly; "and I should have been horribly disappointed in you, Carry, if you had thought of him for a moment." Carry was so soothed, so comforted, so almost happy in her trouble, that the inmost doors of her heart opened to her mother. "Whatever he had been, oh, mother, do you think I could forget Edward?" she said. His name had not been mentioned between them for months before.

"Edward," said Lady Lindores, shaking her head; and then she kissed the pleading expectant face, which she could only feel, not see. "He should have showed more energy, Carry. Had he been worthy of you, he would not have left this question unsettled till now."

"What could he do?" cried Carry, roused out of her prostration; "he could not invent business for himself." Again Lady Lindores shook her head; but by this time they had reached their own door, and in the fervour of her defence and championship of her lover, Carry got out of the carriage a very different creature from the prostrate and fainting girl who had been put into it at Tinto. She went with her mother to her room, feverish and anxious to plead the cause of Edward. Lady Lindores was a romantic woman, who believed in love, and had taught her children to do the same. But she was disappointed that her daughter's lover had not been inspired by his love; that he had not found success, and secured his own cause beyond the power of evil fortune. Arguing against this adverse opinion, and defending Edward on every question, Carry recovered her courage and her composure. She felt able to fight for him to her last gasp when she left her mother, shaking her head still, but always well disposed to every generous plea; for the moment she had forgotten all the nearer dangers which had seemed so terrible to her an hour before.

Lady Lindores sat up in her dressing-gown till her husband and Edith came back. He was very gloomy, she excited and breathless, with a feverish sparkle in her eyes, which her mother noticed for the first time. She wondered if little Edith was in the secret too—that secret which she had herself scarcely thought of till to-night; and her husband's aspect filled her with strange anxieties. Was it possible that she, who had known them so long, her husband for all the most important time of his life, her child since her first breath, should have discoveries to make in them now? The thought was painful to her, and she tried to dismiss it from her mind. "Carry is better," she said, with an attempt to treat the subject lightly. "It was the glare of these rooms, I suppose. They are very handsome, but there was too much heat and too much light."

"I hope it is the last time we shall have any such scenes from Carry," said the Earl. "You ought to speak to her very seriously. She has been behaving like a fool."

"Dear Robert," said Lady Lindores, "it is trying to a girl of any feeling to have a proposal made to her in a ball-room, and I daresay Mr Torrance was rude and pressing. It is exactly what I should have expected of him."

"Since when," said the Earl, sternly, "have you studied Mr Torrance so closely as to divine what may be expected of him?"

"Robert! I have not studied him at all, nor do I attempt to divine. Carry's agitation, her fright, her panic, if I may call it so ——"

"Were simply ridiculous, ridiculous!" cried Lord Lindores. "I always thought her sentimental, but I never suspected her to be a fool."

"Carry is no fool," cried her mother, indignantly; "you know very well she has both spirit and sense, and more than sense. She is not a common girl. She ought not to be treated as one. And this man, this fox-hunter, this vulgar laird——"

"As he will probably be your son-in-law, you will do well to avoid epithets," Lord Lindores said.

"My son-in-law!" said his wife, in a suppressed shriek. "But Carry has refused him," she added, with relief.

"To-night—being flurried, and not knowing her own mind; but she will know better to-morrow."

"Robert! for heaven's sake, when she has been so distressed by this most hateful proposal, you surely will not suffer it to be repeated!"

"Why should it be a hateful proposal?" he said.

"Why?" Lady Lindores did not know how to answer; if he did not see it, if it did not jump at his eyes, as she said to herself, what explanation would make it clearer? She tried to smile and approach him on another side. "Dear Robert," she said, tremulously—"to think of you taking the part of such a man! He must have some fine qualities, I am sure, or you never could have endured the outside of him, or his manners, or his talk. He is so unlike you, so unlike anything the girls have ever been taught to care for." If this was flattery, surely it may be forgiven to the anxious mother. She was anxious too, as a wife, that her husband should not come down from the pedestal on which it had been her pride to keep him for so many years.

"That is all very well," he said, impatiently; "but I never set myself up as a model of what my children were to like. Yes; he has fine qualities, golden qualities. Do you know that he is the richest commoner in Scotland, Lady Lindores?"

"I know," she said, with quick offence, the tears starting suddenly to her eyes, "that my name is Mary, and that I hate this wretched title, which I shall never get used to, and never tolerate if my husband calls me by it. We are all, all, put asunder, all changed, and finding each other out since we came here."

This little outburst was partly real and partly a half-conscious art to find an outlet for her excitement. Her husband was more touched by it than if it had been more serious. The complaint was fantastic, yet it was one which love might be excused for making. "My love," he said, "of course I meant nothing unkind. There have been times when I called you Mrs Lindores in jest, as I did just now. But, seriously, you must see what I am thinking of—you must give me your support. We are poor. If Rintoul is to take the position to which he is entitled after me——"

"You mean Robin? I tell you I hate those new names!" she cried.

"This is foolish, Mary. If he is to enter upon life when his time comes weighted with a heavy provision for his sisters—consider; there is poor Jane. She is quite young; she may outlive us all: and if I were to die, there would be two jointures besides Car and Edith."

"Let me be struck off the list," cried Lady Lindores. "I will never be a burden on my son. Robert, God forgive you; for a distant evil like this, would you bring that man into our family, and force an unwilling marriage on your child? But no, no; I am doing you wrong; your thoughts have never gone so far."

The Earl made no reply. His face was like a thunder-cloud, lowering and heavy—a darkness from which, at any moment, fire and flame might burst forth.

"No, no," said the mother. "I understand what you have thought. I did so once myself when—you remember—young Ashestiel came in our way. I thought if they would but take to each other; if they would only see what a natural harmony they would make! Yes, yes, I remember, I was provoked beyond measure that they would not see it; and when he went away, I did not know how to contain myself. I was angry with my innocent Carry for not caring. I understand you, Robert. If by any chance her fancy had been taken by this young millionaire; but dear, how could it? You would yourself have thought less of Carry had she liked such a man. Acknowledge: he is not much better than a boor—with, perhaps, a boor's virtues."

She looked up when she had got so far, and stopped in sheer amazement at the sight of her husband's face. She had never seen any indication before of what she now found in it. Rage with difficulty smothered; a determined intention to follow his own way; an uneasy shame turning to bitterness and passion. His voice was quite hoarse with the effort to contain himself. "I thought," he said, "that at least you were not one of the silly women who speak of things they don't understand. But I was mistaken. You will rather encourage a foolish girl in a piece of unworthy romance, than show her her duty—her duty! But neither you nor she, by —— shall hold me up to ridicule! She shall take this husband I choose for her, or by ——" Here he became aware how much he was committing himself. He stopped, gazed at her defiantly for a moment, then began to pace up and down the room in great confusion. "The short and the long of it is," he said, "that I can't suffer Carry, for a girlish prejudice, to throw away such a position. He might be the first man in the county," Lord Lindores said. "He has twice as much as we have, and no title to keep up; no encumbrance of any kind. She might be a sort of princess. I cannot allow all this to be thrown away for a mere fancy. If she does not like him, she must learn to like him. What would she have? He is not a *petit maître*, certainly; but he is a man, every inch of him—his family good, his health good, a magnificent house; what could any woman want more? She will have everything that heart can desire."

Lady Lindores made no immediate reply. All this was so new to her—a revelation of things unthought of. It took away her breath; it took away her courage. Is there any shock, any pang that life can give, equal to that of suddenly perceiving a touch of baseness, a failure of honour, a lower level of moral feeling, in those who are most dear to us? This is what shatters heaven and earth, and shakes the pillars of existence to the beholder. It filled this woman with a sudden despair impossible to describe. She tried to speak, and her very voice failed her. What was the use of saying anything? If he thought thus, could anything that was said affect him? Despair made her incapable of effort. She was like Hamlet, paralysed. At the end she managed to falter forth a word of protestation. "There are some," she said, faintly, "who are content with so much less, Robert—and yet how much more!—you and I among the rest."

"A woman always answers with a personal example," he said.

And Lady Lindores was dumb. She did not know what to say to the new man who stood beside her, in the familiar aspect of her husband, expressing sentiments which never before had come from the lips of Robert Lindores. He had been self-indulgent in the old days—perhaps a little selfish—accepting sacrifices which it was not right for him to accept. But there had been a hundred excuses for him; and she and the girls had always been so ready, so eager, to make those sacrifices. It had been the pleasure of their lives to make his as smooth, as graceful, as pleasant as possible. There was no question of anything of this kind now. He who had been dependent on their ministrations for half the comfort of his life, was now quite independent of them, the master of everybody's fate,—judging for them, deciding for them, crushing their private wishes. Lady Lindores was confused beyond measure by this discovery. She put her hand to her head unconsciously, as if it must be that which was wrong. A vague hope that things might not look so terrible in the morning came into her mind. It was very late, and they were all tired and worn with the agitation of the evening. "I think I am not in a condition to understand to-night," she said, drearily. "It will be better, perhaps, to put off till to-morrow."

"It is a pity you sat up," he said coldly; and thus the strange conference ended. It was already morning, the blue light stealing in through the closed shutters. Things, as well as faces, look ghastly in this unaccustomed light. Lady Lindores drew the curtains closer to shut it out, and lay down with her head aching, turning her face to the wall. There are circumstances in which the light of heaven is terrible; and darkness, darkness, oblivion of itself, the only things the soul cares for. But though you can shut out the light, you cannot shut out thought. There was not much rest that night in Lindores. The Earl himself had a consciousness of the strange discovery of him which his wife had made; and though he was defiant and determined to subdue all opposition, yet he was hurt and angry all the same that his Mary should think less well of him. He seemed to himself of late to have done a great deal for her and her children. No idea of the elevation she had now reached had been in her mind when they married. There were three brothers then between him and the title, besides the children of the elder. And now that things had so come about, as that Mary was actually Countess of Lindores, he could not but feel that he had done a great deal for her. Yet she was not grateful. She looked at him with those scrutinising, alarmed eyes. She turned away from him with painful wonder; with—there was no doubt of it—disapproval. And yet all he wanted was the advancement of the family—the real good of his daughter. Who could doubt what his motive was? or that it was for Carry's good to have a noble establishment, a fortune that a princess might envy? Could there be any comparison between that and the marriage with a poor barrister, upon which, in her first folly, she had set her heart? It was unreasonable beyond measure, ungrateful, that his quite legitimate determination, judging for the real advantage of his daughter, should be thus looked upon by Lady Lindores.

But it would be vain to attempt to describe the struggle that followed: that domestic tragedy would have to be told at length if told at all, and it included various tragedies; not only the subjugation of poor Carry, the profanation of her life, and cruel rending of her heart, but such a gradual enlightening and clearing away of all the lovely prejudices and prepossessions of affection from the eyes of Lady Lindores, as was almost as cruel. The end of it was, that one of these poor women, broken in heart and spirit, forced into a marriage she hated, and feeling herself outraged and degraded, began her life in bitterness and misery with a pretence of splendour and success and good fortune which made the real state of affairs still more deplorable; and the other, feeling all the beauty of her life gone from her, her eyes disenchanted, a pitiless cold daylight revealing every angle once hid by the glamour of love and tender fancy, began a sort of second existence alone. If Torrance had been determined before to have Lady Caroline for his wife, he was far more determined after she had put his pride to the humiliation of a refusal, and roused all the savage in him. From the night of the ball until the moment of the wedding, he never slackened in his pursuit of the shrinking unhappy girl, who, on her side, had betrayed her weakness to her sister on the first mention of the hateful suitor. Edith was disenchanted too, as well as her mother. She comprehended none of them. "I would not do it," she said simply, when the struggle was at its bitterest; "why do you do it?" Rintoul, for his part, when he appeared upon the scene, repeated Edith's positivism in a different way. "I think my father is quite right," he said. "What could Carry look for? She is not pretty; she is twenty-four. You ought to take these things into consideration, mother. She has lost her chance of any of the prizes; and when you have here the very thing, a man rolling in money—and not a tradesman either, which many girls have to put up with—it is such a chance as not one in a thousand ever gets. I think Car ought to be very grateful to papa." Lady Lindores listened with a gasp—Robin too! But she did not call him Robin for a long time after that day. He was Rintoul to her as to the rest of the world, his father's heir, very clearly alive to the advantage of having, when his time came, no provision for his sister hanging like a millstone round his neck. His sympathy and approval were delightful to his father. "Women are such queer cattle, you never know how to take them," the experienced young man said. A man is not in a crack regiment for nothing. He had more knowledge of the world than his father had. "I should have thought my mother would have been delighted to settle Carry so near home."

Thus it was a very strange divided house upon the eve of this marriage. To add to the confusion, there was great squabbling over the settlements, which Pat Torrance, eager though he was to secure the bride, whom his pride and self-will, as well as what he believed to be his love, had determined to have at all costs, was by no means so liberal about as the Earl thought necessary. He fought this out step by step, even venturing to hint, like the brute he was, that it was no beauty or belle whom he was marrying, and cutting down the requirements of her side in the most business-like way. Lady Lindores had been entirely silenced, and looked after the indispensable matters of her daughter's *trousseau* without a trace of the usual cheerful bustle attending wedding preparations; while Carry seemed to live in a dream, sometimes rousing up to make an appeal to her father's pity, but mostly in a sort of passive state, too heart-broken to be excited about anything. Edith, young and curious, moved about in the midst of it all in the activity of her independence, as yet touched by none of these things. She was a sort of rebellion impersonated, scarcely comprehending the submission of the others. While Carry wept she stood looking on, her face flushed, her eyes brilliant. "I would not do it," she said. These words were constantly on her lips.

"How could you help doing it?" poor Carry cried, turning upon her in the extremity of her despair. "Oh, have a little pity upon me, Edie! What can I do? I would sooner die. If there is anything you can think of—anything! But it is all past hope now. Papa will not even listen to me. Rintoul tells me I am a fool. He——" but here Carry's voice was broken with a shudder. She could not speak of her bridegroom but with a contraction of her heart.

"I don't know what I should do, but I should not do this," said Edith, surveying her sister from the height of untried resolution. "Nobody can force you to say Yes instead of No; nobody can make you do a thing you are determined not to do. Why do you do it? you can't want not to do it at the very bottom of your heart."

Carry gave her a look of anguish which brought the girl to her knees in compunction and remorse. "Oh, forgive me, Car! but why, *why* do you do it?" she cried. Lady Lindores had come softly in to give her child her good-night kiss. It was within a few days of the wedding. She stood and looked at the group with tears in her eyes—one girl lying back white, worn, and helpless in her chair; the other, at her feet, glowing with courage and life.

"Speak to her, mamma," cried Edith, "as long as there is any hope."

"What can I say?" said the mother; "everything has gone too far now. It would be a public scandal. I have said all that I could. Do not make my poor child more unhappy. Carry, my darling, you will do your duty whatever happens: and everything becomes easier when it is duty——"

"But how is it duty?" said rebellious Edith. "I would not do it!" she cried, stamping her foot on the floor.

"Edith, Edith! do not torture your sister. It is easy to say such things, but how are you to do them? God knows, I would not mind what I did if it was only me. I would fly away with her somewhere—escape from them all. But what would happen? Our family would be rent asunder. Your father and I"—Lady Lindores's voice quivered a little—"who have been always so united, would part for ever. Our family quarrels would be discussed in public. You, Edith—what would become of you? Your prospects would all be ruined. Carry herself would be torn to pieces by the gossips. They would say there must be some reason. God knows, I would not hesitate at any sacrifice."

"Mamma, do not say anything more; it is all over. I know there is nothing to be done," said Carry, faintly. As for Edith, she could not keep still; her whole frame was tingling. She clenched her small fists, and dashed them into the air.

"I would not do it! I would just refuse, refuse! I would not do it! Why should you do it?" she cried.

But between these two there was no talking. The younger sister flew to her own room, impelled by her sense of the intolerable, unable to keep still. She met her brother by the way, and clutched him by the arm, and drew him with her within her own door. "I would not do it, if I were Carry," she said, breathless. "You might drag me to church, if you liked, but even there I would not consent. Why, why does she do it?" Edith cried.

"Because," said Rintoul the experienced, "she is not such a fool as she looks. She knows that after the first is over, with plenty of money and all that, she will get on first-rate, you little goose. Girls like something to make a fuss about."

"Oh, it is a great deal you know about girls!" cried Edith, giving him a shake in the violence of her emotion. But he only laughed, disengaging himself.

"We'll see what you'll do when it comes to your turn," he said, and he went off along the passage whistling. It did not

matter to him that his sister was breaking her heart. But why, why, oh why does she do it? Edith dozed and woke again half-a-dozen times in the night, crying this out into the silence. To refuse, surely one could do that. Papa might scold, there might be scenes and unhappiness, but nothing could be so unhappy as this. She was incapable of understanding how there could be any difficulty in the case.

The marriage took place, however, in spite of these convulsions, and several years had elapsed since that event. It was an old affair when John Erskine, newly arrived, and full of curiosity and interest, had that encounter with Lady Lindores and her daughter at his own gate, where something of the outline of this story was communicated to him—the facts of it at least. The ladies did not linger upon Carry's marriage in their narrative. He was told of it briefly as an event long over, and to which everybody had got accustomed. And so it was. The most miserable of events settle down into the routine of life when a few years have elapsed. Carry herself long ago had accepted her fate, trying to persuade herself that an unhappy marriage was nothing out of the common, and taking such comfort as was possible in poetry and intellectual musings. Her husband, who neither knew nor cared for anything above his own rude external world, yet felt her poetry to enhance the delicacy of her being, and to raise Lady Car more and more to that height of superiority which was what he had sought in her—was all the better satisfied with his bargain, though all the more separated from any possible point of junction with her. The neighbourhood was very well aware of all the circumstances; and though Lady Lindores entered into no explanations, yet there was a sigh, and a tone in her voice, as she spoke of her daughter, which suggested sorrow. But to tell the truth, young John Erskine, suddenly finding such friends at his very door, suddenly readmitted into the old intimacy, and finding the dull country life to which he had been looking forward flash into sunshine and pleasure, made few inquiries into this darker chapter of the family history; and in reality cared for nothing much but to convince himself that the Lindores family were really his next neighbours; that they were quite willing to receive him on the old footing; and that, demurely walking along the same road on the other side of her mother, saying little but touching the entire atmosphere with a sense of her presence, was Edith Lindores. Perhaps, had he actually been by her side, the sensation being more definite would have been less entrancing. But her mother was between them, animated and pleased by the meeting, ready to tell him all that had happened, and to hear his account of himself, with friendly interest; while beyond her ample figure and draperies, the line of a grey dress, the occasional flutter of a ribbon, the putting forth of a small foot, made the young man aware of the other creature wrapped in soft silence and maidenly reserve, whom he could image to himself all the more completely that he saw no more of her. He scarcely heard her voice as they walked along thus near yet separated; but a great many things that Lady Lindores said were confused by the sound upon the road of her daughter's step—by the appearance of that bit of ribbon, with which the sunny wind did not hesitate to play, floating out in advance of her, catching the young man's eye. Thus all at once, on the very first day after his return, another new existence began for John Erskine on the road between Dalrulzian and Lindores.

CHAPTER VII.

There are few things in human affairs more curious than the structure of what is called society, wherever it is met with, whether in the most primitive of its developments or on the higher levels. The perpetual recurrence of a circle within which the sayings and doings of certain individuals are more important than anything else in earth or heaven, and where the conversation persistently rolls back, whatever may be its starting-point, to what this or that little knot of people are doing, to the eccentricities of one and the banalities of another, to some favourite individual scene of tragedy or comedy which forms the centre of the moral landscape—is always apparent to the observer, whether his observations are made in Kamtchatka or in London, among washerwomen or princesses. But under no circumstances is this so evident as to a new-comer in a region where all the people know each other. The novelty and freshness of his impressions perhaps make him congratulate himself for a moment that now at last he has got into a society fresh and original, with features of its own; but half-a-dozen meetings are enough to prove to him that he has only got into another round, a circle as little extended, as much shut up in its own ring, as all the rest. This was what John Erskine found, with a little amusement and a little disgust, almost as soon as he got settled in his unknown home. Any addition to their society was interesting to the country folks, especially in May, when there is not much doing—when those who can indulge themselves in the pleasures of the season have gone to London, and those who cannot are bound to bring forth their philosophy and prove that they enjoy the country in the early summer, even though there is nothing to do. But a young man unencumbered and alone, with all his life before him, and all his connections to form, is perhaps of all others the most interesting human creature who can come into a new sphere. All the world is curious about him—both those whose lives he may influence, and those to whom he can contribute nothing but the interest, perhaps of a new drama, perhaps only of a new face. He who will enact his own story publicly before the eyes of his neighbours, falling in love, wooing, marrying, or, still better, carrying on these processes with interruptions of non-success and threatenings of postponement, what a godsend he is! and perhaps scarcely less he who brings in darker elements into the placid tenor of the general history, and ruins himself for our instruction, while we all look on with bated breath. To the country-side in general, John Erskine, while as yet unknown, was a new hero. He was the beginning of a romance with all the more fascination in it that the most interested spectator for a long time could form but little idea how it was to turn. As soon as he was known to be at home, his neighbours came down upon him from all quarters with friendly greetings, invitations, offers of kindness on all sides. The first to appear was Sir James Montgomery, a sunburnt and cheerful old soldier, whose small estate of Chiefswood "marched" on one side with Dalrulzian, and who was disposed to be very friendly. He came in beaming with smiles over all his brown jovial countenance, and holding out a large cordial hand.

"Well, young man, so this is you at last. You're heartily welcome home. I've been long away myself, and you've never been here, but we're old neighbours for all that, and I take it upon me to call myself an old friend."

"You are very kind," John said, suffering his hand to be engulfed in that kind, warm, capacious grasp. The old soldier held him at arm's length for a moment, looking at him with friendly eyes.

"I remember your grandfather well," he said; "not so much of your father, for he came to man's estate, and died, poor lad, when I was away; but I see some features of the old man in you, my young friend, and I'm glad to see them. You'll seldom meet with a better man than your grandfather. He was very kind to me as a young lad at the time I got my commission. They were ill able to afford my outfit at home, and I'm much mistaken if old Dalrulzian did not lend a helping hand; so mind you, my lad, if young Dalrulzian should ever want one—a day in harvest, as the proverb goes——"

"You are very kind, sir," said John Erskine again: he was touched, but half amused as well. It seemed so unlikely that he should require the old general's helping hand. And then they talked of the country, and of their previous lives and diverse experiences. Sir James was one of those primitive men, much more usual a generation ago than now, whose knowledge of life, which to his own thinking was profound and extensive, left out the greater part of what in our days is known as life at all. He knew Scotland and India, and nothing more. He was great in expedients for dealing with the natives on one hand, and full of a hundred stories of village humour, fun, and pawkiness on the other. To hear him laugh over one of these anecdotes till the tears stood in his clear, warm blue eyes, which were untouched by any dimness of time, was worth all the witticisms ever printed; and to see him bend his fine old brows over the characteristics of his old subjects in India, and the ameliorations of character produced by British rule, firmness, and justice, was better than philosophy. But with that which young John Erskine knew as life he had no acquaintance. Save his own country and the distant East, the globe was wrapped in dimness to him. He had passed through London often, and had even transacted business at the Horse Guards, though an Indian officer in those days had little to do with that centre of military authority; but he had a

mingled awe and horror of "town," and thought of the Continent as of a region of temptation where the devil was far more apparent than in other places, and sought whom he might devour with much more openness and less hindrance than at home. And when our young man, who flattered himself a little on his knowledge of society and the world, as he understood the phrase, unfolded himself before the innocent patriarch, their amazement at each other was mutual. Old Sir James contemplated John in his knowledge with something of the same amused respect which John on his side felt for him in his ignorance. To each there was in the other a mixture of a boy and a sage, which made them each to each half absurd and half wonderful. An old fellow, who must have seen so much to have seen so little! and a mere bit of a lad, Sir James said to himself, who knew nothing about India or anything serious, yet had seen a vast deal, and had very just notions, and spoke like a man of the world when you came to talk to him! It was thus the senior who did most justice to the junior, as is usually the case.

