THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

By

George Meredith

VOL.-4

Freeditorial

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XXVIII

Beauty, of course, is for the hero. Nevertheless, it is not always he on whom beauty works its most conquering influence. It is the dull commonplace man into whose slow brain she drops like a celestial light, and burns lastingly. The poet, for instance, is a connoisseur of beauty: to the artist she is a model. These gentlemen by much contemplation of her charms wax critical. The days when they had hearts being gone, they are haply divided between the blonde and the brunette; the aquiline nose and the Proserpine; this shaped eye and that. But go about among simple unprofessional fellows, boors, dunderheads, and here and there you shall find some barbarous intelligence which has had just strength enough to conceive, and has taken Beauty as its Goddess, and knows but one form to worship, in its poor stupid fashion, and would perish for her. Nay, more: the man would devote all his days to her, though he is dumb as a dog. And, indeed, he is Beauty's Dog. Almost every Beauty has her Dog. The hero possesses her; the poet proclaims her; the painter puts her upon canvas; and the faithful Old Dog follows her: and the end of it all is that the faithful Old Dog is her single attendant. Sir Hero is revelling in the wars, or in Armida's bowers; Mr. Poet has spied a wrinkle; the brush is for the rose in its season. She turns to her Old Dog then. She hugs him; and he, who has subsisted on a bone and a pat till there he squats decrepit, he turns his grateful old eyes up to her, and has not a notion that she is hugging sad memories in him: Hero, Poet, Painter, in one scrubby one! Then is she buried, and the village hears languid howls, and there is a paragraph in the newspapers concerning the extraordinary fidelity of an Old Dog.

Excited by suggestive recollections of Nooredeen and the Fair Persian, and the change in the obscure monotony of his life by his having quarters in a crack hotel, and living familiarly with West-End people—living on the fat of the land (which forms a stout portion of an honest youth's romance), Ripton Thompson breakfasted next morning with his chief at half-past eight. The meal had been fixed overnight for seven, but Ripton slept a great deal more than the nightingale, and (to chronicle his exact state) even half-past eight rather afflicted his new aristocratic senses and reminded him too keenly of law and bondage. He had preferred to breakfast at Algernon's hour, who had left word for eleven. Him, however, it was Richard's object to avoid, so they fell to, and Ripton no longer envied Hippias in bed. Breakfast done, they bequeathed the consoling information for Algernon that they were off to hear a popular preacher, and departed.

"How happy everybody looks!" said Richard, in the quiet Sunday streets.

"Yes—jolly!" said Ripton.

"When I'm—when this is over, I'll see that they are, too—as many as I can make happy," said the hero; adding softly: "Her blind was down at a quarter to six. I think she slept well!"

"You've been there this morning?" Ripton exclaimed; and an idea of what love was dawned upon his dull brain.

"Will she see me, Ricky?"

"Yes. She'll see you to-day. She was tired last night."

"Positively?"

Richard assured him that the privilege would be his.

"Here," he said, coming under some trees in the park, "here's where I talked to you last night. What a time it seems! How I hate the night!"

On the way, that Richard might have an exalted opinion of him, Ripton hinted decorously at a somewhat intimate and mysterious acquaintance with the sex. Headings of certain random adventures he gave.

"Well!" said his chief, "why not marry her?"

Then was Ripton shocked, and cried, "Oh!" and had a taste of the feeling of superiority, destined that day to be crushed utterly.

He was again deposited in Mrs. Berry's charge for a term that caused him dismal fears that the Fair Persian still refused to show her face, but Richard called out to him, and up Ripton went, unaware of the transformation he was to undergo. Hero and Beauty stood together to receive him. From the bottom of the stairs he had his vivaciously agreeable smile ready for them, and by the time he entered the room his cheeks were painfully stiff, and his eyes had strained beyond their exact meaning. Lucy, with one hand anchored to her lover, welcomed him kindly. He relieved her shyness by looking so extremely silly. They sat down, and tried to commence a conversation, but Ripton was as little master of his tongue as he was of his eyes. After an interval, the Fair Persian having done duty by showing herself, was glad to quit the room. Her lord and possessor then turned inquiringly to Ripton.

"You don't wonder now, Rip?" he said.

"No, Richard!" Ripton waited to reply with sufficient solemnity, "indeed I don't!"

He spoke differently; he looked differently. He had the Old Dog's eyes in his head. They watched the door she had passed through; they listened for her, as dogs' eyes do. When she came in, bonneted for a walk, his agitation was dog-like. When she hung on her lover timidly, and went forth, he followed without an idea of envy, or anything save the secret raptures the sight of her gave him, which are the Old Dog's own. For beneficent Nature requites him: His sensations cannot be heroic, but they have a fulness and a wagging delight as good in their way. And this capacity for humble unaspiring worship has its peculiar guerdon. When Ripton comes to think of Miss Random now, what will he think of himself? Let no one despise the Old Dog. Through him doth Beauty vindicate her sex.

It did not please Ripton that others should have the bliss of beholding her, and as, to his perceptions, everybody did, and observed her offensively, and stared, and turned their heads back, and interchanged comments on her, and became in a minute madly in love with her, he had

to smother low growls. They strolled about the pleasant gardens of Kensington all the morning, under the young chestnut buds, and round the windless waters, talking, and soothing the wild excitement of their hearts. If Lucy spoke, Ripton pricked up his ears. She, too, made the remark that everybody seemed to look happy, and he heard it with thrills of joy. "So everybody is, where you are!" he would have wished to say, if he dared, but was restrained by fears that his burning eloquence would commit him. Ripton knew the people he met twice. It would have been difficult to persuade him they were the creatures of accident.

From the Gardens, in contempt of Ripton's frowned protest, Richard boldly struck into the park, where solitary carriages were beginning to perform the circuit. Here Ripton had some justification for his jealous pangs. The young girl's golden locks of hair; her sweet, now dreamily sad, face; her gentle graceful figure in the black straight dress she wore; a sort of half-conventual air she had—a mark of something not of class, that was partly beauty's, partly maiden innocence growing conscious, partly remorse at her weakness and dim fear of the future it was sowing—did attract the eye-glasses. Ripton had to learn that eyes are bearable, but eye-glasses an abomination. They fixed a spell upon his courage; for somehow the youth had always ranked them as emblems of our nobility, and hearing two exquisite eye-glasses, who had been to front and rear several times, drawl in gibberish generally imputed to lords, that his heroine was a charming little creature, just the size, but had no style,—he was abashed; he did not fly at them and tear them. He became dejected. Beauty's dog is affected by the eye-glass in a manner not unlike the common animal's terror of the human eye.

Richard appeared to hear nothing, or it was homage that he heard. He repeated to Lucy Diaper Sandoe's verses—

> "The cockneys nod to each other aside,
> The coxcombs lift their glasses,"

and projected hiring a horse for her to ride every day in the park, and shine among the highest.

They had turned to the West, against the sky glittering through the bare trees across the water, and the bright-edged rack. The lover, his imagination just then occupied in clothing earthly glories in celestial, felt where his senses were sharpest the hand of his darling falter, and instinctively looked ahead. His uncle Algernon was leisurely jolting towards them on his one sound leg. The dismembered Guardsman talked to a friend whose arm supported him, and speculated from time to time on the fair ladies driving by. The two white faces passed him unobserved. Unfortunately Ripton, coming behind, went plump upon the Captain's live toe—or so he pretended, crying, "Confound it, Mr. Thompson! you might have chosen the other."

The horrible apparition did confound Ripton, who stammered that it was extraordinary.

"Not at all," said Algernon. "Everybody makes up to that fellow. Instinct, I suppose!"

He had not to ask for his nephew. Richard turned to face the matter.

"Sorry I couldn't wait for you this morning, uncle," he said, with the coolness of relationship. "I thought you never walked so far."

His voice was in perfect tone—the heroic mask admirable.

Algernon examined the downcast visage at his side, and contrived to allude to the popular preacher. He was instantly introduced to Ripton's sister, Miss Thompson.

The Captain bowed, smiling melancholy approval of his nephew's choice of a minister. After a few stray remarks, and an affable salute to Miss Thompson, he hobbled away, and then the three sealed volcanoes breathed, and Lucy's arm ceased to be squeezed quite so much up to the heroic pitch.

This incident quickened their steps homeward to the sheltering wings of Mrs. Berry. All that passed between them on the subject comprised a stammered excuse from Ripton for his conduct, and a good-humoured rejoinder from Richard, that he had gained a sister by it: at which Ripton ventured to wish aloud Miss Desborough would only think so, and a faint smile twitched poor Lucy's lips to please him. She hardly had strength to reach her cage. She had none to eat of Mrs. Berry's nice little dinner. To be alone, that she might cry and ease her heart of its accusing weight of tears, was all she prayed for. Kind Mrs. Berry, slipping into her bedroom to take off her things, found the fair body in a fevered shudder, and finished by undressing her completely and putting her to bed.

"Just an hour's sleep, or so," the mellifluous woman explained the case to the two anxious gentlemen. "A quiet sleep and a cup of warm tea goes for more than twenty doctors, it do—when there's the flutters," she pursued. "I know it by myself. And a good cry beforehand's better than the best of medicine."

She nursed them into a make-believe of eating, and retired to her softer charge and sweeter babe, reflecting, "Lord! Lord! the three of 'em don't make fifty! I'm as old as two and a half of 'em, to say the least." Mrs. Berry used her apron, and by virtue of their tender years took them all three into her heart.

Left alone, neither of the young men could swallow a morsel.

"Did you see the change come over her?" Richard whispered.

Ripton fiercely accused his prodigious stupidity.

The lover flung down his knife and fork: "What could I do? If I had said nothing, we should have been suspected. I was obliged to speak. And she hates a lie! See! it has struck her down. God forgive me!"

Ripton affected a serene mind: "It was a fright, Richard," he said. "That's what Mrs. Berry means by flutters. Those old women talk in that way. You heard what she said. And these old women know. I'll tell you what it is. It's this, Richard!—it's because you've got a fool for your friend!"

"She regrets it," muttered the lover. "Good God! I think she fears me." He dropped his face in his hands.

Ripton went to the window, repeating energetically for his comfort: "It's because you've got a fool for your friend!"

Sombre grew the street they had last night aroused. The sun was buried alive in cloud. Ripton saw himself no more in the opposite window. He watched the deplorable objects passing on the pavement. His aristocratic visions had gone like his breakfast. Beauty had been struck down by his egregious folly, and there he stood—a wretch!

Richard came to him: "Don't mumble on like that, Rip!" he said. "Nobody blames you."

"Ah! you're very kind, Richard," interposed the wretch, moved at the face of misery he beheld.

"Listen to me, Rip! I shall take her home to-night. Yes! If she's happier away from me!—do you think me a brute, Ripton? Rather than have her shed a tear, I'd!—I'll take her home to-night!"

Ripton suggested that it was sudden; adding from his larger experience, people perhaps might talk.

The lover could not understand what they should talk about, but he said: "If I give him who came for her yesterday the clue? If no one sees or hears of me, what can they say? O Rip! I'll give her up. I'm wrecked for ever! What of that? Yes—let them take her! The world in arms should never have torn her from me, but when she cries—Yes! all's over. I'll find him at once."

He searched in out-of-the-way corners for the hat of resolve. Ripton looked on, wretcheder than ever.

The idea struck him:—"Suppose, Richard, she doesn't want to go?"

It was a moment when, perhaps, one who sided with parents and guardians and the old wise world, might have inclined them to pursue their righteous wretched course, and have given small Cupid a smack and sent him home to his naughty Mother. Alas!(it is The Pilgrim's Scrip interjecting) women are the born accomplices of mischief! In bustles Mrs. Berry to clear away the refection, and finds the two knights helmed, and sees, though 'tis dusk, that they wear doubtful brows, and guesses bad things for her dear God Hymen in a twinkling.

"Dear! dear!" she exclaimed, "and neither of you eaten a scrap! And there's my dear young lady off into the prettiest sleep you ever see!"

"Ha?" cried the lover, illuminated.

"Soft as a baby!" Mrs. Berry averred. "I went to look at her this very moment, and there's not a bit of trouble in her breath. It come and it go like the sweetest regular instrument ever made. The Black Ox haven't trod on her foot yet! Most like it was the air of London. But only fancy, if you had called in a doctor! Why, I shouldn't have let her take any of his quackery. Now, there!"

Ripton attentively observed his chief, and saw him doff his hat with a curious caution, and peer into its recess, from which, during Mrs. Berry's speech, he drew forth a little glove—dropped there by some freak of chance.

"Keep me, keep me, now you have me!" sang the little glove, and amused the lover with a thousand conceits.

"When will she wake, do you think, Mrs. Berry?" he asked.

"Oh! we mustn't go for disturbing her," said the guileful good creature. "Bless ye! let her sleep it out. And if you young gentlemen was to take my advice, and go and take a walk for to get a appetite—everybody should eat! it's their sacred duty, no matter what their feelings be! and I say it who'm no chicken!—I'll frickashee this—which is a chicken—against your return. I'm a cook, I can assure ye!"

The lover seized her two hands. "You're the best old soul in the world!" he cried. Mrs. Berry appeared willing to kiss him. "We won't disturb her. Let her sleep. Keep her in bed, Mrs. Berry. Will you? And we'll call to inquire after her this evening, and come and see her to-morrow. I'm sure you'll be kind to her. There! there!" Mrs. Berry was preparing to whimper. "I trust her to you, you see. Good-bye, you dear old soul."

He smuggled a handful of gold into her keeping, and went to dine with his uncles, happy and hungry.

Before they reached the hotel, they had agreed to draw Mrs. Berry into their confidence, telling her (with embellishments) all save their names, so that they might enjoy the counsel and assistance of that trump of a woman, and yet have nothing to fear from her. Lucy was to receive the name of Letitia, Ripton's youngest and best-looking sister. The heartless fellow proposed it in cruel mockery of an old weakness of hers.

"Letitia!" mused Richard. "I like the name. Both begin with L. There's something soft—womanlike—in the L.'s."

Material Ripton remarked that they looked like pounds on paper. The lover roamed through his golden groves. "Lucy Feverel! that sounds better! I wonder where Ralph is. I should like to help him. He's in love with my cousin Clare. He'll never do anything till he marries. No man can. I'm going to do a hundred things when it's over. We shall travel first. I want to see the Alps. One doesn't know what the earth is till one has seen the Alps. What a delight it will be to her! I fancy I see her eyes gazing up at them.

```
'And oh, your dear blue eyes, that heavenward glance
  With kindred beauty, banished humbleness,
  Past weeping for mortality's distress—
 Yet from your soul a tear hangs there in trance.
   And fills, but does not fall;
   Softly I hear it call
 At heaven's gate, till Sister Seraphs press
 To look on you their old love from the skies:
```

Those are the eyes of Seraphs bright on your blue eyes!

"Beautiful! These lines, Rip, were written by a man who was once a friend of my father's. I intend to find him and make them friends again. You don't care for poetry. It's no use your trying to swallow it, Rip!"

"It sounds very nice," said Ripton, modestly shutting his mouth.

"The Alps! Italy! Rome! and then I shall go to the East," the hero continued. "She's ready to go anywhere with me, the dear brave heart! Oh, the glorious golden East! I dream of the desert. I dream I'm chief of an Arab tribe, and we fly all white in the moonlight on our mares, and hurry to the rescue of my darling! And we push the spears, and we scatter them, and I come to the tent where she crouches, and catch her to my saddle, and away!—Rip! what a life!"

Ripton strove to imagine he could enjoy it.

"And then we shall come home, and I shall lead Austin's life, with her to help me. First be virtuous, Rip! and then serve your country heart and soul. A wise man told me that. I think I shall do something."

Sunshine and cloud, cloud and sunshine, passed over the lover. Now life was a narrow ring; now the distances extended, were winged, flew illimitably. An hour ago and food was hateful. Now he manfully refreshed his nature, and joined in Algernon's encomiums on Miss Letitia Thompson.

Meantime Beauty slept, watched by the veteran volunteer of the hero's band. Lucy awoke from dreams which seemed reality, to the reality which was a dream. She awoke calling for some friend, "Margaret!" and heard one say, "My name is Bessy Berry, my love! not Margaret." Then she asked piteously where she was, and where was Margaret, her dear friend, and Mrs. Berry whispered, "Sure you've got a dearer!"

