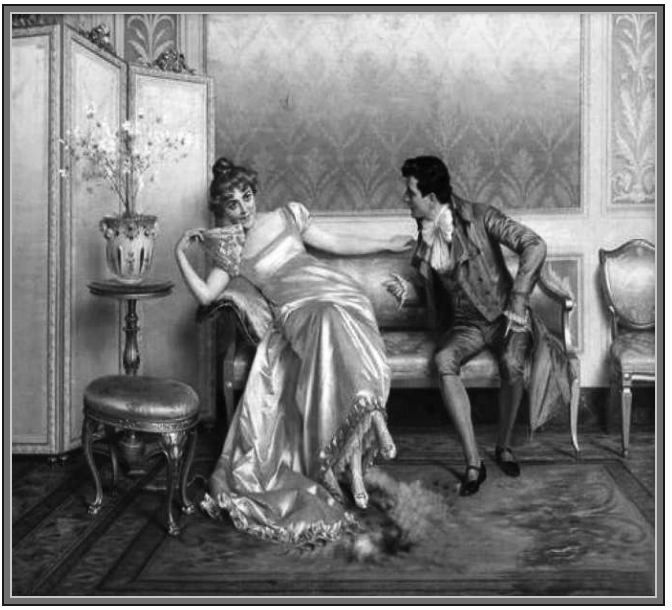
Can You

Forgive Her?

Can You Forgive Her?

[Complete & Illustrated]



By

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.
Mr. Vavasor and His Daughter.

Whether or no, she, whom you are to forgive, if you can, did or did not belong to the Upper Ten Thousand of this our English world, I am not prepared to say with any strength of affirmation. By blood she was connected with big people,—distantly connected with some very big people indeed, people who belonged to the Upper Ten Hundred if there be any such division; but of these very big relations she had known and seen little, and they had cared as little for her. Her grandfather, Squire Vavasor of Vavasor Hall, in Westmoreland, was a country gentleman, possessing some thousand a year at the outside, and he therefore never came up to London, and had no ambition to have himself numbered as one in any exclusive set. A hot-headed, ignorant, honest old gentleman, he lived ever at Vavasor Hall, declaring to any who would listen to him, that the country was going to the mischief, and congratulating himself that at any rate, in his county, parliamentary reform had been powerless to alter the old political arrangements. Alice Vavasor, whose offence against the world I am to tell you, and if possible to excuse, was the daughter of his younger son; and as her father, John Vavasor, had done nothing to raise the family name to eminence, Alice could not lay claim to any high position from her birth as a Vavasor. John Vavasor had come up to London early in life as a barrister, and had failed. He had failed at least in attaining either much wealth or much repute,

though he had succeeded in earning, or perhaps I might better say, in obtaining, a livelihood. He had married a lady somewhat older than himself, who was in possession of four hundred a year, and who was related to those big people to whom I have alluded. Who these were and the special nature of the relationship, I shall be called upon to explain hereafter, but at present it will suffice to say that Alice Macleod gave great offence to all her friends by her marriage. She did not, however, give them much time for the indulgence of their anger. Having given birth to a daughter within twelve months of her marriage, she died, leaving in abeyance that question as to whether the fault of her marriage should or should not be pardoned by her family.

When a man marries an heiress for her money, if that money be within her own control, as was the case with Miss Macleod's fortune, it is generally well for the speculating lover that the lady's friends should quarrel with him and with her. She is thereby driven to throw herself entirely into the gentleman's arms, and he thus becomes possessed of the wife and the money without the abominable nuisance of stringent settlements. But the Macleods, though they quarrelled with Alice, did not quarrel with her *à l'outrance*. They snubbed herself and her chosen husband; but they did not so far separate themselves from her and her affairs as to give up the charge of her possessions. Her four hundred a year was settled very closely on herself and on her children, without even a life interest having been given to Mr. Vavasor, and therefore when she died the mother's fortune became the property of the little baby. But, under these circumstances, the big people did not refuse to interest themselves to some extent on behalf of the father. I do not suppose that any actual agreement or compact was made between Mr. Vavasor and the Macleods; but it came to be understood between them that if he made no demand upon them for his daughter's money, and allowed them to have charge of her education, they would do something for him. He was a practising

barrister, though his practice had never amounted to much; and a practising barrister is always supposed to be capable of filling any situation which may come his way. Two years after his wife's death Mr. Vavasor was appointed assistant commissioner in some office which had to do with insolvents, and which was abolished three years after his appointment. It was at first thought that he would keep his eight hundred a year for life and be required to do nothing for it; but a wretched cheeseparing Whig government, as John Vavasor called it when describing the circumstances of the arrangement to his father, down in Westmoreland, would not permit this; it gave him the option of taking four hundred a year for doing nothing, or of keeping his whole income and attending three days a week for three hours a day during term time, at a miserable dingy little office near Chancery Lane, where his duty would consist in signing his name to accounts which he never read, and at which he was never supposed even to look. He had sulkily elected to keep the money, and this signing had been now for nearly twenty years the business of his life. Of course he considered himself to be a very hardly-used man. One Lord Chancellor after another he petitioned, begging that he might be relieved from the cruelty of his position, and allowed to take his salary without doing anything in return for it. The amount of work which he did perform was certainly a minimum of labour. Term time, as terms were counted in Mr. Vavasor's office, hardly comprised half the year, and the hours of weekly attendance did not do more than make one day's work a week for a working man; but Mr. Vavasor had been appointed an assistant commissioner, and with every Lord Chancellor he argued that all Westminster Hall, and Lincoln's Inn to boot, had no right to call upon him to degrade himself by signing his name to accounts. In answer to every memorial he was offered the alternative of freedom with half his income; and so the thing went on.

There can, however, be no doubt that Mr. Vavasor was better off and happier with his almost nominal employment than he would have been without it. He always argued that it kept him in London; but he would undoubtedly have lived in London with or without his official occupation. He had become so habituated to London life in a small way, before the choice of leaving London was open to him, that nothing would have kept him long away from it. After his wife's death he dined at his club every day on which a dinner was not given to him by some friend elsewhere, and was rarely happy except when so dining. They who have seen him scanning the steward's list of dishes, and giving the necessary orders for his own and his friend's dinner, at about half past four in the afternoon, have seen John Vavasor at the only moment of the day at which he is ever much in earnest. All other things are light and easy to him,—to be taken easily and to be dismissed easily. Even the eating of the dinner calls forth from him no special sign of energy. Sometimes a frown will gather on his brow as he tastes the first half glass from his bottle of claret; but as a rule that which he has prepared for himself with so much elaborate care, is consumed with only pleasant enjoyment. Now and again it will happen that the cook is treacherous even to him, and then he can hit hard; but in hitting he is quiet, and strikes with a smile on his face.

Such had been Mr. Vavasor's pursuits and pleasures in life up to the time at which my story commences. But I must not allow the reader to suppose that he was a man without good qualities. Had he when young possessed the gift of industry I think that he might have shone in his profession, and have been well spoken of and esteemed in the world. As it was he was a discontented man, but nevertheless he was popular, and to some extent esteemed. He was liberal as far as his means would permit; he was a man of his word; and he understood well that code of by-laws which was presumed to constitute the character of a gentleman in his circle. He knew how to carry himself well among men, and understood thoroughly

what might be said, and what might not; what might be done among those with whom he lived, and what should be left undone. By nature, too, he was kindly disposed, loving many persons a little if he loved few or none passionately. Moreover, at the age of fifty, he was a handsome man, with a fine forehead, round which the hair and beard was only beginning to show itself to be grey. He stood well, with a large person, only now beginning to become corpulent. His eyes were bright and grey, and his mouth and chin were sharply cut, and told of gentle birth. Most men who knew John Vavasor well, declared it to be a pity that he should spend his time in signing accounts in Chancery Lane.

I have said that Alice Vavasor's big relatives cared but little for her in her early years; but I have also said that they were careful to undertake the charge of her education, and I must explain away this little discrepancy. The biggest of these big people had hardly heard of her; but there was a certain Lady Macleod, not very big herself, but, as it were, hanging on to the skirts of those who were so, who cared very much for Alice. She was the widow of a Sir Archibald Macleod, K.C.B., who had been a soldier, she herself having also been a Macleod by birth; and for very many years past—from a time previous to the birth of Alice Vavasor—she had lived at Cheltenham, making short sojourns in London during the spring, when the contents of her limited purse would admit of her doing so. Of old Lady Macleod I think I may say that she was a good woman;—that she was a good woman, though subject to two of the most serious drawbacks to goodness which can afflict a lady. She was a Calvinistic Sabbatarian in religion, and in worldly matters she was a devout believer in the high rank of her noble relatives. She could almost worship a youthful marquis, though he lived a life that would disgrace a heathen among heathens; and she could and did, in her own mind, condemn crowds of commonplace men and women to all eternal torments of which her imagination could conceive, because they listened to profane music in a park on

Sunday. Yet she was a good woman. Out of her small means she gave much away. She owed no man anything. She strove to love her neighbours. She bore much pain with calm unspeaking endurance, and she lived in trust of a better world. Alice Vavasor, who was after all only her cousin, she loved with an exceeding love, and yet Alice had done very much to extinguish such love. Alice, in the years of her childhood, had been brought up by Lady Macleod; at the age of twelve she had been sent to a school at Aix-la-Chapelle,—a comitatus of her relatives having agreed that such was to be her fate, much in opposition to Lady Macleod's judgement; at nineteen she had returned to Cheltenham, and after remaining there for little more than a year, had expressed her unwillingness to remain longer with her cousin. She could sympathize neither with her relative's faults or virtues. She made an arrangement, therefore, with her father, that they two would keep house together in London, and so they had lived for the last five years;—for Alice Vavasor when she will be introduced to the reader had already passed her twenty-fourth birthday.