"I am afraid," Sir James said, "that you'll find our country-side but dull after all you've seen. We're pleased with ourselves, as most ignorant people are; we think we're good enough company on the whole, but music, or the play, or art, or that kind of thing, you'll find us wanting in. I'm afraid they find us very wanting at Lindores; but as for a kind welcome, whenever you like and however you like, and a good Scotch dinner, and sometimes a dance, if that will content you in the way of company——"

"I should be hard to please if that would not content me," said John. "I hope you will give me the chance."

"That we will—that we will," said Sir James, heartily; and then he added, "we have no young people about us—Lady Montgomery and me. Our two children are as far from children now as their father and mother. They are both in India, and their families grown up and gone out to them. So we have nothing young of our own about the house; but don't go too fast, we're not without attraction. In a week, I think, we're expecting a visitor that will make the place bright—Miss Barrington—Nora Barrington; you'll have heard of her by this time. She's a great favourite in the country. We are all keen to have her and to keep her. I'm not afraid that a young man will find us dull when we've Nora in the house."

Here John, who had become suspicious of the name of this girl whom everybody insisted on recommending to him, eagerly protested that he should want no foreign attraction to the house in which the kind old general was.

"Foreign! No, she's not foreign," said Sir James; "far from that. A bonnie English girl, which, after a bonnie Scotch lassie, is by far the best thing going. We must stand up for our own first," said the old soldier, laughing; "but nothing foreign—nothing foreign: if you want that, you'll have to go to Lindores."

John felt—he could scarcely tell why—slightly irritated by these references to Lindores. He said, somewhat elaborately, "They are the only people I really know in the county. I met them long ago—on the Continent."

"Ah!—ay; that's just what I say—for anything foreign, you'll have to go to the Castle," said Sir James, a little doubtfully. "But," he added, after a moment's pause, "I hope you'll take to us and your own country, and need no 'foreign aid of ornament,' eh? You must forgive me. I'm an old fellow, and old-fashioned. In my time it used to be thought that your French and Italians were—well, no better than they should be. Germans, they tell me, are a more solid race; but I know little difference—I know little difference. You'll say that's my ignorance," said this man of prejudice, beaming upon his companion with a smile in which there was a little deprecation, but a great deal of simple confidence. It was impossible not to condone the errors of a censor so innocent.

"If you knew them, you would not only see a great deal of difference, but I think you would like them a great deal better than you suppose," John said.

"Very likely—very likely," cried Sir James. It occurred to him suddenly that if his young friend had indeed, poor lad, been brought up among those "foreign cattle," an unfavourable opinion of them might hurt his feelings; and this was the last thing the old man would have done—even to a foreigner in person, much less to a son of the soil temporarily seduced by the wiles of strangers. And then he repeated his formula about being an old fellow and old-fashioned. "And you'll mind to expect nothing but broad Scotch at Chiefswood," he cried, laughing and waving his hand as he rode away, after the hearty invitation with which every visitor ended. "You'll get the other at Lindores."

And the door had scarcely closed upon this new acquaintance when the Earl made his appearance, with the smile of an old friend, quite willing to acknowledge old relationships, but not too familiar or enthusiastic in his claim. He was no longer the languid gentleman he had been in the old wandering days, but had the fresh colour and active step of a man who lived much out of doors. "The scene is very different," he said, with kindness but dignity. "We are all changed more

or less; but the sentiments are the same." He said this with something of the air of a prince graciously renewing acquaintance with a friend of his exile. "I hope we shall see you often at the Castle. We are your nearest neighbours; and when you have been as long here as we have, you will have learned to shudder at the words. But it is a relief to think it is you who will now fill that *rôle*." Could a benevolent nobleman say more? And it was only after a good deal of friendly talk that Lord Lindores began to speak of the county business, and the advantage it would be to him to have support in his attempts to put things on a better footing.

"Nothing can be more *arriéré*," he said. "We are behind in everything; and the prejudices I have to struggle with are inconceivable. I shall have you now, I hope, on my side: we are, I believe, of the same politics."

"I scarcely know what my politics are," said John. "Some one told me the other day that the Erskines are always on the right side; and, if you will not be disgusted, I am obliged to confess that I don't know what was meant. I know what it would be at Milton Magna. I imagine dimly just the opposite here."

The Earl smiled benignly on the young inquirer. "The Erskines have always been Liberal," he said. "I know there is no counting upon you young men. You generally go too far on one side or the other: if you are not Tories, you are Radicals. My Liberalism, *bien entendu*, does not go that length—no Radicalism, no revolutionary sentiments. In short, at present my politics mean county hospitals and drainage more than anything else." Then he paused, and added somewhat abruptly, "I don't know if you ever thought of Parliament—as a career for yourself?"

At this John's pulses gave a sudden jump, and the blood rushed to his cheeks. Had he thought of it? He could scarcely tell. As something he might come to, when he had learned the claims of life upon him, and the circumstances of the country, which as yet he barely knew—as an object to look forward to, something that might ennoble his future and afford him the finest occupation that a man can have, a share in the government of his country—yes; no doubt he had thought of it—at a time when he thought more highly of Dalrulzian and of his own pretensions. But the demand was very sudden, and he had all the modesty of youth. "Parliament!" he faltered forth. "I—don't know that I have thought of it. I fear I know too little of politics—I have too little experience——" And here he paused, expecting nothing less than that he should be kindly urged to think better of it, and persuaded that it was his duty to serve his generation so.

"Ah," said the Earl, "you give me just the assurance I wanted. I need not hesitate to tell you, in that case, that my great desire is to push Rintoul for the county. If you had thought of it yourself, it would have been a different matter; but otherwise everything points to him,—his position, our circumstances as the natural leaders, and the excellent chance he would have with all parties—better than any one else, I believe. You could be of the utmost use to us, Erskine, if it does not interfere with any plans of your own."

Now John had no plans; but this sudden check, after the sudden suggestion which roused all his ambition, was too much like a dash of cold water in his face to be pleasant to him. But he had time to collect himself while Lord Lindores was speaking, and to call up a sort of smile of assent, though it gave him a twinge of ludicrous pain. It was poetic justice. He had faltered and said No, in order to be encouraged and made to say Yes, and his vanity and false modesty, he thought, had got their reward. And all this for Rintoul! He remembered Rintoul well enough when he was not Rintoul at all, but Robin Lindores—a poor little lieutenant in a marching regiment. And now he was in the Guards, and the heir of an earldom. The change of position was so great, that it took away John's breath. In the days of their former acquaintance, there could not have been the smallest doubt which was the more important personage—young Lindores, who had nothing at all, or John Erskine, with a good estate which everybody accepted as much better than it was. But now he had gone down, and the other up. All this went through his mind ruefully, yet not without a sense of amusement in his own discomfiture. He had not much confidence in his own abilities or enlightenment, but it was not much to brag of that he had more of both than young Lindores. However, he had nothing to do in this sudden concatenation but to listen respectfully yet ruefully as the Earl went on, who seemed to have grasped him, present and future, in his hands.

"It is a wonderful comfort to be able to calculate upon you," he said. "My son-in-law—for of course you have heard of Carry's marriage—would have a great deal of influence if he chose to exert it; but he has his own notions—his own notions. You will understand, when you make his acquaintance, that though a sterling character, he has not had all the advantages that might have been wished, of acquaintance with men and knowledge of the world. But you, my dear Erskine, you know something of life. By the by," he said, as he rose to go away, "Lady Lindores charged me to engage you to come to us to-morrow. We are going away to town, but not for more than a month. The ladies insist that they must see you before they go. We all look forward to seeing a great deal of you," the Earl added, with that manner which was always so fascinating. "Between you and me, our dear neighbours are a set of prejudiced old rustics," he said, with a

confidential smile, as he went out; "but it will be strange if you and I together cannot make them hear reason." Could anything be more flattering to a young man? And it was the father of Edith who grasped his hand thus warmly—who associated him with himself in a conjunction so flattering. John forgot the little wrench of theoretical disappointment—the ludicrous ease with which he had been made to give place to Rintoul. After all, something must be sacrificed, he allowed, to the heir of an important family—and the brother of Edith Lindores!

But this was not his last visitor on this eventful afternoon. The Earl had scarcely disappeared when Rolls once more threw open the door of the library, in which John usually sat, and announced with much solemnity Mr Torrance of Tinto. The man whom the Earl, though vouching for him as "a sterling character," had allowed to be wanting in knowledge of the world, came striding in with that air of taking up all the space in the room and finding it too small for him, which wealth and a vulgar mind are so apt to give. That John should dislike him instinctively from the moment he set eyes upon him, was nothing remarkable; for was not he the owner of the most obnoxious house in the neighbourhood? the man to whom Carry Lindores had been sacrificed? John Erskine felt, as he rose to meet the new-comer, a sense of the shabbiness and smallness of his own house, such as, even in the first evening of disenchantment, had scarcely affected him so strongly before. When his visitor cast round him that bold glance of his big, projecting, light-blue eyes, John saw through them the insignificance of the place altogether, and the humility of his own position, with a mortification which he could scarcely subdue. Torrance was tall and strong—an immense frame of a man, with very black hair and dark complexion, and something insufferably insolent, audacious, cynical, in those large, light eyes, *à fleur de tête*. His insolence of nature was sufficiently evident; but what John did not see was the underlying sense of inferiority which his new visitor could not shake off, and which made him doubly and angrily arrogant, as it were, in his own defence. It galled him to recognise better manners and breeding than his own—breeding and manners which perhaps he had found out, as John did the inferiority of his surroundings, through another's eyes. But Torrance's greeting was made with great show of civility. He had heard much of John as a friend of the family at Lindores, he said.

"Not but what I should have called, anyhow," he explained, "though Tinto really belongs to the other side of the county, and Dalrulzian is rather out of the way for me; but still civility is civility, and in the country we're a kind of neighbours. I hope you like it, now you are here?"

"Pretty well," was all that John said.

"It's a nice little place. Of course you knew what it was—not one of the great country places; but it stands well, and it looks fine at a distance. Few places of its size look better when you're a good bit away."

This tried the young man's patience, but he did his best to smile. "It is well enough," he said; "I expected no better. It is not imposing like Tinto. Wherever one goes, it seems to me impossible to get out of sight of your big house."

"Yes, it's an eyesore to half the county; I'm well aware of that," said Torrance, with complacency. "There's far more of it than is any good to me. Lady Car—I hear you knew Lady Car before we were married," he said, fixing John almost threateningly with those light eyes—"fills it now and then; and when I was a bachelor, I've seen it pretty full in September; but in a general way it's too big, and a great trouble to keep up."

"I hope Lady Caroline is quite well?" John said, with formal gravity.

"She is well enough. She is never what you call quite well. Women get into a way of ailing, I think, just as men get into a way of drinking. You were surprised to hear she was married, I suppose?" he asked abruptly, with again the same threatening, offensive look, which made John's blood boil.

"I was surprised—as one is surprised by changes that have taken place years before one hears of them; otherwise it is no surprise to hear that a young lady has married. Of course," John added, with serious malice, "I had not the advantage of knowing you."

Torrance stared at him for a moment, as if doubtful whether to take offence or not. Then he uttered, opening capacious jaws, a fierce laugh.

"I am very easy to get on with, for those that know me," he said, "if that's what you mean. We're a model couple, Lady Car and I: everybody will tell you that. And I don't object to old friends, as some men do. Let them come, I always say. If the difference is not in favour of the present, it's a pity—that's all I say."

To this John, not knowing what answer to make, replied only with a little bow of forced politeness, and nothing more.

"I suppose they were in a very different position when you used to know them?" said Torrance; "in a poor way enough—ready to make friends with whoever turned up?"

"It would be very bad policy on my part to say so," said John, "seeing that I was one of the nobodies to whom Lady Lindores, when she was Mrs Lindores, was extremely kind—as it seems to me she always is."

"Ah, kind! that's all very well: you weren't nobody—you were very eligible—in those days," said Torrance, with a laugh, for which John would have liked to knock him down; but there were various hindrances to this laudable wish. First, that it was John's own house, and civility forbade any aggression; and second, that Tinto was much bigger and stronger than the person whom, perhaps, he did not intend to insult—indeed there was no appearance that he meant to insult him at all. He was only a coarse and vulgar-minded man, speaking after his kind.

"The fact is, if you don't mind my saying so, I'm not very fond of my mamma-in-law," said Torrance. "Few men are, so far as I know: they put your wife up to all sorts of things. For my part, I think there's a sort of conspiracy among women, and mothers hand it down to their daughters. A man should always part his wife from her belongings when he can. She's a great deal better when she has nothing but him to look to. She sees then what's her interest—to please him and never mind the rest. Don't you think I'm complaining—Lady Car's an exception. You never catch *her* forgetting that she's Lady Caroline Torrance and has her place to fill. Doesn't she do it, too! She's the sort of woman, in one way, that's frightened at a fly—and on the other the queen wouldn't daunt her; that's the sort of woman I like. She's what you call a grand damm—and no mistake. Perhaps she was too young for that when you knew her; and had nothing then to stand on her dignity about."

Here John, able to endure no longer, rose hastily and threw open the window. "The weather gets warm," he said, "though it is so early, and vegetation is not so far behind in Scotland as we suppose."

"Behind! I should like to know in what we're behind!" cried his guest: and then his dark countenance reddened, and he burst into another laugh. "Perhaps you think I'm desperately Scotch," he said; "but that's a mistake. I'm as little prejudiced as anybody can be. I was at Oxford myself. I'm not one of your local men. The Earl would like me to take his way and follow his lead, as if I were a country bumpkin, you know. That's his opinion of every man that has stuck to his own country and not wandered abroad; and now he finds I have my own way of thinking, he doesn't half like it. We can think for ourselves down in the country just as well as the rest of you." After he had given vent to these sentiments, however, Torrance got up with a half-abashed laugh. "If you come over to Tinto, Lady Car and I will be glad to see you. We'll show you some things you can't see every day—though we are in an out-of-the-way corner, you're thinking," he said.

"I have already heard of the treasures of Tinto," said John, glad that there was something civil to say.

Pat Torrance nodded his head with much self-satisfaction. "Yes, we've got a thing or two," he said. "I'm not a connoisseur myself. I know they've cost a fortune—that's about all I'm qualified to judge of. But Lady Car knows all about them. You would think it was she and not I they belonged to by nature. But come and judge for yourself. I'm not a man to be suspicious of old friends."

And here he laughed once more, with obvious offensive meaning; but it took John some time to make out what that meaning could be. His visitor had been for some time gone, fortunately for all parties, before it burst upon him. He divined then, that it was he who was supposed to have been poor Carry's lover, and that her husband's object was the diabolical one of increasing her misery by the sight of the man whom she had loved and forsaken. Why had she forsaken Beaufort for this rude barnyard hero? Was it for the sake of his great house, which happily was not visible from Dalrulzian, but which dominated half the county with gingerbread battlements, and the flag that floated presumptuous as if the house were a prince's? Had Carry preferred mere wealth, weighed by such a master, to the congenial spirit of her former lover? It fretted the young man even to think of such a possibility. And the visitors had fretted him each in some special point. They neutralised the breadth of the external landscape with their narrow individuality and busy bustling little schemes. He went out to breathe an air more wholesome, to find refuge from that close pressure of things personal, and circumscribed local scenery, in the genial quietness and freshness of the air outside. How busy they all were in their own way, how intent upon their own plans, how full of suspicion and criticism of each other! Outside all was quiet—the evening wind breathing low, the birds in full chorus. John refreshed himself with a long walk, shaking off his discouragement and partial disgust. Peggy Burnet was at her door, eager to open the gate for him as he passed. She had

just tied a blue handkerchief about the pot containing her "man's" tea, which her eldest child was about to carry. As he sauntered up the avenue, this child, a girl about ten, tied up so far as her shoulders were concerned in a small red-tartan shawl, but with uncovered head and bare legs and feet, overtook him, skimming along the road with her bundle. She admitted, holding down her head shyly, that she was little Peggy, and was carrying her father his tea. "He's up in the fir-wood on the top of the hill. He'll no' be back as long as it's light."

"But that is a long walk for you," said John.

"It's no' twa miles, and I'm fond, fond to get into the woods," said Peggy. She said "wudds," and there was a curious sing-song in the speech to John's unaccustomed ears. When she went on she did not curtsey to him as a well-conditioned English child would have done, but gave him a merry nod of her flaxen head, which was rough with curls, and sped away noiseless and swift, the red shawl over her shoulders, which was carefully knotted round her waist and made a bunch of her small person, showing far off through the early greenness of the brushwood. When she had gone on a little, she began to sing like a bird, her sweet young voice rising on the air as if it had wings. It was an endless song that Peggy sang, like that of Wordsworth's reaper—

> "Whate'er the theme, the maiden sang
> As if her song could have no ending."

It went winding along, a viewless voice, beyond the house, along the slopes, away into the paleness of the hill-top, where the tall pine-trunks stood up like columns against the light. It was like the fresh scent of those same pines—like the aromatic peat-smoke in the air—a something native to the place, which put the troubles and the passions he had stumbled against out of the mind of the young laird. He was reconciled somehow to Scotland and to nature by little Peggy's love for the "wudds," and the clear ringing melody of her endless song.

CHAPTER VIII.

In the midst of all the attentions paid him by his neighbours and the visitors who followed each other day by day, there was one duty which John Erskine had to fulfil, and which made a break in the tide of circumstances which seemed to be drifting him towards the family at Lindores, and engaging him more and more to follow their fortunes. When a life is as yet undecided and capable of turning in a new direction, it is common enough, in fact as well as in allegory, that a second path should be visible, branching off from the first, into which the unconscious feet of the wayfarer might still turn, were the dangers of the more attractive way divined. There is always one unobtrusive turning which leads to the safe track; but how is the traveller to know that, whose soul is all unconscious of special importance in the immediate step it takes? John Erskine contemplated his *rapprochement* to the Lindores with the greatest complacency and calm. That it could contain any dangers, he neither knew nor would have believed: he wanted nothing better than to be identified with them, to take up their cause and be known as their partisan. Nevertheless Providence silently, without giving him any warning, opened up the other path to him, and allowed him in ignorance to choose. If he had known, probably it would not have made the least difference. Young heroes have never in any known history obeyed the dictates of any monitor, either audible or inaudible, who warned them against one connection and in favour of another. Nevertheless he had his chance, as shall be seen. The morning after his first dinner at the Castle, which had been the reopening of a delightful world to him, he decided that he had put off too long his visit to his only relative, and set off through the soft May sunshine, for it was beautiful weather, to pay his respects to his old aunt at Dunearn.

The house of Miss Barbara Erskine at Dunearn opened direct from the street. It was one of the same class of homely Scotch houses to which Dalrulzian itself belonged; but whereas Dalrulzian, being a mansion-house, had two gables, Miss Barbara's Lodging, as she liked it to be called, had but one, stepping out into the broad pathway, not paved, but composed of sand and gravel, which ran along one side of the South Street. This gable was broad enough to give considerable size to the drawing-room which filled the upper story, and which had windows every way, commanding the street and all that went on in it, which was not much. The house was entered by an outside stair, which gave admission to the first floor, on which all the rooms of "the family" were, the floor below being devoted to the uses of the servants, with the single exception of the dining-parlour, which was situated near the kitchen for the convenience of the household. Behind there was a large fragrant old-fashioned garden full of sweet-smelling flowers, interspersed with fruit-trees, and going off into vegetables at the lower end. Notwithstanding that it was so far north, there were few things that would not grow in this garden, and it was a wilderness of roses in their season. Except one or two of the pale China kind—the monthly rose, as Miss Barbara called it, which is so faithful and blows almost all the year round—there were no roses in May; but there was a wealth of spring flowers filling all the borders, and the air was faintly sweet as the old lady walked about in the morning sunshine enjoying the freshness and stir of budding life. She was a portly old lady herself, fresh and fair, with a bright complexion, notwithstanding seventy years of wear and tear, and lively hazel eyes full of vivacity and inquisitiveness. She was one of the fortunate people who take an interest in everything, and to whom life continues full of excitement and variety to the end. She walked as briskly as though she had been twenty years younger, perhaps more so; for care does not press upon seventy as upon fifty, and the only burden upon her ample shoulders was that of years. She had a soft white Indian shawl wrapped round her, and a hood with very soft blue ribbons tied over her cap. She liked a pretty ribbon as well as ever, and was always well dressed. From the garden, which sloped downwards towards the river, there was an extensive view—a prospect of fields and scattered farmhouses spreading into blue distance, into the outline of the hills, towards the north; at the right hand the tower of Dunearn Church, which was not more handsome than church towers generally are in Scotland; and to the left, towards the setting sun, a glimpse of Tinto arrogantly seated on its plateau. Miss Barbara, as she said, "could not bide" the sight of Tinto House. She had planted it out as well as she could; but her trees were perverse, and would separate their branches or die away at the top, as if on purpose to reveal the upstart. On this particular morning of early May, Miss Barbara was not alone: she had a young lady by her side, of whose name and presence at this particular moment the country was full. There was not a house in the neighbourhood of any pretensions which she was not engaged to visit; and there was scarcely a family, if truth must be told, which was not involved more or less in an innocent conspiracy on her behalf, of which John Erskine, all unconscious, was the object. His old aunt, as was befitting, had the first chance.

"You need not ask me any more questions," Miss Barbara was saying, "for I think you know just as much about the family, and all the families in the country-side, as anybody. You have a fine curiosity, Nora; and take my word for it, that's a grand gift, though never properly appreciated in this world. It gives you a great deal of interest in your youth, and it keeps you from wearying in your old age—though that's a far prospect for you."

"My mother says I am a gossip born," said Nora, with her pretty smile.

"Never you trouble your head about that—take you always an interest in your fellow-creatures. Better that than the folk in a novelle. Not but what I like a good novelle myself as well as most things in this life. It's just extending your field. It's like going into a new neighbourhood. The box is come from the library this morning," said Miss Barbara in a parenthesis.

"Oh yes, I opened it to have a peep. There is 'Middlemarch' and one of Mr Trollope's, and several names I don't know."

"No 'Middlemarch' for me," said Miss Barbara, with a wave of her hand. "I am too old for that. That means I've read it, my dear,—the way an experienced reader like me can read a thing—in the air, in the newspapers, in the way everybody talks. No, that's not like going into a new neighbourhood—that is getting to the secrets of the machinery, and seeing how everything, come the time, will run down, some to ill and harm, but all to downfall, commonplace, and prosiness. I have but little pleasure in that. And it's pleasure I want at my time of life. I'm too old to be instructed. If I have not learned my lesson by this time, the more shame to me, my dear."

"But, Miss Barbara, you don't want only to be amused. Oh no: to have your heart touched, sometimes wrung even—to be so sorry, so anxious that you would like to interfere—to follow on and on to the last moment through all their troubles, still hoping that things will take a good turn."

"And what is that but amusement?" said the old lady. "I am not fond of shedding tears; but even that is a luxury in its way—when all the time you are sure that it will hurt nobody, and come all right at the end."

"Lydgate does not turn out all right at the end," said Nora, "nor Rosamond either; they go down and down till you would be glad of some dreadful place at last that they might fall into it and be made an end of. I suppose it is true to nature," said the girl, with a solemnity coming over her innocent face, "that if you don't get better you should go on getting worse and worse—but it is dreadful. It is like what one hears of the place—below."

"Ay, ay, we're not fond nowadays of the place—below; but I'm afraid there must be some truth in it. That woman has found out the secret, you see." Miss Barbara meant no disrespect to the great novelist when she called her "that woman." There was even a certain gratification in the use of the term, as who should say, "Your men, that brag so much of themselves, never found this out"—which was a favourite sentiment with the old lady. "That's just where she's grand," Miss Barbara continued. "There's that young lad in the Italian book—Teeto—what d'ye call him? To see him get meaner and meaner, and falser and falser, is an awful picture, Nora. It's just terrible. It's more than I can stand at my age. I want diversion. Do ye think I have not seen enough of that in my life?"