"Ah!" sighed Lucy, sinking on her pillow, overwhelmed by the strangeness of her state.

Mrs. Berry closed the frill of her nightgown and adjusted the bedclothes quietly.

Her name was breathed.

"Yes, my love?" she said.

"Is he here?"

"He's gone, my dear."

"Gone?—Oh, where?" The young girl started up in disorder.

"Gone, to be back, my love! Ah! that young gentleman!" Mrs. Berry chanted: "Not a morsel have he eat; not a drop have he drunk!"

"O Mrs. Berry! why did you not make him?" Lucy wept for the famine-struck hero, who was just then feeding mightily.

Mrs. Berry explained that to make one eat who thought the darling of his heart like to die, was a sheer impossibility for the cleverest of women; and on this deep truth Lucy reflected, with her eyes wide at the candle. She wanted one to pour her feelings out to. She slid her hand from under the bedclothes, and took Mrs. Berry's, and kissed it. The good creature required no further avowal of her secret, but forthwith leaned her consummate bosom to the pillow, and petitioned heaven to bless them both!—Then the little bride was alarmed, and wondered how Mrs. Berry could have guessed it.

"Why," said Mrs. Berry, "your love is out of your eyes, and out of everything ye do." And the little bride wondered more. She thought she had been so very cautious not to betray it. The common woman in them made cheer together after their own April fashion. Following which Mrs. Berry probed for the sweet particulars of this beautiful love-match; but the little bride's lips were locked. She only said her lover was above her in station.

"And you're a Catholic, my dear!"

"Yes, Mrs. Berry!"

"And him a Protestant."

"Yes, Mrs. Berry!"

"Dear, dear!—And why shouldn't ye be?" she ejaculated, seeing sadness return to the bridal babe. "So as you was born, so shall ye be! But you'll have to make your arrangements about the children. The girls to worship with yet, the boys with him. It's the same God, my dear! You mustn't blush at it, though you do look so pretty. If my young gentleman could see you now!"

"Please, Mrs. Berry!" Lucy murmured.

"Why, he will, you know, my dear!"

"Oh, please, Mrs. Berry!"

"And you that can't bear the thoughts of it! Well, I do wish there was fathers and mothers on both sides and dock-ments signed, and bridesmaids, and a breakfast! but love is love, and ever will be, in spite of them."

She made other and deeper dives into the little heart, but though she drew up pearls, they were not of the kind she searched for. The one fact that hung as a fruit upon her tree of Love, Lucy

had given her; she would not, in fealty to her lover, reveal its growth and history, however sadly she yearned to pour out all to this dear old Mother Confessor.

Her conduct drove Mrs. Berry from the rosy to the autumnal view of matrimony, generally heralded by the announcement that it is a lottery.

"And when you see your ticket," said Mrs. Berry, "you shan't know whether it's a prize or a blank. And, Lord knows! some go on thinking it's a prize when it turns on 'em and tears 'em. I'm one of the blanks, my dear! I drew a blank in Berry. He was a black Berry to me, my dear! Smile away! he truly was, and I a-prizin' him as proud as you can conceive! My dear!" Mrs. Berry pressed her hands flat on her apron. "We hadn't been a three months man and wife, when that man—it wasn't the honeymoon, which some can't say—that man—Yes! he kicked me. His wedded wife he kicked! Ah!" she sighed to Lucy's large eyes, "I could have borne that. A blow don't touch the heart," the poor creature tapped her sensitive side. "I went on loving of him, for I'm a soft one. Tall as a Grenadier he is, and when out of service grows his moustache. I used to call him my body-guardsman like a Queen! I flattered him like the fools we women are. For, take my word for it, my dear, there's nothing here below so vain as a man! That I know. But I didn't deserve it.... I'm a superior cook.... I did not deserve that noways." Mrs. Berry thumped her knee, and accentuated up her climax: "I mended his linen. I saw to his adornments—he called his clothes, the bad man! I was a servant to him, my dear! and there—it was nine months—nine months from the day he swear to protect and cherish and that—nine calendar months, and my gentleman is off with another woman! Bone of his bone!—pish!" exclaimed Mrs. Berry, reckoning her wrongs over vividly. "Here's my ring. A pretty ornament! What do it mean? I'm for tearin' it off my finger a dozen times in the day. It's a symbol? I call it a tomfoolery for the dead-alive to wear it, that's a widow and not a widow, and haven't got a name for what she is in any Dixonary, I've looked, my dear, and"—she spread out her arms—"Johnson haven't got a name for me!"

At this impressive woe Mrs. Berry's voice quavered into sobs. Lucy spoke gentle words to the poor outcast from Johnson. The sorrows of Autumn have no warning for April. The little bride, for all her tender pity, felt happier when she had heard her landlady's moving tale of the wickedness of man, which cast in bright relief the glory of that one hero who was hers. Then from a short flight of inconceivable bliss, she fell, shot by one of her hundred Argus-eyed fears.

"O Mrs. Berry! I'm so young! Think of me—only just seventeen!"

Mrs. Berry immediately dried her eyes to radiance. "Young, my dear! Nonsense! There's no so much harm in being young, here and there. I knew an Irish lady was married at fourteen. Her daughter married close over fourteen. She was a grandmother by thirty! When any strange man began, she used to ask him what pattern caps grandmothers wore. They'd stare! Bless you! the grandmother could have married over and over again. It was her daughter's fault, not hers, you know."

"She was three years younger," mused Lucy.

"She married beneath her, my dear. Ran off with her father's bailiff's son. 'Ah, Berry!' she'd say, 'if I hadn't been foolish, I should be my lady now—not Granny!' Her father never forgave her—left all his estates out of the family."

"Did her husband always love her?" Lucy preferred to know.

"In his way, my dear, he did," said Mrs. Berry, coming upon her matrimonial wisdom. "He couldn't help himself. If he left off, he began again. She was so clever, and did make him so comfortable. Cook! there wasn't such another cook out of a Alderman's kitchen; no, indeed! And she a born lady! That tells ye it's the duty of all women! She had her saying 'When the parlour fire gets low, put coals on the ketchen fire!' and a good saying it is to treasure. Such is man! no use in havin' their hearts if ye don't have their stomachs."

Perceiving that she grew abstruse, Mrs. Berry added briskly: "You know nothing about that yet, my dear. Only mind me and mark me: don't neglect your cookery. Kissing don't last: cookery do!"

Here, with an aphorism worthy a place in The Pilgrim'S Scrip, she broke off to go posseting for her dear invalid. Lucy was quite well; very eager to be allowed to rise and be ready when the knock should come. Mrs. Berry, in her loving considerateness for the little bride, positively commanded her to lie down, and be quiet, and submit to be nursed and cherished. For Mrs. Berry well knew that ten minutes alone with the hero could only be had while the little bride was in that unattainable position.

Thanks to her strategy, as she thought, her object was gained. The night did not pass before she learnt, from the hero's own mouth, that Mr. Richards, the father of the hero, and a stern lawyer, was adverse to his union with this young lady he loved, because of a ward of his, heiress to an immense property, whom he desired his son to espouse; and because his darling Letitia was a Catholic—Letitia, the sole daughter of a brave naval officer deceased, and in the hands of a savage uncle, who wanted to sacrifice this beauty to a brute of a son. Mrs. Berry listened credulously to the emphatic narrative, and spoke to the effect that the wickedness of old people formed the excuse for the wildness of young ones. The ceremonious administration of oaths of secrecy and devotion over, she was enrolled in the hero's band, which now numbered three, and entered upon the duties with feminine energy, for there are no conspirators like women. Ripton's lieutenancy became a sinecure, his rank merely titular. He had never been married—he knew nothing about licences, except that they must be obtained, and were not difficult—he had not an idea that so many days' warning must be given to the clergyman of the parish where one of the parties was resident. How should he? All his forethought was comprised in the ring, and whenever the discussion of arrangements for the great event grew particularly hot and important, he would say, with a shrewd nod: "We mustn't forget the ring, you know, Mrs. Berry!" and the new member was only prevented by natural complacence from shouting: "Oh, drat ye! and your ring too." Mrs. Berry had acted conspicuously in fifteen marriages, by banns, and by licence, and to have such an obvious requisite dinned in her ears was exasperating. They could not have contracted alliance with an auxiliary more invaluable, an authority so profound; and they acknowledged it to themselves. The hero marched like an automaton at her bidding; Lieutenant Thompson was rejoiced to perform services as errand-boy in the enterprise.

"It's in hopes you'll be happier than me, I do it," said the devout and charitable Berry. "Marriages is made in heaven, they say; and if that's the case, I say they don't take much account of us below!"

Her own woeful experiences had been given to the hero in exchange for his story of cruel parents.

Richard vowed to her that he would henceforth hold it a duty to hunt out the wanderer from wedded bonds, and bring him back bound and suppliant.

"Oh, he'll come!" said Mrs. Berry, pursing prophetic wrinkles: "he'll come of his own accord. Never anywhere will he meet such a cook as Bessy Berry! And he know her value in his heart of hearts. And I do believe, when he do come, I shall be opening these arms to him again, and not slapping his impidence in the face—I'm that soft! I always was—in matrimony, Mr. Richards!"

As when nations are secretly preparing for war, the docks and arsenals hammer night and day, and busy contractors measure time by inches, and the air hums around: for leagues as it were myriads of bees, so the house and neighbourhood of the matrimonial soft one resounded in the heroic style, and knew little of the changes of light decreed by Creation. Mrs. Berry was the general of the hour. Down to Doctors' Commons she expedited the hero, instructing him how boldly to face the Law, and fib: for that the Law never could mist a fib and a bold face. Down the hero went, and proclaimed his presence. And lo! the Law danced to him its sedatest lovely bear's-dance. Think ye the Lawless susceptible to him than flesh and blood? With a beautiful confidence it put the few familiar questions to him, and nodded to his replies: then stamped the bond, and took the fee. It must be an old vagabond at heart that can permit the irrevocable to go so cheap, even to a hero. For only mark him when he is petitioned by heroes and heroines to undo what he does so easily! That small archway of Doctors' Commons seems the eye of a needle, through which the lean purse has a way, somehow, of slipping more readily than the portly; but once through, all are camels alike, the lean purse an especially big camel. Dispensing tremendous marriage as it does, the Law can have no conscience.

"I hadn't the slightest difficulty," said the exulting hero.

"Of course not!" returns Mrs. Berry. "It's as easy, if ye're in earnest, as buying a plum bun."

Likewise the ambassador of the hero went to claim the promise of the Church to be in attendance on a certain spot, on a certain day, and there hear oath of eternal fealty, and gird him about with all its forces: which the Church, receiving a wink from the Law, obsequiously engaged to do, for less than the price of a plum-cake.

Meantime, while craftsmen and skilled women, directed by Mrs. Berry, were toiling to deck the day at hand, Raynham and Belthorpe slept,—the former soundly; and one day was as another to them. Regularly every morning a letter arrived from Richard to his father, containing observations on the phenomena of London; remarks (mainly cynical) on the speeches and acts of Parliament; and reasons for not having yet been able to call on the Grandisons. They were certainly rather monotonous and spiritless. The baronet did not complain. That cold dutiful tone

assured him there was no internal trouble or distraction. "The letters of a healthful physique!" he said to Lady Blandish, with sure insight. Complacently he sat and smiled, little witting that his son's ordeal was imminent, and that his son's ordeal was to be his own. Hippias wrote that his nephew was killing him by making appointments which he never kept, and altogether neglecting him in the most shameless way, so that his ganglionic centre was in a ten times worse state than when he left Raynham. He wrote very bitterly, but it was hard to feel compassion for his offended stomach.

On the other hand, young Tom Blaize was not forthcoming, and had despatched no tidings whatever. Farmer Blaize smoked his pipe evening after evening, vastly disturbed. London was a large place—young Tom might be lost in it, he thought; and young Tom had his weaknesses. A wolf at Belthorpe, he was likely to be a sheep in London, as yokels have proved. But what had become of Lucy? This consideration almost sent Farmer Blaize off to London direct, and he would have gone had not his pipe enlightened him. A young fellow might play truant and get into a scrape, but a young man and a young woman were sure to be heard of, unless they were acting in complicity. Why, of course, young Tom had behaved like a man, the rascal! and married her outright there, while he had the chance. It was a long guess. Still it was the only reasonable way of accounting for his extraordinary silence, and therefore the farmer held to it that he had done the deed. He argued as modern men do who think the hero, the upsetter of ordinary calculations, is gone from us. So, after despatching a letter to a friend in town to be on the outlook for son Tom, he continued awhile to smoke his pipe, rather elated than not, and mused on the shrewd manner he should adopt when Master Honeymoon did appear.

Toward the middle of the second week of Richard's absence, Tom Bakewell came to Raynham for Cassandra, and privately handed a letter to the Eighteenth Century, containing a request for money, and a round sum. The Eighteenth Century was as good as her word, and gave Tom a letter in return, enclosing a cheque on her bankers, amply providing to keep the heroic engine in motion at a moderate pace. Tom went back, and Raynham and Lobourne slept and dreamed not of the morrow. The System, wedded to Time, slept, and knew not how he had been outraged—anticipated by seven pregnant seasons. For Time had heard the hero swear to that legalizing instrument, and had also registered an oath. Ah me! venerable Hebrew Time! he is unforgiving. Half the confusion and fever of the world comes of this vendetta he declares against the hapless innocents who have once done him a wrong. They cannot escape him. They will never outlive it. The father of jokes, he is himself no joke; which it seems the business of men to discover.

The days roll round. He is their servant now. Mrs. Berry has a new satin gown, a beautiful bonnet, a gold brooch, and sweet gloves, presented to her by the hero, wherein to stand by his bride at the altar to-morrow; and, instead of being an old wary hen, she is as much a chicken as any of the party, such has been the magic of these articles. Fathers she sees accepting the facts produced for them by their children; a world content to be carved out as it pleases the hero.

At last Time brings the bridal eve, and is blest as a benefactor. The final arrangements are made; the bridegroom does depart; and Mrs. Berry lights the little bride to her bed. Lucy stops on the landing where there is an old clock eccentrically correct that night. 'Tis the palpitating pause before the gates of her transfiguration. Mrs. Berry sees her put her rosy finger on the One about to strike, and touch all the hours successively till she comes to the Twelve that shall sound

"Wife" in her ears on the morrow, moving her lips the while, and looking round archly solemn when she has done; and that sight so catches at Mrs. Berry's heart that, not guessing Time to be the poor child's enemy, she endangers her candle by folding Lucy warmly in her arms, whimpering; "Bless you for a darling! you innocent lamb! You shall be happy! You shall!"

Old Time gazes grimly ahead.

CHAPTER XXIX

Although it blew hard when Caesar crossed the Rubicon, the passage of that river is commonly calm; calm as Acheron. So long as he gets his fare, the ferryman does not need to be told whom he carries: he pulls with a will, and heroes may be over in half-an-hour. Only when they stand on the opposite bank, do they see what a leap they have taken. The shores they have relinquished shrink to an infinite remoteness. There they have dreamed: here they must act. There lie youth and irresolution: here manhood and purpose. They are veritably in another land: a moral Acheron divides their life. Their memories scarce seem their own! The Philosophical Geography (about to be published) observes that each man has, one time or other, a little Rubicon—a clear or a foul water to cross. It is asked him: "Wilt thou wed this Fate, and give up all behind thee?" And "I will," firmly pronounced, speeds him over. The above-named manuscript authority informs us, that by far the greater number of caresses rolled by this heroic flood to its sister stream below, are those of fellows who have repented their pledge, and have tried to swim back to the bank they have blotted out. For though every man of us may be a hero for one fatal minute, very few remain so after a day's march even: and who wonders that Madam Fate is indignant, and wears the features of the terrible Universal Fate to him? Fail before her, either in heart or in act, and lo, how the alluring loves in her visage wither and sicken to what it is modelled on! Be your Rubicon big or small, clear or foul, it is the same: you shall not return. On—or to Acheron!—I subscribe to that saying of The Pilgrim's Scrip:

"The danger of a little knowledge of things is disputable: but beware the little knowledge of one's self!"