Their mode of life had been singular and certainly not in all respects satisfactory. Alice when she was twenty-one had the full command of her own fortune; and when she induced her father, who for the last fifteen years had lived in lodgings, to take a small house in Queen Anne Street, of course she offered to incur a portion of the expense. He had warned her that his habits were not those of a domestic man, but he had been content simply so to warn her. He had not felt it to be his duty to decline the arrangement because he knew himself to be unable to give to his child all that attention which a widowed father under such circumstances should pay to an only daughter. The house had been taken, and Alice and he had lived together, but their lives had been quite apart. For a short time, for a month or two, he had striven to dine at home and even to remain at home through the evening; but the work had been too hard for him and he had utterly broken

down. He had said to her and to himself that his health would fail him under the effects of so great a change made so late in life, and I am not sure that he had not spoken truly. At any rate the effort had been abandoned, and Mr. Vavasor now never dined at home. Nor did he and his daughter ever dine out together. Their joint means did not admit of their giving dinners, and therefore they could not make their joint way in the same circle. It thus came to pass that they lived apart,—quite apart. They saw each other, probably daily; but they did little more than see each other. They did not even breakfast together, and after three o'clock in the day Mr. Vavasor was never to be found in his own house.

Miss Vavasor had made for herself a certain footing in society, though I am disposed to doubt her right to be considered as holding a place among the Upper Ten Thousand. Two classes of people she had chosen to avoid, having been driven to such avoidings by her aunt's preferences; marquises and such-like, whether wicked or otherwise, she had eschewed, and had eschewed likewise all Low Church tendencies. The eschewing of marquises is not generally very difficult. Young ladies living with their fathers on very moderate incomes in or about Queen Anne Street are not usually much troubled on that matter. Nor can I say that Miss Vavasor was so troubled. But with her there was a certain definite thing to be done towards such eschewal. Lady Macleod by no means avoided her noble relatives, nor did she at all avoid Alice Vavasor. When in London she was persevering in her visits to Queen Anne Street, though she considered herself, nobody knew why, not to be on speaking terms with Mr.. Vavasor. And she strove hard to produce an intimacy between Alice and her noble relatives—such an intimacy as that which she herself enjoyed;—an intimacy which gave her a footing in their houses but no footing in their hearts, or even in their habits. But all this Alice declined with as much consistency as she did those other struggles which her old cousin made on her behalf,—strong, never-flagging, but ever-

failing efforts to induce the girl to go to such places of worship as Lady Macleod herself frequented.

A few words must be said as to Alice Vavasor's person; one fact also must be told, and then, I believe, I may start upon my story. As regards her character, I will leave it to be read in the story itself. The reader already knows that she appears upon the scene at no very early age, and the mode of her life had perhaps given to her an appearance of more years than those which she really possessed. It was not that her face was old, but that there was nothing that was girlish in her manners. Her demeanour was as staid, and her voice as self-possessed as though she had already been ten years married. In person she was tall and well made, rather large in her neck and shoulders, as were all the Vavasors, but by no means fat. Her hair was brown, but very dark, and she wore it rather lower upon her forehead than is customary at the present day. Her eyes, too, were dark, though they were not black, and her complexion, though not quite that of a brunette, was far away from being fair. Her nose was somewhat broad, and *retroussé* too, but to my thinking it was a charming nose, full of character, and giving to her face at times a look of pleasant humour, which it would otherwise have lacked. Her mouth was large, and full of character, and her chin oval, dimpled, and finely chiselled, like her father's. I beg you, in taking her for all in all, to admit that she was a fine, handsome, high-spirited young woman.

And now for my fact. At the time of which I am writing she was already engaged to be married.

CHAPTER II.
Lady Macleod.

I cannot say that the house in Queen Anne Street was a pleasant house. I am now speaking of the material house, made up of the walls and furniture, and not of any pleasantness or unpleasantness supplied by the inmates. It was a small house on the south side of the street, squeezed in between two large mansions which seemed to crush it, and by which its fair proportion of doorstep and area was in truth curtailed. The stairs were narrow; the dining-room was dark, and possessed none of those appearances of plenteous hospitality which a dining-room should have. But all this would have been as nothing if the drawing-room had been pretty as it is the bounden duty of all drawing-rooms to be. But Alice Vavasor's drawing-room was not pretty. Her father had had the care of furnishing the house, and he had intrusted the duty to a tradesman who had chosen green paper, a green carpet, green curtains, and green damask chairs. There was a green damask sofa, and two green arm-chairs opposite to each other at the two sides of the fireplace. The room was altogether green, and was not enticing. In shape it was nearly square, the very small back room on the same floor not having been, as is usual, added to it. This had been fitted up as a "study" for Mr. Vavasor, and was very rarely used for any purpose.

Most of us know when we enter a drawing-room whether it is a pretty room or no; but how few of us know how to make a drawing-room pretty! There has come up in London in these latter days a form of room so monstrously ugly that I will venture to say that no other people on earth but Londoners would put up with it.

Londoners, as a rule, take their houses as they can get them, looking only to situation, size, and price. What Grecian, what Roman, what Turk, what Italian would endure, or would ever have endured, to use a room with a monstrous cantle in the form of a parallelogram cut sheerly out of one corner of it? This is the shape of room we have now adopted,—or rather which the builders have adopted for us,—in order to throw the whole first floor into one apartment which may be presumed to have noble dimensions,—with such drawback from it as the necessities of the staircase may require. A sharp unadorned corner projects itself into these would-be noble dimensions, and as ugly a form of chamber is produced as any upon which the eye can look. I would say more on the subject if I dared to do so here, but I am bound now to confine myself to Miss Vavasor's room. The monstrous deformity of which I have spoken was not known when that house in Queen Anne Street was built. There is to be found no such abomination of shape in the buildings of our ancestors,—not even in the days of George the Second. But yet the drawing-room of which I speak was ugly, and Alice knew that it was so. She knew that it was ugly, and she would greatly have liked to banish the green sofa, to have re-papered the wall, and to have hung up curtains with a dash of pink through them. With the green carpet she would have been contented. But her father was an extravagant man; and from the day on which she had come of age she had determined that it was her special duty to avoid extravagance.

"It's the ugliest room I ever saw in my life," her father once said to her.

"It is not very pretty," Alice replied.

"I'll go halves with you in the expense of redoing it," said Mr.. Vavasor.

"Wouldn't that be extravagant, papa? The things have not been here quite four years yet."

Then Mr. Vavasor had shrugged his shoulders and said nothing more about it. It was little to him whether the drawing-room in Queen Anne Street was ugly or pretty. He was on the committee of his club, and he took care that the furniture there should be in all respects comfortable.

It was now June; and that month Lady Macleod was in the habit of spending among her noble relatives in London when she had succeeded in making both ends so far overlap each other at Cheltenham as to give her the fifty pounds necessary for this purpose. For though she spent her month in London among her noble friends, it must not be supposed that her noble friends gave her bed or board. They sometimes gave her tea, such as it was, and once or twice in the month they gave the old lady a second-rate dinner. On these occasions she hired a little parlour and bedroom behind it in King Street, Saint James's, and lived a hot, uncomfortable life, going about at nights to gatherings of fashionable people of which she in her heart disapproved, seeking for smiles which seldom came to her, and which she excused herself for desiring because they were the smiles of her kith and her kin, telling herself always that she made this vain journey to the modern Babylon for the good of Alice Vavasor, and telling herself as often that she now made it for the last time. On the occasion of her preceding visit she had reminded herself that she was then seventy-five years old, and had sworn to herself that she would come to London no more; but here she was again in London, having justified the journey to herself on the plea that there were circumstances in Alice's engagement which made it desirable that she should for a while be near her niece. Her niece, as she thought, was hardly managing her own affairs discreetly.

"Well, aunt," said Alice, as the old lady walked into the drawing-room one morning at eleven o'clock. Alice always called Lady Macleod her aunt, though, as has been before explained, there was no such close connexion between them. During Lady Macleod's

sojourn in London these morning visits were made almost every day. Alice never denied herself, and even made a point of remaining at home to receive them unless she had previously explained that she would be out; but I am not prepared to say that they were, of their own nature, agreeable to her.

"Would you mind shutting the window, my dear?" said Lady Macleod, seating herself stiffly on one of the small ugly green chairs. She had been educated at a time when easy-chairs were considered vicious, and among people who regarded all easy postures as being so; and she could still boast, at seventy-six, that she never leaned back. "Would you mind shutting the window? I'm so warm that I'm afraid of the draught."

"You don't mean to say that you've walked from King Street," said Alice, doing as she was desired.

"Indeed I do,—every step of the way. Cabs are so ruinous. It's a most unfortunate thing; they always say it's just over the two miles here. I don't believe a word of it, because I'm only a little more than the half-hour walking it; and those men will say anything. But how can I prove it, you know?"