"People are not bad like that in life," said Nora; "they have such small sins,—they tell fibs—not big lies that mean anything, but small miserable little fibs; and they are ill-tempered, and sometimes cheat a little. That is all. Nothing that is terrible or tragical——"

Here the girl stopped short with a little gasp, as if realising something she had not thought of before.

"What is it, my dear?" said Miss Barbara.

"Oh—only Tinto showing through the trees: is that tragedy? No, no. Don't you see what I mean? don't you see the difference? He is only a rough, ill-tempered, tyrannical man. He does not really mean to hurt or be cruel: and poor Lady Car, dear Lady Car, is always so wretched; perhaps she aggravates him a little. She will not take pleasure in anything. It is all miserable, but it is all so little, Miss Barbara; not tragedy—not like Lear or Hamlet—rather a sort of scolding, peevish comedy. You might make fun of it all, though it is so dreadful; and that is how life seems to me—very different from poetry," said Nora, shaking her head.

"Wait," said Miss Barbara, patting her on the shoulder, "till the play is played out and you are farther off. The Lord preserve us! I hope I'm not a prophet of evil; but maybe if you had known poor Lear fighting about the number of his knights with that hard-faced woman Regan, for instance (who had a kind of reason, you'll mind, on her side: for I make no doubt they were very unruly—that daft old man would never keep them in order), you would have thought it but a poor kind of a squabble. Who is this coming in upon us, Nora? I see Janet at the glass door looking out.

"It is a gentleman, Miss Barbara. He is standing talking. I think he means to come out here."

"It will be the minister," said the old lady, calmly. "He had far better sit down in the warm room, and send us word, for he's a delicate creature—no constitution in him—aye cold and coughs, and——"

"Indeed it is not Mr Stirling. He is quite young and—and good-looking, I think. He won't listen to Janet. He is coming here. Miss Barbara, shall I run away?"

"Why should you run away? If it's business, we'll go in; if it's pleasure——Ah! I've seen your face before, sir, or one like it, but I cannot put a name to it. You have maybe brought me a letter? Preserve us all! will it be John Erskine come home to Dalrulzian?"

"Yes, aunt Barbara, it is John Erskine," said the young man. He had his hat in one hand, and the sun shone pleasantly on his chestnut locks and healthful countenance. He did not perhaps look like a hero of romance, but he looked like a clean and virtuous young Englishman. He took the hand which Miss Barbara held out to him, eagerly, and, with a little embarrassment, not knowing what else to do, bent over it and kissed it—a salutation which took the old lady by surprise, and, being so unusual, brought a delicate colour to her old cheek.

"Ah, my man! and so you're John Erskine? I would have known you anywhere, at the second glance if not at the first. You're like your father, poor fellow. He was always a great favourite with me. And so you've come back to your ain at last? Well, I'm very glad to see you, John. It's natural to have a young Erskine in the country-side. You'll not know yet how you like it after all this long absence. And how is your mother, poor body? She would think my pity out of place, I don't doubt; but I'm always sorry for a young woman, sore hadden down with a sma' family, as we say here in the North."

"I don't think she is at all sorry for herself," said John, with a laugh, "but it must be allowed there is a lot of them. There are always heaps of children, you know, in a parson's house."

"And that is true; it's a wonderful dispensation," said Miss Barbara, piously, "to keep us down and keep us humble-minded in our position in life. But I'm real glad to see you, and you must tell me where you've come from, and all you've been doing. We'll take a turn round the garden and see my flowers, and then we'll take you in and give you your luncheon. You'll be ready for your luncheon after your walk; or did you ride? This is Miss Nora Barrington, that knows Dalrulzian better than you do, John. Tell Janet, my dear, we'll be ready in an hour, and she must do her best for Mr John."

While this greeting went on, Nora had been standing very demurely with her hands crossed looking on. She was a girl full of romance and imagination, as a girl ought to be, and John Erskine had long been something of a hero to her. Nora was in that condition of spring-time and anticipation when every new encounter looks as if it might produce untold consequences in the future, still so vague, so sweet, so unknown. She stood with her eyes full of subdued light, full of soft excitement, and observation, and fun; for where all was so airy and uncertain, there was room for fun too, it being always possible that the event, which might be serious or even tragic, might at the same time be only a pleasantry in life. Nora seemed to herself to be a spectator of what was perhaps happening to herself. Might this be hereafter a scene in her existence, like "the first meeting between"—say Antony and Cleopatra, say Romeo and Juliet? Several pictures occurred to her of such scenes. At one time there were quite a number of them in all the picture-galleries. "First meeting of Edward IV. with Elizabeth Woodville:" where all unconscious, the fair widow kneels, the gallant monarch sees in his suppliant his future queen. All this was fun to Nora, but very romantic earnest all the same. The time might come when this stranger would say to her—"Do you remember that May morning in old aunt Barbara's garden?" and she might reply —"How little we imagined *then*!" Thus Nora, with a shy delight, forestalled in the secret recesses of her soul the happiness that might never come, and yet made fun of her own thoughts all in the same breath. John's bow to her was not half so graceful or captivating as his salutation to Miss Barbara, but that was nothing; and she went away with a pleasant sense of excitement to instruct Janet about the luncheon and the new-comer. Miss Barbara's household was much moved by the arrival. Janet, who was the housekeeper, lingered in the little hall into which the garden-door opened, looking out with a curiosity which she did not think it necessary to disguise; and Agnes, Miss Barbara's own woman, stood at the staircase-window, half-way up. When Nora came in, those two personages were conversing freely on the event.

"He's awfu' like the Erskines; just the cut of them about the shouthers, and that lang neck——"

"Do you ca' that a lang neck? nae langer than is very becoming. I like the head carried high. He has his father's walk," said Agnes, pensively; "many's the time I've watched him alang the street. He was the best-looking of all the Erskines; if he hadna marriet a bit handless creature——"

"Handless or no' handless," said Janet, "matters little in that condition o' life."

"Eh, but it mattered muckle to him. He might have been a living man this day if there had been a little mair sense in her head. She might have made him change his wet feet and all his dreeping things when he came in from the hillside. It was the planting of yon trees that cost bonnie Johnny Erskine his life. The mistress was aye of that opinion. Eh, to think when ye have a man, that ye shouldna be able to take care of him!" said Agnes, with a sort of admiring wonder. She had never attained that dignity herself. Janet, who was a widow, gave a glance upward at the pensive old maiden of mingled condescension and contempt.

"And if ye had a man, ye would be muckle made up wi' him," she said. "It's grand to be an auld maid, for that—that ye aye keep your faith in the men. This ane'll be for a wife, too, like a' the rest. I could gie him a word in his ear——"

"It will be something for our young misses to think about. A fine young lad, and a bonnie house. He'll have a' our siller, besides his ain,—and that will be a grand addition——"

"If he behaves himsel'!" said Janet, "The mistress is a real sensible woman. You'll no' see her throw away her siller upon a prodigal, if he were an Erskine ten times over."

"And wha said he was a prodigal?" cried Agnes, turning round from the landing upon her fellow-servant, who was at once her natural opponent and bosom friend. Nora was of opinion by this time that she had listened long enough.

"Miss Barbara says that her nephew will stay to luncheon, Janet. You are to do your best for him. It is Mr Erskine, from Dalrulzian," Nora said, with most unnecessary explanation. Janet turned round upon her quietly, yet with superior dignity.

"By this time of day, Miss Nora," said Janet, "I think I ken an Erskine when I see him; and also, when a visitor enters this door at twelve o'clock at noon, that he'll stay to his lunch, and that I maun do my best."

"It is not my fault," cried the girl, half amused, half apologetic. "I tell you only, Janet, what Miss Barbara said. Perhaps it was to get rid of me, to send me indoors out of the way."

"Naething more likely," said the housekeeper. "She canna be fashed with strangers when her ain are at her hand."

"Woman!" cried Agnes, from the landing, "how dare you say sae of my mistress? You'll never mind, Miss Nora. Come up here, my bonnie young leddy, and you'll have a grand sight of him among the trees."

"Ay, glower at him," said Janet, as she went away. "You wouldna be so muckle ta'en up with them if ye kent as much about men as me."

"Na, you'll pay no attention," said Agnes anxiously; "it's no' real malice—just she thinks she has mair experience. And so she has mair experience—the only marriet woman in the house. There's your mamma, with a bonnie family, takes nothing upon her, no more than if she was a single person; but Janet has it a' her ain way. Stand you here, Miss Nora, at this corner, and you'll have a grand sight of him. He's behind the big bourtree-bush; but in a moment—in a moment——"

"I don't want to see Mr Erskine," said Nora, laughing. "I have seen him; most likely I shall see him at lunch. He is just like other people,—like dozens of gentlemen——"

"Eh, but when you think that you never ken what may happen—that *yon* may be the man, for all we ken!"

When Agnes thus put into words the idea which had (she would not deny it to herself) glanced through Nora's own mind, she was so hypocritical as to laugh, as at a great piece of absurdity—but at the same time so honest as to blush.

"I believe you are always thinking of—that sort of thing," she said.

"Awfu' often, Miss Nora," said Agnes, unabashed,—"especially when there's young folk about; and after a', is there onything that's sae important? There's me and the mistress, we've stood aloof from a' that; but I canna think it's been for oor happiness. Her—it was her ain doing; but me—it's a very strange thing to say: I've kent many that were far from my superiors—as far as a person can judge—that have had twa-three offers; but me, I never had it in my power. You'll think it a very strange thing, Miss Nora?"

"I know," said Nora; "and you so pretty. It is quite extraordinary." This was the reply that Agnes expected to her favourite confession. She was pretty still at fifty,—slim and straight, with delicate features, and that ivory complexion which we associate with refinement and good blood; and the old waiting-woman knew how to *faire valoir* her fine person and features. She was dressed delicately in a black gown, with a white kerchief of spotless net—like a lady, everybody said. She shook her head with a smile of melancholy consciousness.

"It's no' looks that does it," she said; "it's——Well, I canna tell. It's when you ken how to humour them and flatter them. But bless me, there's Janet, a woman that never flattered man nor woman either! I canna understand it,—it's beyond me. But you mustna follow the mistress, Miss Nora. She's a happy woman enough, and a bonnie woman for her age, coming up there under her ain trees,—just look at her. But if that young lad had been her son, instead of just a distant cousin ——"

"Oh, but boys give a great deal of trouble," said Nora, seriously. "Dear Miss Barbara, I like her best as she is."

"But you manna follow her example, my bonnie leddy,—you manna follow her example. Take a pattern by your ain mammaw. I ca' her a happy woman, young yet, and a good man, and a bonnie posie of bairns. Eh! I ca' her a happy woman. And takes nothing upon her!" said Agnes,—"nothing upon her. You'll come up the stair, Miss Nora, and look at yoursel' in the glass. Oh no, there's nothing wrang with your bonnie hair. I like it just so,—a wee blown about in the mornin' air. Untidy! bless me, no' the least untidy! but just—give a look in the glass, and if you think another colour would be more becoming, I have plenty ribbons. Some folk thinks yellow's very artistic; but the mistress canna bide yellow. She's owre fair for it, and so are you."

"Why should I change my ribbon? It is quite tidy," said Nora, almost with indignation, standing before Miss Barbara's long cheval-glass. Agnes came and stood behind her, arranging her little collar and the draperies of her dress with caressing hands. And to tell the truth, Nora herself could not shut out from her mind an agreeable consciousness that she was looking "rather nice;—for me," she added, in her own mind. The morning breeze had ruffled an incipient curl out of the hair which she had brushed, demure and smooth, over her forehead in the morning. It was a thing that nobody suspected when she was fresh from her toilet, but the wind always found out that small eccentricity, and Nora was not angry with the wind. Her ribbon was blue, and suited her far better than the most artistic yellow. All was fresh and fair about her, like the spring morning. "Na; I wouldna change a thing," Agnes said, looking at her anxiously in the glass, where they made the prettiest picture, the handsome old maid looking like a lady-in-waiting, her fine head appearing over the girl's shoulder,—a lady-in-waiting anxiously surveying her princess, about to meet for the first time with King Charming, who has come to marry her. This was the real meaning of the group.

Nora did not change her ribbon or her own appearance in any way, but she gave a glance to the table set out for luncheon, and renewed the flowers on it, watching all the while the other group which passed and repassed the large round window of the dining-room, their voices audible as they talked. Miss Barbara had taken John's arm, which was a proof that he had found the way to her favour; and she was evidently asking him a hundred questions. Snatches of their talk about his travels, about his plans, something which she could not make out about the Lindores, caught the ear of Nora. They saw her seated near the window, so there could be no reason why she should stop her ears. And Nora thought him "very nice"—that all-useful adjective. She could scarcely help letting her imagination stray to the familiar place which she had known all her life—her "dear Dalrulzian," which she had lamented so openly, which now she felt it would no longer be decorous to lament. He looked very like it, she thought. She could see him in imagination standing in the kindly open door, on the Walk, looking the very master the place wanted. Papa had been too old for it. It wanted a young man, a young——Well—she laughed and coloured involuntarily—of course a young wife too. In all likelihood *that* was all settled, the young wife ready, so that there was no reason to feel any embarrassment about it. And so he knew the Lindores! She would ask Edith all about him. There was no doubt he was a very interesting figure in the country-side, "something for the misses to think about," as Agnes said, though it was somewhat humiliating to think that "that dreadful man at Tinto" had roused a similar excitement. But the oftener John Erskine passed the window, the more he pleased Nora Barrington. He was "very nice," she was sure. How kind and careful he was of Miss Barbara! How frank and open his countenance! his voice and his laugh so natural and cheerful! Up to this time, though Nora's imagination had not been utterly untouched, she was still free of any serious inclination, almost if not entirely fancy-free. It could not be denied that when the new Rintoul became known in the country-side, he, too, had been the object of many prognostications. And he had been, she felt, "very nice" to Nora. Though he had pretensions far above hers, and was not in the least likely to ally himself to a family without fortune, his advances had been such as a girl cannot easily overlook. He was the first who had paid Nora "attention," and awakened her to a consciousness of power. And she had been

flattered and pleased, being very young. But Nora now felt herself at that junction of the two roads, which, as has been said, is inevitable in the experience of every young soul. She was standing in suspense, saying to herself, with a partial sense of treachery and guilt, that Mr Erskine was still more nice than Lord Rintoul. John Erskine of Dalrulzian; there was something delightful in the very name. All this, it is true, was entirely visionary, without solid foundation of any kind; for they had exchanged nothing but two shy bows, not a word as yet—and whether he would be as "nice" when he talked, Nora did not know.

Her decision afterwards, made with some mortification, was, that he was not nearly so nice when he talked. He showed no wish to talk to her at all, which was an experience quite out of Nora's way. She sat and listened, for the most part, at this simple banquet, growing angry in spite of herself, and altogether changing her opinion about Lord Rintoul. If she had been a little girl out of the nursery, John Erskine could scarcely have taken less notice of her. Miss Barbara and he continued their talk as if Nora had no existence at all.

"I always thought it a great pity that you were brought up so far from home," the old lady said. "You know nothing about your own place, or the ways of the country-side. It will take you a long time to make that up. But the neighbours are all very kind, and Lindores, no doubt, will be a great resource, now there's a young family in it. Fortunately for you, John, you're not grand enough nor rich enough to come into my lord's plans."

"Has my lord plans? For county hospitals and lunatic asylums. So he told me; and he wants my help. To hear even so much as that astonished me. When I knew him he was an elegant hypochondriac, doing nothing at all——"

"He does plenty now, and cares much, for the world and the things of the world," said Miss Barbara. "I think I have divined his meaning; but we'll wait and see. You need not sit and make those faces at me, Nora. I know well enough *they* are not to blame. A woman should know how to stand up for her own child better than that; but she was just struck helpless with surprise, I say nothing different. Speak of manœuvring mothers! manœuvring fathers are a great deal worse. I cannot away with a man that will sacrifice his own flesh and blood. Fiegh! I would not do it for a kingdom. And the son, you'll see, will do the same. Hold you your tongue, Nora. I know better—the son will do the very same. He will be sold to some grocer's daughter for her hogsheads. Perhaps they're wanted; two jointures to pay is hard upon any estate, and a title will always bring in money when it's put up for sale in a judicious way. But you must have your wits about you now, if you have any dealings with your elegant hypochondriac, John, my man. You're too small—too small for him; but if you had fifty thousand a-year, you would soon—soon be helpless in his hands——"

"Oh, Miss Barbara," cried Nora, "you are unjust to Lord Lindores. Remember how kind he has been to us, and we have not fifty thousand, nor fifty hundred a-year."

"You're not a young man," said Miss Barbara; "but John, take you care of dangling about Lindores. I am not naming any names; but there may be heartaches gotten there—nothing more for a man of your small means. Oh ay! perhaps I ought to hold my tongue before Nora; but she will be well advised if she takes care too; and besides, she knows all about it as well as I do myself."

"I hope," said John, courteously—for he saw that Nora's composure was disturbed by these last warnings, and he was glad of a chance to change the subject—"I hope I may be so fortunate as to see Colonel Barrington before he leaves the country. He has done so well by Dalrulzian, I should like to thank him for his care."

This made Nora more red than before. She could not get over that foolish idea that Dalrulzian was far more to her than to this stranger, who could not care for it as she did. She felt that his thanks were an offence. "Papa has gone, Mr Erskine," she said, with unusual stateliness. "I am left behind to pay some visits. Everybody here has been so good to us."

"That means we are all fond of her bit bright face," said Miss Barbara; "but we'll say no more on that subject, Nora. Human nature's selfish in grain. The like of me will take no trouble for lad or lass that is not sweet to see, and a comfort to the heart."

"I never heard such a pretty apology for selfishness before," said John. And Miss Barbara took his compliment in good part. But he and Nora made no further approach to each other. Those praises of her made him draw back visibly, she thought, and embarrassed herself beyond bearing. To be praised before an unsympathetic, silently protesting audience—can anything be more humiliating? Nora was conscious of something like dislike of John Erskine before he went away.

And yet his state of feeling was natural enough. He believed that the young lady, so dangerously suitable for him, the

very wife he wanted, was being thrust upon him on every side, and the thought revolted him. No doubt he thought, if she were conscious of it, it must be revolting to her too; and in such a case the highest politeness was to be all but rude to her, to show at once and conclusively that schemes of the kind were hopeless. This sentiment was strengthened in the present case by the irritation caused by Miss Barbara's warning about Lindores, and the heartache which was all that a man of his means was likely to get there. He laughed at it, yet it made him angry. He who had been always used to feel himself a person of importance—he for whom, even now, the whole country was taking the trouble to scheme—to have himself suddenly classified with other small deer as quite beneath the consideration of the Lindores family, too small for my lord's plans! It was scarcely possible to imagine anything more irritating. After all, a Scotch lord was no such grand affair; and John could not be ignorant that, five years ago, neither father nor mother would have repulsed him. Now! but the doubt, the risk, did not induce the young man to be wise—to put Lady Edith out of his imagination, and turn his thoughts to the other, just as pretty, if that were all, who was manifestly within his reach. What a pity that young people are so slow to see reason in such matters, that they will never take the wiser way! Thus John had his opportunity offered to him to escape from a world of troubles and embarrassments before he had committed himself to that dangerous path; and distinctly refused, and turned his back upon it, not knowing—as indeed at the real turning-point of our fortunes we none of us know.

But as he set out on his homeward walk, his eyes caught that great house of Tinto, which from Dunearn was the central object in the landscape—an immense house, seated on a high platform of rock, dominating the river and the whole country, with scarcely wood enough about it to afford any shadow; an ostentatious pile of building, with that spot of audacious red against the grey sky—the flag always flying (set him up! Miss Barbara said) when the master was at home, which was, so to speak, the straw which broke the camel's back, the supreme piece of vanity which the county could not tolerate. Pat Torrance to mount a flag upon his house to mark his presence! What more could Sacred Majesty itself do? John Erskine felt as if some malicious spirit had thrown a stone at him out of the clouds as his eye was caught by that flaunting speck of red. He felt all the local intolerance of the man, without a claim but his money to crow thus over his neighbours. And then he thought of Carry Lindores and her poetry and enthusiasm. That was how the Earl disposed of his daughters. A thrill ran through John's frame, but it was a thrill of defiance. He raised his stick unawares and waved it, as if at the big bully who thus scorned him from afar.

CHAPTER IX.

Lady Caroline Torrance was in her morning-room with her children when her husband came to tell her of his visit to Dalrulzian. He had kept it for twenty-four hours, in order to have an opportunity of telling it at his leisure, and making it as disagreeable to her as possible; for indeed he was fully convinced in his own mind that John had been the man about whom his broken-hearted bride had made a confession to him. The confession had not disarmed or moved him to generosity: not that his delicacy was wounded by the thought of his wife's engagement to some one else before she saw him—no such fantastical reason moved him; but that he was furious at the thought that this unseen personage still remained agreeable to her, and that in secret she could retire upon the recollection of some one whom she had once preferred, or perhaps did now prefer, to himself. This was insupportable to him. He did not care very much for filling her heart himself; but he meant that she should belong to him utterly, and not at all, even in imagination or by a passing thought, to anybody else. Lady Car's morning-room was the last of a gorgeous but faded suite of rooms opening off the drawing-room, from which it was separated by heavy velvet curtains. Everything was heavy and grand even in this sanctuary, where it was supposed the lady of the house was to find her refuge when no longer on duty, so to speak—no longer bound to sit in state and receive her visitors. It was furnished like the rest, with gilded chairs, a table of Florentine mosaic, and curtains of ruby velvet, looped and puckered into what the upholsterer of the late Mrs Torrance's time thought the most elegant and sumptuous fashion. The gilding was a little tarnished, the velvet faded; but still it was too fine for anything less than a royal habitation. It is supposed that princesses, being used to it, like to knock their elbows against ormolu ornaments, and to put down their thimbles and scissors (if they ever use such vulgar implements) upon marble; but poor Lady Car did not. She was chilly by nature, and she never had got over her horror of these additional chillinesses. The Florentine marble made her shiver. It was far too fine to have a cover over it, which she had ventured once to suggest, to her husband's horror. "What! cover it up, as if it were plain mahogany—a thing that was worth no one could tell how much!" So she gave it up, and shivered all the more. It was a chilly day of May, which the fresh foliage outside, and a deceitful sun not strong enough to neutralise the east wind, made only a little less genial, and Lady Car sat very close to the fire, in a chair as little gilt as could be found, and with a little table beside her covered with a warm and heavy cover, as if to make up for the naked coldness of the rest. The room had three large windows, looking, from the platform upon which the house stood, over the wide country—a great landscape full of greening fields and foliage, and an infinite blue and white sky, the blue somewhat pale but very clear, the clouds mounting in Alpine peaks into the far distance and lying along the horizon in long lines. The windows, it need not be said, were plate-glass, so that an impression of being out of doors and exposed to the full keenness of the breeze was conveyed to the mind. How often had poor Lady Car sat and shivered, looking over that wistful sweep of distance in her loneliness, and knowing that no one could ever come out of it who would bring joy to her or content! She had never been beautiful, the reader is aware. She was plain now, in the absence of all that sunshine and happiness which beautifies and brightens homely faces. And yet her face was not a homely face. The master of Tinto had got what he wanted—a woman whose appearance could never be overlooked, or whom, any one could undervalue. Her air was full of natural distinction though she had no beauty. Her slight, pliant figure, like a long sapling bending before every breeze, had a grace of gentle yielding which did not look like weakness; and her smile, if perhaps a little timid, was winning and gracious. But her nose and her upper lip were both too long, and the pretty wavering colour she had possessed in her youth was gone altogether. Ill-natured people called her sallow; and indeed, though it is not a pretty word, it was not, at this stage of her existence, far from the truth.