Richard Feverel was now crossing the River of his Ordeal. Already the mists were stealing over the land he had left: his life was cut in two, and he breathed but the air that met his nostrils. His father, his father's love, his boyhood and ambition, were shadowy. His poetic dreams had taken a living attainable shape. He had a distincter impression of the Autumnal Berry and her household than of anything at Raynham. And yet the young man loved his father, loved his home: and I daresay Caesar loved Rome: but whether he did or no, Caesar when he killed the Republic was quite bald, and the hero we are dealing with is scarce beginning to feel his despotic moustache. Did he know what he was made of? Doubtless, nothing at all. But honest passion has an instinct that can be safer than conscious wisdom. He was an arrow drawn to the head, flying from the

bow. His audacious mendacities and subterfuges did not strike him as in any way criminal; for he was perfectly sure that the winning and securing of Lucy would in the end be boisterously approved of, and in that case, were not the means justified? Not that he took trouble to argue thus, as older heroes and self-convicting villains are in the habit of doing; to deduce a clear conscience. Conscience and Lucy went together.

It was a soft fair day. The Rubicon sparkled in the morning sun. One of those days when London embraces the prospect of summer, and troops forth all its babies. The pavement, the squares, the parks, were early alive with the cries of young Britain. Violet and primrose girls, and organ boys with military monkeys, and systematic bands very determined in tone if not in tune, filled the atmosphere, and crowned the blazing procession of omnibuses, freighted with business men, Cityward, where a column of reddish brown smoke,—blown aloft by the South-west, marked the scene of conflict to which these persistent warriors repaired. Richard had seen much of early London that morning. His plans were laid. He had taken care to ensure his personal liberty against accidents, by leaving his hotel and his injured uncle Hippias at sunrise. To-day or to-morrow his father was to arrive. Farmer Blaize, Tom Bakewell reported to him, was raging in town. Another day and she might be torn from him: but to-day this miracle of creation would be his, and then from those glittering banks yonder, let them summon him to surrender her who dared! The position of things looked so propitious that he naturally thought the powers waiting on love conspired in his behalf. And she, too—since she must cross this river, she had sworn to him to be brave, and do him honour, and wear the true gladness of her heart in her face. Without a suspicion of folly in his acts, or fear of results, Richard strolled into Kensington Gardens, breakfasting on the foreshadow of his great joy, now with a vision of his bride, now of the new life opening to him. Mountain masses of clouds, rounded in sunlight, swung up the blue. The flowering chestnut pavilions overhead rustled and hummed. A sound in his ears as of a banner unfolding in the joyful distance lulled him.

He was to meet his bride at the church at a quarter past eleven. His watch said a quarter to ten. He strolled on beneath the long-stemmed trees toward the well dedicated to a saint obscure. Some people were drinking at the well. A florid lady stood by a younger one, who had a little silver mug half-way to her mouth, and evinced undisguised dislike to the liquor of the salutary saint.

"Drink, child!" said the maturer lady. "That is only your second mug. I insist upon your drinking three full ones every morning we're in town. Your constitution positively requires iron!"

"But, mama," the other expostulated, "it's so nasty. I shall be sick."

"Drink!" was the harsh injunction. "Nothing to the German waters, my dear. Here, let me taste." She took the mug and gave it a flying kiss. "I declare I think it almost nice—not at all objectionable. Pray, taste it," she said to a gentleman standing below them to act as cup-bearer.

An unmistakable cis-Rubicon voice replied: "Certainly, if it's good fellowship; though I confess I don't think mutual sickness a very engaging ceremony."

Can one never escape from one's relatives? Richard ejaculated inwardly.

Without a doubt those people were Mrs. Doria, Clare, and Adrian. He had them under his eyes.

Clare, peeping up from her constitutional dose to make sure no man was near to see the possible consequence of it, was the first to perceive him. Her hand dropped.

"Now, pray, drink, and do not fuss!" said Mrs. Doria.

"Mama!" Clare gasped.

Richard came forward and capitulated honourably, since retreat was out of the question. Mrs. Doria swam to meet him: "My own boy! My dear Richard!" profuse of exclamations. Clare shyly greeted him. Adrian kept in the background.

"Why, we were coming for you to-day, Richard," said Mrs. Doria, smiling effusion; and rattled on, "We want another cavalier. This is delightful! My dear nephew! You have grown from a boy to a man. And there's down on his lip! And what brings you here at such an hour in the morning? Poetry, I suppose! Here, take my arm, child.—Clare! finish that mug and thank your cousin for sparing you the third. I always bring her, when we are by a chalybeate, to take the waters before breakfast. We have to get up at unearthly hours. Think, my dear boy! Mothers are sacrifices! And so you've been alone a fortnight with your agreeable uncle! A charming time of it you must have had! Poor Hippias! what may be his last nostrum?"

"Nephew!" Adrian stretched his head round to the couple. "Doses of nephew taken morning and night fourteen days! And he guarantees that it shall destroy an iron constitution in a month."

Richard mechanically shook Adrian's hand as he spoke.

"Quite well, Ricky?"

"Yes: well enough," Richard answered.

"Well?" resumed his vigorous aunt, walking on with him, while Clare and Adrian followed. "I really never saw you looking so handsome. There's something about your face—look at me—you needn't blush. You've grown to an Apollo. That blue buttoned-up frock coat becomes you admirably—and those gloves, and that easy neck-tie. Your style is irreproachable, quite a style of your own! And nothing eccentric. You have the instinct of dress. Dress shows blood, my dear boy, as much as anything else. Boy!—you see, I can't forget old habits. You were a boy when I left, and now!—Do you see any change in him, Clare?" she turned half round to her daughter.

"Richard is looking very well, mama," said Clare, glancing at him under her eyelids.

"I wish I could say the same of you, my dear.—Take my arm, Richard. Are you afraid of your aunt? I want to get used to you. Won't it be pleasant, our being all in town together in the season? How fresh the Opera will be to you! Austin, I hear, takes stalls. You can come to the Forey's box when you like. We are staying with the Foreys close by here. I think it's a little too far out, you

know; but they like the neighbourhood. This is what I have always said: Give him more liberty! Austin has seen it at last. How do you think Clare looking?"

The question had to be repeated. Richard surveyed his cousin hastily, and praised her looks.

"Pale!" Mrs. Doria sighed.

"Rather pale, aunt."

"Grown very much—don't you think, Richard?"

"Very tall girl indeed, aunt."

"If she had but a little more colour, my dear Richard! I'm sure I give her all the iron she can swallow, but that pallor still continues. I think she does not prosper away from her old companion. She was accustomed to look up to you, Richard"—

"Did you get Ralph's letter, aunt?" Richard interrupted her.

"Absurd!" Mrs. Doria pressed his arm. "The nonsense of a boy! Why did you undertake to forward such stuff?"

"I'm certain he loves her," said Richard, in a serious way.

The maternal eyes narrowed on him. "Life, my dear Richard, is a game of cross-purposes," she observed, dropping her fluency, and was rather angered to hear him laugh. He excused himself by saying that she spoke so like his father.

"You breakfast with us," she freshened off again. "The Foreys wish to see you; the girls are dying to know you. Do you know, you have a reputation on account of that"—she crushed an intruding adjective—"System you were brought up on. You mustn't mind it. For my part, I think you look a credit to it. Don't be bashful with young women, mind! As much as you please with the old ones. You know how to behave among men. There you have your Drawing-room Guide! I'm sure I shall be proud of you. Am I not?"

Mrs. Doria addressed his eyes coaxingly.

A benevolent idea struck Richard, that he might employ the minutes to spare, in pleading the case of poor Ralph; and, as he was drawn along, he pulled out his watch to note the precise number of minutes he could dedicate to this charitable office.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Doria. "You want manners, my dear boy. I think it never happened to me before that a man consulted his watch in my presence."

Richard mildly replied that he had an engagement at a particular hour, up to which he was her servant.

"Fiddledededee!" the vivacious lady sang. "Now I've got you, I mean to keep you. Oh! I've heard all about you. This ridiculous indifference that your father makes so much of! Why, of course, you wanted to see the world! A strong healthy young man shut up all his life in a lonely house—no friends, no society, no amusements but those of rustics! Of course you were indifferent! Your intelligence and superior mind alone saved you from becoming a dissipated country boor.—Where are the others?"

Clare and Adrian came up at a quick pace.

"My damozel dropped something," Adrian explained.

Her mother asked what it was.

"Nothing, mama," said Clare, demurely, and they proceeded as before.

Overborne by his aunt's fluency of tongue, and occupied in acute calculation of the flying minutes, Richard let many pass before he edged in a word for Ralph. When he did, Mrs. Doria stopped him immediately.

"I must tell you, child, that I refuse to listen to such rank idiotcy."

"It's nothing of the kind, aunt."

"The fancy of a boy."

"He's not a boy. He's half-a-year older than I am!"

"You silly child! The moment you fall in love, you all think yourselves men."

"On my honour, aunt! I believe he loves her thoroughly."

"Did he tell you so, child?"

"Men don't speak openly of those things," said Richard.

"Boys do," said Mrs. Doria.

"But listen to me in earnest, aunt. I want you to be kind to Ralph. Don't drive him to—You maybe sorry for it. Let him—do let him write to her, and see her. I believe women are as cruel as men in these things."

"I never encourage absurdity, Richard."

"What objection have you to Ralph, aunt?"

"Oh, they're both good families. It's not that absurdity, Richard. It will be to his credit to remember that his first fancy wasn't a dairymaid." Mrs. Doria pitched her accent tellingly. It did not touch her nephew.

"Don't you want Clare ever to marry?" He put the last point of reason to her.

Mrs. Doria laughed. "I hope so, child. We must find some comfortable old gentleman for her."

"What infamy!" mutters Richard.

"And I engage Ralph shall be ready to dance at her wedding, or eat a hearty breakfast—We don't dance at weddings now, and very properly. It's a horrid sad business, not to be treated with levity.—Is that his regiment?" she said, as they passed out of the hussar-sentinelled gardens. "Tush, tush, child! Master Ralph will recover, as—hem! others have done. A little headache—you call it heartache—and up you rise again, looking better than ever. No doubt, to have a grain of sense forced into your brains, you poor dear children! must be painful.. Girls suffer as much as boys, I assure you. More, for their heads are weaker, and their appetites less constant. Do I talk like your father now? Whatever makes the boy fidget at his watch so?"

Richard stopped short. Time spoke urgently.

"I must go," he said.

His face did not seem good for trifling. Mrs. Doria would trifle in spite.

"Listen, Clare! Richard is going. He says he has an engagement. What possible engagement can a young man have at eleven o'clock in the morning?—unless it's to be married!" Mrs. Doria laughed at the ingenuity of her suggestion.

"Is the church handy, Ricky?" said Adrian. "You can still give us half-an-hour if it is. The celibate hours strike at Twelve." And he also laughed in his fashion.

"Won't you stay with us, Richard?" Clare asked. She blushed timidly, and her voice shook.

Something indefinite—a sharp-edged thrill in the tones made the burning bridegroom speak gently to her.

"Indeed, I would, Clare; I should like to please you, but I have a most imperative appointment—that is, I promised—I must go. I shall see you again"—

Mrs. Doria, took forcible possession of him. "Now, do come, and don't waste words. I insist upon your having some breakfast first, and then, if you really must go, you shall. Look! there's the house. At least you will accompany your aunt to the door."

Richard conceded this. She little imagined what she required of him. Two of his golden minutes melted into nothingness. They were growing to be jewels of price, one by one more and more

precious as they ran, and now so costly-rare—rich as his blood! not to kindest relations, dearest friends, could he give another. The die is cast! Ferryman! push off.

"Good-bye!" he cried, nodding bluffly at the three as one, and fled.

They watched his abrupt muscular stride through the grounds of the house. He looked like resolution on the march. Mrs. Doria, as usual with her out of her brother's hearing, began rating the System.

"See what becomes of that nonsensical education! The boy really does not know how to behave like a common mortal. He has some paltry appointment, or is mad after some ridiculous idea of his own, and everything must be sacrificed to it! That's what Austin calls concentration of the faculties. I think it's more likely to lead to downright insanity than to greatness of any kind. And so I shall tell Austin. It's time he should be spoken to seriously about him."

"He's an engine, my dear aunt," said Adrian. "He isn't a boy, or a man, but an engine. And he appears to have been at high pressure since he came to town—out all day and half the night."

"He's mad!" Mrs. Doria interjected.

"Not at all. Extremely shrewd is Master Ricky, and carries as open an eye ahead of him as the ships before Troy. He's more than a match for any of us. He is for me, I confess."

"Then," said Mrs. Doria, "he does astonish me!"

Adrian begged her to retain her astonishment till the right season, which would not be long arriving.

Their common wisdom counselled them not to tell the Foreys of their hopeful relative's ungracious behaviour. Clare had left them. When Mrs. Doria went to her room her daughter was there, gazing down at something in her hand, which she guiltily closed.

In answer to an inquiry why she had not gone to take off her things, Clare said she was not hungry. Mrs. Doria lamented the obstinacy of a constitution that no quantity of iron could affect, and eclipsed the looking-glass, saying: "Take them off here, child, and learn to assist yourself."

She disentangled her bonnet from the array of her spreading hair, talking of Richard, and his handsome appearance, and extraordinary conduct. Clare kept opening and shutting her hand, in an attitude half-pensive, half-listless. She did not stir to undress. A joyless dimple hung in one pale cheek, and she drew long even breaths.

Mrs. Doria, assured by the glass that she was ready to show, came to her daughter.

"Now, really," she said, "you are too helpless, my dear. You cannot do a thing without a dozen women at your elbow. What will become of you? You will have to marry a millionaire.—What's the matter with you, child?"

Clare undid her tight-shut fingers, as if to some attraction of her eyes, and displayed a small gold hoop on the palm of a green glove.

"A wedding-ring!" exclaimed Mrs. Doria, inspecting the curiosity most daintily.

There on Clare's pale green glove lay a wedding-ring!

Rapid questions as to where, when, how, it was found, beset Clare, who replied: "In the Gardens, mama. This morning. When I was walking behind Richard."

"Are you sure he did not give it you, Clare?"

"Oh no, mama! he did not give it me."

"Of course not! only he does such absurd things! I thought, perhaps—these boys are so exceedingly ridiculous! Mrs. Doria had an idea that it might have been concerted between the two young gentlemen, Richard and Ralph, that the former should present this token of hymeneal devotion from the latter to the young lady of his love; but a moment's reflection exonerated boys even from such preposterous behaviour.

"Now, I wonder," she speculated on Clare's cold face, "I do wonder whether it's lucky to find a wedding-ring. What very quick eyes you have, my darling!" Mrs. Doria kissed her. She thought it must be lucky, and the circumstance made her feel tender to her child. Her child did not move to the kiss.

"Let's see whether it fits," said Mrs. Doria, almost infantine with surprise and pleasure.

Clare suffered her glove to be drawn off. The ring slid down her long thin finger, and settled comfortably.

"It does!" Mrs. Doria whispered. To find a wedding ring is open to any woman; but to find a wedding-ring that fits may well cause a superstitious emotion. Moreover, that it should be found while walking in the neighbourhood of the identical youth whom a mother has destined for her daughter, gives significance to the gentle perturbation of ideas consequent on such a hint from Fortune.

"It really fits!" she pursued. "Now I never pay any attention to the nonsense of omens and that kind of thing" (had the ring been a horseshoe Mrs. Doria would have pinked it up and dragged it obediently home), "but this, I must say, is odd—to find a ring that fits!—singular! It never happened to me. Sixpence is the most I ever discovered, and I have it now. Mind you keep it, Clare—this ring: And," she laughed, "offer it to Richard when he comes; say, you think he must have dropped it."

The dimple in Clare's cheek quivered.