"I really think it's too far for you to walk when it's so warm."

"But what can I do, my dear? I must come, when I've specially come up to London to see you. I shall have a cab back again, because it'll be hotter then, and dear Lady Midlothian has promised to send her carriage at three to take me to the concert. I do so wish you'd go, Alice."



"Would you mind shutting the window?"

"It's out of the question, aunt. The idea of my going in that way at the last moment, without any invitation!"

"It wouldn't be without an invitation, Alice. The marchioness has said to me over and over again how glad she would be to see you, if I would bring you."

"Why doesn't she come and call if she is so anxious to know me?"

"My dear, you've no right to expect it; you haven't indeed. She never calls even on me."

"I know I've no right, and I don't expect it, and I don't want it. But neither has she a right to suppose that, under such circumstances, I shall go to her house. You might as well give it up, aunt. Cart ropes wouldn't drag me there."

"I think you are very wrong,—particularly under your present circumstances. A young woman that is going to be married, as you are—"

"As I am,—perhaps."

"That's nonsense, Alice. Of course you are; and for his sake you are bound to cultivate any advantages that naturally belong to you. As to Lady Midlothian or the marchioness coming to call on you here in your father's house, after all that has passed, you really have no right to look for it."

"And I don't look for it."

"That sort of people are not expected to call. If you'll think of it, how could they do it with all the demands they have on their time?"

"My dear aunt, I wouldn't interfere with their time for worlds."

"Nobody can say of me, I'm sure, that I run after great people or rich people. It does happen that some of the nearest relations I have,—indeed I may say the nearest relations,—are people of high rank; and I do not see that I'm bound to turn away from my own flesh and blood because of that, particularly when they are always so anxious to keep up the connexion."

"I was only speaking of myself, aunt. It is very different with you. You have known them all your life."

"And how are you to know them if you won't begin? Lady Midlothian said to me only yesterday that she was glad to hear that you were going to be married so respectably, and then—"

"Upon my word I'm very much obliged to her ladyship. I wonder whether she considered that she married respectably when she took Lord Midlothian?"

Now Lady Midlothian had been unfortunate in her marriage, having united herself to a man of bad character, who had used her ill, and from whom she had now been for some years separated. Alice might have spared her allusion to this misfortune when speaking of the countess to the cousin who was so fond of her, but she was angered by the application of that odious word respectable to her own prospects; and perhaps the more angered as she was somewhat inclined to feel that the epithet did suit her own position. Her engagement, she had sometimes told herself, was very respectable, and had as often told herself that it lacked other attractions which it should have possessed. She was not quite pleased with herself in having accepted John Grey,—or rather perhaps was not satisfied with herself in having loved him. In her many thoughts on the subject, she always admitted to herself that she had accepted him simply because she loved him;—that she had given her quick assent to his quick proposal simply because he had won her heart. But she was sometimes almost angry with herself that she had permitted her heart to be thus easily taken from her, and had rebuked herself for her girlish facility. But the marriage would be at any rate respectable. Mr. Grey was a man of high character, of good though moderate means; he was, too, well educated, of good birth, a gentleman, and a man of talent. No one could deny that the marriage would be highly respectable, and her father had been more than satisfied. Why Miss Vavasor herself was not quite satisfied will, I hope, in time make itself appear. In the meanwhile it can be understood that Lady Midlothian's praise would gall her.

"Alice, don't be uncharitable," said Lady Macleod severely. "Whatever may have been Lady Midlothian's misfortunes no one can say they have resulted from her own fault."

"Yes they can, aunt, if she married a man whom she knew to be a scapegrace because he was very rich and an earl."

"She was the daughter of a nobleman herself, and only married in her own degree. But I don't want to discuss that. She meant to be good-natured when she mentioned your marriage, and you should take it as it was meant. After all she was only your mother's second cousin—"

"Dear aunt, I make no claim on her cousinship."

"But she admits the claim, and is quite anxious that you should know her. She has been at the trouble to find out everything about Mr.. Grey, and told me that nothing could be more satisfactory."

"Upon my word I am very much obliged to her."

Lady Macleod was a woman of much patience, and possessed also of considerable perseverance. For another half-hour she went on expatiating on the advantages which would accrue to Alice as a married woman from an acquaintance with her noble relatives, and endeavouring to persuade her that no better opportunity than the present would present itself. There would be a place in Lady Midlothian's carriage, as none other of the daughters were going but Lady Jane. Lady Midlothian would take it quite as a compliment, and a concert was not like a ball or any customary party. An unmarried girl might very properly go to a concert under such circumstances as now existed without any special invitation. Lady Macleod ought to have known her adopted niece better. Alice was immoveable. As a matter of course she was immoveable. Lady Macleod had seldom been able to persuade her to anything, and ought to have been well sure that, of all things, she could not have persuaded her to this.

Then, at last, they came to another subject, as to which Lady Macleod declared that she had specially come on this special morning, forgetting, probably, that she had already made the same assertion with reference to the concert. But in truth the last assertion was the correct one, and on that other subject she had been hurried on to say more than she meant by the eagerness of the moment. All the morning she had been full of the matter on which she was now about to speak. She had discussed it quite at length with Lady Midlothian;—though she was by no means prepared to tell Alice Vavasor that any such discussion had taken place. From the concert, and the effect which Lady Midlothian's countenance might have upon Mr.. Grey's future welfare, she got herself by degrees round to a projected Swiss tour which Alice was about to make. Of this Swiss tour she had heard before, but had not heard who were to be Miss Vavasor's companions until Lady Midlothian had told her. How it had come to pass that Lady Midlothian had interested herself so much in the concerns of a person whom she did not know, and on whom she in her greatness could not be expected to call, I cannot say; but from some quarter she had learned who were the proposed companions of Alice Vavasor's tour, and she had told Lady Macleod that she did not at all approve of the arrangement.

"And when do you go, Alice?" said Lady Macleod.

"Early in July, I believe. It will be very hot, but Kate must be back by the middle of August." Kate Vavasor was Alice's first cousin.

"Oh! Kate is to go with you?"

"Of course she is. I could not go alone, or with no one but George. Indeed it was Kate who made up the party."

"Of course you could not go alone with George," said Lady Macleod, very grimly. Now George Vavasor was Kate's brother, and was therefore also first cousin to Alice. He was heir to the old squire down in Westmoreland, with whom Kate lived, their father

being dead. Nothing, it would seem, could be more rational than that Alice should go to Switzerland with her cousins; but Lady Macleod was clearly not of this opinion; she looked very grim as she made this allusion to cousin George, and seemed to be preparing herself for a fight.

"That is exactly what I say," answered Alice. "But, indeed, he is simply going as an escort to me and Kate, as we don't like the rôle of unprotected females. It is very good-natured of him, seeing how much his time is taken up."

"I thought he never did anything."

"That's because you don't know him, aunt."

"No; certainly I don't know him." She did not add that she had no wish to know Mr. George Vavasor, but she looked it. "And has your father been told that he is going?"

"Of course he has."

"And does—" Lady Macleod hesitated a little before she went on, and then finished her question with a little spasmodic assumption of courage. "And does Mr. Grey know that he is going?"

Alice remained silent for a full minute before she answered this question, during which Lady Macleod sat watching her grimly, with her eyes very intent upon her niece's face. If she supposed such silence to have been in any degree produced by shame in answering the question, she was much mistaken. But it may be doubted whether she understood the character of the girl whom she thought she knew so well, and it is probable that she did make such mistake.

"I might tell you simply that he does," said Alice at last, "seeing that I wrote to him yesterday, letting him know that such were our arrangements; but I feel that I should not thus answer the question you mean to ask. You want to know whether Mr. Grey will approve of it. As I only wrote yesterday of course I have not heard, and

therefore cannot say. But I can say this, aunt, that much as I might regret his disapproval, it would make no change in my plans."

"Would it not? Then I must tell you, you are very wrong. It ought to make a change. What! the disapproval of the man you are going to marry make no change in your plans?"

"Not in that matter. Come, aunt, if we must discuss this matter let us do it at any rate fairly. In an ordinary way, if Mr. Grey had asked me to give up for any reason my trip altogether, I should have given it up certainly, as I would give up any other indifferent project at the request of so dear a friend,—a friend with whom I am so—so—so closely connected. But if he asked me not to travel with my cousin George, I should refuse him absolutely, without a word of parley on the subject, simply because of the nature and closeness of my connection with him. I suppose you understand what I mean, aunt?"

"I suppose I do. You mean that you would refuse to obey him on the very subject on which he has a right to claim your obedience."

"He has no right to claim my obedience on any subject," said Alice; and as she spoke Aunt Macleod jumped up with a little start at the vehemence of the words, and of the tone in which they were expressed. She had heard that tone before, and might have been used to it; but, nevertheless, the little jump was involuntary. "At present he has no right to my obedience on any subject, but least of all on that," said Alice. "His advice he may give me, but I am quite sure he will not ask for obedience."

"And if he advises you you will slight his advice."

"If he tells me that I had better not travel with my cousin George I shall certainly not take his advice. Moreover, I should be careful to let him know how much I was offended by any such counsel from him. It would show a littleness on his part, and a suspicion of which I cannot suppose him to be capable." Alice, as she said this, got up from her seat and walked about the room. When she had

finished she stood at one of the windows with her back to her visitor. There was silence between them for a minute or two, during which Lady Macleod was deeply considering how best she might speak the terrible words, which, as Alice's nearest female relative, she felt herself bound to utter. At last she collected her thoughts and her courage, and spoke out.