Her two children were playing beside her on the carpet. Poor lady! here was perhaps the worst circumstance in her hard lot. As if it were not enough to be compelled to take Pat Torrance for her husband, it had been her melancholy fate to bring other Torrances, all his in temper and feature, into the world. This is an aggravation of which nobody would have thought. In imagination we are all glad to find a refuge for an unhappy wife in her children, whom instinctively we allot to her as the natural compensation—creatures like herself and belonging to her, although the part in them of the obnoxious father cannot be ignored. But here the obnoxious father was all in all; even the baby of two years old on the rug at her feet, the little girl who by all laws ought to have been like her mother, showed in her little dark countenance as small relationship to Lady Caroline as to any stranger. They were their father's children: they had his black hair, a peculiarity which sometimes is extremely piquant and attractive in childhood, giving an idea of unusual development; but, on the other hand, sometimes is—not. Little Tom and Edie were of those to whom it is not attractive, for they had heavy fat cheeks, and the same light, large, projecting eyes which were so marked a feature in their father's face. Poor Lady Car thought they fixed their eyes upon her with a cynical gaze when she tried to sing to them—to tell them baby-stories. She tried her best, but that was perhaps too fine for these children of a coarser race. They scrambled down from

her lap, and liked better to roll upon the floor or break with noisy delight the toys which were showered upon them, leaving the poor young mother to gaze and wonder, and feel as much rebuffed as if these two infants of two and three had been twenty years older. They screamed with delight when their father tossed them up in his arms, but they escaped from their mother's knee when she would have coaxed them to quiet. Poor Lady Car! they were a wonder and perplexity to her. She was half afraid of them though they were her own.

Torrance had come in from the woods, which he had been inspecting with his forester, and perhaps something had crossed him in this inspection, for he was a tyrant by nature, and could not tolerate a contrary opinion; whereas the officials, so to speak, of a great estate in Scotland, are much given to opinions, and by no means to be persuaded to relinquish them. The forester had objected to something the master suggested, and the agent had taken the forester's part. The master of Tinto came in fuming. To give in was a thing intolerable to him, and to give in to his own servant! But here was another servant whom he need not fear bullying, who could not throw up her situation and put him to inconvenience, who was forced to put up with as much indignity as he chose to put upon her. This thought gave his mind a welcome relief; he strode along through all the gilded rooms with a footstep which meant mischief. Lady Caroline heard it afar off, and recognised the sound. What could it be now? Her mind ran hurriedly over the recent occurrences of the day, to think what possible offence she could have given him. Nothing—or at least she could think of nothing. It did not require a very solid reason for the transference to her shoulders of the rage which he did not think it expedient to bestow upon some one else. He came in kicking out of the way the toys with which the children were playing.

"These monkeys," he said, "would ruin a Jew if they grow up the way you are breeding them, my lady. That cost a pound or two yesterday, and now it's all in bits. If your family could stand such extravagance, mine can't. Tom, my lad, if you break your fine toys like this, I'll break your head. But it's not the children's fault," he added, "it's the way they're bred."

"It is very wrong of Tommy," said poor Lady Car, "but you laughed and clapped your hands yesterday when I found fault."

"I won't have the boy's spirit broken—that's another thing. Breeding's an affair of day by day; but it can't be expected that you should take such trouble, with your head full of other things."

"What other things?" cried Lady Car. "Oh, Pat, have a little pity! What else have I to think of? I may not understand the children, but they are my only thought."

Here he gave a mocking, triumphant laugh. "No, I daresay you don't understand them. They're of my side of the house," he said. It was a pleasure to him, but not an unalloyed pleasure, for he would have liked to secure in his daughter at least some reflection of her mother's high-bred air, which had always been her attraction in his eyes. "As for other things," he added, "there's plenty: for instance, I have just been visiting your old friend."

"My old friend?" Lady Caroline looked at him with wondering eyes.

"Oh, that is the way, is it? pretend you don't understand! I went expressly for your sake. You see what a husband I am: not half appreciated—ready to please his wife in every sort of way. I don't think much of your taste though: under size," said Torrance, with a laugh,—"decidedly under size."

Lady Car looked at him with a momentary elevation of her slender, drooping throat. The action was one that had a certain pride in it, and this was what her husband specially admired in her. But she did not understand him, nor was there any secret in her gentle soul to be found out by innuendoes. She shook her head gently, and drooped it again with her habitual bend.

"I do not know what you mean. It must be some mistake," she said.

"It is no mistake, Lady Car. That's not my way to make mistakes. It suits you not to know. That makes me all the more certain. Oh, I'm not afraid of you. We're not in Italy or any of these places. And you're a great deal too proud to go wrong: you're too cold, you have not got it in you."

Lady Caroline raised her head again, but this time in sheer surprise. "Pat," she said, faltering, "all I know is, that you mean to insult me. I know nothing but that. What is it? Do not insult me before the children."

"Pshaw! how should the children understand?"

"Not what you mean; but neither do I understand that. The children know as well as I do that you mean to hurt me. What is it?—what have I done?"

"By Jove!" he said, looking at her, "to see you there with your white face, one would think you never had done anything but good all your life. You look as if butter would not melt in your mouth. Not the sort of woman to look down upon her husband and count him a savage, and keep thinking of a nice, smooth, soft-spoken——You would never tell me his name, and I was a fool, and didn't insist upon it; but now he has come back to be your ladyship's neighbour, and see you every day."

She did not answer immediately. She looked at him with a curious light stealing into her soft grey eyes, raising her head again. Then she said slowly, "I think you must mean Mr Erskine of Dalrulzian. If so, you have made a great mistake. I think he is younger than I am. He was not much more than a boy when I knew him. He never was anything—but an acquaintance."

"It's likely you'll get me to believe that," cried Torrance, scornfully. He jumped up from his seat, and came and stood in front of the fire, with his back to it, brushing against her dress, so close to her that she had to draw back out of his way. "An acquaintance! There are different meanings to that word. I've been to see him on your account, my lady. I've asked him to come here. Oh, I'm not afraid of you, as I tell you. You're too cold and too proud to go wrong. You shall see him as much as you like—I have every confidence in you—see him, and talk to him, and tell him what you think of your husband. It will be a nice sentimental amusement for you; and as for me, I'll always be by to look on."

He laughed as he spoke, angrily, fiercely, and glared down upon her from under his eyelids with a mixture of fury and satisfaction. She pushed her chair back a little with a shiver, drawing away her dress, upon which he had placed his foot.

"If it was as you suppose," she said, trembling, "what misery you would be planning for me! It makes me cold indeed to think of such cruelty. What! you would put me in such a strait! You would force me into the society of one——Oh, Pat, surely you are doing yourself wrong! You could not be so cruel as that!"

He laughed again, striding across the fireplace, ever encroaching more upon her corner. His face had grown red with wrath. He was not without feeling, such as it was, and this which he supposed his wife's acknowledgment that his cruel device could indeed wound her, gave himself a start of self-reproach and alarm, though there was pleasure in the power he felt he had acquired of causing pain.

"Ah, I've caught you, have I? I've caught you at last!" he cried, with a tone of triumph.

"You could not do it!" cried Lady Caroline, her pale face flushed. "No! do not say you made such a cruel plan—no, no! —to entrap the poor woman who is your wife—alas! who never did you harm—to rend her heart in two, and make her life more miserable. No, no! do not tell me you have this cunning as well as—all the rest; do not tell me! You would not do it, you could not do it. There is no such cruelty in man."

"It's a satisfaction," he cried, his face burning and glowing, "to think I have you in my grip, Lady Car."

She breathed quick and hard, pushed back in her corner, gazing up at him with a look from which a stronger tremor had taken all the timidity. It was some time before she could speak. "Do not think," she said, "that I am afraid of you. I am only horrified to think—but I might have known. Mr Erskine, by whom you think you can make me more unhappy, is nothing to me—nothing, nothing at all, nothing at all! He is not the gentleman I thought it right to tell you about—no, no! a very different person. I do not want to see him, because I should not like—old friends to know; but Mr Erskine is nothing to me—nothing!"

Whether he would have been convinced by the vehemence with which she said this alone, cannot be known—for at that moment the carefully festooned velvet curtains were disturbed in the regulated folds which nobody at Tinto had ever ventured to alter, and Edith suddenly appeared with an anxious and pale countenance. She had heard the raised voices as she approached, and her sister's "nothing to me, nothing!" had been quite distinct to her as she came in. She could not imagine what it was that could have excited poor Carry so much, and Edith had a nervous dislike of any scene. She could not draw back, having with difficulty sent away the servant who was conducting her punctiliously to her sister's presence, and she felt herself compelled to face the quarrel, which was evidently a serious one. Edith was fastidious and sensitive, with all the horror of a girl who had never seen anything like domestic contention or the jars of family life. Lord Lindores and his wife had not always agreed since his recent elevation—indeed they had disagreed bitterly and

painfully on the most serious questions; but such a thing as a quarrel had been unknown in their household. To Edith it seemed such an offence against good taste and all the courtesies of life, as nothing could excuse—petty and miserable, as well as unhappy and wrong. She was annoyed as well as indignant to be drawn into it thus against her will. Carry had hitherto concealed with all her might from her young sister the state of conflict in which she lived. Her unhappiness she did not hide; but she had managed to keep silent in Edith's presence, so that the girl had never been an actual witness of the wranglings of the ill-matched pair. But poor Lady Car for once was moved out of her usual precautions. She was too much excited even to remember them. She appealed to her sister at once, hailing her appearance with eagerness, and without pausing to think.

"Edith," she cried, "you have come in time. Tell Mr Torrance that Mr Erskine, who has just come home, was not a—special friend of mine. You can speak, for you know. Mr Torrance says—he thinks——" here Lady Car came to herself, perceiving the disturbed looks of her sister, and remembering her own past reserve. She paused, and forced herself into a miserable smile. "It is not worth while entering into the story," she said; "it does not—matter much. It is only a mistake, a—a difference of opinion. You can tell Mr Torrance——"

"I don't want any information," said Torrance, sulkily. He, too, felt embarrassed by the sudden introduction of Edith into the discussion. He moved away from the fire with a rude attempt at civility. Edith, in her youthful absolutism, and want of toleration or even understanding of himself, overawed him a little. She was not, he thought, nearly so aristocratic in appearance as his wife; but he was slightly afraid of her, and had never been at his ease in her presence. What was the opinion of this little chit to him? He asked himself the question often, but it did not divest him of that vague perception of his own appearance in her eyes, which is the most mortifying of all reflections. No caricature made of us can be so disconcerting. Just so Haman must have seen himself, a wretched pretender, through the eyes of that poor Jew in the gate. Torrance saw himself an exaggerated boor, a loud-speaking, underbred clown, in the clear regard, a little contemptuous, never for a moment overawed by him, of Edith Lindores. He had perhaps believed his wife's denial in respect to John Erskine while they were alone, but he believed her entirely when she called Edith to witness. He was subdued at once—he drew away from before the fire with sulky politeness, and pushed forward a chair. "It's a cold day," he said. The quarrel died in a moment a natural death. He hung about the room for a few minutes, while Edith, to lessen the embarrassment of the situation, occupied herself with the children. As for Lady Car, she had been too much disturbed to return at once to the pensive calm which was her usual aspect. She leant back in her chair, pushed up into the corner as she had been by her husband's approach, and with her thin hands clasped together. Her breath still came fast, her poor breast heaved with the storm—she said nothing to aid in the gradual restoration of quiet. The spell being once broken, perhaps she was not sorry of the opportunity of securing Edith's sympathy. There is a consolation in disclosing such pangs, especially when the creator of them is unbeloved. To tell the cruelties to which she was subject, to pour out her wrongs, seemed the only relief which poor Carry could look forward to. It had not been her will to betray it to her sister; but now that the betrayal had taken place, it was almost a pleasure to her to anticipate the unburdening of her heart. All that she desired for the moment was that he would go away, that she might be free to speak. The words seemed bursting from her lips even while he was still there. Perhaps Torrance himself had a perception of this; but then he did not believe that his wife had not a hundred times made her complaint to Edith before. And thus there ensued a pause which was not a pleasant one. Neither the husband nor the wife spoke, and Edith's agitated discourses with the children were the only sounds audible. They were not prattling, happy children, capable of making a diversion in such circumstances; and Edith was not so fond of the nephew and niece, who so distinctly belonged to their father, as she ought to have been. The situation was relieved by a summons to Torrance to see some one below. He went away reluctantly, jealously, darting a threatening look at his wife as he looked back. Edith was as much alarmed for what was coming as Torrance was. She redoubled her attentions to the children, hoping to avert the disclosure which she, too, saw was so near.

"It is their time to—go back to the nursery," said Carry, with a voice full of passion, ringing the bell; and the children were scarcely out of hearing when the storm burst forth: "I have borne a great deal, oh, a great deal—more, far more, than you can ever know; but think, think! what he intended for me. To invite John Erskine here, thinking he was—some one else; to bring us into each other's company day after day; to tempt me to the old conversations, the old walks. Don't contradict me—he said so: that I might feel my misery, and drink my cup to the last dregs."

"Carry, Carry! you must be mistaking him; he could not wish that; it would be an insult—it would be impossible."

"That is why it pleases him," cried the poor wife; "he likes to watch and make sure that I suffer. If I did not suffer, it would do him no good. He says I am too proud and too cold to—go wrong, Edith! That is how he speaks to your sister; and he wishes to show me—to show me, as if I did not know—what I have and what I have lost!"

"Carry, you must not. Oh, don't let us even think of what is past now!"

"It is easy for you to say so. I have tried—oh, how I have tried!—never to think of the past—even now, even to-day. Think, only think! Because he supposed *that*, he went expressly to see John Erskine, to ask him to come here, planning to torture me,—no matter to him, because he was sure I was too proud to go wrong. He wanted to watch the meeting—to see how we would look at each other, what we would say, how we would behave ourselves at such a moment. Can you believe it, Edith? Was there ever anything in a book, in the theatre, so cruel, so terrible? Do you suppose one can help, after that, thinking of the past, thinking of the future too?—for suppose it had been—Edward——Oh no, no! I don't want to name his name; but suppose it had been—he. Another time it may be he. He may come to visit John Erskine. We may meet in the world; and then I know—I know what is before me. This man—oh, I cannot call him by any name!—this man, whom I belong to, who can do what he pleases with my life—I know now what his pleasure will be,—to torture me, Edie!—for no purpose but just to see me suffer—in a new way. He has seen me suffer already—oh, how much!—and he is *blasé*! he wants something more piquant, a newer torture, a finer invention to get more satisfaction out of me. And you tell me I must not think of the past!"

"Carry, Carry!" cried Edith, trembling; "what can I say? You ought not to bear it. Come home; come back to us. Don't stay with him, if this is how you feel about him, another day."

Carry shook her head. "There is no going back," she said; "alas! I know that now, if never before. To go back is impossible: my father would not allow it; my mother would not approve it. I dare not myself. No, no, that cannot be. However dreadful the path may be, all rocks or thorns, and however your feet may be torn and bleeding—forward, forward one must go. There is no escape. I have learned that."

There was a difference of about six years between them—not a very great period; and yet what a difference it made! Edith had in her youthful mind the certainty that there was a remedy for every evil, and that what was wrong should not be permitted to exist. Carry knew no remedy at all for her own condition, or indeed, in the reflection of her own despair, for any other. Nothing was to be done that she knew of; nothing could do any good. To go back was impossible. She sat leaning back in her chair, clasping her white thin hands, looking into the vacant air,—knowing of no aid, but only a little comfort in the mere act of telling her miseries—nothing more; while Edith sat by her, trembling, glowing, impatient, eager for something to be done.

"Does mamma know?" the girl asked, after a pause.

Carry did not move from her position of quiet despair. "Do you think," she said, "it is possible that mamma, who has seen so much, should not know?"

To this Edith could make no reply, knowing how often the subject had been discussed between her mother and herself, with the certainty that Carry was unhappy, though without any special explanation to each other of the manner of her unhappiness.

"But if my father were to speak to him, Carry? My father ought to do it; it was he who made you—it was he who——"

"No one can say anything; no one can do anything. I am sorry I told you, Edie; but how could I help it? And it does me a little good to speak. I must complain, or I should die."

"Oh, my poor Car, my poor Car!" Edith cried, throwing herself upon her knees beside her sister. Die! she said, within herself; would it not be better—far better—to die? It was living that seemed to her impossible. But this was another of the sad pieces of knowledge which Carry had acquired: that you cannot die when you please, as the young and untried are apt to suppose—that mortal anguish does not always kill. It was Edith who was agitated and excited, seeking eagerly for a remedy—any remedy—even that heroic and tragical one; but Carry did not feel that even in that there was any refuge for her now.

This was by no means John Erskine's fault. He was as innocent of it, as unconscious of it, as any man could be; but Edith, an impatient girl, felt a sort of visionary rage against him, in which there was a certain attraction too. It seemed to her as if she must go and tell him of this sad family secret, though he had so little to do with it. For was not he involved, and his coming the occasion of it? If she could but have accused him, confided in him, it would have given her mind a certain relief, though she could not well tell why.

CHAPTER X.

After the strange scene in which she had been made a party to her sister's wretchedness, it was inevitable that Edith should return to Lindores so completely occupied with this subject that she could think of nothing else. It was some time before she could get her mother's ear undisturbed; but as soon as they were alone, after various interruptions which the girl could scarcely bear, she poured forth her lamentable story with all the eloquence of passion and tears. Edith's whole soul was bent upon some remedy.

"How can there be any doubt on the subject? She must come home—she must go away from him. Mother! it is sacrilege, it is profanation. It is—I don't know any word bad enough. She must come away——"

Lady Lindores shook her head. "It is one of the most terrible things in the world; but now that it is done, she must stand to it. We can do nothing, Edith——"

"I cannot believe that," cried the girl. "What! live with a man like that,—live with him *like that*—always together, sharing everything—and hate him? Mother! it is worse wickedness than—than the wicked. It is a shame to one's very nature. And to think it should be Carry who has to do it! But no one ought to be compelled to do it. It ought not to be. I will speak to papa myself if no one else will—it ought not to be——"

Again Lady Lindores shook her head. "In this world, in this dreadful world," she said, "we cannot think only of what is right and wrong—alas! there are other things to be taken into consideration. I think till I came home I was almost as innocent as you, Edith. Your father and I were very much blamed when we married. My people said to me, and still more his people said to him, that we should repent it all our lives; but that once having done it, we should have to put up with it. Well, you know what it used to be. I suppose I should be ashamed to say that I found it very easy to put up with. It was a strange sort of wandering life——"

"Oh, how much happier than now!" cried Edith. "Oh, poor little Rintoul! poor uncle! if they had but lived and flourished, how much better for us all!"

"I would not say that," said Lady Lindores. "I think now that when we were all so happy your father felt it. He did not say anything, but I am sure he felt it. See how different he is now! Now he feels himself in his right place. He has room for all his talents. Edith, do not put on that look, my dear child."

Edith's face was soft and young; but as her mother spoke, it hardened into an expression which changed its character entirely. Her upper lip closed down tight upon the other; her eyes widened and grew stern. Not her father himself, not the old ancestors on the panels, looked more stern than this girl of twenty. She did not say anything, but the change in her face was answer enough.

"Edith! you must not form such strong opinions; you must not make yourself the judge——"

"Then I must not be a human creature, mamma; and that I am, grown up, and obliged to think for myself. Sometimes I wish I did not. If I could only believe that all that was done was well, as some people do. Here all is wrong—all is wrong! It ought not to have been at all, this marriage,—and now—it ought not to continue to be——"

"My darling!" said Lady Lindores, appealing to her child with piteous eyes, "I am to blame too. I ought to have resisted more strongly; but it is hard, hard—to set one's self against one's husband, whom one has respected, always respected, and who has seemed to know best."

Edith's face did not relax. "Let us not talk of that," she said. "It makes one's heart sick. I think every one was wrong. Neither should you have done it, mamma—forgive me! nor should Carry have done it. She ought never, never, to have consented. I could not believe till the last moment that it was possible. Some one should have stopped it. I hoped so till the last moment; but when once it was done, as you say, one thought at least that he loved her. Why did he want to marry her if he did not love her? But he can't love her, since he behaves so. No love at all, either on one side or the other; and yet the two bound together for their lives. Was there ever anything so horrible? It ought not to be! It ought not to be!"

Lady Lindores took her daughter in her arms to soothe her; but Edith, drying the hot tears from her eyes, was almost impatient of her mother's caresses. What were caresses? Well enough, sweet in their way, but setting nothing right that was wrong. Yes, it was true the mother should not have permitted it, any more than the daughter should have done it.

Two human creatures, grown up (as Edith repeated to herself), able to judge—they ought not to have allowed themselves to be swept away by the will of another. This was how the resolute girl put it. Her father she gave up—she would not judge him, therefore she preferred not to think of him at all. He had done it determinedly, and of distinct purpose; but the others who submitted, who allowed themselves to be forced into ill-doing, were they less to blame? All this she had gone over at the time of Carry's marriage, and had suppressed and forced it away from her. But now the current turned again. She withdrew herself from her mother's arms. Here was the most hideous thing in the world existing in their sight, her sister at once the victim and the chief actor in it, and all that could be given her in her eager attempt to set things right was a kiss! It seemed to Edith that the shame on her cheeks, the fire in her eyes, dried up her tears. She turned away from Lady Lindores. If she should be doomed too, by her father's will, would her mother have no better help to give her than a kiss? But when this idea passed through the girl's mind, she tossed back her head with an involuntary defiance. Never should such a doom come upon her. Heaven and earth could not move her so far. Obedience! This was such obedience as no one of God's creatures had any right to render to another—neither wife to husband, nor to her parents any child!

After this there was a long pause in the conversation between the mother and daughter. Lady Lindores divined Edith's thoughts. She understood every shade of the repugnance, disgust, disapproval, that the young upright spirit, untouched as yet by the bonds and complications of life, was passing through. And she shrank a little from Edith's verdict, which she acknowledged to be true. But what could she have done, she asked herself? Who would have approved her had she opposed her husband's wishes, encouraged her daughter to keep to a foolish engagement made under circumstances so totally different, and to refuse a match so advantageous? She had done everything she could; she had remonstrated, she had protested: but when Carry herself gave in, what could her mother, in the face of the universal disapproval of the world, at the risk of an absolute breach with her husband, do? But none of these things did Edith take into account—Edith, young and absolute, scorning compromises, determined only that what was right should be done, and nothing else. Lady Lindores withdrew too, feeling her caress rejected, understanding even what Edith was saying in her heart. What was a kiss when things so much more important were in question? It was perfectly true. She felt the justice of it to the bottom of her heart, and yet was chilled and wounded by the tacit condemnation of her child. She went to her work, which was always a resource at such a moment, and there was a silence during which each had time to regain a little composure. By-and-by, when the crisis seemed to have passed, Lady Lindores spoke.

"We must have young Erskine here," she said, almost timidly. "Your father has asked him; and in the circumstances, as we saw so much of him before, it is quite necessary. I think, as this unpleasant suggestion has been made—now, Edith, do not be unreasonable, we must do what we can in this world, not what we would,—as this has taken place, I will ask Carry and her husband to meet him. It will show Mr Torrance at least——"

"Mother!" Edith burst out—"mother! I tell you of a thing which is wickedness, which is a horror to think of, and you speak of asking people to dinner! Do you mean to turn it all into ridicule?—oh, not me, that would not matter—but all purity, all fitness? To ask them to—meet him——"

"My dear, my dear!" cried Lady Lindores, half weeping, half angry, appealing and impatient at once. She did not know what to say to this impracticable young judge. "We cannot resort to heroic measures," she cried. "It is impossible. We cannot take her away from him, any more than we can make of him a reasonable man. Carry herself would be the first to say no—for the children's sake, for the sake of her own credit. All we can do is to make the best of what exists. Mr Torrance must be shown quietly how mistaken he is—how much he is in the wrong."