Mother and daughter had never spoken explicitly of Richard. Mrs. Doria, by exquisite management, had contrived to be sure that on one side there would be no obstacle to her project of general happiness, without, as she thought, compromising her daughter's feelings unnecessarily. It could do no harm to an obedient young girl to hear that there was no youth in the world like a certain youth. He the prince of his generation, she might softly consent, when requested, to be his princess; and if never requested (for Mrs. Doria envisaged failure), she might easily transfer her softness to squires of lower degree. Clare had always been blindly obedient to her mother (Adrian called them Mrs. Doria Battledoria and the fair Shuttlecockiana), and her mother accepted in this blind obedience the text of her entire character. It is difficult for those who think very earnestly for their children to know when their children are thinking on their own account. The exercise of their volition we construe as revolt. Our love does not like to be invalided and deposed from its command, and here I think yonder old thrush on the lawn who has just kicked the last of her lank offspring out of the nest to go shift for itself, much the kinder of the two, though sentimental people do shrug their shoulders at these unsentimental acts of the creatures who never wander from nature. Now, excess of obedience is, to one who manages most exquisitely, as bad as insurrection. Happily Mrs. Doria saw nothing in her daughter's manner save a want of iron. Her pallor, her lassitude, the tremulous nerves in her face, exhibited an imperious requirement of the mineral.

"The reason why men and women are mysterious to us, and prove disappointing," we learn from The Pilgrim's Scrip, "is, that we will read them from our own book; just as we are perplexed by reading ourselves from theirs."

Mrs. Doria read her daughter from her own book, and she was gay; she laughed with Adrian at the breakfast-table, and mock-seriously joined in his jocose assertion that Clare was positively and by all hymeneal auspices betrothed to the owner of that ring, be he who he may, and must, whenever he should choose to come and claim her, give her hand to him (for everybody agreed the owner must be masculine, as no woman would drop a wedding-ring), and follow him whither he listed all the world over. Amiable giggling Forey girls called Clare, The Betrothed. Dark man, or fair? was mooted. Adrian threw off the first strophe of Clare's fortune in burlesque rhymes, with an insinuating gipsy twang. Her aunt Forey warned her to have her dresses in readiness. Her grandpapa Forey pretended to grumble at bridal presents being expected from grandpapas.

This one smelt orange-flower, another spoke solemnly of an old shoe. The finding of a wedding-ring was celebrated through all the palpitating accessories and rosy ceremonies involved by that famous instrument. In the midst of the general hilarity, Clare showed her deplorable want of iron by bursting into tears.

Did the poor mocked-at heart divine what might be then enacting? Perhaps, dimly, as we say: that is, without eyes.

At an altar stand two fair young creatures, ready with their oaths. They are asked to fix all time to the moment, and they do so. If there is hesitation at the immense undertaking, it is but maidenly. She conceives as little mental doubt of the sanity of the act as he. Over them hangs a cool young curate in his raiment of office. Behind are two apparently lucid people, distinguished from each other by sex and age: the foremost a bunch of simmering black satin; under her

shadow a cock-robin in the dress of a gentleman, big joy swelling out his chest, and pert satisfaction cocking his head. These be they who stand here in place of parents to the young couple. All is well. The service proceeds.

Firmly the bridegroom tells forth his words. This hour of the complacent giant at least is his, and that he means to hold him bound through the eternities, men may hear. Clearly, and with brave modesty, speaks she: no less firmly, though her body trembles: her voice just vibrating while the tone travels on, like a smitten vase.

Time hears sentence pronounced on him: the frail hands bind his huge limbs and lock the chains. He is used to it: he lets them do as they will.

Then comes that period when they are to give their troth to each other. The Man with his right hand takes the Woman by her right hand: the Woman with her right hand takes the Man by his right hand.—Devils dare not laugh at whom Angels crowd to contemplate.

Their hands are joined; their blood flows as one stream. Adam and fair Eve front the generations. Are they not lovely? Purer fountains of life were never in two bosoms.

And then they loose their hands, and the cool curate doth bid the Man to put a ring on the Woman's fourth finger, counting thumb. And the Man thrusts his hand into one pocket, and into another, forward and back many times into all his pockets. He remembers that he felt for it, and felt it in his waistcoat pocket, when in the Gardens. And his hand comes forth empty. And the Man is ghastly to look at!

Yet, though Angels smile, shall not Devils laugh! The curate deliberates. The black satin bunch ceases to simmer. He in her shadow changes from a beaming cock-robin to an inquisitive sparrow. Eyes multiply questions: lips have no reply. Time ominously shakes his chain, and in the pause a sound of mockery stings their ears.

Think ye a hero is one to be defeated in his first battle? Look at the clock! there are but seven minutes to the stroke of the celibate hours: the veteran is surely lifting his two hands to deliver fire, and his shot will sunder them in twain so nearly united. All the jewellers of London speeding down with sacks full of the nuptial circlet cannot save them!

The battle must be won on the field, and what does the hero now? It is an inspiration! For who else would dream of such a reserve in the rear? None see what he does; only that the black-satin bunch is remonstratingly agitated, stormily shaken, and subdued: and as though the menacing cloud had opened, and dropped the dear token from the skies at his demand, he produces the symbol of their consent, and the service proceeds: "With this ring I thee wed."

They are prayed over and blest. For good, or for ill, this deed is done. The names are registered; fees fly right and left: they thank, and salute, the curate, whose official coolness melts into a smile of monastic gallantry: the beadle on the steps waves off a gaping world as they issue forth bridegroom and bridesman recklessly scatter gold on him: carriage doors are banged to: the coachmen drive off, and the scene closes, everybody happy.

CHAPTER XXX

And the next moment the bride is weeping as if she would dissolve to one of Dian's Virgin Fountains from the clasp of the Sun-God. She has nobly preserved the mask imposed by comedies, till the curtain has fallen, and now she weeps, streams with tears. Have patience, O impetuous young man! It is your profession to be a hero. This poor heart is new to it, and her duties involve such wild acts, such brigandage, such terrors and tasks, she is quite unnerved. She did you honour till now. Bear with her now. She does not cry the cry of ordinary maidens in like cases. While the struggle went on her tender face was brave; but, alas! Omens are against her: she holds an ever-present dreadful one on that fatal fourth finger of hers, which has coiled itself round her dream of delight, and takes her in its clutch like a horrid serpent. And yet she must love it. She dares not part from it. She must love and hug it, and feed on its strange honey, and all the bliss it gives her casts all the deeper shadow on what is to come.

Say: Is it not enough to cause feminine apprehension, for a woman to be married in another woman's ring?

You are amazons, ladies, at Saragossa, and a thousand citadels—wherever there is strife, and Time is to be taken by the throat. Then shall few men match your sublime fury. But what if you see a vulture, visible only to yourselves, hovering over the house you are gaily led by the torch to inhabit? Will you not crouch and be cowards?

As for the hero, in the hour of victory he pays no heed to omens. He does his best to win his darling to confidence by caresses. Is she not his? Is he not hers? And why, when the battle is won, does she weep? Does she regret what she has done?

Oh, never! never! her soft blue eyes assure him, steadfast love seen swimming on clear depths of faith in them, through the shower.

He is silenced by her exceeding beauty, and sits perplexed waiting for the shower to pass.

Alone with Mrs. Berry, in her bedroom, Lucy gave tongue to her distress, and a second character in the comedy changed her face.

"O Mrs. Berry! Mrs. Berry! what has happened! what has happened!"

"My darlin' child!" The bridal Berry gazed at the finger of doleful joy. "I'd forgot all about it! And that's what've made me feel so queer ever since, then! I've been seemin' as if I wasn't myself somehow, without my ring. Dear! dear! what a wilful young gentleman! We ain't a match for men in that state—Lord help us!"

Mrs. Berry sat on the edge of a chair: Lucy on the edge of the bed.

"What do you think of it, Mrs. Berry? Is it not terrible?"

"I can't say I should 'a liked it myself, my dear," Mrs. Berry candidly responded.

"Oh! why, why, why did it happen!" the young bride bent to a flood of fresh tears, murmuring that she felt already old—forsaken.

"Haven't you got a comfort in your religion for all accidents?" Mrs. Berry inquired.

"None for this. I know it's wrong to cry when I am so happy. I hope he will forgive me."

Mrs. Berry vowed her bride was the sweetest, softest, beautifulest thing in life.

"I'll cry no more," said Lucy. "Leave me, Mrs. Berry, and come back when I ring."

She drew forth a little silver cross, and fell upon her knees to the bed. Mrs. Berry left the room tiptoe.

When she was called to return, Lucy was calm and tearless, and smiled kindly to her.

"It's over now," she said.

Mrs. Berry sedately looked for her ring to follow.

"He does not wish me to go in to the breakfast you have prepared, Mrs. Berry. I begged to be excused. I cannot eat."

Mrs. Berry very much deplored it, as she had laid out a superior nuptial breakfast, but with her mind on her ring she nodded assentingly.

"We shall not have much packing to do, Mrs. Berry."

"No, my dear. It's pretty well all done."

"We are going to the Isle of Wight, Mrs. Berry."

"And a very suitable spot ye've chose, my dear!"

"He loves the sea. He wishes to be near it."

"Don't ye cross to-night, if it's anyways rough, my dear. It isn't advisable." Mrs. Berry sank her voice to say, "Don't ye be soft and give way to him there, or you'll both be repenting it."

Lucy had only been staving off the unpleasantness she had to speak. She saw Mrs. Berry's eyes pursuing her ring, and screwed up her courage at last.

"Mrs. Berry."

"Yes, my dear."

"Mrs. Berry, you shall have another ring."

"Another, my dear?" Berry did not comprehend. "One's quite enough for the objeck," she remarked.

"I mean," Lucy touched her fourth finger, "I cannot part with this." She looked straight at Mrs. Berry.

That bewildered creature gazed at her, and at the ring, till she had thoroughly exhausted the meaning of the words, and then exclaimed, horror-struck: "Deary me, now! you don't say that? You're to be married again in your own religion."

The young wife repeated: "I can never part with it."

"But, my dear!" the wretched Berry wrung her hands, divided between compassion and a sense of injury. "My dear!" she kept expostulating like a mute.

"I know all that you would say, Mrs. Berry. I am very grieved to pain you. It is mine now, and must be mine. I cannot give it back."

There she sat, suddenly developed to the most inflexible little heroine in the three Kingdoms.

From her first perception of the meaning of the young bride's words, Mrs. Berry, a shrewd physiognomist, knew that her case was hopeless, unless she treated her as she herself had been treated, and seized the ring by force of arms; and that she had not heart for.

"What!" she gasped faintly, "one's own lawful wedding-ring you wouldn't give back to a body?"

"Because it is mine, Mrs. Berry. It was yours, but it is mine now. You shall have whatever you ask for but that. Pray, forgive me! It must be so."

Mrs. Berry rocked on her chair, and sounded her hands together. It amazed her that this soft little creature could be thus firm. She tried argument.

"Don't ye know, my dear, it's the fatalest thing you're inflictin' upon me, reelly! Don't ye know that bein' bereft of one's own lawful wedding-ring's the fatalest thing in life, and there's no prosperity after it! For what stands in place o' that, when that's gone, my dear? And what could ye give me to compensate a body for the loss o' that? Don't ye know—Oh, deary me!" The little bride's face was so set that poor Berry wailed off in despair.

"I know it," said Lucy. "I know it all. I know what I do to you. Dear, dear Mrs. Berry! forgive me! If I parted with my ring I know it would be fatal."

So this fair young freebooter took possession of her argument as well as her ring.

Berry racked her distracted wits for a further appeal.

"But, my child," she counter-argued, "you don't understand. It ain't as you think. It ain't a hurt to you now. Not a bit, it ain't. It makes no difference now! Any ring does while the wearer's a maid. And your Mr. Richard will find the very ring he intended for ye. And, of course, that's the one you'll wear as his wife. It's all the same now, my dear. It's no shame to a maid. Now do—now do—there's a darlin'!"

Wheedling availed as little as argument.

"Mrs. Berry," said Lucy, "you know what my—he spoke: 'With this ring I thee wed.' It was with this ring. Then how could it be with another?"

Berry was constrained despondently to acknowledge that was logic.

She hit upon an artful conjecture:

"Won't it be unlucky your wearin' of the ring which served me so? Think o' that!"

"It may! it may! it may!" cried Lucy.

"And arn't you rushin' into it, my dear?"

"Mrs. Berry," Lucy said again, "it was this ring. It cannot—it never can be another. It was this. What it brings me I must bear. I shall wear it till I die!"

"Then what am I to do?" the ill-used woman groaned. "What shall I tell my husband when he come back to me, and see I've got a new ring waitin' for him? Won't that be a welcome?"

Quoth Lucy: "How can he know it is not the same; in a plain gold ring?"

"You never see so keen a eyed man in joolry as my Berry!" returned his solitary spouse. "Not know, my dear? Why, any one would know that've got eyes in his head. There's as much difference in wedding-rings as there's in wedding people! Now, do pray be reasonable, my own sweet!"

"Pray, do not ask me," pleads Lucy.

"Pray, do think better of it," urges Berry.

"Pray, pray, Mrs. Berry!" pleads Lucy.

"—And not leave your old Berry all forlorn just when you're so happy!"

"Indeed I would not, you dear, kind old creature!" Lucy faltered.

Mrs. Berry thought she had her.

"Just when you're going to be the happiest wife on earth—all you want yours!" she pursued the tender strain. "A handsome young gentleman! Love and Fortune smilin' on ye!"—

Lucy rose up.

"Mrs. Berry," she said, "I think we must not lose time in getting ready, or he will be impatient."

Poor Berry surveyed her in abject wonder from the edge of her chair. Dignity and resolve were in the ductile form she had hitherto folded under her wing. In an hour the heroine had risen to the measure of the hero. Without being exactly aware what creature she was dealing with, Berry acknowledged to herself it was not one of the common run, and sighed, and submitted.

"It's like a divorce, that it is!" she sobbed.

After putting the corners of her apron to her eyes, Berry bustled humbly about the packing. Then Lucy, whose heart was full to her, came and kissed her, and Berry bumped down and regularly cried. This over, she had recourse to fatalism.

"I suppose it was to be, my dear! It's my punishment for meddlin' wi' such matters. No, I'm not sorry. Bless ye both. Who'd 'a thought you was so wilful?—you that any one might have taken for one of the silly-softs! You're a pair, my dear! indeed you are! You was made to meet! But we mustn't show him we've been crying.—Men don't like it when they're happy. Let's wash our faces and try to bear our lot."

So saying the black-satin bunch careened to a renewed deluge. She deserved some sympathy, for if it is sad to be married in another person's ring, how much sadder to have one's own old accustomed lawful ring violently torn off one's finger and eternally severed from one! But where you have heroes and heroines, these terrible complications ensue.

They had now both fought their battle of the ring, and with equal honour and success.

In the chamber of banquet Richard was giving Ripton his last directions. Though it was a private wedding, Mrs. Berry had prepared a sumptuous breakfast. Chickens offered their breasts: pies hinted savoury secrets: things mystic, in a mash, with Gallic appellatives, jellies, creams, fruits, strewed the table: as a tower in the midst, the cake colossal: the priestly vesture of its nuptial white relieved by hymeneal splendours.

Many hours, much labour and anxiety of mind, Mrs. Berry had expended upon this breakfast, and why? There is one who comes to all feasts that have their basis in Folly, whom criminals of trained instinct are careful to provide against: who will speak, and whose hateful voice must

somehow be silenced while the feast is going on. This personage is The Philosopher. Mrs. Berry knew him. She knew that he would come. She provided against him in the manner she thought most efficacious: that is, by cheating her eyes and intoxicating her conscience with the due and proper glories incident to weddings where fathers dilate, mothers collapse, and marriage settlements are flourished on high by the family lawyer: and had there been no show of the kind to greet her on her return from the church, she would, and she foresaw she would, have stared at squalor and emptiness, and repented her work. The Philosopher would have laid hold of her by the ear, and called her bad names. Entrenched behind a breakfast-table so legitimately adorned, Mrs. Berry defied him. In the presence of that cake he dared not speak above a whisper. And there were wines to drown him in, should he still think of protesting; fiery wines, and cool: claret sent purposely by the bridegroom for the delectation of his friend.

For one good hour, therefore, the labour of many hours kept him dumb. Ripton was fortifying himself so as to forget him altogether, and the world as well, till the next morning. Ripton was excited, overdone with delight. He had already finished one bottle, and listened, pleasantly flushed, to his emphatic and more abstemious chief. He had nothing to do but to listen, and to drink. The hero would not allow him to shout Victory! or hear a word of toasts; and as, from the quantity of oil poured on it, his eloquence was becoming a natural force in his bosom, the poor fellow was afflicted with a sort of elephantiasis of suppressed emotion. At times he half-rose from his chair, and fell vacuously into it again; or he chuckled in the face of weighty, severely-worded instructions; tapped his chest, stretched his arms, yawned, and in short behaved so singularly that Richard observed it, and said: "On my soul, I don't think you know a word I'm saying."