"My dear Alice, I need hardly say that if you had a mother living, or any person with you filling the place of a mother, I should not interfere in this matter."

"Of course, Aunt Macleod, if you think I am wrong you have quite a right to say so."

"I do think you are wrong,—very wrong, indeed; and if you persist in this I am afraid I must say that I shall think you wicked. Of course Mr. Grey cannot like you to travel with George Vavasor."

"And why not, aunt?" Alice, as she asked this question, turned round and confronted Lady Macleod boldly. She spoke with a steady voice, and fixed her eyes upon the old lady's face, as though determined to show that she had no fear of what might be said to her.

"Why not, Alice? Surely you do not wish me to say why not."

"But I do wish you to say why not. How can I defend myself till the accusation is made?"

"You are now engaged to marry Mr. Grey, with the consent and approbation of all your friends. Two years ago you had—had—"

"Had what, aunt? If you mean to say that two years ago I was engaged to my cousin George you are mistaken. Three years ago I told him that under certain conditions I would become engaged to him. But my conditions did not suit him, nor his me, and no engagement was ever made. Mr. Grey knows the history of the whole thing. As far as it was possible I have told him everything that took place."

"The fact was, Alice, that George Vavasor's mode of life was such that an engagement with him would have been absolute madness."

"Dear aunt, you must excuse me if I say that I cannot discuss George Vavasor's mode of life. If I were thinking of becoming his wife you would have a perfect right to discuss it, because of your constant kindness to me. But as matters are he is simply a cousin; and as I like him and you do not, we had better say nothing about him."

"I must say this—that after what has passed, and at the present crisis of your life—"

"Dear aunt, I'm not in any crisis."

"Yes you are, Alice; in the most special crisis of a girl's life. You are still a girl, but you are the promised wife of a very worthy man, who will look to you for all his domestic happiness. George Vavasor has the name, at least, of being very wild."

"The worthy man and the wild man must fight it out between them. If I were going away with George by himself, there might be something in what you say."

"That would be monstrous."

"Monstrous or not, it isn't what I'm about to do. Kate and I have put our purses together, and are going to have an outing for our special fun and gratification. As we should be poor travellers alone, George has promised to go with his sister. Papa knows all about it, and never thought of making any objection."

Lady Macleod shook her head. She did not like to say anything against Mr. Vavasor before his daughter; but the shaking of her head was intended to signify that Mr. Vavasor's assent in such a matter was worth nothing.

"I can only say again," said Lady Macleod, "that I think Mr. Grey will be displeased,—and that he will have very great cause for

displeasure. And I think, moreover, that his approbation ought to be your chief study. I believe, my dear, I'll ask you to let Jane get me a cab. I shan't have a bit too much time to dress for the concert."

Alice simply rang the bell, and said no further word on the subject which they had been discussing. When Lady Macleod got up to go away, Alice kissed her, as was customary with them, and the old lady as she went uttered her customary valediction. "God bless you, my dear. Good-bye! I'll come to-morrow if I can." There was therefore no quarrel between them. But both of them felt that words had been spoken which must probably lead to some diminution of their past intimacy.

When Lady Macleod had gone Alice sat alone for an hour thinking of what had passed between them,—thinking rather of those two men, the worthy man and the wild man, whose names had been mentioned in close connection with herself. John Grey was a worthy man, a man worthy at all points, as far as she knew him. She told herself it was so. And she told herself, also, that her cousin George was wild,—very wild. And yet her thoughts were, I fear, on the whole more kindly towards her cousin than towards her lover. She had declared to her aunt that John Grey would be incapable of such suspicion as would be shown by any objection on his part to the arrangements made for the tour. She had said so, and had so believed; and yet she continued to brood over the position which her affairs would take, if he did make the objection which Lady Macleod anticipated. She told herself over and over again, that under such circumstances she would not give way an inch. "He is free to go," she said to herself. "If he does not trust me he is quite free to go." It may almost be said that she came at last to anticipate from her lover that very answer to her own letter which she had declared him to be incapable of making.

CHAPTER III.
John Grey, the Worthy Man.

Mr. Grey's answer to Alice Vavasor's letter, which was duly sent by return of post and duly received on the morning after Lady Macleod's visit, may perhaps be taken as giving a sample of his worthiness. It was dated from Nethercoats, a small country-house in Cambridgeshire which belonged to him, at which he already spent much of his time, and at which he intended to live altogether after his marriage.

Nethercoats, June, 186––.

Dearest Alice,

I am glad you have settled your affairs,—foreign affairs, I mean,—so much to your mind. As to your home affairs they are not, to my thinking, quite so satisfactorily arranged. But as I am a party interested in the latter my opinion may perhaps have an undue bias. Touching the tour, I quite agree with you that you and Kate would have been uncomfortable alone. It's a very fine theory, that of women being able to get along without men as well as with them; but, like other fine theories, it will be found very troublesome by those who first put it in practice. Gloved hands, petticoats, feminine softness, and the general homage paid to beauty, all stand in the way of success. These things may perhaps some day be got rid of, and possibly with advantage; but while young ladies are still encumbered with them a male companion will always be found to be a comfort. I don't quite know whether your cousin George is the best possible knight you might have

chosen. I should consider myself to be infinitely preferable, had my going been upon the cards. Were you in danger of meeting Paynim foes, he, no doubt, would kill them off much quicker than I could do, and would be much more serviceable in liberating you from the dungeons of oppressors, or even from stray tigers in the Swiss forests. But I doubt his being punctual with the luggage. He will want you or Kate to keep the accounts, if any are kept. He will be slow in getting you glasses of water at the railway stations, and will always keep you waiting at breakfast. I hold that a man with two ladies on a tour should be an absolute slave to them, or they will not fully enjoy themselves. He should simply be an upper servant, with the privilege of sitting at the same table with his mistresses. I have my doubts as to whether your cousin is fit for the place; but, as to myself, it is just the thing that I was made for. Luckily, however, neither you nor Kate are without wills of your own, and perhaps you may be able to reduce Mr. Vavasor to obedience.

As to the home affairs I have very little to say here,—in this letter. I shall of course run up and see you before you start, and shall probably stay a week in town. I know I ought not to do so, as it will be a week of idleness, and yet not a week of happiness. I'd sooner have an hour with you in the country than a whole day in London. And I always feel in town that I've too much to do to allow of my doing anything. If it were sheer idleness I could enjoy it, but it is a feverish idleness, in which one is driven here and there, expecting some gratification which not only never comes, but which never even begins to come. I will, however, undergo a week of it,—say the last seven days of this month, and shall trust to you to recompense me by as much of yourself as your town doings will permit.

And now again as to those home affairs. If I say nothing now I believe you will understand why I refrain. You have cunningly just left me to imply, from what you say, that all my arguments have been of no avail; but you do not answer them, or even tell me that

you have decided. I shall therefore imply nothing, and still trust to my personal eloquence for success. Or rather not trust,—not trust, but hope.

The garden is going on very well. We are rather short of water, and therefore not quite as bright as I had hoped; but we are preparing with untiring industry for future brightness. Your commands have been obeyed in all things, and Morrison always says "The mistress didn't mean this," or "The mistress did intend that." God bless the mistress is what I now say, and send her home, to her own home, to her flowers, and her fruit, and her house, and her husband, as soon as may be, with no more of these delays which are to me so grievous, and which seem to me to be so unnecessary. That is my prayer.

Yours ever and always,

J. G.

"I didn't give commands," Alice said to herself, as she sat with the letter at her solitary breakfast-table. "He asked me how I liked the things, and of course I was obliged to say. I was obliged to seem to care, even if I didn't care." Such were her first thoughts as she put the letter back into its envelope, after reading it the second time. When she opened it, which she did quickly, not pausing a moment lest she should suspect herself of fearing to see what might be its contents, her mind was full of that rebuke which her aunt had anticipated, and which she had almost taught herself to expect. She had torn the letter open rapidly, and had dashed at its contents with quick eyes. In half a moment she had seen what was the nature of the reply respecting the proposed companion of her tour, and then she had completed her reading slowly enough. "No; I gave no commands," she repeated to herself, as though she might thereby absolve herself from blame in reference to some possible future accusations, which might perhaps be brought against her under certain circumstances which she was contemplating.

Then she considered the letter bit by bit, taking it backwards, and sipping her tea every now and then amidst her thoughts. No; she had no home, no house, there. She had no husband;—not as yet. He spoke of their engagement as though it were a betrothal, as betrothals used to be of yore; as though they were already in some sort married. Such betrothals were not made now-a-days. There still remained, both to him and to her, a certain liberty of extricating themselves from this engagement. Should he come to her and say that he found that their contemplated marriage would not make him happy, would not she release him without a word of reproach? Would not she regard him as much more honourable in doing so than in adhering to a marriage which was distasteful to him? And if she would so judge him,—judge him and certainly acquit him, was it not reasonable that she under similar circumstances should expect a similar acquittal? Then she declared to herself that she carried on this argument within her own breast simply as an argument, induced to do so by that assertion on his part that he was already her husband,—that his house was even now her home. She had no intention of using that power which was still hers. She had no wish to go back from her pledged word. She thought that she had no such wish. She loved him much, and admired him even more than she loved him. He was noble, generous, clever, good,—so good as to be almost perfect; nay, for aught she knew he was perfect. Would that he had some faults! Would that he had! Would that he had! How could she, full of faults as she knew herself to be,—how could she hope to make happy a man perfect as he was! But then there would be no doubt as to her present duty. She loved him, and that was everything. Having told him that she loved him, and having on that score accepted his love, nothing but a change in her heart towards him could justify her in seeking to break the bond which bound them together. She did love him, and she loved him only.