"Mr Torrance! I would show him nothing, except how much I scorn him," Edith cried. "A man who dares to torture my sister—a man—who is not worthy to take her name into his lips, with his insolent doubts and his 'Lady Car,' which I cannot endure to hear!"

"But who is her husband, alas! I cannot bear to hear it either; but what can we do? We can take no notice of his insolent doubts; but we must prove, all the same, to all the world——"

"Mother! But if it did so happen—who can tell?—that it had been—poor Edward?"

"Hush!" cried her mother, almost fiercely; and then she added, "God forbid, Edith—God forbid!"

But who could have divined that such preliminaries were necessary to procure the assembling of the little party which met a few evenings later at Lindores, just on the eve of the departure of the family to London for their short enjoyment of the season? John Erskine had been told that it would be merely a family party—his old friends, as Lady Lindores, with

kind familiarity and a smile so genial and so charming that the young man must have been a wizard had he seen anything beneath it, assured him. It never occurred to him to think of anything beneath. The Earl had been as cordial, as friendly, as could be desired; and though it gave him a disagreeable sensation to meet, when he entered the room, the stare of Torrance, whose big light eyes seemed to project out of his face to watch the entrance of the stranger, yet he speedily forgot this in the pleasure with which he found himself greeted by the others. Carry walked across the room with a gentle dignity, which yet was very unlike the shy brightness of her old girlish aspect, and held out to him a thin hand. "I think you scarcely remember me," she said, with a soft pathetic smile. She was not, as many women would have been, confused by the recollection that her husband was there jealously watching her looks and her tones: this consciousness, instead of agitating her, gave her a kind of inspiration. In other circumstances, the very sight of one who had been a witness of her brief romance might have disturbed her, but she was steeled against all tremors now.

John could scarcely make her any reply. The change in her was so great that he was struck dumb. Her girlish freshness was gone, her animation subdued, the intellectual eagerness quenched in her eyes. A veil of suffering and patience seemed to fall about her, through which she appeared as at a distance, in another sphere. "Indeed," he said, hesitating, "I should scarcely have known you," and murmured something about his pleasure in seeing her—at which she smiled again sadly, saying nothing more. This was all their greeting. Edith stood by with an unusually high colour, and a tremor of agitation in her frame, which he perceived vaguely with surprise, not knowing what it could mean; and then the little incident was over, half of the company seeing nothing whatever in it but a mere casual encounter of old acquaintances. Besides the family, there were present the girl whom John Erskine began within himself to call "that everlasting Miss Barrington," and the minister of the parish, a man carefully dressed in the costume adopted during the last generation by the Anglican priesthood, who was one of the "new school," and had the distinction of having made himself very alarming to his presbytery as, if not a heretic, yet at least "a thinker," given to preaching about honest doubt, and trifling with German philosophy. These two strangers scarcely afforded enough of variety to change the character of the family party. Torrance devoted himself to his dinner, and for some time spoke but little. Lady Caroline occupied herself with Dr. Meldrum with something of her old eagerness. It was evident that he was her resource, and that vague views upon the most serious subjects, which everybody else thought high-flown, found some sympathy in this professional thinker, who was nothing if not heretical. As for John, he was wholly occupied by Lady Lindores, who talked to him with a fluency which was almost feverish.

"We shall find you here when we come back," she said, "with all your arrangements made? And I hope Rintoul will return with us. Certainly he will be here in August, and very thankful to find a neighbour like you, Mr Erskine, with whom he will have so much in common."

"That's a compliment to the rest of us," said Torrance, who sat on the other side. "Rintoul, I suppose, doesn't find much in common with us ignorant clowns in the county,"—this he said without looking at any one, with his head bent over his plate.

"I did not say so. Rintoul is not so much with us as I could wish—he has his duty to attend to. To be sure, they get a great deal of leave; but you young men have so many places to go to nowadays. You spend so very little time at home. I wonder if it is a good thing or the reverse," said Lady Lindores, with a little sigh. "A mother may be pardoned for not admiring the new way, when our sons come home, not for us, but for the shooting."

"I think I am scarcely able to judge," said John: "home—perhaps was a little different to me: my mother has so many claiming a share in her. And now my home is here in Dalrulzian, which is merely a house, not a home at all," he said with something between a laugh and a sigh.

"You must marry," Lady Lindores said; "that is what the county expects of you. You will disappoint all your neighbours if you do not accomplish this duty within a year. The question is, whether the lady is already found, or whether we are to have the gratification of seeing you go through all the preliminaries, which is a great amusement, Mr Erskine; so I hope you have your choice still to make."

It was accident, of course, which directed her eyes to Nora, who sat by Torrance—accident only; for a kind woman, who was herself a mother, would not have willingly done anything to light up the sudden colour which flamed over the girl's face. Nora felt as if she could have sunk into the earth. As for John, it seemed almost an insult to her that he should look at her coldly across the table with studious unconsciousness.

"I am afraid I cannot undertake to furnish amusement for the county," he said, "in that way—and Dalrulzian is not big

enough for two people. I had no idea it was so small. It is a bachelor's box, a lodge, a sort of chambers in the country, where one can put up a friend, but nothing more."

Here Nora found a way out of her embarrassment. "Indeed," she cried, "you wrong Dalrulzian, Mr Erskine. We found it sufficient for our whole family, and the most delightful place to live in. You are not worthy of Dalrulzian if you talk of it so."

"I think Erskine is quite right," said Torrance, between two mouthfuls; "it's a small little bit of a place."

"So is Lindores," the Countess said, eagerly; "there are quantities of small rooms, but no sort of grandeur of space. We must go to Tinto for that. You have not yet seen Tinto, Mr Erskine? We must not be jealous, for our old nests are more natural. If we were all rich enough to build sets of new rooms like a little Louvre, there would be none of the old architecture left."

"You are speaking about architecture, Lady Lindores," said Dr Meldrum. He had just returned from his first expedition "abroad," and he was very willing to enlighten the company with his new experiences: besides, just then Lady Caroline was pressing him very hard upon a point which he did not wish as yet to commit himself upon. "Stone and lime are safer questions than evolution and development," he said, turning to her, in an undertone.

"Safer perhaps, but not so interesting. They are ended and settled—arrange them in what form you please, and they stand there for ever," said Lady Caroline, with brightening eyes; "but not so the mind: not so a single thought, however slight it may be. There is all the difference between life and death."

"My dear Lady Caroline! you will not call the Stones of Venice dead—or St Peter's, soaring away into the skies? Though they are but collections of stones, they are as living as we are."

"I begin to recognise her again," said John, innocent of all reason why he should not fix his attention upon poor Carry, as her pale face lighted up. He felt too pitiful, too tender of her, to speak of her formally by her new title. "She used to look like that in the old days."

"Yes," said Lady Lindores, with a sigh. "Poor Carry! visionary subjects always pleased her best."

Torrance had raised his head from his plate, and was lending an eager ear. "It's confoundedly out of place all that for a woman," he said. "What has she to do with politics, and philosophy, and nonsense? She has plenty to think of in her children and her house."

Lady Lindores made him a little bow, but took no further notice. She was exasperated, and scarcely under her own control; but Nora, on the other side, was glad to have the chance of breaking her lance on some one. If Pat Torrance was not worth her steel, there was at least another opposite whose opinions she had no clue to, whom she would have liked to transfix if that had been possible. "It does us poor girls good to have the benefit of a gentleman's real opinion," she said. "Would you like Lady Caroline to make your puddings? It is so good to know what is expected of us—in all ranks."

"Why not?" said Torrance, over his plate. "A woman's business is to look after her house—that was always considered the right thing. I hope you are not one of the strong-minded ones, Miss Barrington. You had much better not. No man ever looks at them."

"And what a penalty that would be!" cried Nora, with solemnity.

"You wouldn't like it, that I'll promise you. I tell you, they are all the ugly ones. I once saw a lot of them, one uglier than the other—women that knew no man would ever look at them. They were friends of Lady Car's, you may be sure, all chattering twenty to the dozen. They want to get into Parliament—that is at the bottom of it all; and then they would make a pretty mess—for us to set right."

"But, Mr Torrance, you could not set it right, for you are not in Parliament any more than I am," said Nora, pointedly. He gave her a look out of his big eyes which might have killed her had looks such power. The Earl had complained that his son-in-law was not amenable in this matter. But nobody knew that it was a very sore point with the wealthy squire, whom no one had so much as thought of for such a dignity. Much poorer, less important persons than himself, had been suggested, had even sat for the county. But Torrance of Tinto, conscious that he was the only man among them who could afford to throw away a few thousands without wincing—of him nobody had thought. He had declaimed loudly on many

occasions that nothing would induce him to take the trouble; but this slight had rankled at his heart.

"Mr Torrance would not like London life," Lady Lindores said, coming to his aid; "turning night into day is hard upon those who are accustomed to a more natural existence."

"You speak as if I had never been out of the country," said her ungracious son-in-law. "I know that's the idea entertained of me in this house: but it's a mistake. I've seen life just as much as those who make more fuss about it."

"And you, Mr Erskine, have you seen life?" said Lady Lindores, turning to him with, a smile.

"Very little," said John—"in London at least."

"It's a wonderful idea to me, though most people seem to hold it," said Dr Meldrum, coming in, in a pause of that conversation with Lady Caroline, which sometimes alarmed him by its abstractness and elevation, "that life is only to be seen in London, or in Paris, or some of those big centres. Under correction, Lady Lindores, and not to put my small experience above the more instructed——"

"That is an alarming beginning," cried Edith. "Dr Meldrum means to show us how ignorant we all are."

"That's what I never can show any one in this house," said the minister, with old-fashioned politeness; "but my opinion is, that life in a great metropolis is the most conventional—ay, you'll acknowledge that—the most contracted, the most narrow, the most——Well, well, if you'll not let a man speak——"

The hubbub of contradiction and amusement made the party more genial, more at ease, than it had yet been.

"If you make that out, Doctor, you will give us something new to think of," the Earl said.

And poor Lady Caroline, who found in the good minister her chief intellectual resource, prepared to listen to his argument with all the attention of a hearer who believes fully in the abilities of her guide. "I think I can see what Dr Meldrum means," she said.

"I am sure you will see what I mean," the Doctor said, gratefully. "In the first place, it's far too big to make society general—you'll allow that? Well, then, the result is, that society, being so vast, breaks itself up into little coteries. It's liker a number of bits of villages just touching each other, like a long thread of them, every one with its own little atmosphere. That's just London to me. You meet the same people as if you were in a village; then go out of that clique to another, and you meet the same people again, but another set. There was one day," said the minister, with a certain pride, "that I was very dissipated. I went out to my lunch, and then to a party in the afternoon, and then to my dinner, and to two places at night. It was a great experience. Well, if you'll believe me, I was wearied with seeing the same faces, in a great society like London, the chief place in the world. There was scarcely one I did not meet three times in the course of that day. In the country here, you could not do more. There's as much variety as that in Dunearn itself."

"I see what Dr Meldrum means," said Carry. "No doubt it was a special society into which he had been introduced, and people were asked to meet him because they were distinguished—because they were people whom it was a pleasure to meet."

"That's a great compliment to me, but I cannot take it to myself. They were, many of them, persons that it was no pleasure to meet. Some with titles, and, so far as I could see, little more. Some that were perhaps rich—I hope so, at least, for they were nothing else."

"This is cynicism," said Lord Lindores; "and I, who have lived in the opinion that Dr Meldrum was the most benignant, the most tolerant of men——"

"One can understand entirely," repeated Lady Caroline, standing by her friend, "what he means. I have thought so myself. The same faces, the same ideas, even the same words that mean so little——"

"I didn't know you were so well up in London society, Lady Car," said her husband, who had been trying for some time to strike into the *mêlée*, and whose lance was specially aimed at her of all the talkers. And then there was a general flutter of talk, instinctive, all round the table; for when a man stretches across to say something disagreeable to his wife, everybody present is upon their honour to quench the nascent quarrel. The ladies left the table soon after; and the conversation of the men did not afford the same risks, for after one or two contradictions, which the Earl put aside with

well-bred ease and a slight but unanswerable contempt, Torrance sank into sulky silence, taking a great deal of wine. At such moments a little poetic justice and punishment of his sins towards his daughter was inflicted even upon Lord Lindores.

CHAPTER XI.

"Do you like him, Nora?"

This is a question that means nothing in most cases, nor would it have meant anything now save for Nora's special sense of having been presented to John Erskine in something like the light of a candidate for his favour.

"I don't think I like him at all," she said, with some petulance. "He looks at us all as if we were natives of an undiscovered country. He is very cautious, not intending to make us proud by too much notice. Oh, it is different with you. You knew him before—you are not one of the barbarous people. As for me, I am jaundiced, I am not a fair judge; because he is determined, whatever happens, that not a single glass bead, not a cowrie or a bangle, or whatever you call them, will he give to me."

"That is not what he means, Nora. He is a little bewildered. Fancy coming into an entirely new place, which you know nothing about, and realising all at once that you belong to it, and that here is your place in the world. That happened to us too. I sympathise with him. We felt just the same when we came to Lindores."

"But you were not afraid of the natives, Edith. Young men, however," said Nora, with an air of grave impartiality, "are to be pitied in that way; they think themselves so dreadfully important. If they speak to a girl, they suppose immediately that they may be putting false hopes into her head and making her think—and then that frightens them. Well, it is natural it should frighten them. Suppose that Mr Erskine, by merely speaking civilly to me, should run the risk of breaking my heart—is not that something to be afraid of? for he is quite *nice*, I am sure, and would not, if he could help it, break any girl's heart."

"You are talking nonsense, Nora. How did you get so much acquaintance with the conceits of young men?"

"I see them through the boys. Jamie and Ned are like a pair of opera-glasses; you can see through them what that kind of creature thinks."

"I am sure," said Edith, with some heat, "Rintoul is not like that."

"Oh, I was not thinking of Lord Rintoul," cried Nora, precipitately. She blushed, and Edith observed it, making her own conclusions. And thereupon she on her side had something to say.

"Rintoul, when he was only Robin, was a delightful brother. He never was clever—even I was cleverer than he was; and Carry, of course, was always ever so far above us both. But now that he is Rintoul, he is a little changed. One is fond of him, of course, all the same. But it is different; he has ideas—of money, of getting on in the world, of people making good marriages, and that sort of thing. I think we have had enough of that in our family," Edith added, with a sigh; "but Rintoul has got corrupted. To be heir to anything seems to corrupt people somehow. It is not so very much: but he has got ideas—of what his rank demands—that sort of thing. Because there is a title, he must marry for money. Well, perhaps not quite so broad as that: but he must not marry where there is no money. I cannot put up with it," Edith cried.

And it was true that she could not put up with it. Yet there was a certain intention, too, even in this little outburst. One girl cannot chatter with another without meanings, without secret intimations of dangers in the way. Nora's countenance clouded over, the blush on her cheek grew deeper; but she laughed, putting a little force on herself.

"Is not that quite right? I have always been taught so. Not to marry for money. That is putting it a great deal too broadly, as you say—but only when you are going to marry, that it should not be a penniless person. It is so much better for both parties, mamma always says."

"I wonder if you mean to conform to the rule?" her friend asked, with an impulse half of mockery, half of curiosity.

"I don't mean to conform to any rule," said Nora. "One has to wait, you know, when one is a girl, till somebody is kind enough to fall in love with one; and then you are allowed to say whether you will have him or no. Don't you remember what Beatrice says?—'It is my cousin's duty to make courtesy and say, "Father, as it please you,"' only with that little reservation, 'Let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another courtesy——'"

"It is worse than that," said Edith, very gravely. "You say some things are hard upon young men; but oh, how much, much harder upon girls! It is in town that one feels that. There was something, after all, to be said for Carry marrying in the

country, without going through the inspection of all these men. If I speak to any one or dance with any one who would be a good match, they will say immediately that mamma has got her eye upon him—that she is trying to catch him for me—that she means to make up a marriage. My mother," cried Edith, with an inference in the very emphasis with which she uttered the word; "as if she were not more romantic than I am a hundred times, and more intolerant of scheming! The fatal thing is," added the girl, with her serious face, "that, if a crisis should come, mamma would give in. Against her conscience she will try to find reasons for doing what my father wishes, whether it is right or wrong."

"But isn't it a woman's duty to do what her husband wishes?" said Nora. "I have always heard that, too, at home."

These two young women belonged to their period. They considered the subject gravely, willing to be quite impartial; but neither she who suggested that conjugal obedience was a duty, nor she who objected to it in her mother's case, felt the question to be in the least beyond discussion.

"It is in the Bible," said Edith—"one cannot deny that; still there must be distinctions. A woman who is grown up, and a reasonable creature, cannot obey like a slave. It is still more distinct that a child should obey its parents; but at my age, it is not possible I could just do everything I am told, like a little girl. If papa were to order me to do as poor Carry did, I should not think twice; I should refuse, plainly. If it is wrong, I cannot help it; it could not be so wrong as to obey. I would not do it,—nothing in the world," cried the girl, in her ardour striking her hands together, "would make me do it; and with far more reason a mother should—judge for herself. You will never convince me otherwise," Edith said, holding her head high.

Nora pondered, but made no reply. She had never arrived at any great domestic question on which the rules of her life had been out of accord with her happiness. She had never thought of orders from one or the other of her parents, insisted upon against her will. They had never compelled her to do anything, so far as she could remember. And indeed, cruel parents are little known to the children of the present day. She would not have believed in them but for this great and evident instance of Carry Lindores. The Earl was no tyrant either. He had never been known in the character until that temptation came in his way. Had he forced his daughter to compliance? Nobody could say so. He had not locked her in her room, or kept her on bread and water, or dragged her to the altar, according to old formulas. He had insisted, and she had not been strong enough to stand out. Was it not her fault rather than his? Open as a nineteenth-century mind is bound to be to all sides of the question, Nora was not sure that there was not something to be said for the father too—which was a great instance of candour in a representative of youth.

"I do not understand being forced to do anything," she said, contemplatively. "How is it when you are *forced*? One might yield of one's own will. If I was asked to do anything—I think anything—for the sake of my father and mother, I should do it, whatever it was."

"Almost anything," Edith said, correcting her friend; "but not *that*, for instance—certainly not that."

"I don't know what you mean by *that*" said Nora, petulantly; though indeed this was not exactly true. Both speaker and listener knew that it was not exactly true, and no explanation followed. The girls had been wandering in the woods which covered the sloping bank on the summit of which the castle stood. Its turrets were visible far above them, among the green of the early foliage. The trees were still thinly but brightly clad, the leaves not wholly unclosed, the beeches just loosening their spring finery out of its brown sheath. The river was still some way below. They were seated full in the afternoon sunshine, which was not warm enough to incommode them, upon a knoll covered half with grass, half with moss, through which penetrated here and there the brownness of the twisted roots, and of bits of rock and boulder. All about in the hollows, under every projection, at the root of every tree, nestling in the crevices of the brown banks, and on the edges of the rocks, were clumps of primroses, like scatterings of palest gold. The river made a continuous murmur in the air; the birds were busy overhead in all their sweet afternoon chatter, flitting about from branch to branch, paying their visits, trying over their notes. It was only through a checkered screen of leaves that the sky was visible at all, save in this little opening, where all was light and brightness, the centre of the picture, with these two young figures lending it interest. They were not either of them beauties to make a sensation in a London season, but they were both fair enough to please any simple eye—two fair and perfect human creatures in their bloom, the very quintessence of the race, well-bred, well-mannered, well-educated, well-looking, knowing a little and thinking a little, and perhaps, according to the fashion of the time, believing that they knew less and thought more than was at all the case. Both Edith and Nora despised themselves somewhat for knowing no Latin, much less any Greek. They thought the little accomplishments they possessed entirely trivial, and believed that their education had been shamefully neglected—which was an unnecessary

reproach to their parents, who had done the best they could for the girls, and had transmitted to them at least an open and bright intelligence, which is more pleasant than learning. On the other hand, these young things believed that they had inspirations unknown to their seniors, and had worked out unaided many problems unsolved by their fathers and mothers—which perhaps was also a mistaken view. They liked to raise little questions of delicate morality, and to feel that there were more things in heaven and earth than had been thought of in any previous philosophy. They were a little alike even in appearance; the one a little fairer than the other—not any piquant contrast of blue eyes with brown, after the usual fashion of artistic grouping. They might even have been mistaken for sisters, as they sometimes were—a mistake which pleased them in their enthusiasm for each other.

Both these girls had been affected more or less by the intellectual tastes of poor Lady Caroline, whom they devoutly believed to be a genius, though wanting (as persons of genius are supposed generally to be) in some ordinary qualities which would have been good for her. Their speculations, their loves and likings, especially in the matter of books, were more or less moulded by her; and they copied out her verses, and thought them poetry. Perhaps in this respect Nora, who was the more intellectual, was at the same time the less independent of the two. Edith was in all things the representative of the positive, as they were all fond of saying—the realist, the practical person. Such was the pretty *argot* of this thoughtful circle. But on the whole, as they sat there together musing and talking as became their visionary age, the eye could not have lighted upon, nor the heart been satisfied with, any spectacle more pleasant than that of these two slim and simple girls exchanging their thoughts in the temperate spring sunshine, among the spring buds and flowers. A little silence had fallen upon them: they were sitting idly together, each one following out her own thoughts—thoughts which bore somehow, who could doubt, upon the opening life before them, and were more than mere thinkings, dreams, and anticipations all in one—when suddenly there drifted across their path a very simple, very ordinary embodiment of fate, yet distinctly such, a young man in fishing costume, with his basket over his shoulder, coming towards them by the winding path from the river. The sound of his step in the silence of the woods—which were not silent at all, yet thrilled to the first human sound as if all the rest of creation were not worth reckoning—caught their attention at once. They saw him before he was aware of their presence, and recognised him with a slight sensation. It is to be doubted whether the sudden apparition of a pretty girl flitting across the vision of two young men would not have produced a greater emotion for the moment, but it would have been of a different kind. Both Nora and Edith recognised in the approach of the new-comer the coming in of a new influence—a something which, for aught they knew, might be of far more importance in their lives than all the echoes of the woods or influences of the fresh spring skies. The character of the scene changed at once with his appearance. Its tranquillity lessened; it became dramatic, opening up an opportunity for all the complications of life. Nora was the one whom these romantic possibilities affected the most, for she was the most imaginative, seeing a story in everything. Since that morning at Miss Barbara's house in Dunearn, she had withdrawn from the contemplation of John Erskine as in any way capable of affecting herself. For a moment she had been offended and vexed with fate; but that feeling had passed away, and Nora now looked upon him with a philosophical eye with a reference to Edith, not to herself. From all she had ever seen or heard, it did not appear likely to Nora that two girls and a young man could go on meeting familiarly, constantly, as it was inevitable they should do, without something more coming of it than is written in the trivial records of every day. Perhaps young men, being more immediately active agents of their own fate, are less likely to think of the dramatic importance of any chance meeting. John did not think about the future at all, nor had he made any calculation as to what was likely to result from continual meetings. He was pleased, yet half annoyed at the same time, his heart giving a jump when he recognised Edith, but falling again when he saw "that eternal Miss Barrington" beside her. "Am I never to see her by herself?" he muttered, half angrily. But next moment he came forward, quickening his pace; and after a little hesitation, to see whether it were permissible, he threw himself at their feet, making the pretty picture perfect.

"Have you caught any fish, Mr Erskine? But isn't it too bright?"

"I have not been trying to catch any fish. These things," said John, laying down his rod and loosening his basket from his shoulder, "are tributes paid to the genius of the place. I don't want to kill the trout. I daresay they are of more use, and I am sure they have more right to be where they are, than I."

"Who can have a better right than you?" said Nora, always moved by the idea of the home from which she had felt herself ousted to make room for this languid proprietor. "You are the real owner of the place."