"Every word, Ricky!" Ripton spirted through the opening. "I'm going down to your governor, and tell him: Sir Austin! Here's your only chance of being a happy father—no, no!—Oh! don't you fear me, Ricky! I shall talk the old gentleman over."

His chief said:

"Look here. You had better not go down to-night. Go down the first thing to-morrow, by the six o'clock train. Give him my letter. Listen to me—give him my letter, and don't speak a word till he speaks. His eyebrows will go up and down, he won't say much. I know him. If he asks you about her, don't be a fool, but say what you think of her sensibly"—

No cork could hold in Ripton when she was alluded to. He shouted: "She's an angel!"

Richard checked him: "Speak sensibly, I say—quietly. You can say how gentle and good she is—my fleur-de-luce! And say, this was not her doing. If any one's to blame, it's I. I made her marry me. Then go to Lady Blandish, if you don't find her at the house. You may say whatever you please to her. Give her my letter, and tell her I want to hear from her immediately. She has seen Lucy, and I know what she thinks of her. You will then go to Farmer Blaize. I told you Lucy happens to be his niece—she has not lived long there. She lived with her aunt Desborough in France while she was a child, and can hardly be called a relative to the farmer—there's not a point of likeness between them. Poor darling! she never knew her mother. Go to Mr. Blaize, and tell him. You will treat him just as you would treat any other gentleman. If you are civil, he is

sure to be. And if he abuses me, for my sake and hers you will still treat him with respect. You hear? And then write me a full account of all that has been said and done. You will have my address the day after to-morrow. By the way, Tom will be here this afternoon. Write out for him where to call on you the day after to-morrow, in case you have heard anything in the morning you think I ought to know at once, as Tom will join me that night. Don't mention to anybody about my losing the ring, Ripton. I wouldn't have Adrian get hold of that for a thousand pounds. How on earth I came to lose it! How well she bore it, Rip! How beautifully she behaved!"

Ripton again shouted: "An angel!" Throwing up the heels of his second bottle, he said:

"You may trust your friend, Richard. Aha! when you pulled at old Mrs. Berry I didn't know what was up. I do wish you'd let me drink her health?"

"Here's to Penelope!" said Richard, just wetting his mouth. The carriage was at the door: a couple of dire organs, each grinding the same tune, and a vulture-scented itinerant band (from which not the secretest veiled wedding can escape) worked harmoniously without in the production of discord, and the noise acting on his nervous state made him begin to fume and send in messages for his bride by the maid.

By and by the lovely young bride presented herself dressed for her journey, and smiling from stained eyes.

Mrs. Berry was requested to drink some wine, which Ripton poured out for her, enabling Mrs. Berry thereby to measure his condition.

The bride now kissed Mrs. Berry, and Mrs. Berry kissed the bridegroom, on the plea of her softness. Lucy gave Ripton her hand, with a musical "Good-bye, Mr. Thompson," and her extreme graciousness made him just sensible enough to sit down before he murmured his fervent hopes for her happiness.

"I shall take good care of him," said Mrs. Berry, focussing her eyes to the comprehension of the company.

"Farewell, Penelope!" cried Richard. "I shall tell the police everywhere to look out for your lord."

"Oh my dears! good-bye, and Heaven bless ye both!"

Berry quavered, touched with compunction at the thoughts of approaching loneliness. Ripton, his mouth drawn like a bow to his ears, brought up the rear to the carriage, receiving a fair slap on the cheek from an old shoe precipitated by Mrs. Berry's enthusiastic female domestic.

White handkerchiefs were waved, the adieux had fallen to signs: they were off. Then did a thought of such urgency illumine Mrs. Berry, that she telegraphed, hand in air; awakening Ripton's lungs, for the coachman to stop, and ran back to the house. Richard chafed to be gone, but at his bride's intercession he consented to wait. Presently they beheld the old black-satin

bunch stream through the street-door, down the bit of garden, and up the astonished street; halting, panting, capless at the carriage door, a book in her hand,—a much-used, dog-leaved, steamy, greasy book, which; at the same time calling out in breathless jerks, "There! never ye mind looks! I ain't got a new one. Read it, and don't ye forget it!" she discharged into Lucy's lap, and retreated to the railings, a signal for the coachman to drive away for good.

How Richard laughed at the Berry's bridal gift! Lucy, too, lost the omen at her heart as she glanced at the title of the volume. It was Dr. Kitchener on Domestic Cookery!

CHAPTER XXXI

General withdrawing of heads from street-windows, emigration of organs and bands, and a relaxed atmosphere in the circle of Mrs. Berry's abode, proved that Dan Cupid had veritably flown to suck the life of fresh regions. With a pensive mind she grasped Ripton's arm to regulate his steps, and returned to the room where her creditor awaited her. In the interval he had stormed her undefended fortress, the cake, from which altitude he shook a dolorous head at the guilty woman. She smoothed her excited apron, sighing. Let no one imagine that she regretted her complicity. She was ready to cry torrents, but there must be absolute castigation before this criminal shall conceive the sense of regret; and probably then she will cling to her wickedness the more—such is the born Pagan's tenacity! Mrs. Berry sighed, and gave him back his shake of the head. O you wanton, improvident creature! said he. O you very wise old gentleman! said she. He asked her the thing she had been doing. She enlightened him with the fatalist's reply. He sounded a bogey's alarm of contingent grave results. She retreated to the entrenched camp of the fact she had helped to make.

"It's done!" she exclaimed. How could she regret what she felt comfort to know was done? Convinced that events alone could stamp a mark on such stubborn flesh, he determined to wait for them, and crouched silent on the cake, with one finger downwards at Ripton's incision there, showing a crumbling chasm and gloomy rich recess.

The eloquent indication was understood. "Dear! dear!" cried Mrs. Berry, "what a heap o' cake, and no one to send it to!"

Ripton had resumed his seat by the table and his embrace of the claret. Clear ideas of satisfaction had left him and resolved to a boiling geysir of indistinguishable transports. He bubbled, and waggled, and nodded amicably to nothing, and successfully, though not without effort, preserved his uppermost member from the seductions of the nymph, Gravitation, who was on the look-out for his whole length shortly.

"Ha! ha!" he shouted, about a minute after Mrs. Berry had spoken, and almost abandoned himself to the nymph on the spot. Mrs. Berry's words had just reached his wits.

"Why do you laugh, young man?" she inquired, familiar and motherly on account of his condition.

Ripton laughed louder, and caught his chest on the edge of the table and his nose on a chicken. "That's goo'!" he said, recovering, and rocking under Mrs. Berry's eyes. "No friend!"

"I did not say, no friend," she remarked. "I said, no one; meanin', I know not where for to send it to."

Ripton's response to this was: "You put a Griffin on that cake. Wheatsheaves each side."

"His crest?" Mrs. Berry said sweetly.

"Oldest baronetcy 'n England!" waved Ripton.

"Yes?" Mrs. Berry encouraged him on.

"You think he's Richards. We're oblige' be very close. And she's the most lovely!—If I hear man say thing 'gainst her."

"You needn't for to cry over her, young man," said Mrs. Berry. "I wanted for to drink their right healths by their right names, and then go about my day's work, and I do hope you won't keep me."

Ripton stood bolt upright at her words.

"You do?" he said, and filling a bumper he with cheerfully vinous articulation and glibness of tongue proposed the health of Richard and Lucy Feverel, of Raynham Abbey! and that mankind should not require an expeditious example of the way to accept the inspiring toast, he drained his bumper at a gulp. It finished him. The farthing rushlight of his reason leapt and expired. He tumbled to the sofa and there stretched.

Some minutes subsequent to Ripton's signalization of his devotion to the bridal pair, Mrs. Berry's maid entered the room to say that a gentleman was inquiring below after the young gentleman who had departed, and found her mistress with a tottering wineglass in her hand, exhibiting every symptom of unconsoled hysterics. Her mouth gaped, as if the fell creditor had her by the swallow. She ejaculated with horrible exultation that she had been and done it, as her disastrous aspect seemed to testify, and her evident, but inexplicable, access of misery induced the sympathetic maid to tender those caressing words that were all Mrs. Berry wanted to go off into the self-caressing fit without delay; and she had already given the preluding demoniac ironic outburst, when the maid called heaven to witness that the gentleman would hear her; upon which Mrs. Berry violently controlled her bosom, and ordered that he should be shown upstairs instantly to see her the wretch she was. She repeated the injunction.

The maid did as she was told, and Mrs. Berry, wishing first to see herself as she was, mutely accosted the looking-glass, and tried to look a very little better. She dropped a shawl on Ripton and was settled, smoothing her agitation when her visitor was announced.

The gentleman was Adrian Harley. An interview with Tom Bakewell had put him on the track, and now a momentary survey of the table, and its white-vestured cake, made him whistle.

Mrs. Berry plaintively begged him to do her the favour to be seated.

"A fine morning, ma'am," said Adrian.

"It have been!" Mrs. Berry answered, glancing over her shoulder at the window, and gulping as if to get her heart down from her mouth.

"A very fine Spring," pursued Adrian, calmly anatomizing her countenance.

Mrs. Berry smothered an adjective to "weather" on a deep sigh. Her wretchedness was palpable. In proportion to it, Adrian waned cheerful and brisk. He divined enough of the business to see that there was some strange intelligence to be fished out of the culprit who sat compressing hysterics before him; and as he was never more in his element than when he had a sinner, and a repentant prostrate abject sinner in hand, his affable countenance might well deceive poor Berry.

"I presume these are Mr. Thompson's lodgings?" he remarked, with a look at the table.

Mrs. Berry's head and the whites of her eyes informed him that they were not Mr. Thompson's lodgings.

"No?" said Adrian, and threw a carelessly inquisitive eye about him. "Mr. Feverel is out, I suppose?"

A convulsive start at the name, and two corroborating hands dropped on her knees, formed Mrs. Berry's reply.

"Mr. Feverel's man," continued Adrian, "told me I should be certain to find him here. I thought he would be with his friend, Mr. Thompson. I'm too late, I perceive. Their entertainment is over. I fancy you have been having a party of them here, ma'am?—a bachelors' breakfast!"

In the presence of that cake this observation seemed to mask an irony so shrewd that Mrs. Berry could barely contain herself. She felt she must speak. Making her face as deplorably propitiating as she could, she began:

"Sir, may I beg for to know your name?"

Mr. Harley accorded her request.

Groaning in the clutch of a pitiless truth, she continued:

"And you are Mr. Harley, that was—oh! and you've come for Mr.?"—

Mr. Richard Feverel was the gentleman Mr. Harley had come for.

"Oh! and it's no mistake, and he's of Raynham Abbey?" Mrs. Berry inquired.

Adrian, very much amused, assured her that he was born and bred there.

"His father's Sir Austin?" wailed the black-satin bunch from behind her handkerchief.

Adrian verified Richard's descent.

"Oh, then, what have I been and done!" she cried, and stared blankly at her visitor. "I been and married my baby! I been and married the bread out of my own mouth. O Mr. Harley! Mr. Harley! I knew you when you was a boy that big, and wore jackets; and all of you. And it's my softness that's my ruin, for I never can resist a man's asking. Look at that cake, Mr. Harley!"

Adrian followed her directions quite coolly. "Wedding-cake, ma'am!" he said.

"Bride-cake it is, Mr. Harley!"

"Did you make it yourself, ma'am?"

The quiet ease of the question overwhelmed Mrs. Berry and upset that train of symbolic representations by which she was seeking to make him guess the catastrophe and spare her the furnace of confession.

"I did not make it myself, Mr. Harley," she replied. "It's a bought cake, and I'm a lost woman. Little I dreamed when I had him in my arms a baby that I should some day be marrying him out of my own house! I little dreamed that! Oh, why did he come to me! Don't you remember his old nurse, when he was a baby in arms, that went away so sudden, and no fault of hers, Mr. Harley! The very mornin' after the night you got into Mr. Benson's cellar, and got so tipsy on his Madeary—I remember it as clear as yesterday!—and Mr. Benson was that angry he threatened to use the whip to you, and I helped put you to bed. I'm that very woman."

Adrian smiled placidly at these reminiscences of his guileless youthful life.

"Well, ma'am! well?" he said. He would bring her to the furnace.

"Won't you see it all, kind sir?" Mrs. Berry appealed to him in pathetic dumb show.

Doubtless by this time Adrian did see it all, and was mentally cursing at Folly, and reckoning the immediate consequences, but he looked uninstructed, his peculiar dimple-smile was undisturbed, his comfortable full-bodied posture was the same. "Well, ma'am?" he spurred her on.

Mrs. Berry burst forth: "It were done this mornin', Mr. Harley, in the church, at half-past eleven of the clock, or twenty to, by licence."

Adrian was now obliged to comprehend a case of matrimony. "Oh!" he said, like one who is as hard as facts, and as little to be moved: "Somebody was married this morning; was it Mr. Thompson, or Mr. Feverel?"

Mrs. Berry shuffled up to Ripton, and removed the shawl from him, saying: "Do he look like a new married bridegroom, Mr. Harley?"

Adrian inspected the oblivious Ripton with philosophic gravity.

"This young gentleman was at church this morning?" he asked.

"Oh! quite reasonable and proper then," Mrs. Berry begged him to understand.

"Of course, ma'am." Adrian lifted and let fall the stupid inanimate limbs of the gone wretch, puckering his mouth queerly. "You were all reasonable and proper, ma'am. The principal male performer, then, is my cousin, Mr. Feverel? He was married by you, this morning, by licence at your parish church, and came here, and ate a hearty breakfast, and left intoxicated."

Mrs. Berry flew out. "He never drink a drop, sir. A more moderate young gentleman you never see. Oh! don't ye think that now, Mr. Harley. He was as upright and master of his mind as you be."

"Ay!" the wise youth nodded thanks to her for the comparison, "I mean the other form of intoxication."

Mrs. Berry sighed. She could say nothing on that score.

Adrian desired her to sit down, and compose herself, and tell him circumstantially what had been done.

She obeyed, in utter perplexity at his perfectly composed demeanour.

Mrs. Berry, as her recital declared, was no other than that identical woman who once in old days had dared to behold the baronet behind his mask, and had ever since lived in exile from the Raynham world on a little pension regularly paid to her as an indemnity. She was that woman, and the thought of it made her almost accuse Providence for the betraying excess of softness it had endowed her with. How was she to recognize her baby grown a man? He came in a feigned name; not a word of the family was mentioned. He came like an ordinary mortal, though she felt something more than ordinary to him—she knew she did. He came bringing a beautiful young lady, and on what grounds could she turn her back on them? Why, seeing that all was chaste and legal, why should she interfere to make them unhappy—so few the chances of happiness in this world! Mrs. Berry related the seizure of her ring.

"One wrench," said the sobbing culprit, "one, and my ring was off!"

She had no suspicions, and the task of writing her name in the vestry-book had been too enacting for a thought upon the other signatures.

"I daresay you were exceedingly sorry for what you had done," said Adrian.

"Indeed, sir," moaned Berry, "I were, and am."

"And would do your best to rectify the mischief—eh, ma'am?"

"Indeed, and indeed, sir, I would," she protested solemnly.

"—As, of course, you should—knowing the family. Where may these lunatics have gone to spend the Moon?"

Mrs. Berry swimmingly replied: "To the Isle—I don't quite know, sir!" she snapped the indication short, and jumped out of the pit she had fallen into. Repentant as she might be, those dears should not be pursued and cruelly balked of their young bliss! "To-morrow, if you please, Mr. Harley: not to-day!"

"A pleasant spot," Adrian observed, smiling at his easy prey.

By a measurement of dates he discovered that the bridegroom had brought his bride to the house on the day he had quitted Raynham, and this was enough to satisfy Adrian's mind that there had been concoction and chicanery. Chance, probably, had brought him to the old woman: chance certainly had not brought him to the young one.