But she had once loved her cousin. Yes, truly it was so. In her thoughts she did not now deny it. She had loved him, and was tormented by a feeling that she had had a more full delight in that love than in this other that had sprung up subsequently. She had told herself that this had come of her youth;—that love at twenty was sweeter than it could be afterwards. There had been a something of rapture in that earlier dream which could never be repeated,—which could never live, indeed, except in a dream. Now, now that she was older and perhaps wiser, love meant a partnership, in which each partner would be honest to the other, in which each would wish and strive for the other's welfare, so that thus their joint welfare might be insured. Then, in those early girlish days, it had meant a total abnegation of self. The one was of earth, and therefore possible. The other had been a ray from heaven,—and impossible, except in a dream.

And she had been mistaken in her first love. She admitted that frankly. He whom she had worshipped had been an idol of clay, and she knew that it was well for her to have abandoned that idolatry. He had not only been untrue to her, but, worse than that, had been false in excusing his untruth. He had not only promised falsely, but had made such promises with a deliberate, premeditated falsehood. And he had been selfish, coldly selfish, weighing the value of his own low lusts against that of her holy love. She had known this, and had parted from him with an oath to herself that no promised contrition on his part should ever bring them again together. But she had pardoned him as a man, though never as a lover, and had bade him welcome again as a cousin and as her friend's brother. She had again become very anxious as to his career, not hiding her regard, but professing that anxiety aloud. She knew him to be clever, ambitious, bold,—and she believed even yet, in spite of her own experience, that he might not be bad at heart. Now, as she told herself that in truth she loved the man to

whom her troth was plighted, I fear that she almost thought more of that other man from whom she had torn herself asunder.

"Why should he find himself unhappy in London?" she said, as she went back to the letter. "Why should he pretend to condemn the very place which most men find the fittest for all their energies? Were I a man, no earthly consideration should induce me to live elsewhere. It is odd how we differ in all things. However brilliant might be his own light, he would be contented to hide it under a bushel!"

And at last she recurred to that matter as to which she had been so anxious when she first opened her lover's letter. It will be remembered how assured she had expressed herself that Mr. Grey would not condescend to object to her travelling with her cousin. He had not so condescended. He had written on the matter with a pleasant joke, like a gentleman as he was, disdaining to allude to the past passages in the life of her whom he loved, abstaining even from expressing anything that might be taken as a permission on his part. There had been in Alice's words, as she told him of their proposed plan, a something that had betrayed a tremor in her thoughts. She had studiously striven so to frame her phrases that her tale might be told as any other simple statement,—as though there had been no trembling in her mind as she wrote. But she had failed, and she knew that she had failed. She had failed; and he had read all her effort and all her failure. She was quite conscious of this; she felt it thoroughly; and she knew that he was noble and a gentleman to the last drop of his blood. And yet—yet—yet there was almost a feeling of disappointment in that he had not written such a letter as Lady Macleod had anticipated.

During the next week Lady Macleod still came almost daily to Queen Anne Street, but nothing further was said between her and Miss Vavasor as to the Swiss tour; nor were any questions asked about Mr.. Grey's opinion on the subject. The old lady of course discovered that there was no quarrel, or, as she believed, any

probability of a quarrel; and with that she was obliged to be contented. Nor did she again on this occasion attempt to take Alice to Lady Midlothian's. Indeed, their usual subjects of conversation were almost abandoned, and Lady Macleod's visits, though they were as constant as heretofore, were not so long. She did not dare to talk about Mr. Grey, and because she did not so dare, was determined to regard herself as in a degree ill-used. So she was silent, reserved, and fretful. At length came the last day of her London season, and her last visit to her niece. "I would come because it's my last day," said Lady Macleod; "but really I'm so hurried, and have so many things to do, that I hardly know how to manage it."

"It's very kind," said Alice, giving her aunt an affectionate squeeze of the hand.

"I'm keeping the cab, so I can just stay twenty-five minutes. I've marked the time accurately, but I know the man will swear it's over the half-hour."

"You'll have no more trouble about cabs, aunt, when you are back in Cheltenham."

"The flies are worse, my dear. I really think they're worse. I pay the bill every month, but they've always one down that I didn't have. It's the regular practice, for I've had them from all the men in the place."

"It's hard enough to find honest men anywhere, I suppose."

"Or honest women either. What do you think of Mrs. Green wanting to charge me for an extra week, because she says I didn't give her notice till Tuesday morning? I won't pay her, and she may stop my things if she dares. However, it's the last time. I shall never come up to London again, my dear."

"Oh, aunt, don't say that!"

"But I do say it, my dear. What should an old woman like me do, trailing up to town every year, merely because it's what people choose to call the season."

"To see your friends, of course. Age doesn't matter when a person's health is so good as yours."

"If you knew what I suffer from lumbago,—though I must say coming to London always does cure that for the time. But as for friends—! Well, I suppose one has no right to complain when one gets to be as old as I am; but I declare I believe that those I love best would sooner be without me than with me."

"Do you mean me, aunt?"

"No, my dear, I don't mean you. Of course my life would have been very different if you could have consented to remain with me till you were married. But I didn't mean you. I don't know that I meant any one. You shouldn't mind what an old woman like me says."

"You're a little melancholy because you're going away."

"No, indeed. I don't know why I stayed the last week. I did say to Lady Midlothian that I thought I should go on the 20th; and, though I know that she knew that I really didn't go, she has not once sent to me since. To be sure they've been out every night; but I thought she might have asked me to come and lunch. It's so very lonely dining by myself in lodgings in London."

"And yet you never will come and dine with me."

"No, my dear; no. But we won't talk about that. I've just one word more to say. Let me see. I've just six minutes to stay. I've made up my mind that I'll never come up to town again,—except for one thing."

"And what's that, aunt?" Alice, as she asked the question, well knew what that one thing was.

"I'll come for your marriage, my dear. I do hope you will not keep me long waiting."

"Ah! I can't make any promise. There's no knowing when that may be."

"And why should there be no knowing? I always think that when a girl is once engaged the sooner she's married the better. There may be reasons for delay on the gentleman's part."

"There very often are, you know,"

"But, Alice, you don't mean to say that Mr. Grey is putting it off?"

Alice was silent for a moment, during which Lady Macleod's face assumed a look of almost tragic horror. Was there something wrong on Mr. Grey's side of which she was altogether unaware? Alice, though for a second or two she had been guilty of a slight playful deceit, was too honest to allow the impression to remain. "No, aunt," she said; "Mr. Grey is not putting it off. It has been left to me to fix the time."

"And why don't you fix it?"

"It is such a serious thing! After all it is not more than four months yet since I—I accepted him. I don't know that there has been any delay."

"But you might fix the time now, if he wishes it."

"Well, perhaps I shall,—some day, aunt. I'm going to think about it, and you mustn't drive me."

"But you should have some one to advise you, Alice."

"Ah! that's just it. People always do seem to think it so terrible that a girl should have her own way in anything. She mustn't like any one at first; and then, when she does like some one, she must marry him directly she's bidden. I haven't much of my own way at present; but you see, when I'm married I shan't have it at all. You can't wonder that I shouldn't be in a hurry."

"I am not advocating anything like hurry, my dear. But, goodness gracious me! I've been here twenty-eight minutes, and that horrid man will impose upon me. Good-bye; God bless you! Mind you write." And Lady Macleod hurried out of the room more intent at the present moment upon saving her sixpence than she was on any other matter whatsoever.

And then John Grey came up to town, arriving a day or two after the time that he had fixed. It is not, perhaps, improbable that Alice had used some diplomatic skill in preventing a meeting between Lady Macleod and her lover. They both were very anxious to obtain the same object, and Alice was to some extent opposed to their views. Had Lady Macleod and John Grey put their forces together she might have found herself unable to resist their joint endeavours. She was resolved that she would not at any rate name any day for her marriage before her return from Switzerland; and she may therefore have thought it wise to keep Mr. Grey in the country till after Lady Macleod had gone, even though she thereby cut down the time of his sojourn in London to four days. On the occasion of that visit Mr. Vavasor did a very memorable thing. He dined at home with the view of welcoming his future son-in-law. He dined at home, and asked, or rather assented to Alice's asking, George and Kate Vavasor to join the dinner-party. "What an auspicious omen for the future nuptials!" said Kate, with her little sarcastic smile. "Uncle John dines at home, and Mr. Grey joins in the dissipation of a dinner-party. We shall all be changed soon, I suppose, and George and I will take to keeping a little cottage in the country."

"Kate," said Alice, angrily, "I think you are about the most unjust person I ever met. I would forgive your raillery, however painful it might be, if it were only fair."

"And to whom is it unfair on the present occasion;—to your father?"

"It was not intended for him."