"I am a fish out of water—as yet," said the young man: he added the last words in deference to the eager remonstrances and reproaches which were evidently rushing to their lips.

"You had better come with us to town. Would you be in your element there? Men seem to like that do-nothing life. It is only we girls that are rising up against it. We want something to do."

"And so do I," said John, ruefully. "Tell me something. Nobody that I can see wants me here. Old Rolls, perhaps; but his approval is not enough to live for—is it? He would make out a code for me with very little trouble. But imagine a poor fellow stranded in a fresh country—altogether new to me, Miss Barrington, notwithstanding my forefathers—no shooting, no hunting, nothing to do. You may laugh, but what is to become of me—especially when you go away?" he said, turning to Edith, with a little heightening colour. This acted sympathetically, and brought a still brighter flush to Edith's face. Nora looked on in a gentle, pensive, grandmotherly sort of way, observing the young people with benignity, and saying to herself that she knew this was how it would be—because it is *not* so suitable, and Lord Lindores will never consent, she added, with a private reflection aside upon the extreme perversity of human affairs.

"No shooting, no hunting, no——Then you will be happy, Mr Erskine, in September."

"Happi*er*. But I don't want to wait so long. I should prefer to be happy now."

"In the way of amusement, Mr Erskine means, Edith. That is all boys——I beg your pardon—I was thinking of my brothers. That is all gentlemen mean when they speak of something to do."

"Well—unless I had a trade, and could make shoes or chairs, or something. The people are all too well off, too well educated, to want me. They condescend to me as a foolish individual without information or experience. They tell me my family has always been on *the right side* in politics, with a scornful consciousness that I don't know very well what they mean by the right side. My humble possessions are all in admirable order. There are not even any trees to cut down. What am I to do? Visit the poor? There are no poor——"

"Oh, Mr Erskine!" cried both the girls in a breath.

"*I poveri vergognosi*, who require to be known and delicately dealt with, perhaps—fit subjects for your delicate hands, not for mine."

"If you begin talking of delicate hands, you defeat us altogether: the age of compliments is over," said Edith, with some heat; while Nora cast a furtive glance at the hands both of herself and her friend. They were both sufficiently worthy of the name—ladies' hands which had known no labour, neither in themselves nor their progenitors. Edith's were the better shaped—if the tapering Northern fingers are to be considered better than the blunter Greek—but Nora's the whiter of the two. This reflection was quite irrelevant; yet how much of our thinkings would be silenced if all that was irrelevant was put out of account?

"I mean no compliment. Suppose that I were to go into the nearest village and offer charity—that would be my brutal way of proceeding. What would they do to me, do you think? Pitch me into the river! tar and feather me! No; if there is anything to be done in that way, it must be done with knowledge. It is in vain you mock me with reproaches for doing nothing—I am a man out of work."

"So long as they do not ask for money," said Nora, demurely, "mamma says every man should be helped to get work. And then we ask, what is his trade?"

"Ah! that is the question,—if the wretch hasn't got one?"

"It is very difficult in that case. Then he must take to helping in the garden, or harvest-work, or—I don't know—hanging on (but that is so very bad for them) about the house."

"Clearly that is what I am most fit for. Do you remember how you used to engage me reading aloud? They all made sketches except myself, Miss Barrington. Beaufort—do you recollect what capital drawings he made? And I read—there's no telling how many Tauchnitz volumes I got through: and then the discussions upon them. I wonder if you recollect as well as I do?" said John to Edith, with a great deal of eager light in his eyes.

Nora had a great mind to get up and walk away. She was not at all offended, nor did she feel left out, as might have happened. But she said to herself calmly, that it was a pity to spoil sport, and that she was not wanted the least in the world.

"I remember very well; but there are reasons," said Edith, dropping her voice, and bending a little towards him, "why we don't talk of that much. Oh, it does not matter to me! but mamma and Car—have a—feeling. Don't say anything to them of these old times."

"So long as I may talk of them now and then—to you," said John, in the same undertone. He was delighted to have this little link of private recollections between them; and the pleasure of it made his eyes and his countenance glow. At this Nora felt actually impelled to do what she had only thought of before. She rose and wandered off from them on pretence of gathering some primroses. "How lovely they are! and nobody sees them. Will you lend me your basket, Mr Erskine, to carry some home?" She took it up with a smile, bidding them wait for her. She felt gently benignant, protecting, patronising, like a quite old person. Why should not they have their day? Edith, too, rose hastily, following her friend's example, as if their easy repose was no longer practicable. She had a sense, half delightful, half alarming, of having suddenly got upon very confidential terms with John Erskine. She rose up, and so did he. But it would have been foolish to copy Nora's whim and gather primroses, or even to follow her, as if they were afraid of each other. So Edith stood still, and John by her side.

"I cannot forget that summer," he said, in the same low tone, which was now totally unnecessary, there being nobody at hand to overhear.

"I remember it too," said Edith, softly, "almost better than any other. It was just before—anything happened: when we were so poor. I have my little grey frock still that I used to wear—that I went everywhere in. What expeditions we had—Car and I! I daresay you thought us very wild, very untamed. That was what mamma always used to say."

"I thought you," John began hurriedly—then stopped, with a little unsteady laugh. "You might object if I put it into words. It was my first awakening," he added a moment after, in a still lower tone.

Edith gave him a curious, half-startled glance. She thought the word a strange one. Awakening! What was the meaning of it? But he said no more; and they stood together in the sweet silence, in that confusion of delightful sound which we call silence, because our human voices and noises have nothing to do with its harmony. There were birds singing, one would have said, on every twig, pouring forth their experiences with a hundred repetitions, flitting from one branch to another telling their several tales. On every side were mysterious depths of shadow, cool hollows, and long withdrawing vistas—a soft background, where nature tenderly looked on and watched, around that centre of life and brightness and reawakening. It was a scene for any painter: the brown banks and spring foliage, all breathing new life; the sunny opening all full of the warmth of the present sunshine; Nora a pretty attendant figure on the grass among the trees, all flushed with light and shadow, stooping to gather handfuls of primroses, while the others stood diffident, charmed, shy of each other, lingering together. It seemed to John the new world in which all life begins again; but to Edith it was only a confusing, bewildering, alarming sort of fairy land, which all her instincts taught her it was right to flee from. "Look at Nora with her basket full," she cried, hurriedly, "and we doing nothing! Let us go and help her."

CHAPTER XII.

It was a rainy morning when the Lindores went away. They were not rich enough to command all the delights of the London season, and had no house in town, nor any position to keep up which demanded their presence. The Earls of Lindores were merely Scotch lords. They had no place in Parliament, no importance in the realm. Hitherto a succession of unobtrusive but proud country gentlemen, not fond of appearing where their claims were not fully recognised, had borne the name, and contented themselves with their dignity at home, which no one questioned, if perhaps it was never very reverentially regarded. It was enough to them to make a visit to London now and then, to comment upon the noise and bigness of town, to attend a levee and a drawing-room, and to come home well pleased that they had no need to bind themselves to the chariot-wheels of fashion. The late Earl had been entirely of this mind; and the consequence was, that nobody in these busy circles which call themselves Society knew anything about the Lindores. But the present bearer of these honours was of a very different intention. It galled him to be so little though he was so much—the representative of a great race (in his own thinking), and yet nobody, made of no account among his own class. Perhaps Lord Lindores thought all the more of his position that it had not come to him in easy natural succession, but by right of a great family catastrophe, and after his life had been long settled on a different and much humbler basis. It is certain that he had no mind to accept it as his predecessors had done. He meant to vindicate a position for himself, to assert his claim among the best. What he intended in his heart was to turn his old Scotch earldom into a British peerage by hook or crook, and in the meantime to get himself elected a representative peer of Scotland, and attain the paradise of hereditary legislatorship by one means or another. This was his determination, and had been so from the moment when the family honours came to him. In the very afternoon of the solemn day when he heard of the death of his brother, and his own entirely unlooked-for elevation, this is what he resolved upon. He had withdrawn to his own room to be alone—to consider the wonderful revolution which had taken place, and, if he could, to expend a tear upon the three ended lives which had opened up that position to him—when this intention first rose in his mind. As a matter of fact, he had been sad enough. The extinction of these lives, the transference to himself of the honours which, for aught he knew, might be taken from him to-morrow, was too startling to be otherwise than sad. He had retired within himself, he had compelled himself to think of the poor boy Rintoul dead in his bloom, of the heart-broken father who had followed him to the grave, and to represent to himself, with all the details most likely to move the heart, that terrible scene. And he had been satisfied to feel that he was sad,—that the natural wofulness of this spectacle had moved him enough even to counterbalance the tremor and elation of this extraordinary turn of fortune. But his very sadness and overwhelming sense of a visible fate working in the history of his family, gave him an impulse which was not ungenerous. On the instant, even while he solicited the moisture in his eyes to come the length of a tear, the thought leapt into his mind that if he was spared, if he had time to do anything, it should not be merely a Scotch earldom that he would transmit to his son. At last Lindores had come into the possession of one who knew what he wanted, and meant to obtain it. His family, which had suffered so much, should no longer be pushed aside among the titled nobodies. It should have its weight in the councils of the sovereign and in the history of the kingdom. "The house shall not suffer because I have come to the head of it," he cried. He felt that he could compensate it for the series of misfortunes it had endured, by adding importance and dignity to the name. He made up his mind, then, that when his son succeeded him it should be as a peer of the realm. And it was to this end and with this inspiration that so great a change had come upon him. For this he had set his heart upon making his county a model for every shire in England. To this end he had determined to wrest the seat from the Tory representative, and put in his son in the Liberal interest. A seat so important gained, an influence so great established, what Ministry could refuse to the representative of one of the oldest families in the North the distinction which ought to have been his long before?

Nobody suspected the Earl's meaning in its fullest extent. Old Miss Barbara Erskine was the only one who had partly divined him; but of all the people who did not understand his intention, the wife of his bosom was the first. To her high mind, finely unsuspicious because so contemptuous of mean motives, this little ambition would perhaps have seemed pettier than it really was; for if nobility is worth having at all, surely it is best to possess all its privileges. And perhaps, had Lady Lindores been less lofty in her ideal, her husband would have been more disposed to open his inmost thoughts to her, and thus correct any smaller tendency. It was this that had made him insist upon Carry's marriage. He wanted to ally himself with the richest and most powerful people within his reach, to strengthen himself in every way, extending the family connection so that he should have every security for success when the moment came for his great *coup*. And he was anxiously alive to every happy chance that might occur for the two of his children who were still to marry—anxious yet critical. He would not have had Rintoul marry a grocer's daughter for her hogsheads, as Miss Barbara said. He would have him, if possible, to marry the daughter of a Minister of State, or some other personage of importance. He intended Rintoul to be a popular Member of Parliament, a rising man altogether, thinking he could infuse enough of his

own energy as well as ambition into the young man to secure these ends. And this great aim of his was the reason why he underwent the expense of a season, though a short one, in town. He was of opinion that it was important to keep himself and his family in the knowledge of the world, to make it impossible for any fastidious fashionable to say, "Who is Lord Lindores?" The Earl, by dint of nursing this plan in his mind, and revealing it to nobody, had come to think it was a great aim.

It was, as we have said, a rainy morning when the family left Lindores. They made the journey from Edinburgh to London by night, as most people do. But before they reached Edinburgh, there was a considerable journey, and those two ferries, of which Rolls had reminded Colonel Barrington. Two great firths to cross, with no small amount of sea when the wind is in the east, was no such small matter. Lady Caroline had driven over in the morning to bid her mother good-bye, and it was she who was to deposit Nora Barrington at Chiefswood, where her next visit was to be paid. There had been but little conversation between the mother and daughter on the subject of that scene which Edith had witnessed, but Lady Lindores could not forbear a word of sympathy in the last half-hour they were to spend together. They were seated in her dressing-room, which was safe from interruption. "I do not like to leave you, my darling," Lady Lindores said, looking wistfully into her daughter's pale face.

"It does not matter, mother. Oh, you must not think of me, and spoil your pleasure. I think perhaps things go better sometimes when I have no one to fall back upon," said poor Lady Caroline.

"Oh, Carry, my love, what a thing that is to say!"

Carry did not make any reply at first. She was calm, not excited at all. "Yes; I think perhaps I am more patient, more resigned, when I have no one to fall back upon. There is no such help in keeping silence as when you have no one to talk to," she added, with a faint smile.

Her mother was much more disturbed in appearance than she. She was full of remorse as well as sympathy. "I did not think—I never knew it was so bad as this," she said, faltering, holding in her own her child's thin hands.

"What could it be but as bad as this?" said Carry. "We both must have known it from the beginning, mother. It is of no use saying anything. I spoke to Edith the other day because she came in the midst of it, and I could not help myself. It never does any good to talk. When there is no one to speak to, I shall get on better, you will see."

"In that case, it is best for us to be away from you——Carry, my darling!" Lady Lindores was frightened by the wild energy with which her daughter suddenly clutched her arm.

"Oh no, no! don't think that. If I could not look across to Lindores and think there was some one there who loved me, I should go out of my senses. Don't let us talk of it. How curious to think you are going away where I used always to wish to go—to London! No, don't look so. I don't think I have the least wish to go now. There must be ghosts there—ghosts everywhere," she said, with a sigh, "except at home. There are no ghosts at Tinto; that is one thing I may be thankful for."

"I don't think," said her mother, with an attempt to take a lighter tone, "that London is a likely place for ghosts."

"Ah, don't you think so? Mother," said Carry suddenly, "I am afraid of John Erskine. He never knew of what happened—after. What so likely as that he might have people to stay with him—people from town?"

"Nobody—whose coming would make any difference to *us*—would accept such an invitation, Carry. Of that you may be sure."

"Do you think so, mother?" she said; then added, with some wistfulness, "But perhaps it might be thought that no one would mind. That must be the idea among people who know. And there might be, you know, a little curiosity to see for one's self how it was. I think I could understand that without any blame."

"No, I do not think so—not where there was any delicacy of mind. It would not happen. A chance meeting might take place anywhere else; but here, in our own country, oh no, no!"

"You think so?" said Lady Caroline: perhaps there was a faint disappointment as well as relief in her tone. "I do not know how or why, but I am afraid of John Erskine," she said again, after a pause.

"My dearest! he brings back old associations."

"It is not that. I feel as if there was something new, some other trouble, coming in his train."

"You were always fanciful," her mother said; "and you are feverish, Carry, and nervous. I don't like to leave you. I wish there could be some one with you while we are away. You would not ask Nora?"

"I am better without company," she said, shaking her head. "In some houses guests are always inconvenient. One never knows—and indeed, things go better when we are alone. Don't vex yourself about me. There is the carriage. And one thing more—take care of Edith, mother dear."

"Of Edith? But surely! she will be my constant companion. Why do you say take care of Edith, Carry?"

"I think I have a kind of second-sight—or else it is my nerves, as you say. I feel as if there were schemes about Edith. My father will want her—to marry,—that is quite right, I suppose; and in town she will see so many people. I am like an old raven, boding harm. But you will stand by her, mother, whatever happens?"

"Oh, Carry, my darling, don't reproach me!" cried her mother; "it breaks my heart!"

"Reproach you! Oh, not for the world! How could I reproach my dearest friend—always my best support and comfort? No, no, mamma—no, no. It is only that I am silly with sorrow to see you all go away. And yet I want you to go away, to get all the pleasure possible. But only, if anything should happen,—if Edith should—meet any one—you will be sure to stand by her, mamma?"

"Are you ready? Are you coming? The carriage is waiting," said Lord Lindores at the door.

Carry gave a little start at the sound of his voice, and her mother rose hastily, catching up a shawl from the sofa on which she had been sitting—a sort of excuse for a moment's delay. "Let me see that we have got everything," she said, hurriedly; and coming back, took her daughter once more into her arms. "Take care of yourself—oh, take care of yourself, my darling! and if you should want me—if it should prove too much—if you find it more than you can bear ——"

"I can bear anything for a month," said Lady Caroline, with a smile; "and I tell you, things go better—and *you* will be all the better of forgetting me for a while, mother dear."

"As if that were possible, Carry!"

"No, no; thank God, it is not possible! But I shall do very well, and you will not have my white face for ever before your eyes. There is my father calling again. Good-bye, mother dear—good-bye!" and as they kissed, Carry breathed once more that prayer, "Take care of Edith!"—in which Lady Lindores read the most tender and heartrending of all reproaches—in her mother's ear.

They drove to the little station, a large party. Lady Caroline, who was the element of care and sadness in it, made an effort to cast her troubles behind her for the sake of the travellers. As they all walked about on the little platform waiting the arrival of the slow-paced local train, it was she who looked the most cheerful—so cheerful, that her mother and sister, not unwilling to be deceived, could scarcely believe that this was the same being who had been "silly with sorrow" to part from them. Between Lord Lindores and his daughter there had always been a certain shadow and coldness since her marriage; but to-day, even he seemed to miss the tacit reproach in her look, and to feel at his ease with Carry. Before the train arrived, John Erskine, too, appeared on the platform to say good-bye to his friends. John was by far the most downcast of the party. "I shall vegetate till you come back," he said to Lady Lindores, not venturing to look at Edith, who listened to him with a smile all the same, mocking his sentiment. She was not afraid of anything he could say at that moment.

"Come and meet us this day month," she said, "and let us see if you are in leaf or blossom, Mr Erskine."

John gave her a reproachful glance. He did not feel in the humour even to answer with a compliment—with a hint that the sunshine which encourages blossom would be veiled over till she came back, though some loverlike conceit of the kind had floated vaguely through his thoughts. When the travellers disappeared at last, the three who remained were left standing forlorn on the platform, flanked by the entire strength of the station (one man and a boy, besides the stationmaster), which had turned out to see his lordship and her ladyship off. They looked blankly at each other, as those who are left behind can scarcely fail to do. Nora was the only one who kept up a cheerful aspect. "It is only for a month,

after all," she said, consoling her companions. But Carry dropped back in a moment out of her false courage, and John looked black as a thunder-cloud at the well-meant utterance. He was so rude as to turn his back upon the comforter, giving Lady Caroline his arm to take her to her carriage. With her he was in perfect sympathy—he even gave her hand a little pressure in brotherly kindness and fellow-feeling: there was nothing to be said in words. Neither did she say anything to him; but she gave him a grateful glance, acknowledging that mute demonstration. At this moment the stillness which had fallen round the little place, after the painful puffing off of the train, was interrupted by the sound of horse's hoofs, and Torrance came thundering along on his black horse. Lady Caroline made a hurried spring into the carriage, recognising the sound, and hid herself in its depths before her husband came up.

"Holloa!" he cried. "Gone, are they! I thought I should have been in time to say good-bye. But there are plenty of you without me. Why, Car, you look as if you had buried them all, both you and Erskine. What's the matter? is she going to faint?"

"I never faint," said Lady Caroline, softly, from the carriage window. "I am tired a little. Nora, we need not wait now."

"And you look like a dead cat, Erskine," said the civil squire. "It must have been a tremendous parting, to leave you all like this. Hey! wait a moment; don't be in such a hurry. When will you come over and dine, and help Lady Car to cheer up a bit? After this she'll want somebody to talk to, and she don't appreciate me in that line. Have we anything on for Tuesday, Car, or will that suit?"

"Any day that is convenient for Mr Erskine," said Carry, faltering, looking out with pitiful deprecation and a sort of entreaty at John standing by. Her wistful eyes seemed to implore him not to think her husband a brute, yet to acknowledge that he was so all the same.

"Then we'll say Tuesday," said Torrance. "Come over early and see the place. I don't suppose you have so many invitations that you need to be asked weeks in advance. But don't think I am going to cheat you of your state dinner. Oh, you shall have that in good time, and all the old fogeys in the county. In the meantime, as you're such old friends, it's for Lady Car I'm asking you now." This was said with a laugh which struck John's strained nerves as the most insolent he had ever heard.

"I need not say that I am at Lady Caroline's disposition—when she pleases," he replied, very gravely.

"Oh, not for me—not for me," she cried, under her breath. Then recovering herself—"I mean—forgive me; I was thinking of something else. On Tuesday, if you will come, Mr Erskine—it will be most kind to come. And, Nora, you will come too. To Chiefswood," she said, as the servant shut the door, falling back with a look of relief into the shelter of the carriage. The two men stood for a moment looking after it as it whirled away. Why they should thus stand in a kind of forced antagonism, John Erskine, at least, did not know. The railway forces looked on vaguely behind; and Torrance, curbing his impatient horse, made a great din and commotion on the country road.

"Be quiet, you brute! We didn't bargain for Nora—eh, Erskine? she's thrown in," said Torrance, with that familiarity which was so offensive to John. "To be sure, three's no company, they say. It's a pity they play their cards so openly—or rather, it's a great thing for you, my fine fellow. You were put on your guard directly, I should say. I could have told them, no man was ever caught like that—and few men know better than I do all the ways of it," he said, with a laugh.

"You have the advantage of me," said Erskine, coldly. "I don't know who is playing cards, or what I have to do with them. Till Tuesday—since I have Lady Caroline's commands," he said, lifting his hat.

"Confound——" the other said, under his breath; but John had already turned away. Torrance stared after him, with a doubt in his eyes whether he should not pursue and pick a quarrel on the spot; but a moment's reflection changed his plans. "I'll get more fun out of him yet before I'm done with him," he said, half to himself. Then he became aware of the observation of Sandy Struthers the porter and the boy who had formed the background, and were listening calmly to all that was said. He turned round upon them quickly. "Hey, Sandy! what's wrong, my man? Were you waiting to spy upon Mr Erskine and me?"

"Me—spying! No' me; what would I spy for?" was the porter's reply. He was too cool to be taken by surprise. "What's that to me if twa gentlemen spit and scratch at ilk ither, like cats or women folk," he said, slowly. He had known Tinto "a' his days," and was not afraid of him. A porter at a little roadside station may be pardoned if he is misanthropical. He did not even change his position, as a man less accustomed to waiting about with his hands hanging by his side might

have done.

"You scoundrel! how dare you talk of spitting and scratching to me?"

"'Deed, I daur mair than that," said Sandy, calmly. "You'll no' take the trouble to complain to the Directors, Tinto, and I'm feared for naebody else. But you shouldna quarrel—gentlemen shouldna quarrel. It sets a bad example to the country-side."

"Quarrel! nothing of the sort. That's your imagination. I was asking Mr Erskine to dinner," said Tinto, with his big laugh.

"Weel, it looked real like it. I wouldna gang to your dinner, Tinto, if you asked me like that."

"Perhaps you wouldn't take a shilling if I tossed it to you like that."

"It's a'thegither different," said Sandy, catching the coin adroitly enough. "I see nae analogy atween the twa. But jist take you my advice and quarrel nane, sir, especially with that young lad: thae Erskines are a dour race."

"You idiot! I was asking him to dinner," Torrance said. He was on friendly terms with all the common people, with a certain jocular roughness which did not displease them. Sandy stood imperturbable, with all the calm of a man accustomed to stand most of his time looking on at the vague and quiet doings of the world about him. Very little ever happened about the station. To have had a crack with Tinto was a great entertainment after the morning excitement, enough to maintain life upon for a long time, of having helped the luggage into the van, and assisted my lord and my lady to get away.

"I wish," cried Nora, as they rolled along the quiet road, "that you would not drag me in wherever John Erskine is going, Car!"

They all called him John Erskine. It was the habit of the neighbourhood, from which even strangers could scarcely get free.

"I drag you in! Ah, see how selfish we are without knowing!" said Carry. "I thought only that between Mr Torrance and myself—there would be little amusement."

"Amusement!" cried Nora—"always amusement! Is that all that is ever to be thought of even at a dinner-party?"