"Very well, ma'am," he said, in answer to her petitions for his favourable offices with Sir Austin in behalf of her little pension and the bridal pair, "I will tell him you were only a blind agent in the affair, being naturally soft, and that you trust he will bless the consummation. He will be in town to-morrow morning; but one of you two must see him to-night. An emetic kindly administered will set our friend here on his legs. A bath and a clean shirt, and he might go. I don't see why your name should appear at all. Brush him up, and send him to Bellingham by the seven o'clock train. He will find his way to Raynham; he knows the neighbourhood best in the dark. Let him go and state the case. Remember, one of you must go."

With this fair prospect of leaving a choice of a perdition between the couple of unfortunates, for them to fight and lose all their virtues over, Adrian said, "Good morning."

Mrs. Berry touchingly arrested him. "You won't refuse a piece of his cake, Mr. Harley?"

"Oh, dear, no, ma'am," Adrian turned to the cake with alacrity. "I shall claim a very large piece. Richard has a great many friends who will rejoice to eat his wedding-cake. Cut me a fair quarter, Mrs. Berry. Put it in paper, if you please. I shall be delighted to carry it to them, and apportion it equitably according to their several degrees of relationship."

Mrs. Berry cut the cake. Somehow, as she sliced through it, the sweetness and hapless innocence of the bride was presented to her, and she launched into eulogies of Lucy, and clearly showed how little she regretted her conduct. She vowed that they seemed made for each other; that both, were beautiful; both had spirit; both were innocent; and to part them, or make them unhappy, would be, Mrs. Berry wrought herself to cry aloud, oh, such a pity!

Adrian listened to it as the expression of a matter-of-fact opinion. He took the huge quarter of cake, nodded multitudinous promises, and left Mrs. Berry to bless his good heart.

"So dies the System!" was Adrian's comment in the street. "And now let prophets roar! He dies respectably in a marriage-bed, which is more than I should have foretold of the monster. Meantime," he gave the cake a dramatic tap, "I'll go sow nightmares."

CHAPTER XXXII

Adrian really bore the news he had heard with creditable disinterestedness, and admirable repression of anything beneath the dignity of a philosopher. When one has attained that felicitous point of wisdom from which one sees all mankind to be fools, the diminutive objects may make what new moves they please, one does not marvel at them: their sedateness is as comical as their frolic, and their frenzies more comical still. On this intellectual eminence the wise youth had built his castle, and he had lived in it from an early period. Astonishment never shook the foundations, nor did envy of greater heights tempt him to relinquish the security of his stronghold, for he saw none. Jugglers he saw running up ladders that overtopped him, and air-balloons scaling the empyrean; but the former came precipitately down again, and the latter were at the mercy of the winds; while he remained tranquil on his solid unambitious ground, fitting his morality to the laws, his conscience to his morality, his comfort to his conscience. Not that voluntarily he cut himself off from his fellows: on the contrary, his sole amusement was their society. Alone he was rather dull, as a man who beholds but one thing must naturally be. Study of the animated varieties of that one thing excited him sufficiently to think life a pleasant play; and the faculties he had forfeited to hold his elevated position he could serenely enjoy by contemplation of them in others. Thus:—wonder at Master Richard's madness: though he himself did not experience it, he was eager to mark the effect on his beloved relatives. As he carried along his vindictive hunch of cake, he shaped out their different attitudes of amaze, bewilderment, horror; passing by some personal chagrin in the prospect. For his patron had projected a journey, commencing with Paris, culminating on the Alps, and lapsing in Rome: a delightful journey to show Richard the highways of History and tear him from the risk of further ignoble fascinations, that his spirit might be altogether bathed in freshness and revived. This had been planned during Richard's absence to surprise him.

Now the dream of travel was to Adrian what the love of woman is to the race of young men. It supplanted that foolishness. It was his Romance, as we say; that buoyant anticipation on which in youth we ride the airs, and which, as we wax older and too heavy for our atmosphere, hardens to the Hobby, which, if an obstinate animal, is a safer horse, and conducts man at a slower pace to the sexton. Adrian had never travelled. He was aware that his romance was earthly and had discomforts only to be evaded by the one potent talisman possessed by his patron. His Alp would hardly be grand to him without an obsequious landlord in the foreground: he must recline on Mammon's imperial cushions in order to moralize becomingly on the ancient world. The search for pleasure at the expense of discomfort, as frantic lovers woo their mistresses to partake the shelter of a but and batten on a crust, Adrian deemed the bitterness of beggarliness. Let his sweet mistress be given him in the pomp and splendour due to his superior emotions, or not at all. Consequently the wise youth had long nursed an ineffectual passion, and it argued a great nature in him, that at the moment when his wishes were to be crowned, he should look with such slight touches of spleen at the gorgeous composite fabric of Parisian cookery and Roman antiquities crumbling into unsubstantial mockery. Assuredly very few even of the philosophers would have turned away uncomplainingly to meaner delights the moment after.

Hippias received the first portion of the cake.

He was sitting by the window in his hotel, reading. He had fought down his breakfast with more than usual success, and was looking forward to his dinner at the Foreys' with less than usual timidity.

"Ah! glad you've come, Adrian," he said, and expanded his chest. "I was afraid I should have to ride down. This is kind of you. We'll walk down together through the park. It's absolutely dangerous to walk alone in these streets. My opinion is, that orange-peel lasts all through the year now, and will till legislation puts a stop to it. I give you my word I slipped on a piece of orange-peel yesterday afternoon in Piccadilly, and I thought I was down! I saved myself by a miracle."

"You have an appetite, I hope?" asked Adrian.

"I think I shall get one, after a bit of a walk," chirped Hippias. "Yes. I think I feel hungry now."

"Charmed to hear it," said Adrian, and began unpinning his parcel on his knees. "How should you define Folly?" he checked the process to inquire.

"Hm!" Hippias meditated; he prided himself on being oracular when such questions were addressed to him. "I think I should define it to be a slide."

"Very good definition. In other words, a piece of orange-peel; once on it, your life and limbs are in danger, and you are saved by a miracle. You must present that to the Pilgrim. And the monument of folly, what would that be?"

Hippias meditated anew. "All the human race on one another's shoulders." He chuckled at the sweeping sourness of the instance.

"Very good," Adrian applauded, "or in default of that, some symbol of the thing, say; such as this of which I have here brought you a chip."

Adrian displayed the quarter of the cake.

"This is the monument made portable—eh?"

"Cake!" cried Hippias, retreating to his chair to dramatize his intense disgust. "You're right of them that eat it. If I—if I don't mistake," he peered at it, "the noxious composition bedizened in that way is what they call wedding-cake. It's arrant poison! Who is it you want to kill? What are you carrying such stuff about for?"

Adrian rang the bell for a knife. "To present you with your due and proper portion. You will have friends and relatives, and can't be saved from them, not even by miracle. It is a habit which exhibits, perhaps, the unconscious inherent cynicism of the human mind, for people who consider that they have reached the acme of mundane felicity, to distribute this token of esteem to their friends, with the object probably" (he took the knife from a waiter and went to the table to slice the cake) "of enabling those friends (these edifices require very delicate incision—each particular currant and subtle condiment hangs to its neighbour—a wedding-cake is evidently the most highly civilized of cakes, and partakes of the evils as well as the advantages of civilization!)—I was saying, they send us these love-tokens, no doubt (we shall have to weigh out the crumbs, if each is to have his fair share) that we may the better estimate their state of bliss by passing some hours in purgatory. This, as far as I can apportion it without weights and scales, is your share, my uncle!"

He pushed the corner of the table bearing the cake towards Hippias.

"Get away!" Hippias vehemently motioned, and started from his chair. "I'll have none of it, I tell you! It's death! It's fifty times worse than that beastly compound Christmas pudding! What fool has been doing this, then? Who dares send me cake? Me! It's an insult."

"You are not compelled to eat any before dinner," said Adrian, pointing the corner of the table after him, "but your share you must take, and appear to consume. One who has done so much to bring about the marriage cannot in conscience refuse his allotment of the fruits. Maidens, I hear, first cook it under their pillows, and extract nuptial dreams therefrom—said to be of a lighter class, taken that way. It's a capital cake, and, upon my honour, you have helped to make it—you have indeed! So here it is."

The table again went at Hippias. He ran nimbly round it, and flung himself on a sofa exhausted, crying: "There!... My appetite's gone for to-day!"

"Then shall I tell Richard that you won't touch a morsel of his cake?" said Adrian, leaning on his two hands over the table and looking at his uncle.

"Richard?"

"Yes, your nephew: my cousin: Richard! Your companion since you've been in town. He's married, you know. Married this morning at Kensington parish church, by licence, at half-past eleven of the clock, or twenty to. Married, and gone to spend his honeymoon in the Isle of Wight, a very delectable place for a month's residence. I have to announce to you that, thanks to your assistance, the experiment is launched, sir!"

"Richard married!"

There was something to think and to say in objection to it, but the wits of poor Hippias were softened by the shock. His hand travelled half-way to his forehead, spread out to smooth the surface of that seat of reason, and then fell.

"Surely you knew all about it? you were so anxious to have him in town under your charge...."

"Married?" Hippias jumped up—he had it. "Why, he's under age! he's an infant."

"So he is. But the infant is not the less married. Fib like a man and pay your fee—what does it matter? Any one who is breeched can obtain a licence in our noble country. And the interests of morality demand that it should not be difficult. Is it true—can you persuade anybody that you have known nothing about it?"

"Ha! infamous joke! I wish, sir, you would play your pranks on somebody else," said Hippias, sternly, as he sank back on the sofa. "You've done me up for the day, I can assure you."

Adrian sat down to instil belief by gentle degrees, and put an artistic finish to the work. He had the gratification of passing his uncle through varied contortions, and at last Hippias perspired in conviction, and exclaimed, "This accounts for his conduct to me. That boy must have a cunning nothing short of infernal! I feel...I feel it just here, he drew a hand along his midriff.

"I'm not equal to this world of fools," he added faintly, and shut his eyes. "No, I can't dine. Eat? ha!... no. Go without me!"

Shortly after, Hippias went to bed, saying to himself, as he undressed, "See what comes of our fine schemes! Poor Austin!" and as the pillow swelled over his ears, "I'm not sure that a day's fast won't do me good." The Dyspepsy had bought his philosophy at a heavy price; he had a right to use it.

Adrian resumed the procession of the cake.

He sighted his melancholy uncle Algernon hunting an appetite in the Row, and looking as if the hope ahead of him were also one-legged. The Captain did not pass with out querying the ungainly parcel.

"I hope I carry it ostentatiously enough?" said Adrian.

"Enclosed is wherewithal to quiet the alarm of the land. Now may the maids and wives of Merry England sleep secure. I had half a mind to fix it on a pole, and engage a band to parade it. This is our dear Richard's wedding-cake. Married at half-past eleven this morning, by licence, at the Kensington parish church; his own ring being lost he employed the ring of his beautiful bride's lachrymose land-lady, she standing adjacent by the altar. His farewell to you as a bachelor, and hers as a maid, you can claim on the spot if you think proper, and digest according to your powers."

Algernon let off steam in a whistle. "Thompson, the solicitor's daughter!" he said. "I met them the other day, somewhere about here. He introduced me to her. A pretty little baggage.

"No." Adrian set him right. "'Tis a Miss Desborough, a Roman Catholic dairymaid. Reminds one of pastoral England in the time of the Plantagenets! He's quite equal to introducing her as Thompson's daughter, and himself as Beelzebub's son. However, the wild animal is in Hymen's chains, and the cake is cut. Will you have your morsel?"

"Oh, by all means!—not now." Algernon had an unwonted air of reflection.—"Father know it?"

"Not yet. He will to-night by nine o'clock."

"Then I must see him by seven. Don't say you met me." He nodded, and pricked his horse.

"Wants money!" said Adrian, putting the combustible he carried once more in motion.

The women were the crowning joy of his contemplative mind. He had reserved them for his final discharge. Dear demonstrative creatures! Dyspepsia would not weaken their poignant outcries, or self-interest check their fainting fits. On the generic woman one could calculate. Well might The Pilgrim's Scrip say of her that, "She is always at Nature's breast"; not intending it as a compliment. Each woman is Eve throughout the ages; whereas the Pilgrim would have us believe that the Adam in men has become warier, if not wiser; and weak as he is, has learnt a lesson from time. Probably the Pilgrim's meaning may be taken to be, that Man grows, and Woman does not.

At any rate, Adrian hoped for such natural choruses as you hear in the nursery when a bauble is lost. He was awake to Mrs. Doria's maternal predestinations, and guessed that Clare stood ready with the best form of filial obedience. They were only a poor couple to gratify his Mephistophelian humour, to be sure, but Mrs. Doria was equal to twenty, and they would proclaim the diverse ways with which maidenhood and womanhood took disappointment, while the surrounding Forey girls and other females of the family assembly were expected to develop the finer shades and tapering edges of an agitation to which no woman could be cold.

All went well. He managed cleverly to leave the cake unchallenged in a conspicuous part of the drawing-room, and stepped gaily down to dinner. Much of the conversation adverted to Richard. Mrs. Doria asked him if he had seen the youth, or heard of him.

"Seen him? no! Heard of him? yes!" said Adrian. "I have heard of him. I heard that he was sublimely happy, and had eaten such a breakfast that dinner was impossible; claret and cold chicken, cake and"—

"Cake at breakfast!" they all interjected.

"That seems to be his fancy just now."

"What an extraordinary taste!"

"You know, he is educated on a System."

One fast young male Forey allied the System and the cake in a miserable pun. Adrian, a hater of puns, looked at him, and held the table silent, as if he were going to speak; but he said nothing, and the young gentleman vanished from the conversation in a blush, extinguished by his own spark.

Mrs. Doria peevishly exclaimed, "Oh! fish-cake, I suppose! I wish he understood a little better the obligations of relationship."

"Whether he understands them, I can't say," observed Adrian, "but I assure you he is very energetic in extending them."

The wise youth talked innuendoes whenever he had an opportunity, that his dear relative might be rendered sufficiently inflammable by and by at the aspect of the cake; but he was not thought more than commonly mysterious and deep.

"Was his appointment at the house of those Grandison people?" Mrs. Doria asked, with a hostile upper-lip.

Adrian warmed the blindfolded parties by replying, "Do they keep a beadle at the door?"

Mrs. Doria's animosity to Mrs. Grandison made her treat this as a piece of satirical ingenuousness. "I daresay they do," she said.

"And a curate on hand?"

"Oh, I should think a dozen!"

Old Mr. Forey advised his punning grandson Clarence to give that house a wide berth, where he might be disposed of and dished-up at a moment's notice, and the scent ran off at a jest.

The Foreys gave good dinners, and with the old gentleman the excellent old fashion remained in permanence of trooping off the ladies as soon as they had taken their sustenance and just exchanged a smile with the flowers and the dessert, when they rose to fade with a beautiful accord, and the gallant males breathed under easier waistcoats, and settled to the business of the

table, sure that an hour for unbosoming and imbibing was their own. Adrian took a chair by Brandon Forey, a barrister of standing.

"I want to ask you," he said, "whether an infant in law can legally bind himself."

"If he's old enough to affix his signature to an instrument, I suppose he can," yawned Brandon.

"Is he responsible for his acts?"

"I've no doubt we could hang him."

"Then what he could do for himself, you could do for him?"

"Not quite so much; pretty near."

"For instance, he can marry?"

"That's not a criminal case, you know."

"And the marriage is valid?"

"You can dispute it."

"Yes, and the Greeks and the Trojans can fight. It holds then?"

"Both water and fire!"

The patriarch of the table sang out to Adrian that he stopped the vigorous circulation of the claret.

"Dear me, sir!" said Adrian, "I beg pardon. The circumstances must excuse me. The fact is, my cousin Richard got married to a dairymaid this morning, and I wanted to know whether it held in law."

It was amusing to watch the manly coolness with which the announcement was taken. Nothing was heard more energetic than, "Deuce he has!" and, "A dairymaid!"

"I thought it better to let the ladies dine in peace," Adrian continued. "I wanted to be able to console my aunt"—

"Well, but—well, but," the old gentleman, much the most excited, puffed—"eh, Brandon? He's a boy, this young ass! Do you mean to tell me a boy can go and marry when he pleases, and any troll he pleases, and the marriage is good? If I thought that I'd turn every woman off my premises. I would! from the housekeeper to the scullery-maid. I'd have no woman near him till—till"—

"Till the young greenhorn was grey, sir?" suggested Brandon.