"To yourself?"

"I care nothing as to myself; you know that very well."

"Then it must have been unfair to Mr. Grey."

"Yes; it was Mr. Grey whom you meant to attack. If I can forgive him for not caring for society, surely you might do so."

"Exactly; but that's just what you can't do, my dear. You don't forgive him. If you did you might be quite sure that I should say nothing. And if you choose to bid me hold my tongue I will say nothing. But when you tell me all your own thoughts about this thing you can hardly expect but that I should let you know mine in return. I'm not particular; and if you are ready for a little good, wholesome, useful hypocrisy, I won't balk you. I mayn't be quite so dishonest as you call me, but I'm not so wedded to truth but what I can look, and act, and speak a few falsehoods if you wish it. Only let us understand each other."

"You know I wish for no falsehood, Kate."

"I know it's very hard to understand what you do wish. I know that for the last year or two I have been trying to find out your wishes, and, upon my word, my success has been very indifferent. I suppose you wish to marry Mr. Grey, but I'm by no means certain. I suppose the last thing on earth you'd wish would be to marry George?"

"The very last. You're right there at any rate."

"Alice—! sometimes you drive me too hard; you do, indeed. You make me doubt whether I hate or love you most. Knowing what my feelings are about George, I cannot understand how you can bring yourself to speak of him to me with such contempt!" Kate Vavasor, as she spoke these words, left the room with a quick step, and hurried up to her own chamber. There Alice found her in tears, and

was driven by her friend's real grief into the expression of an apology, which she knew was not properly due from her. Kate was acquainted with all the circumstances of that old affair between her brother and Alice. She had given in her adhesion to the propriety of what Alice had done. She had allowed that her brother George's behaviour had been such as to make any engagement between them impossible. The fault, therefore, had been hers in making any reference to the question of such a marriage. Nor had it been by any means her first fault of the same kind. Till Alice had become engaged to Mr. Grey she had spoken of George only as her brother, or as her friend's cousin, but now she was constantly making allusion to those past occurrences, which all of them should have striven to forget. Under these circumstances was not Lady Macleod right in saying that George Vavasor should not have been accepted as a companion for the Swiss tour?

The little dinner-party went off very quietly; and if no other ground existed for charging Mr. Grey with London dissipation than what that afforded, he was accused most unjustly. The two young men had never before met each other; and Vavasor had gone to his uncle's house, prepared not only to dislike but to despise his successor in Alice's favour. But in this he was either disappointed or gratified, as the case may be. "He has plenty to say for himself," he said to Kate on his way home.



"Sometimes you drive me too hard."

"Oh yes; he can talk."

"And he doesn't talk like a prig either, which was what I expected. He's uncommonly handsome."

"I thought men never saw that in each other. I never see it in any man."

"I see it in every animal—in men, women, horses, dogs, and even pigs. I like to look on handsome things. I think people always do who are ugly themselves."

"And so you're going into raptures in favour of John Grey."

"No, I'm not. I very seldom go into raptures about anything. But he talks in the way I like a man to talk. How he bowled my uncle over about those actors; and yet if my uncle knows anything about anything it is about the stage twenty years ago." There was nothing more said then about John Grey; but Kate understood her brother well enough to be aware that this praise meant very little. George Vavasor spoke sometimes from his heart, and did so more frequently to his sister than to any one else; but his words came generally from his head.

On the day after the little dinner in Queen Anne Street, John Grey came to say good-bye to his betrothed;—for his betrothed she certainly was, in spite of those very poor arguments which she had used in trying to convince herself that she was still free if she wished to claim her freedom. Though he had been constantly with Alice during the last three days, he had not hitherto said anything as to the day of their marriage. He had been constantly with her alone, sitting for hours in that ugly green drawing-room, but he had never touched the subject. He had told her much of Switzerland, which she had never yet seen but which he knew well. He had told her much of his garden and house, whither she had once gone with her father, whilst paying a visit nominally to the colleges at Cambridge. And he had talked of various matters, matters bearing in no immediate way upon his own or her affairs; for Mr. Grey was a man who knew well how to make words pleasant; but previous to this last moment he had said nothing on that subject on which he was so intent.

"Well, Alice," he said, when the last hour had come, "and about that question of home affairs?"

"Let us finish off the foreign affairs first."

"We have finished them; haven't we?"

"Finished them! why we haven't started yet."

"No; you haven't started. But we've had the discussion. Is there any reason why you'd rather not have this thing settled."

"No; no special reason."

"Then why not let it be fixed? Do you fear coming to me as my wife?"

"No."

"I cannot think that you repent your goodness to me."

"No; I don't repent it;—what you call my goodness? I love you too entirely for that."

"My darling!" And now he passed his arm round her waist as they stood near the empty fireplace. "And if you love me—"

"I do love you."

"Then why should you not wish to come to me?"

"I do wish it. I think I wish it."

"But, Alice, you must have wished it altogether when you consented to be my wife."

"A person may wish for a thing altogether, and yet not wish for it instantly."

"Instantly! Come; I have not been hard on you. This is still June. Will you say the middle of September, and we shall still be in time for warm pleasant days among the lakes? Is that asking for too much?"

"It is not asking for anything."

"Nay, but it is, love. Grant it, and I will swear that you have granted me everything."

She was silent, having things to say but not knowing in what words to put them. Now that he was with her she could not say the things which she had told herself that she would utter to him. She

could not bring herself to hint to him that his views of life were so unlike her own, that there could be no chance of happiness between them, unless each could strive to lean somewhat towards the other. No man could be more gracious in word and manner than John Grey; no man more chivalrous in his carriage towards a woman; but he always spoke and acted as though there could be no question that his manner of life was to be adopted, without a word or thought of doubting, by his wife. When two came together, why should not each yield something, and each claim something? This she had meant to say to him on this day; but now that he was with her she could not say it.

"John," she said at last, "do not press me about this till I return."

"But then you will say the time is short. It would be short then."

"I cannot answer you now;—indeed, I cannot. That is I cannot answer in the affirmative. It is such a solemn thing."

"Will it ever be less solemn, dearest?"

"Never, I hope never."

He did not press her further then, but kissed her and bade her farewell.

CHAPTER IV.
George Vavasor, the Wild Man.

It will no doubt be understood that George Vavasor did not roam about in the woods unshorn, or wear leathern trappings and sandals, like Robinson Crusoe, instead of coats and trousers. His wildness was of another kind. Indeed, I don't know that he was in truth at all wild, though Lady Macleod had called him so, and Alice had assented to her use of the word.

George Vavasor had lived in London since he was twenty, and now, at the time of the beginning of my story, he was a year or two over thirty. He was and ever had been the heir to his grandfather's estate; but that estate was small, and when George first came to London his father was a strong man of forty, with as much promise of life in him as his son had. A profession had therefore been absolutely necessary to him; and he had, at his uncle John's instance, been placed in the office of a parliamentary land agent. With this parliamentary land agent he had quarrelled to the knife, but not before he had by his talents made himself so useful that he had before him the prospects of a lucrative partnership in the business. George Vavasor had many faults, but idleness—absolute idleness—was not one of them. He would occasionally postpone his work to pleasure. He would be at Newmarket when he should have been at Whitehall. But it was not usual with him to be in bed when he should be at his desk, and when he was at his desk he did not whittle his ruler, or pick his teeth, or clip his nails. Upon the whole his friends were pleased with the first five years of his life in London—in spite of his having been found to be in debt on more than one occasion. But his debts had been paid; and all was going

on swimmingly, when one day he knocked down the parliamentary agent with a blow between the eyes, and then there was an end of that. He himself was wont to say that he had known very well what he was about, that it had behoved him to knock down the man who was to have been his partner, and that he regretted nothing in the matter. At any rate the deed was looked upon with approving eyes by many men of good standing,—or, at any rate, sufficient standing to help George to another position; and within six weeks of the time of his leaving the office at Whitehall, he had become a partner in an established firm of wine merchants. A great-aunt had just then left him a couple of thousand pounds, which no doubt assisted him in his views with the wine merchants.

In this employment he remained for another period of five years, and was supposed by all his friends to be doing very well. And indeed he did not do badly, only that he did not do well enough to satisfy himself. He was ambitious of making the house to which he belonged the first house in the trade in London, and scared his partners by the boldness and extent of his views. He himself declared that if they would only have gone along with him he would have made them princes in the wine market. But they were men either of more prudence or of less audacity than he, and they declined to walk in his courses. At the end of the five years Vavasor left the house, not having knocked any one down on this occasion, and taking with him a very nice sum of money.

The two last of these five years had certainly been the best period of his life, for he had really worked very hard, like a man, giving up all pleasure that took time from him,—and giving up also most pleasures which were dangerous on account of their costliness. He went to no races, played no billiards, and spoke of Cremorne as a childish thing, which he had abandoned now that he was no longer a child. It was during these two years that he had had his love passages with his cousin; and it must be presumed that he had, at any rate, intended at one time to settle himself

respectably as a married man. He had, however, behaved very badly to Alice, and the match had been broken off.