Carry was too serious to take up this challenge. "Dear Nora," she said, "I am afraid of John Erskine, though I cannot tell you why. I think Mr Torrance tries to irritate him: he does not mean it,—but they are so different. I know by my own experience that sometimes a tone, a look—which is nothing, which means nothing—will drive one beside one's self. That is why I would rather he did not come; and when he comes, I want some one—some one indifferent—to help me to make it seem like a common little dinner—like every day."

"Is it not like every day? Is there—anything? If you want me, Carry, of course there is not a word to be said." Nora looked at her with anxious, somewhat astonished eyes. She, too, was aware that before Carry's marriage—before the family came to Lindores—there had been *some one else*. But if that had been John, how then did it happen that Edith ——Nora stopped short, confounded. To her young imagination the idea, not so very dreadful a one, that a man who had loved one sister might afterwards console himself with another, was a sort of sacrilege. But friendship went above all.

"I do not think I can explain it to you, Nora," said Lady Caroline. "There are so many things one cannot explain. Scarcely anything in this world concerns one's very self alone and nobody else. That always seems to make confidences so impossible."

"Never mind confidences," cried Nora, wounded. "I did not ask why. I said if you really *wanted* me, Carry——"

"I know you would not ask why. And there is nothing to tell. Mr Torrance has had a mistaken idea. But it is not that altogether. I am frightened without any reason. I suppose it is as my mother says, because of all the old associations he brings back. Marriage is so strange a thing. It cuts your life in two. What was before seems to belong to some one else—to another world."

"Is it always so, I wonder?" said Nora, wistfully.

"So far as I know," Carry said.

"Then I think St Paul is right," cried the girl, decisively, "and that it is not good in that case to marry; but never mind, if you want me. There is nothing to be frightened about in John Erskine. He is nice enough. He would not do anything to make you uncomfortable. He is not ill-tempered nor ready to take offence."

"I did not know that you knew him so well, Nora."

"Oh yes—when you have a man thrust upon you as he has been—when you have always heard of him all your life; when people have said for years,—in fun, you know, of course, but still they have said it—'Wait till you see John Erskine!'"

Nora's tone was slightly aggrieved. She could not help feeling herself a little injured that, after so much preparation and so many indications of fate, John Erskine should turn out to be nothing to her after all.

Lady Caroline listened with an eager countenance. Before Nora had done speaking, she turned upon her, taking both her hands. Her soft grey eyes widened out with anxious questions. The corners of her mouth drooped. "Nora, dear child, dear child!" she said, "you cannot mean—you do not say——"

"Oh, I don't say anything at all," cried Nora, half angry, half amused, with a laugh at herself which was about a quarter part inclined to crying. "No, of course not, Car. How could I care for him—a man I had never seen? But just—it seems so ludicrous, after this going on all one's life, that it should come to nothing in a moment. I never can help laughing when I think of it. 'Oh, wait till you see John Erskine!' Since I was fifteen everybody has said that. And then when he did appear at last, oh,—I thought him very nice—I had no objection to him—I was not a bit unwilling,—to see him calmly turn his back upon me, as he did to-day at the station!"

Nora laughed till the tears came into her eyes; but Lady Caroline, whose seriousness precluded any admixture of humour in the situation, took the younger girl in her arms and kissed her, with a pitying tenderness and enthusiasm of consolation. "My little Nora! my little Nora!" she said. She was too much moved with the most genuine emotion and sympathy to say more; at which Nora, half accepting the crisis, half struggling against it, laughed again and again till the tears rolled over her cheeks.

"Lady Car! Lady Car! it is not for sorrow; it is the fun of it—the fun of it!" she cried.

But Carry did not see the fun. She wanted to soothe the sorrow away.

"Dearest Nora, this sort of disappointment is only visionary," she said. "It is your imagination that is concerned, not your heart. Oh, believe me, dear, you will laugh at it afterwards; you will think it nothing at all. How little he knows! I shall think less of his good sense, less of his discrimination, than I was disposed to do. To think of a man so left to himself as to throw my Nora away!"

"He has not thrown me away," cried Nora, with a little pride; "because, thank heaven, he never knew that he had me in his power! But you must think more, not less, of his discrimination, Carry; for if he never had any eyes for me, it was for the excellent good reason that he had seen Edith before. So my pride is saved—quite saved," the girl cried.

"Edith!" Carry repeated after her. And then her voice rose almost to a shriek—"Edith! You cannot mean that?"

"But I do mean it. Oh, I know there will be a thousand difficulties. Lord Lindores will never consent: that is why they go and do it, I suppose. Because she was the last person he ought to have fallen in love with, as they say in the 'Critic'——"

"Edith!" repeated Carry again. Nora was half satisfied, half disappointed, to find that her own part of the story faded altogether from her friend's mind when this astonishing peace of intelligence came in. Then she whispered in an awe-stricken voice, "Does my mother know?"

"Nobody knows—not even Edith herself. I saw it because, you know——And of course," cried Nora, in delightful self-contradiction, "it does not matter at all when I meet him now; for he is not thinking of me any longer, but of her. Oh, he never did think of me, except to say to himself, 'There is that horrid girl again!'"

This time Nora's laugh passed without any notice from Carry, whose thoughts were absorbed in her sister's concerns. "Was not I right," she said, clasping her hands, "when I said I was frightened for John Erskine? I said so to my mother to-day. What I was thinking of was very different: that he might quarrel with Mr Torrance—that harm might come in that

way. But oh, this is worse, far worse! Edith! I thought she at least would be safe. How short-sighted we are even in our instincts! Oh, my little sister! What can I do, Nora, what can I do to save her?"

Nora received this appeal with a countenance trembling between mirth and vexation. She did not think Edith at all to be pitied. If there was any victim—and the whole matter was so absurd that she felt it ought not to be looked at in so serious a light,—but if there was a victim, it was not Edith, but herself. She could only reply to Carry's anxiety with a renewed outbreak of not very comfortable laughter. "Save her! You forget," she said, with sudden gravity, "that Edith is not one to be saved unless she pleases. And if she should like Mr Erskine——"

"My father will kill her!" Lady Caroline cried.

CHAPTER XIII.

Lord Rintoul made his appearance in the house which his parents had hired in Eaton Place on the day before their arrival, with a mixture of satisfaction and anxiety. He was pleased, for he was a good young fellow on the whole, and fond of his mother and sister; but he was anxious, for he was a Guardsman—a young man about town, "up," as he modestly hoped, to most things—and they were people from the country, who in all probability were not quite dressed as they ought to be, or prepared for the duties of their position. These mingled sentiments were apparent in the young man's face as he walked into the room in which Lady Lindores and Edith were sitting together, working out on their side a programme of the things they were going to do. Notwithstanding Carry, they were both tolerably cheerful, looking forward to the excitement of this unaccustomed life with a little stir of anticipation; for neither mother nor daughter was *blasée*, and the thrill of quickened existence, in a place where human pulses beat more rapidly and the tide runs fuller than elsewhere, moved them in spite of themselves. Lady Lindores would have said, and did say, that her heart was not in it—and this in perfect good faith; yet when she was actually in London, though her daughter's pale face and lonely life were often present with her, the impression was less strong than when that white face, as poor Carry said, was constantly before her eyes. She was a handsome woman of forty-five, with a liking for all that was beautiful, a love of conversation and movement, much repressed by the circumstances of her life, but always existing; and when thus free for a moment from habitual cares, her heart rose almost in spite of herself, and she was able to believe that things would set themselves right somehow, even though she did not see from whence the alleviation was to come. She was discussing with Edith many things that they had planned and thought of, when Rintoul arrived. Their plans embraced various matters which were not within the range of that golden youth's ideas. When they had been in London before, they had vexed his soul by the list of things they had wanted to see. The sights of London! such as country people of the lower orders went staring about: Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, even St Paul's and the Tower!—things which he had never seen nor thought of seeing himself, though he often passed the former, not taking any notice, thinking it was "bad form" to show any rustic curiosity. His mother and the girls had scoffed at all he said about "bad form;" but now they were accustomed to their change of circumstances, and everything was different. Would they be reasonable, and acknowledge that there were certain matters in which he was an authority now?

Rintoul himself had made, he was conscious, immense progress since he first stepped upon that platform of rank to which he was now accustomed. At first the elevation had made him a little giddy. Young Robin Lindores, of the 120th, had been on the whole a very simple young fellow, pleased to feel that he had the benefit of "good connections," and an uncle who was an Earl, though they had never been of any use to him. Even in that innocent stage he was, as is natural to a young man, vaguely critical of the proceedings of his "people." He thought it was a pity they should live abroad. Were they at home, it appeared certain to him that he would now and then have been invited to Lindores for the shooting, and been taken some notice of. But on the other hand, he acknowledged that to live abroad was cheap, and that it was better for him on the whole to say "My people are abroad," than to be obliged to acknowledge that they were living in a little country cottage somewhere, or in Brighton or Cheltenham, or some shabby-genteel place. And he did his duty very cheerfully, and kept tolerably well within his allowance, and took such pleasures as came in his way, without any very clear outlook towards the future, but always with some hope of active service and promotion. So long as he had "something to do"—a little cricket or boating, a tolerable amount of parties—he neither looked too closely into the pedigree of his entertainers, nor gave himself any airs on the subject of his own birth and connections. For what was he, after all?—not even an Honourable himself, but the son of an Honourable—plain Mr Lindores, no more than Mr Smith or Mr Jones. It never occurred to him that his position demanded anything of him in those days; for what position had he but that of a lieutenant in the 120th? In society, though he would pretend now and then, like the rest, to talk of this and that girl as having money—or "tin," as it was more usually called—such a prudential consideration never went beyond the mere light flutter of talk; and he liked to dance, not with the heiresses, but with the prettiest girls and the best dancers, as was natural and befitting—to marry anybody being entirely out of his *rôle*. He knew himself to be wiser than his mother, and to know more of life than even the governor himself, who (no fault of his) was growing an old fogy in the course of nature; but on the whole, he was respectful enough to these old persons when he was with them, and in his way fond of them all, and even proud of little Edith's prettiness, and the distinguished looks of Carry, who was always like a princess though she was not pretty. When, however, that sudden and unlooked-for advancement came, and Robin Lindores at one bound became Lord Rintoul, the change that passed over him was something wonderful. It was as great a revolution as that which had converted the gentle and fastidious *dilettante* of former years into the energetic, ambitious Scotch Earl, who kept his family in awe and wonder. Robin changed as much, or almost as much, as his father had changed. He left his simple regiment, and all its little garrison gaieties, and became a Guardsman, and was introduced into society. He

learned the chatter of the drawing-rooms and clubs, and to talk familiarly about everybody, and to think he understood all the motives (almost always supposed to be bad ones) which swayed their conduct. Perhaps it was his familiarity with these tales which drove the young man into such an alarmed state of susceptibility as to the risk of encountering in his own person, or in his family, a similar freedom of comment. He said to himself that he knew "how fellows talked," and he could not bear that his sister should be pulled to pieces among them, and known as a rustic or an *exaltée*—one of the strong-minded sisterhood on the one hand, or a foolish bread-and-butter girl on the other. And Rintoul had become fully possessed by the idea that to get Edith "off" was the first duty of the family. He felt that his pride would be touched if she did not secure a good marriage before the end of the season. "Fellows would talk:" they would say that she had been a failure; that it was no good Lady Lindores hawking her daughter about; that she had tried very hard for this man, or flung herself at the other's head, but it was no use. He knew that he had heard such things said a hundred times—perhaps been moved to echo them himself on the very slightest warrant; but the blood rushed to his face when it occurred to him that his sister in her turn might be subjected to such comments. And the only way for her to escape them was to succeed. Therefore it was with a conviction of the importance of the crisis, which affected every nerve in his body, as well as all the powers of his mind, that Rintoul appeared in the little morning-room at Eaton Place. Every girl was said to throw herself at somebody's head—to make a dead set at one man or another. Without that purpose no one was supposed to go into society. When she succeeded, and the man was secured, her triumph, it is true, was always discussed in the same way; but that was once for all, and the matter was done with. Therefore it was evident to Rintoul that Edith must succeed. She must secure somebody before the season was out. He could not bear to have it said of her that she was hawked about. At the same time, this anxious young man saw the difficulties. His "people" had not a very large acquaintance. His mother was not half up to her duties as a mother. Edith herself, though a very pretty girl, was not a beauty of the undeniable and all-conquering sort. So much the more grave were all the difficulties of the situation, and so much the more important all the expedients that could be adopted, all the precautions that Rintoul—perhaps, he felt, the only one of the family who fully perceived them—must take. Their appearance, their gowns and bonnets, the places they intended to appear in,—all these were of the utmost consequence—a consequence, he was afraid, which the real head of the party, she who ought to be the chief mover in the matter, could scarcely be got to understand, much less to take into earnest consideration as she ought.

This was why his pleasure in seeing his people was shadowed by so much anxiety. His smile was only on the lower part of his face—all the rest was clouded with an almost fretful disquietude. He did not even know whether he could make them understand the importance of the crisis. They would receive him, he felt sure, with levity, with minds directed to things of no consequence whatever; and it was natural that this sense, that he was the only person who understood the gravity of the situation, should make Rintoul's countenance serious. As he kissed his mother and sister, he looked them all over, taking in every detail of their appearance, and uttered a mental thanksgiving, and felt an enormous relief to find that there was little to remark upon. "They would not look amiss anywhere," he said to himself. But this gleam of contentment was soon dimmed by the reflection that you never can know how a woman will look till you have seen her in her outdoor costume. The bonnet is such a test! Most likely they wore impossible bonnets. So the contraction returned to his forehead once more.

"So here you are," he said. "I am mighty glad to see you. I thought everything worth while would be over before you came."

"And what is there that is worth while that is not over?" said his mother. "We defer to your superior knowledge. We in our ignorance were thinking of the concerts, and the pictures, and the new play."

"Ah, that's all very well. *They're* not over, of course, nor will be so long as the season lasts," said Rintoul, carelessly. "I was thinking of more important things. I think I've got you cards for the next Chiswick *fête*. It wanted diplomacy. I got Lady Reston, who is *au mieux* with Archy Chaunter, to get them for you; but you must have very nice toilets for that. The new Irish beauty went to the last a perfect fright in poplin and Limerick lace, all native product, and was the talk of the town. Thank heaven there's nothing but tartan indigenous to Scotland!"

"Let us go in tartan, mamma," said Edith. "It would be a graceful way of showing our nationality, and please the people who are going to elect Robin for the county."

"If you think it would please the county," said the Countess, with much gravity, which almost paralysed Rintoul; but she added, shaking her head, "Alas! the county is not Highland at all, and scoffs at the tartan. We must try some other way."

"I wish you wouldn't speak nonsense to aggravate me," cried the young man. "How am I to know when you're in earnest,

and when you are laughing? But one thing I can tell you: unless you are well dressed, you need never think of going at all. Old-fashioned gowns that do well enough for the country—though even in the country I don't think you ought ever to be careless of your dress——"

"You seem to be an authority," said Edith, laughing. "You will have to tell us if our gowns are old-fashioned."

"Well, I don't suppose I am an authority: I don't understand details; but I can tell on the whole, as well as another, whether a woman looks as she ought when she's got up."

"*Comme il faut*. I thought the phrase was untranslatable, but Robin has mastered it," said Lady Lindores.

"You need not laugh at me, mother; and I wish you wouldn't, all of you, call me by that absurd name. I feel like a shepherd boy in a pastoral—the hero, you know,—like Fidelio or Cherubino. Oh, I don't say you are to call me Rintoul—that if you like; but I don't mind Bob——"

"Bob!" the mother and sister cried in one breath. They had all been secretly proud of that pet name of Robin, which he had borne from a child.

"It's not worth talking of," he said carelessly, feeling something of ridicule involved; for though he was not clever, he was sufficiently sympathetic to be conscious of the sentiment in the minds of the others. "The real question is, what you are going to do while you are in town. I have told everybody you were coming; but, mamma, I hope you won't balk everything by going on about theatres and pictures, and so forth. Society is a hundred times more important. It is not only amusing ourselves we have got to think of. It is all very well to laugh," he said, with the most solemn air of offended dignity, "but anybody who knew the world would tell you the same thing."

"My dear boy, I thought I knew a little about the world; but I daresay I am mistaken. I hope, however, you will permit us to amuse ourselves a little now and then. Edith wants to see something and hear something while she is in London. She has not had your advantages——"

"My advantages don't count for very much," said Rintoul, half irritated, half flattered, "and it's just Edith I'm thinking of. There is more to be taken into consideration for her than either amusement or what you call improving her mind. Edith is the entire question. It is to do her justice that is my whole thought."

Edith, on hearing this, laughed out, yet flamed crimson, with mingled ridicule and suspicion. "In what respect am I to have justice?" she said.

"You needn't fire up. All that I want is your good. You ought to be seen: you ought to have your chance like the rest. How are you ever to have that if my mother and you fly about skylarking in all sorts of unlikely places, and keep out of the way of—every opportunity?"

Rintoul, though carried away by his feelings to the point of making this plain statement, was rather alarmed when he had said it, and stopped somewhat breathless. It was alarming to be confronted by his sister's indignant countenance and the angry sparkle in her eyes.

"Do you know what he means, mother?" she cried. "Did you bring me to London to market? That's what he means. Did you come to set up a booth in Vanity Fair? If you did, you must find other wares. Rintoul would make such a good salesman, it is a pity to balk him. But I am not going to be put up to auction," cried the girl, springing to her feet. Then she laughed, though she was so angry. "I am going to get ready for a walk," she said. "I think that delightful bonnet that Miss Macalister in Dunearn made for me will be the very thing for the Park——"

"Heaven above! do you let her have bonnets from Miss Macalister in Dunearn?" cried Rintoul, dismayed, as his sister disappeared. "Even in the country I would never consent to that."

"You must not pour too much wisdom upon us all at once," said his mother, "especially upon Edith, who is not used to it." Lady Lindores could not take it all seriously. She was vexed at the bottom of her heart, yet could not but smile at the oracle who had so short a time before been simple Robin—her nice, kind, silly, lovable boy. He had not ceased to be lovable even in his new development as Mentor and man of the world.

"That is all very well, mother; but if you make a joke of it, what is the good of coming to town at all?" cried Rintoul,

with his serious face—too serious to be angry. "Edith may flare up if she pleases—she doesn't know any better; but surely you must understand she has never had her chance. Who is to see her down in the country? There was Torrance of course, but Carry snapped him up."

"Robin," said his mother, her countenance changing, "I desire you will not speak in that heartless, vulgar way. Yes, my boy, it is vulgar, though you think it so wise. Poor Carry, to her sorrow, has snapped up, as you say, a most unsuitable husband and a miserable life. I wish I was free of blame in that matter. We must make the best of it now, since there's no remedy; but to speak as if Carry's marriage was something to be envied——"

"Well, Torrance is rather a brute," Rintoul acknowledged, somewhat subdued; "but what a place and what a position! Carry's boy, with our connection and all that money, may be—anything she chooses to make him——"

"Carry's boy is not half so much to me as Carry herself," said Lady Lindores, gravely; "but that is done, and we must make the best of it," she added, with a sigh.

"A girl may pick up a bad husband anywhere," said Rintoul, regaining his confidence. "It just as often happens in a hot love-match as in anything else. There's Lily Trevor, old Lord Warhawk's daughter, would never rest till they had let her marry Smithers of the Blues—and they say he beats her. Charley Floyd says there never was such a wretched *ménage*; and she might have married half-a-dozen fellows, every one a better match than Smithers. There's no accounting for these sort of things. But, mamma, unless we're all mad together, we must give Edith her chance. By Jove, when you think of it, she's past her first bloom!" ("and that's mostly the thing that fetches," he added parenthetically, under his breath)—"she's twenty-one, mother! The moment she's seen anywhere, people will begin to calculate when she came out: and it's three seasons back! That does a girl more harm than anything. There's always a little added on to every one's age, and I shouldn't wonder in the least if they made her out to be thirty! She doesn't look it, fortunately; but what are looks, when half the women one sees are made up like pictures? But mind my words, mother—you will repent it all your life if you don't make up your mind now to give Edith one real good chance."

Lady Lindores made no reply. She began to lose her sense of amusement, and to feel vexed and humiliated, sore and wroth, as parents do when their children parade before them sentiments which are unworthy. Perhaps a woman cannot be quite just in such a predicament. It may be all an unconscious fiction, this atrocious precocious cynicism and worldliness of youth. Nothing is ever so cruelly conventional, so shamelessly egoistical, as the young disciple of social philosophy, who is possibly hiding a quivering and terrified youthful heart beneath that show of abominable wisdom. But it is hard for a mother whose whole heart is bent on finding excellence and nobleness in her child, to be tolerant of what appears to be such apparent and unmistakable unworthiness. Lady Lindores felt, while her son was speaking, as if some barbarous giant had got her heart in his hand and crushed it, clinching his cruel grasp. She did not look at him while he pleaded that Edith might have her chance, nor answer him when he had spoken. What could she say to the boy who could thus discourse to her like an old man learned in all wickedness? There was a poignant sting of injured pride, too, in the sensation with which she listened to him. This from the boy she had trained, to whom she must have given his first conception of life, of women and their ways! Had it been her example, against her will, unconscious of any such possibility, that had taught him to despise them? She looked at the young face so dear to her, and which was now full of all the gravity of conviction, endeavouring to enforce its doctrines upon her mind, with a mixture of hot impatience and hopeless toleration. Poor boy! this was what he really thought, honestly believed, though he was *her* son! His eyes were quite impressive in their sincerity. "She ought to see people," Rintoul said; "she ought to be seen. She has never been hawked about like other girls, so it does not matter so much that this isn't her first season. People may forget it if we take no notice. But in another year, mother, if she does not have her chance now—in another year," cried the anxious brother, with threatening solemnity, "it will be quite another matter. She has kept her bloom pretty well, but it will be gone by that time; and when it's gone, she'll not have half the chance. A girl *must* make hay while the sun shines," he added, more and more dogmatically: "we all of us ought to remember that, but for a girl it's imperative—there is nothing that tells like the first bloom."

Still Lady Lindores did not make any reply.

"I wonder at you, mother," he cried, exasperated. "I should have thought it would be your first object to see Edith happily settled. And when you think how difficult it is—how many there are always ready, waiting to snap up any fellow with money! I believe," he said, with a sort of prophetic wrath, a visionary anger at what might have been,—"I believe if my father had not interfered, Carry was as likely as not to have married that Professor fellow. By the way, isn't Erskine at Dalrulzian? and I daresay you have had him up at Lindores?"

"Certainly, we have had him up at Lindores. What is your objection to that?" said Lady Lindores, quietly.

And now it was Rintoul's turn to sigh and shake his head with hopeless impatience. Was it impossible to get her to understand? "I don't know what you people are thinking of," he said, with a kind of quiet despair. "Though you know what mischief happened before, you will have that fellow to the house, you will let him be with Edith as much as he pleases."

"Edith!" cried Lady Lindores: and then she stopped short, and added with a laugh, "I assure you, Robin, there's no danger in that quarter. The entire county has made up its mind that John Erskine is to marry Nora Barrington, and nobody else, whatever other people may say."

Now it was Rintoul's turn to be red and indignant. He was so much startled, that he sprang to his feet with an excitement altogether without justification. "Nora Barrington!" he cried; "I would like to know what right any one has to mix up the name of an innocent girl—who never, I am certain, had either part or lot in such wretched schemings——"

"The same kind of schemings—but far more innocent—as those you would involve your sister in," cried Lady Lindores, rising too, with a deep flush upon her face.

"Nothing of the kind, mother—besides, the circumstances are entirely different," he cried, hotly. "Edith *must* marry well. She must marry to advantage, for the sake of the family. But Nora—a girl that would never lead herself to—to—that never had a thought of interest in her head—that doesn't know what money means——"

"I am glad there is somebody you believe in, Robin," his mother said.

The young man saw his inconsistency, but that mattered little. It is only in other people that we find consistency to be necessary. The consciousness made him hotter and less coherent perhaps, but no more. "The cases are entirely different. I see no resemblance between them," he said, with resentment and indignation in every tone. Lady Lindores would have been more than human if she had not followed up her advantage.