"Till he knew what women are made of, sir!" the old gentleman finished his sentence vehemently. "What, d'ye think, will Feverel say to it, Mr. Adrian?"

"He has been trying the very System you have proposed sir—one that does not reckon on the powerful action of curiosity on the juvenile intelligence. I'm afraid it's the very worst way of solving the problem."

"Of course it is," said Clarence. "None but a fool!"—

"At your age," Adrian relieved his embarrassment, "it is natural, my dear Clarence, that you should consider the idea of an isolated or imprisoned manhood something monstrous, and we do not expect you to see what amount of wisdom it contains. You follow one extreme, and we the other. I don't say that a middle course exists. The history of mankind shows our painful efforts to find one, but they have invariably resolved themselves into asceticism, or laxity, acting and reacting. The moral question is, if a naughty little man, by reason of his naughtiness, releases himself from foolishness, does a foolish little man, by reason of his foolishness, save himself from naughtiness?"

A discussion, peculiar to men of the world, succeeded the laugh at Mr. Clarence. Then coffee was handed round and the footman informed Adrian, in a low voice, that Mrs. Doria Forey particularly wished to speak with him. Adrian preferred not to go in alone. "Very well," he said, and sipped his coffee. They talked on, sounding the depths of law in Brandon Forey, and receiving nought but hollow echoes from that profound cavity. He would not affirm that the marriage was invalid: he would not affirm that it could not be annulled. He thought not: still he thought it would be worth trying. A consummated and a non-consummated union were two different things....

"Dear me!" said Adrian, "does the Law recognize that? Why, that's almost human!"

Another message was brought to Adrian that Mrs. Doria Forey very particularly wished to speak with him.

"What can be the matter?" he exclaimed, pleased to have his faith in woman strengthened. The cake had exploded, no doubt.

So it proved, when the gentlemen joined the fair society. All the younger ladies stood about the table, whereon the cake stood displayed, gaps being left for those sitting to feast their vision, and intrude the comments and speculations continually arising from fresh shocks of wonder at the unaccountable apparition. Entering with the half-guilty air of men who know they have come from a grosser atmosphere, the gallant males also ranged themselves round the common object of curiosity.

"Here! Adrian!" Mrs. Doria cried. "Where is Adrian? Pray, come here. Tell me! Where did this cake come from? Whose is it? What does it do here? You know all about it, for you brought it.

Clare saw you bring it into the room. What does it mean? I insist upon a direct answer. Now do not make me impatient, Adrian."

Certainly Mrs. Doria was equal to twenty. By her concentrated rapidity and volcanic complexion it was evident that suspicion had kindled.

"I was really bound to bring it," Adrian protested.

"Answer me!"

The wise youth bowed: "Categorically. This cake came from the house of a person, a female, of the name of Berry. It belongs to you partly, partly to me, partly to Clare, and to the rest of our family, on the principle of equal division for which purpose it is present...."

"Yes! Speak!"

"It means, my dear aunt, what that kind of cake usually does mean."

"This, then, is the Breakfast! And the ring! Adrian! where is Richard?"

Mrs. Doria still clung to unbelief in the monstrous horror.

But when Adrian told her that Richard had left town, her struggling hope sank. "The wretched boy has ruined himself!" she said, and sat down trembling.

Oh! that System! The delicate vituperations gentle ladies use instead of oaths, Mrs. Doria showered on that System. She hesitated not to say that her brother had got what he deserved. Opinionated, morbid, weak, justice had overtaken him. Now he would see! but at what a price! at what a sacrifice!

Mrs. Doria, commanded Adrian to confirm her fears.

Sadly the wise youth recapitulated Berry's words. "He was married this morning at half-past eleven of the clock, or twenty to twelve, by licence, at the Kensington parish church."

"Then that was his appointment!" Mrs. Doria murmured.

"That was the cake for breakfast!" breathed a second of her sex.

"And it was his ring!" exclaimed a third.

The men were silent, and made long faces.

Clare stood cold and sedate. She and her mother avoided each other's eyes.

"Is it that abominable country person, Adrian?"

"The happy damsel is, I regret to say, the Papist dairymaid," said Adrian, in sorrowful but deliberate accents.

Then arose a feminine hum, in the midst of which Mrs. Doria cried, "Brandon!" She was a woman of energy. Her thoughts resolved to action spontaneously.

"Brandon," she drew the barrister a little aside, "can they not be followed, and separated? I want your advice. Cannot we separate them? A boy! it is really shameful if he should be allowed to fall into the toils of a designing creature to ruin himself irrevocably. Can we not, Brandon?"

The worthy barrister felt inclined to laugh, but he answered her entreaties: "From what I hear of the young groom I should imagine the office perilous."

"I'm speaking of law, Brandon. Can we not obtain an order from one of your Courts to pursue them and separate them instantly?"

"This evening?"

"Yes!"

Brandon was sorry to say she decidedly could not.

"You might call on one of your Judges, Brandon."

Brandon assured her that the Judges were a hard-worked race, and to a man slept heavily after dinner.

"Will you do so to-morrow, the first thing in the morning? Will you promise me to do so, Brandon?—Or a magistrate! A magistrate would send a policeman after them. My dear Brandon! I beg—I beg you to assist us in this dreadful extremity. It will be the death of my poor brother. I believe he would forgive anything but this. You have no idea what his notions are of blood."

Brandon tipped Adrian a significant nod to step in and aid.

"What is it, aunt?" asked the wise youth. "You want them followed and torn asunder by wild policemen?"

"To-morrow!" Brandon queerly interposed.

"Won't that be—just too late?" Adrian suggested.

Mrs. Doria, sighed out her last spark of hope.

"You see," said Adrian....

"Yes! yes!" Mrs. Doria did not require any of his elucidations. "Pray be quiet, Adrian, and let me speak. Brandon! it cannot be! it's quite impossible! Can you stand there and tell me that boy is legally married? I never will believe it! The law cannot be so shamefully bad as to permit a boy—a mere child—to do such absurd things. Grandpapa!" she beckoned to the old gentleman. "Grandpapa! pray do make Brandon speak. These lawyers never will. He might stop it, if he would. If I were a man, do you think I would stand here?"

"Well, my dear," the old gentleman toddled to compose her, "I'm quite of your opinion. I believe he knows no more than you or I. My belief is they none of them know anything till they join issue and go into Court. I want to see a few female lawyers."

"To encourage the bankrupt perruquier, sir?" said Adrian. "They would have to keep a large supply of wigs on hand."

"And you can jest, Adrian!" his aunt reproached him. "But I will not be beaten. I know—I am firmly convinced that no law would ever allow a boy to disgrace his family and ruin himself like that, and nothing shall persuade me that it is so. Now, tell me, Brandon, and pray do speak in answer to my questions, and please to forget you are dealing with a woman. Can my nephew be rescued from the consequences of his folly? Is what he has done legitimate? Is he bound for life by what he has done while a boy?

"Well—a," Brandon breathed through his teeth. "A—hm! the matter's so very delicate, you see, Helen."

"You're to forget that," Adrian remarked.

"A—hm! well!" pursued Brandon. "Perhaps if you could arrest and divide them before nightfall, and make affidavit of certain facts"...

"Yes?" the eager woman hastened his lagging mouth.

"Well...hm! a...in that case...a... Or if a lunatic, you could prove him to have been of unsound mind."...

"Oh! there's no doubt of his madness on my mind, Brandon."

"Yes! well! in that case... Or if of different religious persuasions"...

"She is a Catholic!" Mrs. Doria joyfully interjected.

"Yes! well! in that case...objections might be taken to the form of the marriage... Might be proved fictitious... Or if he's under, say, eighteen years"...

"He can't be much more," cried Mrs. Doria. "I think," she appeared to reflect, and then faltered imploringly to Adrian, "What is Richard's age?"

The kind wise youth could not find it in his heart to strike away the phantom straw she caught at.

"Oh! about that, I should fancy," he muttered; and found it necessary at the same time to duck and turn his head for concealment. Mrs. Doria surpassed his expectations.

"Yes I well, then..." Brandon was resuming with a shrug, which was meant to say he still pledged himself to nothing, when Clare's voice was heard from out the buzzing circle of her cousins: "Richard is nineteen years and six months old to-day, mama."

"Nonsense, child."

"He is, mama." Clare's voice was very steadfast.

"Nonsense, I tell you. How can you know?"

"Richard is one year and nine months older than me, mama."

Mrs. Doria fought the fact by years and finally by months. Clare was too strong for her.

"Singular child!" she mentally apostrophized the girl who scornfully rejected straws while drowning.

"But there's the religion still!" she comforted herself, and sat down to cogitate.

The men smiled and looked vacuous.

Music was proposed. There are times when soft music hath not charms; when it is put to as base uses as Imperial Caesar's dust and is taken to fill horrid pauses. Angelica Forey thumped the piano, and sang: "I'm a laughing Gitana, ha-ha! ha-ha!" Matilda Forey and her cousin Mary Branksburne wedded their voices, and songfully incited all young people to Haste to the bower that love has built, and defy the wise ones of the world; but the wise ones of the world were in a majority there, and very few places of assembly will be found where they are not; so the glowing appeal of the British ballad-monger passed into the bosom of the emptiness he addressed. Clare was asked to entertain the company. The singular child calmly marched to the instrument, and turned over the appropriate illustrations to the ballad-monger's repertory.

Clare sang a little Irish air. Her duty done, she marched from the piano. Mothers are rarely deceived by their daughters in these matters; but Clare deceived her mother; and Mrs. Doria only persisted in feeling an agony of pity for her child, that she might the more warrantably pity herself—a not uncommon form of the emotion, for there is no juggler like that heart the ballad-monger puts into our mouths so boldly. Remember that she saw years of self-denial, years of a ripening scheme, rendered fruitless in a minute, and by the System which had almost reduced her to the condition of constitutional hypocrite. She had enough of bitterness to brood over, and some excuse for self-pity.

Still, even when she was cooler, Mrs. Doria's energetic nature prevented her from giving up. Straws were straws, and the frailer they were the harder she clutched them.

She rose from her chair, and left the room, calling to Adrian to follow her.

"Adrian," she said, turning upon him in the passage, "you mentioned a house where this horrible cake...where he was this morning. I desire you to take me to that woman immediately."

The wise youth had not bargained for personal servitude. He had hoped he should be in time for the last act of the opera that night, after enjoying the comedy of real life.

"My dear aunt"...he was beginning to insinuate.

"Order a cab to be sent for, and get your hat," said Mrs. Doria.

There was nothing for it but to obey. He stamped his assent to the Pilgrim's dictum, that Women are practical creatures, and now reflected on his own account, that relationship to a young fool may be a vexation and a nuisance. However, Mrs. Doria compensated him.

What Mrs. Doria intended to do, the practical creature did not plainly know; but her energy positively demanded to be used in some way or other, and her instinct directed her to the offender on whom she could use it in wrath. She wanted somebody to be angry with, somebody to abuse. She dared not abuse her brother to his face: him she would have to console. Adrian was a fellow-hypocrite to the System, and would, she was aware, bring her into painfully delicate, albeit highly philosophic, ground by a discussion of the case. So she drove to Bessy Berry simply to inquire whither her nephew had flown.

When a soft woman, and that soft woman a sinner, is matched with a woman of energy, she does not show much fight, and she meets no mercy. Bessy Berry's creditor came to her in female form that night. She then beheld it in all its terrors. Hitherto it had appeared to her as a male, a disembodied spirit of her imagination possessing male attributes, and the peculiar male characteristic of being moved, and ultimately silenced, by tears. As female, her creditor was terrible indeed. Still, had it not been a late hour, Bessy Berry would have died rather than speak openly that her babes had sped to make their nest in the Isle of Wight. They had a long start, they were out of the reach of pursuers, they were safe, and she told what she had to tell. She told more than was wise of her to tell. She made mention of her early service in the family, and of her little pension. Alas! her little pension! Her creditor had come expecting no payment—come; as creditors are wont in such moods, just to take it out of her—to employ the familiar term. At once Mrs. Doria pounced upon the pension.

"That, of course, you know is at an end," she said in the calmest manner, and Berry did not plead for the little bit of bread to her. She only asked a little consideration for her feelings.

True admirers of women had better stand aside from the scene. Undoubtedly it was very sad for Adrian to be compelled to witness it. Mrs. Doria was not generous. The Pilgrim may be wrong about the sex not growing; but its fashion of conducting warfare we must allow to be barbarous,

and according to what is deemed the pristine, or wild cat, method. Ruin, nothing short of it, accompanied poor Berry to her bed that night, and her character bled till morning on her pillow.

The scene over, Adrian reconducted Mrs. Doria to her home. Mice had been at the cake during her absence apparently. The ladies and gentlemen present put it on the greedy mice, who were accused of having gorged and gone to bed.

"I'm sure they're quite welcome," said Mrs. Doria. "It's a farce, this marriage, and Adrian has quite come to my way of thinking. I would not touch an atom of it. Why, they were married in a married woman's ring! Can that be legal, as you call it? Oh, I'm convinced! Don't tell me. Austin will be in town to-morrow, and if he is true to his principles, he will instantly adopt measures to rescue his son from infamy. I want no legal advice. I go upon common sense, common decency. This marriage is false."

Mrs. Doria's fine scheme had become so much a part of her life, that she could not give it up. She took Clare to her bed, and caressed and wept over her, as she would not have done had she known the singular child, saying, "Poor Richard! my dear poor boy! we must save him, Clare! we must save him!" Of the two the mother showed the greater want of iron on this occasion. Clare lay in her arms rigid and emotionless, with one of her hands tight-locked. All she said was: "I knew it in the morning, mama." She slept clasping Richard's nuptial ring.

By this time all specially concerned in the System knew it. The honeymoon was shoring placidly above them. Is not happiness like another circulating medium? When we have a very great deal of it, some poor hearts are aching for what is taken away from them. When we have gone out and seized it on the highways, certain inscrutable laws are sure to be at work to bring us to the criminal bar, sooner or later. Who knows the honeymoon that did not steal somebody's sweetness? Richard Turpin went forth, singing "Money or life" to the world: Richard Feverel has done the same, substituting "Happiness" for "Money," frequently synonyms. The coin he wanted he would have, and was just as much a highway robber as his fellow Dick, so that those who have failed to recognize him as a hero before, may now regard him in that light. Meanwhile the world he has squeezed looks exceedingly patient and beautiful. His coin chinks delicious music to him. Nature and the order of things on earth have no warmer admirer than a jolly brigand or a young man made happy by the Jews.

CHAPTER XXXIII

And now the author of the System was on trial under the eyes of the lady who loved him. What so kind as they? Yet are they very rigorous, those soft watchful woman's eyes. If you are below the measure they have made of you, you will feel it in the fulness of time. She cannot but show you that she took you for a giant, and has had to come down a bit. You feel yourself strangely

diminishing in those sweet mirrors, till at last they drop on you complacently level. But, oh beware, vain man, of ever waxing enamoured of that wonderful elongation of a male creature you saw reflected in her adoring upcast orbs! Beware of assisting to delude her! A woman who is not quite a fool will forgive your being but a man, if you are surely that: she will haply learn to acknowledge that no mortal tailor could have fitted that figure she made of you respectably, and that practically (though she sighs to think it) her ideal of you was on the pattern of an overgrown charity-boy in the regulation jacket and breech. For this she first scorns the narrow capacities of the tailor, and then smiles at herself. But shouldst thou, when the hour says plainly, Be thyself, and the woman is willing to take thee as thou art, shouldst thou still aspire to be that thing of shanks and wrests, wilt thou not seem contemptible as well as ridiculous? And when the fall comes, will it not be flat on thy face, instead of to the common height of men? You may fall miles below her measure of you, and be safe: nothing is damaged save an overgrown charity-boy; but if you fall below the common height of men, you must make up your mind to see her rustle her gown, spy at the looking-glass, and transfer her allegiance. The moral of which is, that if we pretend to be what we are not, woman, for whose amusement the farce is performed, will find us out and punish us for it. And it is usually the end of a sentimental dalliance.