He had also during the last two years quarrelled with his grandfather. He had wished to raise a sum of money on the Vavasor estate, which, as it was unentailed, he could only do with his grandfather's concurrence. The old gentleman would not hear of it,—would listen with no patience to the proposition. It was in vain that George attempted to make the squire understand that the wine business was going on very well, that he himself owed no man anything, that everything with him was flourishing;—but that his trade might be extended indefinitely by the use of a few thousand pounds at moderate interest. Old Mr. Vavasor was furious. No documents and no assurances could make him lay aside a belief that the wine merchants, and the business, and his grandson were all ruined and ruinous together. No one but a ruined man would attempt to raise money on the family estate! So they had quarrelled, and had never spoken or seen each other since. "He shall have the estate for his life," the squire said to his son John. "I don't think I have a right to leave it away from him. It never has been left away from the heir. But I'll tie it up so that he shan't cut a tree on it." John Vavasor perhaps thought that the old rule of primogeniture might under such circumstances have been judiciously abandoned—in this one instance, in his own favour. But he did not say so. Nor would he have said it had there been a chance of his doing so with success. He was a man from whom no very noble deed could be expected; but he was also one who would do no ignoble deed.

After that George Vavasor had become a stockbroker, and a stockbroker he was now. In the first twelve months after his leaving the wine business,—the same being the first year after his breach with Alice,—he had gone back greatly in the estimation of men. He had lived in open defiance of decency. He had spent much money and had apparently made none, and had been, as all his

friends declared, on the high road to ruin. Aunt Macleod had taken her judgement from this period of his life when she had spoken of him as a man who never did anything. But he had come forth again suddenly as a working man; and now they who professed to know, declared that he was by no means poor. He was in the City every day; and during the last two years had earned the character of a shrewd fellow who knew what he was about, who might not perhaps be very mealy-mouthed in affairs of business, but who was fairly and decently honourable in his money transactions. In fact, he stood well on 'Change.

And during these two years he had stood a contest for a seat in Parliament, having striven to represent the metropolitan borough of Chelsea, on the extremely Radical interest. It is true that he had failed, and that he had spent a considerable sum of money in the contest. "Where on earth does your nephew get his money?" men said to John Vavasor at his club. "Upon my word I don't know," said Vavasor. "He doesn't get it from me, and I'm sure he doesn't get it from my father." But George Vavasor, though he failed at Chelsea, did not spend his money altogether fruitlessly. He gained reputation by the struggle, and men came to speak of him as though he were one who would do something. He was a stockbroker, a thorough-going Radical, and yet he was the heir to a fine estate, which had come down from father to son for four hundred years! There was something captivating about his history and adventures, especially as just at the time of the election he became engaged to an heiress, who died a month before the marriage should have taken place. She died without a will, and her money all went to some third cousins.

George Vavasor bore this last disappointment like a man, and it was at this time that he again became fully reconciled to his cousin. Previous to this they had met; and Alice, at her cousin Kate's instigation, had induced her father to meet him. But at first there had been no renewal of real friendship. Alice had given her

cordial assent to her cousin's marriage with the heiress, Miss Grant, telling Kate that such an engagement was the very thing to put him thoroughly on his feet. And then she had been much pleased by his spirit at that Chelsea election. "It was grand of him, wasn't it?" said Kate, her eyes brimming full of tears. "It was very spirited," said Alice. "If you knew all, you would say so. They could get no one else to stand but that Mr. Travers, and he wouldn't come forward, unless they would guarantee all his expenses." "I hope it didn't cost George much," said Alice. "It did, though; nearly all he had got. But what matters? Money's nothing to him, except for its uses. My own little mite is my own now, and he shall have every farthing of it for the next election, even though I should go out as a housemaid the next day." There must have been something great about George Vavasor, or he would not have been so idolized by such a girl as his sister Kate.

Early in the present spring, before the arrangements for the Swiss journey were made, George Vavasor had spoken to Alice about that intended marriage which had been broken off by the lady's death. He was sitting one evening with his cousin in the drawing-room in Queen Anne Street, waiting for Kate, who was to join him there before going to some party. I wonder whether Kate had had a hint from her brother to be late! At any rate, the two were together for an hour, and the talk had been all about himself. He had congratulated her on her engagement with Mr. Grey, which had just become known to him, and had then spoken of his own last intended marriage.

"I grieved for her," he said, "greatly."

"I'm sure you did, George."

"Yes, I did;—for her, herself. Of course the world has given me credit for lamenting the loss of her money. But the truth is, that as regards both herself and her money, it is much better for me that we were never married."

"Do you mean even though she should have lived?"

"Yes;—even had she lived."

"And why so? If you liked her, her money was surely no drawback."

"No; not if I had liked her."

"And did you not like her?"

"No."

"Oh, George!"

"I did not love her as a man should love his wife, if you mean that. As for my liking her, I did like her. I liked her very much."

"But you would have loved her?"

"I don't know. I don't find that task of loving so very easy. It might have been that I should have learned to hate her."

"If so, it is better for you, and better for her, that she has gone."

"It is better. I am sure of it. And yet I grieve for her, and in thinking of her I almost feel as though I were guilty of her death."

"But she never suspected that you did not love her?"

"Oh no. But she was not given to think much of such things. She took all that for granted. Poor girl! she is at rest now, and her money has gone, where it should go, among her own relatives."

"Yes; with such feelings as yours are about her, her money would have been a burden to you."

"I would not have taken it. I hope, at least, that I would not have taken it. Money is a sore temptation, especially to a poor man like me. It is well for me that the trial did not come in my way."

"But you are not such a very poor man now, are you, George? I thought your business was a good one."

"It is, and I have no right to be a poor man. But a man will be poor who does such mad things as I do. I had three or four thousand pounds clear, and I spent every shilling of it on the Chelsea election. Goodness knows whether I shall have a shilling at all when another chance comes round; but if I have I shall certainly spend it, and if I have not, I shall go in debt wherever I can raise a hundred pounds."

"I hope you will be successful at last."

"I feel sure that I shall. But, in the mean time, I cannot but know that my career is perfectly reckless. No woman ought to join her lot to mine unless she has within her courage to be as reckless as I am. You know what men do when they toss up for shillings?"

"Yes, I suppose I do."

"I am tossing up every day of my life for every shilling that I have."

"Do you mean that you're—gambling?"

"No. I have given that up altogether. I used to gamble, but I never do that now, and never shall again. What I mean is this,—that I hold myself in readiness to risk everything at any moment, in order to gain any object that may serve my turn. I am always ready to lead a forlorn hope. That's what I mean by tossing up every day for every shilling that I have."

Alice did not quite understand him, and perhaps he did not intend that she should. Perhaps his object was to mystify her imagination. She did not understand him, but I fear that she admired the kind of courage which he professed. And he had not only professed it: in that matter of the past election he had certainly practised it.

In talking of beauty to his sister he had spoken of himself as being ugly. He would not generally have been called ugly by women, had not one side of his face been dreadfully scarred by a

cicatrice, which in healing, had left a dark indented line down from his left eye to his lower jaw. That black ravine running through his cheek was certainly ugly. On some occasions, when he was angry or disappointed, it was very hideous; for he would so contort his face that the scar would, as it were, stretch itself out, revealing all its horrors, and his countenance would become all scar. "He looked at me like the devil himself—making the hole in his face gape at me," the old squire had said to John Vavasor in describing the interview in which the grandson had tried to bully his grandfather into assenting to his own views about the mortgage. But in other respects George's face was not ugly, and might have been thought handsome by many women. His hair was black, and was parted in the front. His forehead, though low, was broad. His eyes were dark and bright, and his eyebrows were very full, and perfectly black. At those periods of his anger, all his face which was not scar, was eye and eyebrow. He wore a thick black moustache, which covered his mouth, but no whiskers. People said of him that he was so proud of his wound that he would not grow a hair to cover it. The fact, however, was that no whisker could be made to come sufficiently forward to be of service, and therefore he wore none.

The story of that wound should be told. When he was yet hardly more than a boy, before he had come up to London, he was living in a house in the country which his father then occupied. At the time his father was absent, and he and his sister only were in the house with the maid-servants. His sister had a few jewels in her room, and an exaggerated report of them having come to the ears of certain enterprising burglars, a little plan was arranged for obtaining them. A small boy was hidden in the house, a window was opened, and at the proper witching hour of night a stout individual crept up-stairs in his stocking-feet, and was already at Kate Vavasor's door,—when, in the dark, dressed only in his nightshirt, wholly unarmed, George Vavasor flew at the fellow's throat. Two hours elapsed before the horror-stricken women of the

house could bring men to the place. George's face had then been ripped open from the eye downwards, with some chisel, or house-breaking instrument. But the man was dead. George had wrenched from him his own tool, and having first jabbed him all over with insufficient wounds, had at last driven the steel through his windpipe. The small boy escaped, carrying with him two shillings and threepence which Kate had left upon the drawing-room mantelpiece.

George Vavasor was rather low in stature, but well made, with small hands and feet, but broad in the chest and strong in the loins. He was a fine horseman and a hard rider; and men who had known him well said that he could fence and shoot with a pistol as few men care to do in these peaceable days. Since volunteering had come up, he had become a captain of Volunteers, and had won prizes with his rifle at Wimbledon.

Such had been the life of George Vavasor, and such was his character, and such his appearance. He had always lived alone in London, and did so at present; but just now his sister was much with him, as she was staying up in town with an aunt, another Vavasor by birth, with whom the reader will, if he persevere, become acquainted in course of time. I hope he will persevere a little, for of all the Vavasors Mrs.. Greenow was perhaps the best worth knowing. But Kate Vavasor's home was understood to be in her grandfather's house in Westmoreland.