"Yes," she said, "in Nora's case even I myself, though I am no match-maker, feel disposed to aid in the scheme. For nothing could be more entirely suitable. The same position, the same class, the same tastes; and the Barringtons are poor, so that it would be a great comfort to them to see their girl in a nice house of her own; and she is very fond of Dalrulzian, and much liked in the neighbourhood. I can see everything in favour of the plan—nothing against it."

"Except that it will never come to anything," cried young Rintoul. "Good heavens! Nora—a girl that one never could think of in any such way,—that never in her life—I'll answer for it—made any plans about whom she was to marry. Mother, I think you might have so much respect for one of your own sex as to acknowledge that."

"It is time to appeal to my respect for my own sex," cried Lady Lindores, with an angry laugh. If this was how the tables were to be turned upon her! When she left the room, angry, yet indignantly amused at the same time, Rintoul reflected with hot indignation upon the want of sympathy and fellow-feeling among women. "When they do see a girl that's above all that sort of thing, that it's desecration to think of in that way, they either don't understand her, or they're jealous of her," he said to himself, with profound conviction. "Women don't know what justice means."

CHAPTER XIV.

The present writer has already confessed to a certain disinclination to venture upon any exposition of the manners and customs of the great; and should an attempt be made to thread the mazes of the season, and to represent in sober black and white the brilliant assemblies, the crowded receptions, the drawing-rooms and ball-rooms and banqueting-rooms, all full of that sheen of satin and shimmer of pearls which only the most delicate manipulation, the lightest exquisite touch, can secure? Could the writer's pen be dipped in tints as ethereal as those which fill the brush (if that is not too crude a word) of the accomplished President, then perhaps the task might be attempted; but common ink is not equal to it. Though Lady Lindores was negligent of her duties, and did not give herself up as she ought to have done to the task of getting invitations and doing her daughter justice, yet her shortcomings were made up by the superior energy and knowledge of her husband and son. And as a matter of fact, they went everywhere, and saw a great deal of society. So far were they from being under the standard at that Chiswick *fête*, as Rintoul nervously anticipated, that the graceful mother and pretty daughter were noticed by eyes whose notice is the highest distinction, and inquired into with that delightful royal curiosity which is so complimentary to mankind, and which must be one of the things which make the painful trade of sovereignty tolerable. Both the ladies, indeed, had so much *succès*, that the anxious young Guardsman, who stalked about after them, too much disturbed to get any satisfaction in his own person, and watching their demeanour as with a hundred eyes, gradually allowed the puckers in his forehead to relax, and went off guard with a sigh of relief. Rintoul was more than relieved—he was delighted with the impression produced by Edith's fresh beauty. "Oh, come! she's a pretty little thing, if you please; but not all that," he said, confused by the excess of approbation accorded to her by some complimentary friend. There was one drawback, however, to this satisfaction, and that was, that neither did Edith "mind a bit" who was introduced to her, who danced with her, or took her down to dinner,—whether a magnificent young peer or a penniless younger son; nor, still more culpable, did her mother pay the attention she ought to this, or take care as she ought that her daughter's smiles were not thrown away. She was known once, indeed, to have—inconceivable folly!—actually gone the length of introducing to Edith, in a ball-room bristling with eligible partners, a brilliant young artist, a "painter-fellow," the very last person who ought to have been put in the girl's way. "If a girl goes wrong of herself, and is an idiot, why, you say, it's because she knows no better," Rintoul said; "but when it's her mother!" The young painter danced very well, and was bright and interesting beyond, it is to be supposed, the general level; and he hung about the ladies the whole evening, never long away from one or the other. Rintoul felt that if it happened only one other evening, all the world would say that there was something going on, and possibly some society paper would inform its anxious readers that "a marriage is arranged." On the other hand, that evening was marked with a white stone on which the young Marquis of Millefleurs, son of the Duke of Lavender, made himself conspicuous as one of Edith's admirers, pursuing her wherever she went, till the foolish girl was disposed to be angry; though Lady Lindores this time had the sense to excuse him as being so young, and to add that he seemed "a nice sort of boy,"—not a way, certainly, to recommend so desirable an adorer to a fanciful girl, but still perhaps, in the circumstances, as much as could be expected. Lady Lindores received with great composure a few days after, an announcement from her husband that he had asked the youth to dinner. She repeated her praise with a perfectly calm countenance—

"I shall be glad to see him, Robert. I thought him a mere boy, very young, but frank and pleasant as a boy should be."

"I don't know what you call a boy. I believe he is four-and-twenty," said Lord Lindores, with some indignation; and then he added in a subdued tone, as knowing that he had something less easy to suggest, "I have asked some one else whom you will probably not look on in the same light. I should much rather have left him out, but there was no getting Millefleurs without him. He has been travelling with him as a sort of tutor-companion, I suppose." Here he seemed to pause to get up his courage, which was so remarkable that his wife's suspicions were instantly aroused. She turned towards him with a look of roused attention.

"I don't hesitate to say that I am sorry to bring him again in contact with the family. Of course the whole affair was folly from beginning to end. But the young fellow himself behaved well enough. There is nothing against him personally, and I am rather willing to let him see that it has entirely passed from our minds."

"Of whom are you speaking?" cried Lady Lindores.

The Earl actually hesitated, stammered, almost blushed, so far as a man of fifty is capable of blushing. "You remember young Beaufort, whom we saw so much of in——"

"Beaufort!" cried Lady Lindores,—"*Edward!*" her voice rose into a sort of shriek.

"He certainly was never Edward to me. I thought it best, when Millefleurs presented him to me, to receive him at once as an old acquaintance. And I hope you will do so also, without any fuss. It is very important that it should be made quite clear we have no fear of him, or feeling in the matter."

"Edward!" Lady Lindores said again. "How can I receive him as if I had no feeling in the matter? He has called me mother. I have kissed him as Carry's future husband. Good heavens! and Carry poor Carry!"

"I did not know you had been such a fool," he cried, reddening; then after a pause, "I see no reason why Carry should be called poor. Her position at home is in some points better than our own. And it is not necessary to tell Carry of every one who enters this house, which is so much out of her way."

"My poor child, my poor child!" the mother said, wringing her hands. "She divined this. She had a fear of something. She thought John Erskine might invite him. Oh, you need not suppose this was ever a subject of conversation between us!—but it seems that Mr Torrance suspected John Erskine himself to be the man. Edith surprised them in the midst of a painful scene on this subject, and then Carry told me of her terror lest John should invite—she did not say whom. It was not necessary between us to name any names."

"What did Torrance know about 'the man'? as you say; what had he to do with it? You women are past bearing. This was some of your confidences, I suppose."

"It was Carry's own communication to the man who is her husband. She thought it her duty, poor, poor child!—and now, is it I that am to be made the instrument of further torture?" Lady Lindores cried.

"The instrument of—fiddlesticks! This is really not a subject for heroics," said her husband, fretfully. "I ask you to receive as an acquaintance merely—no intimacy required of you—a man against whom I know nothing. These absurd passages you refer to, *I* had no knowledge of. It was idiotic; but fortunately it is all over, and no harm done. For Carry's sake even, that nobody may be able to say that there was any embarrassment on her account, it seems to me your duty to receive him—especially as his coming involves Millefleurs."

"What do I care for that boy? What do you want with that boy?" Lady Lindores cried. She did not show her usual desire to please and soothe him, but spoke sharply, with an impatience which she could not control.

"Whatever my reason may be, I hope I have a right to invite Millefleurs if I please," said the Earl, with a cloudy smile, "and his companion with him, whoever he may be."

Lady Lindores made no reply, nor was there anything further said between them on the subject. The intimation, however, almost overwhelmed the woman, who in these last years had learned to contemplate her husband in so different a light. Enough has been said about the tragical unworthiness which tears asunder those who are most closely bound together, and kills love, as people say, by killing respect. To kill love is terrible, but yet it is an emancipation in its way; and no man or woman can suffer for the unworthiness of one whom he or she has ceased to love, with anything approaching the pain which we feel when those who never can cease to be dear to us fall into evil. And love is so fatally robust, and can bear so many attacks! Lady Lindores, who divined her husband's motives, and the unscrupulous adherence to them through thick and thin which would recoil from nothing, suffered from that and every other discovery that he was not what she had thought him, with bitter pangs, from which she would have been free had he ceased to be the first object of her affections. But that he could never cease to be; and his faults tore her as with red-hot pincers. She could not bear to think of it, and yet was obliged to think of it, unable to forget it. That he should not shrink from the embarrassment and pain of renewing an acquaintance so broken up, when it happened to appear to him useful for his own ends, was more to her than even the pain she would feel in herself receiving the man who might have been Carry's husband—whom Carry had, as people say, jilted in order to marry a richer rival. How could she look him in the face, knowing this? How could she talk to him without allusion to the past? But even bad as this was, it was more heartrending still to think why it was that he was invited. She had to explain it to Edith too, who was thunderstruck. "Edward! you don't mean *Edward*, mamma?" "Yes, my darling, I mean Edward, no one else. He must not be Edward now, but Mr Beaufort, to you and me. Your father was obliged to ask him, for he was with Lord Millefleurs." "But what does he want with Lord Millefleurs? I would rather have had nobody in the house till we go home than ask Edward. And what, oh what will you say to Carry, mamma?" "We must say nothing," the mother cried, with a quivering lip. "It must not be breathed to her. Thank heaven, we have no old servants! At all costs Carry must not know." "I thought you said, mamma, that there never was such a thing as a secret—that everything was known?" "And so I did," cried Lady Lindores, distracted. "Why do you remind me

of what I have said? It is not as if I could help it. We must stand firm, and get through it as well as we can, and think as little as we can of what may follow. There is no other way." This was how Lady Lindores bore the brunt of her child's inquiries. As for Lord Rintoul, he declared that he understood his father perfectly. "If Beaufort were left out, he'd fill Millefleurs's mind with all sorts of prejudices. I'd rather not meet the fellow myself; but as it can't be helped, it must be done, I suppose," he said. "He will never say anything, that is certain. And what can that boy's opinion be to us?" said Lady Lindores. Her son stared at her for a moment open-eyed. "Mamma, you are the most wonderful woman I ever knew," he said. "If you don't mean it, it's awfully clever; and if you do mean it, you are such an innocent as never was seen. Why, don't you know that everybody is after Millefleurs? He is the great match of the season. I wish I thought Edith had a chance." Lady Lindores covered her face with her hands, hating the very light. Her boy, too! They pursued their ignoble way side by side with her, scarcely believing that it was possible she did not see and share their meaning, and in her heart approve of all their efforts.

"What is wrong now?" said Rintoul. "I declare I never know what to say. Sometimes you take things quite easily. Sometimes you will flare up at nothing at all."

"Do you think it is nothing at all that your sister and I should be brought into what you yourselves call a husband-hunt?" cried Lady Lindores. "Have you not told me of a dozen women who are trying to catch this man and that? Don't you think it is ignominious to expose us to the same reproach? Perhaps they are just as innocent of it as I."

"Oh, trust them for that," said Rintoul, with a laugh. "Of course it is said of everybody. It will be said of you just the same; we can't help that. But surely you can see yourself—even *you* can see—that when a fellow like Millefleurs actually puts himself out of the way to come after a girl like Edith——"

"Robin!" cried his mother (a little *accès* of passion seized her). "Do you think Edith—Edith, your sister—is not worth a hundred boys like this Millefleurs? What do you mean by coming out of his way? Is it the fashion now that girls like Edith should put themselves at the disposal of a little jackanapes—a bit of a boy—a——"

"Don't lose your temper, mamma," said the young man, with a laugh. "But now you've had it out," said this wise son, "only just be reasonable, and think a moment. Millefleurs is a great catch. There's not such a big fish to be landed anywhere; and Edith is no better than a hundred others. Do hear a fellow out. She's very pretty and nice, and all that; but there's heaps of pretty, nice girls—and the prettier they are, and the nicer they are, the less they have a penny to bless themselves with," he added, in a regretful parenthesis. "There's a hundred of them, and there's only one of him. Of course he knows that well enough. Of course he knows it's a great thing when he lets a girl see that he admires her; and if her people are such fools as to let him slip through their fingers for want of a little trouble—why, then, they deserve to lose their chance,—and that's all I can say," Rintoul said.

Once more Lady Lindores was silenced. What was the use of saying anything? Indignation was out of place, or anything that she could say of love profaned and marriage desecrated. To speak of the only foundation of a true union to this world-instructed boy—what would be the use of it? She swallowed down as best she could the bitterness, the pain, the disappointment and contempt, which it is anguish to feel in such a case. After a while she said with a smile, commanding herself, "And you, Robin, who are so clever as to know all this, are you too a catch, my poor boy? are you pursued by mothers, and competed for by girls?—not, of course, to the same extent as Lord Millefleurs—I recognise the difference; but something, I suppose, in the same way?"

"Well," said Rintoul, caressing his moustache, "not to the same extent, as you say, and not in the same way perhaps. I'm nobody, of course, when Millefleurs is there; but still, you know, when there's no Millefleurs on the horizon—why, one has one's value, mother. It's an old title, for one thing, and Scotch estates, which people think better than they are, perhaps. They don't throw heiresses at my head; but still, you know, in a general way——"

As he sat stroking that moustache which was not very mature yet, but rather young and scanty for its age, with a little smile of subdued vanity about his mouth, and a careless air of making light of his advantages, what woman could have helped laughing? But when a mother laughs at her boy, the ridicule hurts more than it amuses her. "I see," she said. "Then don't you think, Robin, you who are so clear-sighted, that this young man will see through our attentions, if we pay him attention, and laugh at our efforts to—catch him (that's the word, is it?), as much as you do yourself?"

"All right," said Rintoul; "so he will, of course; but what does that matter when a fellow takes a fancy into his head? Of course he knows you will want to catch him if you can—that stands to reason—everybody wants to catch him; but if he

likes Edith, he will never mind that—if he likes Edith——"

"Robin, hold your tongue," cried his mother, almost violently. She felt that she could have boxed his ears in the heat of her displeasure. "I will not hear your sister's name bandied about so. You disgust me—you horrify me—you make me ill to hear you! *My* son! and you venture to speak of your sister so!"

Rintoul, arrested in his speech, stared for a moment open-mouthed; and then he shook his head with a look of impatient toleration, and uttered a weary sigh. "If you will not hear reason, of course it's in vain my arguing with you," he said.

These several encounters, and the heavy thought of what might be to come soon, took away all the gloss of pleasure that had been upon Lady Lindores's first entrance into society. She thought, indeed, there had never been any pleasure at all in it; but this was an unintentional self-deception. She thought that Carry's pale image had come between her and every lighter emotion. She did not herself know how natural she was—her mood changing, her heart rising in spite of herself, a bright day, a pleasant company, the consciousness of being approved, and even admired, giving her some moments of gratification in spite of all; but after these discussions, she was so twisted and turned the wrong way, so irritated and disenchanted by her husband and son, that she felt herself sick and disgusted with London and all the world. If she could but get home! but yet at home there was poor Carry, who would ask after everything, and from whom it would be so difficult to conceal the reappearance of her old lover: if she had but wings like a dove!—but oh, whither to go to be at rest! One must be alone, and free of all loves and relationships, to hope for that anywhere by flight. And what was before her was appalling to her: to meet the man whom she had thought of as her son, to keep a calm countenance, and talk to him as if no different kind of intercourse had ever been between them—to avoid all confidence, all *épanchements*, and to keep him at the safe distance of acquaintanceship: how was she to do it? She said to herself that she did not know how to look him in the face, he who had been so deeply wronged. And then she began to hope that he, full of delicacy and fine feeling as he used to be, would see how impossible it was that they should meet, and would refuse to come. This hope kept her up till the last moment. When the evening came, it was with a quivering emotion which she could scarcely restrain, that she waited to receive her guests, hoping more strenuously every moment, and trying to persuade herself, that Beaufort would not come. He had accepted the invitation; but what was that? He would accept, no doubt, in order to show them that he had got over it—that he bore no malice—and then he would send his excuses. Her eyes were feverish with eagerness and suspense when the door opened. She could not hear the names announced for the beating of her heart in her ears; but it was only when she saw against the light the shadow of a figure not to be forgotten, and heard the doors open and shut, that she realised the fact that he had really presented himself. Then it seemed to Lady Lindores that all her pulses stood still, and that an appalling stillness instead of their loud flutter of beating was in her ears and in the world. He had really come! She became conscious of her husband's voice speaking to her, and the sound of his name, and the touch of his hand, and then she regained her composure desperately, by such an effort as it seemed to her she had never made before. For to faint, or to call attention to herself in any way, was what must not be done. And by-and-by the moment was over, and the party were all seated at table, eating and drinking, and talking commonplaces. When Lady Lindores looked round the table and saw Beaufort's face among the other faces, she seemed to herself to be in a dream. The only other face of which she was conscious was that of Edith, perfectly colourless, and full of inquiry and emotion; and at the other end of the table her husband, throwing a threatening, terrified look across the flowers and the lights, and all the prettinesses of the table. These three she seemed to see, and no more.

But Lord Millefleurs by her side was full of pleasant chatter and cheerful boyish confidence, and demanded her attention. He was aware how important he was; and it never occurred to him that Beaufort, who was an excellent fellow, but nobody in particular, could distract the attention of those who surrounded him from himself. Millefleurs sat between Lady Lindores and Edith. It was a position that was his due.

"I am so sorry you are not well," he said. "The fact is, it is London, Lady Lindores. I know your complaint, for it is mine too. Was there ever anything so irrational as to carry on this treadmill as we all do—you out of a wholesome country life, no doubt, and I out of a wandering existence, always in the open air, always in motion? What do we do it for? Lady Edith, tell me, what do we do it for?—I am asking everybody. Half of it would be very well, you know, but the whole of it is purgatory. I am sure that is your opinion. Is it merely fashion, or is it something in our nature which requires extravagance in all we do——"

"There is not much extravagance in what we do habitually," said Lady Lindores, "which perhaps makes this outbreak of activity less alarming to us. It is a change; and as for Edith, this is virtually her first season——"

"I thought it was your first season," cried the little Marquis. "I knew it must be so." This he said with decision, as if in

triumph over some adversary. "There is a look which one is never deceived in. I have seen all my sisters come out, so I am quite an authority. They get to look at things quite in another way; they get so knowing, as bad—as I am myself," the youth added in perfect good faith, with a serious look upon his infantile countenance, and a lisping utterance which gave point to the speech. Lord Millefleurs, though he did not need to study appearances, was yet aware of the piquancy of the contrast between his round childlike countenance and the experience of his talk.

"I should not have thought you were so bad," said Edith, beguiled into smiling. "I think you look as if you were in your first season too——"

"Oh, bad—Bohemian, a waif and a stray," said Millefleurs; "you cannot think what an abandoned little person I was, till Beaufort took me in hand. You knew Beaufort, abroad somewhere? So he tells me. How lucky for him to be able to renew such an acquaintance! I need not tell you what a fine fellow he is—he has made me quite a reformed character. Do not laugh, Lady Edith; you hurt my feelings. You would not laugh if I were a coal-heaver addressing a meeting and telling how wicked I had been."

"And have you really been so wicked? You do not look so," said Edith, who, amused in spite of herself, began to get used to the grave countenance of Beaufort, seated on the other side of the table. Both the ladies were grateful to Millefleurs, who chattered on, and gave them time to recover themselves.

"No," he said, "that is what makes it so funny, they all tell me. I am a wolf in sheep's clothing; at least I was—I was, until Beaufort took me in hand. At present I am good, as good as gold. I get up early, and go to bed—when I can. I go out to three parties every night, and stand about at everybody's receptions. I even pay calls in the morning. I shall go to a levee soon—I know I shall," he said, in an accent of deep conviction. "Can you think of anything more virtuous than that?"

"And what has your Bohemianism consisted in, Lord Millefleurs?"

"Good heavens!" said the self-accused, "do you venture to ask me, Lady Edith?—everything that is dreadful. For months I never wrote a letter, for months I never had a penny. It was the best fun in the world. The sting of being poor is when you can't help it. I believe, for my part, that the most luxurious condition in this world is when you know you can be well off at any moment, and yet are half starving. No, I never was half starving. I worked with these hands;" and he held out a pair of plump, delicate, pink-tinged hands, not without a little vanity. "To feel that it's quite a chance whether you have ever any dinner again, to be altogether uncertain how you're to get shelter for the night—and yet to be quite sure that nothing dreadful can happen to you, that at the worst you can always 'draw a bugle from your side,' and be surrounded by 'five-and-thirty belted knights,'—I assure you it is the most delightful excitement in the world."

It was impossible to resist this baby-faced and lisping adventurer. The mother and daughter both yielded to his fascinations. The conversation became more and more animated and amusing. At the other end of the table they were not by any means so cheerful; but Lord Lindores beheld with a satisfaction far more solid than any sort of amusement, the result of his experiment. Edith, who had been pale and *distraite*, doing herself no sort of justice, when they sat down at table, had roused up, and was now bright and responsive, interested in all that was being said to her. And Millefleurs, it was evident, was enjoying himself thoroughly. Two such women giving their full attention to him, listening to all his adventures—which were neither few nor small—was enough to raise him to the height of satisfaction. Lord Lindores talked very rationally and agreeably to the lady next him, but it was with an effort that he caught her not very brilliant remarks, so much interested was he in what was going on at the other end of the room. As for Rintoul, he gave himself up to his dinner. Things were going as well as possible, he thought; and though Millefleurs was a little Bohemian, he was the heir of a Duke, and could do no wrong.

It was thus that Lady Lindores was beguiled almost to forget the other guest at the table, whose coming had affected her so deeply. Her interest was easily excited, and the little Marquis was delightful. And it was not till she had returned to the comparative quiet of the drawing-room that the recollection of Beaufort came back to her. Much of the danger seemed over. It would be over altogether in another hour, and the tremor in her mind was not so all-pervading as when she first saw his familiar face approaching. But she was not to get over her ordeal so easily. When the gentlemen came up-stairs, Beaufort came at once towards her. He stood in front of her for a moment, as if claiming his right to be heard, shutting everybody else out. She felt a sort of fascination in his gaze, and could make no attempt to begin any conversation. Her tremor returned: she looked up wistfully at him without anything to say, clasping and unclasping in unspoken appeal her unsteady hands.

"It is a long time since we have met," he said at length.

"Yes—it is a long time, Mr Beaufort."

"And many things have happened since that time."

She raised her clasped hands a little from her lap in mute entreaty, and made no other reply; but it did not occur to her—what was the case—that he was quite as much excited as she was, and did not notice her agitation, being so fully occupied with his own.

"I hope—that all of your family are—well: and happy, Lady Lindores."

"Very well. Mr Beaufort, I know that there is much that must have seemed strange and cruel to you. How can I speak of it now? It is impossible to explain."

He paused a little, replying nothing. Then he said suddenly, "If you would let me come and talk to you—talk of everything—I should feel it a great kindness—when I could see you alone."

She put out her hands now in sudden alarm and deprecation. "Mr Beaufort, it could do no good, it would be very painful. Do not ask me to do it. For me it would be a terrible ordeal—and no advantage to you."

"I think it would be an advantage," he said gently.

Again she clasped her hands, imploring forbearance. "I do not wish to try to justify—but after so long a time—is it right, is it kind, do you think, to press me so?"

"Let me come and talk to you," he said; "you need not fear my reproaches. May not I know how it was, how it came about? I will not complain. How can I cease to be interested, if that were all? Let me come and talk to you—let me know how it was."

Lady Lindores did not know what to answer or how to hide her emotion. She was trying to form an evasive answer with lips that faltered, when suddenly her husband came to her relief.

"I should not have expected you to have had part in adventures such as I hear Millefleurs relating. Where was he really when you picked him up?" said Lord Lindores.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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