Had Sir Austin given vent to the pain and wrath it was natural he should feel, he might have gone to unphilosophic excesses, and, however much he lowered his reputation as a sage, Lady Blandish would have excused him: she would not have loved him less for seeing him closer. But the poor gentleman tasked his soul and stretched his muscles to act up to her conception of him. He, a man of science in life, who was bound to be surprised by nothing in nature, it was not for him to do more than lift his eyebrows and draw in his lips at the news delivered by Ripton Thompson, that ill bird at Raynham.

All he said, after Ripton had handed the letters and carried his penitential headache to bed, was: "You see, Emmeline, it is useless to base any system on a human being."

A very philosophical remark for one who has been busily at work building for nearly twenty years. Too philosophical to seem genuine. It revealed where the blow struck sharpest. Richard was no longer the Richard of his creation—his pride and his joy—but simply a human being with the rest. The bright star had sunk among the mass.

And yet, what had the young man done? And in what had the System failed?

The lady could not but ask herself this, while she condoled with the offended father.

"My friend," she said, tenderly taking his hand before she retired, "I know how deeply you must be grieved. I know what your disappointment must be. I do not beg of you to forgive him now. You cannot doubt his love for this young person, and according to his light, has he not behaved honourably, and as you would have wished, rather than bring her to shame? You will think of that. It has been an accident—a misfortune—a terrible misfortune"...

"The God of this world is in the machine—not out of it," Sir Austin interrupted her, and pressed her hand to get the good-night over.

At any other time her mind would have been arrested to admire the phrase; now it seemed perverse, vain, false, and she was tempted to turn the meaning that was in it against himself, much as she pitied him.

"You know, Emmeline," he added, "I believe very little in the fortune, or misfortune, to which men attribute their successes and reverses. They are useful impersonations to novelists; but my opinion is sufficiently high of flesh and blood to believe that we make our own history without intervention. Accidents?—Terrible misfortunes?—What are they?—Good-night."

"Good-night," she said, looking sad and troubled. "When I said, 'misfortune,' I meant, of course, that he is to blame; but—shall I leave you his letter to me?"

"I think I have enough to meditate upon," he replied, coldly bowing.

"God bless you," she whispered. "And—may I say it? do not shut your heart."

He assured her that he hoped not to do so and the moment she was gone he set about shutting it as tight as he could.

If, instead of saying, Base no system on a human being, he had said, Never experimentalize with one, he would have been nearer the truth of his own case. He had experimented on humanity in the person of the son he loved as his life, and at once, when the experiment appeared to have failed, all humanity's failings fell on the shoulders of his son. Richard's parting laugh in the train—it was explicable now: it sounded in his ears like the mockery of this base nature of ours at every endeavour to exalt and chasten it. The young man had plotted this. From step to step Sir Austin traced the plot. The curious mask he had worn since his illness; the selection of his incapable uncle Hippias for a companion in preference to Adrian; it was an evident, well-perfected plot. That hideous laugh would not be silenced: Base, like the rest, treacherous, a creature of passions using his abilities solely to gratify them—never surely had humanity such chances as in him! A Manichaean tendency, from which the sententious eulogist of nature had been struggling for years (and which was partly at the bottom of the System), now began to cloud and usurp dominion of his mind. As he sat alone in the forlorn dead-hush of his library, he saw the devil.

How are we to know when we are at the head and fountain of the fates of them we love?

There by the springs of Richard's future, his father sat: and the devil said to him: "Only be quiet: do nothing: resolutely do nothing: your object now is to keep a brave face to the world, so that all may know you superior to this human nature that has deceived you. For it is the shameless deception, not the marriage, that has wounded you."

"Ay!" answered the baronet, "the shameless deception, not the marriage: wicked and ruinous as it must be; a destroyer of my tenderest hopes! my dearest schemes! Not the marriage—the shameless deception!" and he crumpled up his son's letter to him, and tossed it into the fire.

How are we to distinguish the dark chief of the Manichaeans when he talks our own thoughts to us?

Further he whispered, "And your System:—if you would be brave to the world, have courage to cast the dream of it out of you: relinquish an impossible project; see it as it is—dead: too good for men!"

"Ay!" muttered the baronet: "all who would save them perish on the Cross!"

And so he sat nursing the devil.

By and by he took his lamp, and put on the old cloak and cap, and went to gaze at Ripton. That exhausted debauchee and youth without a destiny slept a dead sleep. A handkerchief was bound about his forehead, and his helpless sunken chin and snoring nose projected up the pillow, made him look absurdly piteous. The baronet remembered how often he had compared his boy with this one: his own bright boy! And where was the difference between them?

"Mere outward gilding!" said his familiar.

"Yes," he responded, "I daresay this one never positively plotted to deceive his father: he followed his appetites unchecked, and is internally the sounder of the two."

Ripton, with his sunken chin and snoring nose under the light of the lamp, stood for human nature, honest, however abject.

"Miss Random, I fear very much, is a necessary establishment!" whispered the monitor.

"Does the evil in us demand its natural food, or it corrupts the whole?" ejaculated Sir Austin. "And is no angel of avail till that is drawn off? And is that our conflict—to see whether we can escape the contagion of its embrace, and come uncorrupted out of that?"

"The world is wise in its way," said the voice.

"Though it look on itself through Port wine?" he suggested, remembering his lawyer Thompson.

"Wise in not seeking to be too wise," said the voice.

"And getting intoxicated on its drug of comfort!"

"Human nature is weak."

"And Miss Random is an establishment, and Wild Oats an institution!"

"It always has been so."

"And always will be?"

"So I fear! in spite of your very noble efforts."

"And leads—whither? And ends—where?"

Richard's laugh, taken up by horrid reverberations, as it were through the lengths of the Lower Halls, replied.

This colloquy of two voices in a brain was concluded by Sir Austin asking again if there were no actual difference between the flower of his hopes and yonder drunken weed, and receiving for answer that there was a decided dissimilarity in the smell of the couple; becoming cognizant of which he retreated.

Sir Austin did not battle with the tempter. He took him into his bosom at once, as if he had been ripe for him, and received his suggestions and bowed to his dictates. Because he suffered, and decreed that he would suffer silently, and be the only sufferer, it seemed to him that he was great-minded in his calamity. He had stood against the world. The world had beaten him. What then? He must shut his heart and mask his face; that was all. To be far in advance of the mass, is as fruitless to mankind, he reflected, as straggling in the rear. For how do we know that they move behind us at all, or move in our track? What we win for them is lost; and where we are overthrown we lie!

It was thus that a fine mind and a fine heart at the bounds of a nature not great, chose to colour his retrogression and countenance his shortcoming; and it was thus that he set about ruining the work he had done. He might well say, as he once did, that there are hours when the clearest soul becomes a cunning fox. For a grief that was private and peculiar, he unhesitatingly cast the blame upon humanity; just as he had accused it in the period of what he termed his own ordeal. How had he borne that? By masking his face. And he prepared the ordeal for his son by doing the same. This was by no means his idea of a man's duty in tribulation, about which he could be strenuously eloquent.

But it was his instinct so to act, and in times of trial great natures alone are not at the mercy of their instincts. Moreover it would cost him pain to mask his face; pain worse than that he endured when there still remained an object for him to open his heart to in proportion; and he always reposed upon the Spartan comfort of bearing pain and being passive. "Do nothing," said the devil he nursed; which meant in his case, "Take me into you and don't cast me out." Excellent and sane is the outburst of wrath to men, when it stops short of slaughter. For who that locks it up to eat in solitary, can say that it is consumed? Sir Austin had as weak a digestion for wrath, as poor Hippias for a green duckling. Instead of eating it, it ate him. The wild beast in him was not the less deadly because it did not roar, and the devil in him not the less active because he resolved to do nothing.

He sat at the springs of Richard's future, in the forlorn dead-hush of his library there, hearing the cinders click in the extinguished fire, and that humming stillness in which one may fancy one hears the midnight Fates busily stirring their embryos. The lamp glowed mildly on the bust of Chatham.

Toward morning a gentle knock fell at his door. Lady Blandish glided in. With hasty step she came straight to him, and took both his hands.

"My friend," she said, speaking tearfully, and trembling, "I feared I should find you here. I could not sleep. How is it with you?"

"Well! Emmeline, well!" he replied, torturing his brows to fix the mask.

He wished it had been Adrian who had come to him. He had an extraordinary longing for Adrian's society. He knew that the wise youth would divine how to treat him, and he mentally confessed to just enough weakness to demand a certain kind of management. Besides, Adrian, he had not a doubt, would accept him entirely as he seemed, and not pester him in any way by trying to unlock his heart; whereas a woman, he feared, would be waxing too womanly, and swelling from tears and supplications to a scene, of all things abhorred by him the most. So he rapped the floor with his foot, and gave the lady no very welcome face when he said it was well with him.

She sat down by his side, still holding one hand firmly, and softly detaining the other.

"Oh, my friend! may I believe you? May I speak to you?" She leaned close to him. "You know my heart. I have no better ambition than to be your friend. Surely I divide your grief, and may I not claim your confidence? Who has wept more over your great and dreadful sorrows? I would not have come to you, but I do believe that sorrow shared relieves the burden, and it is now that you may feel a woman's aid, and something of what a woman could be to you...."

"Be assured," he gravely said, "I thank you, Emmeline, for your intentions."

"No, no! not for my intentions! And do not thank me. Think of him...think of your dear boy... Our Richard, as we have called him.—Oh! do not think it a foolish superstition of mine, but I have had a thought this night that has kept me in torment till I rose to speak to you... Tell me first you have forgiven him."

"A father bears no malice to his son, Emmeline."

"Your heart has forgiven him?"

"My heart has taken what he gave."

"And quite forgiven him?"

"You will hear no complaints of mine."

The lady paused despondingly, and looked at him in a wistful manner, saying with a sigh, "Yes! I know how noble you are, and different from others!"

He drew one of his hands from her relaxed hold.

"You ought to be in bed, Emmeline."

"I cannot sleep."

"Go, and talk to me another time."

"No, it must be now. You have helped me when I struggled to rise into a clearer world, and I think, humble as I am, I can help you now. I have had a thought this night that if you do not pray for him and bless him...it will end miserably. My friend, have you done so?"

He was stung and offended, and could hardly help showing it in spite of his mask.

"Have you done so, Austin?"

"This is assuredly a new way of committing fathers to the follies of their sons, Emmeline!"

"No, not that. But will you pray for your boy, and bless him, before the day comes?"

He restrained himself to pronounce his words calmly:—"And I must do this, or it will end in misery? How else can it end? Can I save him from the seed he has sown? Consider, Emmeline, what you say. He has repeated his cousin's sin. You see the end of that."

"Oh, so different! This young person is not, is not of the class poor Austin Wentworth allied himself to. Indeed it is different. And he—be just and admit his nobleness. I fancied you did. This young person has great beauty, she has the elements of good breeding, she—indeed I think, had she been in another position, you would not have looked upon her unfavourably."

"She may be too good for my son!" The baronet spoke with sublime bitterness.

"No woman is too good for Richard, and you know it."

"Pass her."

"Yes, I will speak only of him. He met her by a fatal accident. We thought his love dead, and so did he till he saw her again. He met her, he thought we were plotting against him, he thought he should lose her for ever, and is the madness of an hour he did this...."

"My Emmeline pleads bravely for clandestine matches."

"Ah! do not trifle, my friend. Say: would you have had him act as young men in his position generally do to young women beneath them?"

Sir Austin did not like the question. It probed him very severely.

"You mean," he said, "that fathers must fold their arms, and either submit to infamous marriages, or have these creatures ruined."

"I do not mean that," exclaimed the lady, striving for what she did mean, and how to express it. "I mean that he loved her. Is it not a madness at his age? But what I chiefly mean is—save him from the consequences. No, you shall not withdraw your hand. Think of his pride, his sensitiveness, his great wild nature—wild when he is set wrong: think how intense it is, set upon love; think, my friend, do not forget his love for you."

Sir Austin smiled an admirable smile of pity.

"That I should save him, or any one, from consequences, is asking more than the order of things will allow to you, Emmeline, and is not in the disposition of this world. I cannot. Consequences are the natural offspring of acts. My child, you are talking sentiment, which is the distraction of our modern age in everything—a phantasmal vapour distorting the image of the life we live. You ask me to give him a golden age in spite of himself. All that could be done, by keeping him in the paths of virtue and truth, I did. He is become a man, and as a man he must reap his own sowing."

The baffled lady sighed. He sat so rigid: he spoke so securely, as if wisdom were to him more than the love of his son. And yet he did love his son. Feeling sure that he loved his son while he spoke so loftily, she reverenced him still, baffled as she was, and sensible that she had been quibbled with.

"All I ask of you is to open your heart to him," she said.

He kept silent.

"Call him a man,—he is, and must ever be the child of your education, my friend."

"You would console me, Emmeline, with the prospect that, if he ruins himself, he spares the world of young women. Yes, that is something!"

Closely she scanned the mask. It was impenetrable. He could meet her eyes, and respond to the pressure of her hand, and smile, and not show what he felt. Nor did he deem it hypocritical to seek to maintain his elevation in her soft soul, by simulating supreme philosophy over offended love. Nor did he know that he had an angel with him then: a blind angel, and a weak one, but one who struck upon his chance.

"Am I pardoned for coming to you?" she said, after a pause.

"Surely I can read my Emmeline's intentions," he gently replied.

"Very poor ones. I feel my weakness. I cannot utter half I have been thinking. Oh, if I could!"

"You speak very well, Emmeline."

"At least, I am pardoned!"

"Surely so."

"And before I leave you, dear friend, shall I be forgiven?—may I beg it?—will you bless him?"

He was again silent.

"Pray for him, Austin! pray for him ere the night is over."

As she spoke she slid down to his feet and pressed his hand to her bosom.

The baronet was startled. In very dread of the soft fit that wooed him, he pushed back his chair, and rose, and went to the window.

"It's day already!" he said with assumed vivacity, throwing open the shutters, and displaying the young light on the lawn.

Lady Blandish dried her tears as she knelt, and then joined him, and glanced up silently at Richard's moon standing in wane toward the West. She hoped it was because of her having been premature in pleading so earnestly, that she had failed to move him, and she accused herself more than the baronet. But in acting as she had done, she had treated him as no common man, and she was compelled to perceive that his heart was at present hardly superior to the hearts of ordinary men, however composed his face might be, and apparently serene his wisdom. From that moment she grew critical of him, and began to study her idol—a process dangerous to idols. He, now that she seemed to have relinquished the painful subject, drew to her, and as one who wished to smooth a foregone roughness, murmured: "God's rarest blessing is, after all, a good woman! My Emmeline bears her sleepless night well. She does not shame the day." He gazed down on her with a fondling tenderness.

"I could bear many, many!" she replied, meeting his eyes, "and you would see me look better and better, if... if only..." but she had no encouragement to end the sentence.

Perhaps he wanted some mute form of consolation; perhaps the handsome placid features of the dark-eyed dame touched him: at any rate their Platonism was advanced by his putting an arm about her. She felt the arm and talked of the morning.

Thus proximate, they by and by both heard something very like a groan behind them, and looking round, beheld the Saurian eye. Lady Blandish smiled, but the baronet's discomposure was not to be concealed. By a strange fatality every stage of their innocent loves was certain to have a human beholder.

"Oh, I'm sure I beg pardon," Benson mumbled, arresting his head in a melancholy pendulosity. He was ordered out of the room.

"And I think I shall follow him, and try to get forty winks," said Lady Blandish. They parted with a quiet squeeze of hands.

The baronet then called in Benson.

"Get me my breakfast as soon as you can," he said, regardless of the aspect of injured conscience Benson sombrely presented to him. "I am going to town early. And, Benson," he added, "you will also go to town this afternoon, or to-morrow, if it suits you, and take your book with you to Mr. Thompson. You will not return here. A provision will be made for you. You can go."

The heavy butler essayed to speak, but the tremendous blow and the baronet's gesture choked him. At the door he made another effort which shook the rolls of his loose skin pitiably. An impatient signal sent him out dumb,—and Raynham was quit of the one believer in the Great Shaddock dogma.

END OF VOLUME-4