On the evening before they started for Switzerland, George and Kate walked from Queen Anne Street, where they had been dining with Alice, to Mrs. Greenow's house. Everything had been settled about luggage, hours of starting, and routes as regarded their few first days; and the common purse had been made over to George. That portion of Mr.. Grey's letter had been read which alluded to the Paynims and the glasses of water, and everything had passed in the best of good-humour. "I'll endeavour to get the cold water for you," George had said; "but as to the breakfasts, I can only hope

you won't put me to severe trials by any very early hours. When people go out for pleasure it should be pleasure."

The brother and sister walked through two or three streets in silence, and then Kate asked a question.

"George, I wonder what your wishes really are about Alice?"

"That she shouldn't want her breakfast too early while we are away."

"That means that I'm to hold my tongue, of course."

"No, it doesn't."

"Then it means that you intend to hold yours."

"No; not that either."

"Then what does it mean?"

"That I have no fixed wishes on the subject. Of course she'll marry this man John Grey, and then no one will hear another word about her."

"She will no doubt, if you don't interfere. Probably she will whether you interfere or not. But if you wish to interfere—"

"She's got four hundred a year, and is not so good-looking as she was."

"Yes; she has got four hundred a year, and she is more handsome now than ever she was. I know that you think so;—and that you love her and love no one else—unless you have a sneaking fondness for me."

"I'll leave you to judge of that last."

"And as for me,—I only love two people in the world; her and you. If ever you mean to try, you should try now."

CHAPTER V.
The Balcony at Basle.

I am not going to describe the Vavasors' Swiss tour. It would not be fair on my readers. "Six Weeks in the Bernese Oberland, by party of three," would have but very small chance of success in the literary world at present, and I should consider myself to be dishonest if I attempt to palm off such matter on the public in the pages of a novel. It is true that I have just returned from Switzerland, and should find such a course of writing very convenient. But I dismiss the temptation, strong as it is. *Retro age, Satanas*. No living man or woman any longer wants to be told anything of the Grimsell or of the Gemmi. Ludgate Hill is now-a-days more interesting than the Jungfrau.

The Vavasors were not very energetic on their tour. As George had said, they had gone out for pleasure and not for work. They went direct to Interlaken and then hung about between that place and Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen, It delighted him to sit still on some outer bench, looking at the mountains, with a cigar in his mouth, and it seemed to delight them to be with him. Much that Mr. Grey prophesied had come true. The two girls were ministers to him, instead of having him as their slave.

"What fine fellows those Alpine club men think themselves," he said on one of these occasions, "and how thoroughly they despise the sort of enjoyment I get from mountains. But they're mistaken."

"I don't see why either need be mistaken," said Alice.

"But they are mistaken," he continued. "They rob the mountains of their poetry, which is or should be their greatest charm. Mont

Blanc can have no mystery for a man who has been up it half a dozen times. It's like getting behind the scenes at a ballet, or making a conjuror explain his tricks."

"But is the exercise nothing?" said Kate.

"Yes; the exercise is very fine;—but that avoids the question."

"And they all botanize," said Alice.

"I don't believe it. I believe that the most of them simply walk up the mountain and down again. But if they did, that avoids the question also. The poetry and mystery of the mountains are lost to those who make themselves familiar with their details, not the less because such familiarity may have useful results. In this world things are beautiful only because they are not quite seen, or not perfectly understood. Poetry is precious chiefly because it suggests more than it declares. Look in there, through that valley, where you just see the distant little peak at the end. Are you not dreaming of the unknown beautiful world that exists up there;—beautiful, as heaven is beautiful, because you know nothing of the reality? If you make your way up there and back to-morrow, and find out all about it, do you mean to say that it will be as beautiful to you when you come back?"

"Yes;—I think it would," said Alice.

"Then you've no poetry in you. Now I'm made up of poetry." After that they began to laugh at him and were very happy.

I think that Mr. Grey was right in answering Alice's letter as he did; but I think that Lady Macleod was also right in saying that Alice should not have gone to Switzerland in company with George Vavasor. A peculiar familiarity sprang up, which, had all its circumstances been known to Mr. Grey, would not have entirely satisfied him, even though no word was said which might in itself have displeased him. During the first weeks of their travelling no word was said which would have displeased him; but at last, when

the time for their return was drawing nigh, when their happiness was nearly over, and that feeling of melancholy was coming on them which always pervades the last hours of any period that has been pleasant,—then words became softer than they had been, and references were made to old days,—allusions which never should have been permitted between them.

Alice had been very happy,—more happy perhaps in that she had been a joint minister with Kate to her cousin George's idle fantasies, than she would have been hurrying about with him as her slave. They had tacitly agreed to spoil him with comforts; and girls are always happier in spoiling some man than in being spoiled by men. And he had taken it all well, doing his despotism pleasantly, exacting much, but exacting nothing that was disagreeable. And he had been amusing always, as Alice thought without any effort. But men and women, when they show themselves at their best, seldom do so without an effort. If the object be near the heart the effort will be pleasant to him who makes it, and if it be made well, it will be hidden; but, not the less, will the effort be there. George Vavasor had on the present occasion done his very best to please his cousin.

They were sitting at Basle one evening in the balcony of the big hotel which overlooks the Rhine. The balcony runs the length of the house, and is open to all the company; but it is spacious, and little parties can be formed there with perfect privacy. The swift broad Rhine runs underneath, rushing through from the bridge which here spans the river; and every now and then on summer evenings loud shouts come up from strong swimmers in the water, who are glorying in the swiftness of the current. The three were sitting there, by themselves, at the end of the balcony. Coffee was before them on a little table, and George's cigar, as usual, was in his mouth.

"It's nearly all over," said he, after they had remained silent for some minutes.

"And I do think it has been a success," said Kate. "Always excepting about the money. I'm ruined for ever."

"I'll make your money all straight," said George.

"Indeed you'll do nothing of the kind," said Kate. "I'm ruined, but you are ruineder. But what signifies? It is such a great thing ever to have had six weeks' happiness, that the ruin is, in point of fact, a good speculation. What do you say, Alice? Won't you vote, too, that we've done it well?"

"I think we've done it very well. I have enjoyed myself thoroughly."

"And now you've got to go home to John Grey and Cambridgeshire! It's no wonder you should be melancholy." That was the thought in Kate's mind, but she did not speak it out on this occasion.

"That's good of you, Alice," said Kate. "Is it not, George? I like a person who will give a hearty meed of approbation."

"But I am giving the meed of approbation to myself."

"I like a person even to do that heartily," said Kate. "Not that George and I are thankful for the compliment. We are prepared to admit that we owe almost everything to you,—are we not, George?"

"I'm not; by any means," said George.

"Well, I am, and I expect to have something pretty said to me in return. Have I been cross once, Alice?"

"No; I don't think you have. You are never cross, though you are often ferocious."

"But I haven't been once ferocious,—nor has George."

"He would have been the most ungrateful man alive if he had," said Alice. "We've done nothing since we've started but realize

from him that picture in 'Punch' of the young gentleman at Jeddo who had a dozen ladies to wait upon him."

"And now he has got to go home to his lodgings, and wait upon himself again. Poor fellow! I do pity you, George."

"No, you don't;—nor does Alice. I believe girls always think that a bachelor in London has the happiest of all lives. It's because they think so that they generally want to put an end to the man's condition."

"It's envy that makes us want to get married,—not love," said Kate.

"It's the devil in some shape, as often as not," said he. "With a man, marriage always seems to him to be an evil at the instant."

"Not always," said Alice.

"Almost always;—but he does it, as he takes physic, because something worse will come if he don't. A man never likes having his tooth pulled out, but all men do have their teeth pulled out,—and they who delay it too long suffer the very mischief."

"I do like George's philosophy," said Kate, getting up from her chair as she spoke; "it is so sharp, and has such a pleasant acid taste about it; and then we all know that it means nothing. Alice, I'm going up-stairs to begin the final packing."

"I'll come with you, dear."

"No, don't. To tell the truth I'm only going into that man's room because he won't put up a single thing of his own decently. We'll do ours, of course, when we go up to bed. Whatever you disarrange to-night, Master George, you must rearrange for yourself to-morrow morning, for I promise I won't go into your room at five o'clock."

"How I do hate that early work," said George.

"I'll be down again very soon," said Kate. "Then we'll take one turn on the bridge and go to bed."

Alice and George were left together sitting in the balcony. They had been alone together before many times since their travels had commenced; but they both of them felt that there was something to them in the present moment different from any other period of their journey. There was something that each felt to be sweet, undefinable, and dangerous. Alice had known that it would be better for her to go up-stairs with Kate; but Kate's answer had been of such a nature that had she gone she would have shown that she had some special reason for going. Why should she show such a need? Or why, indeed, should she entertain it?

Alice was seated quite at the end of the gallery, and Kate's chair was at her feet in the corner. When Alice and Kate had seated themselves, the waiter had brought a small table for the coffee-cups, and George had placed his chair on the other side of that. So that Alice was, as it were, a prisoner. She could not slip away without some special preparation for going, and Kate had so placed her chair in leaving, that she must actually have asked George to move it before she could escape. But why should she wish to escape? Nothing could be more lovely and enticing than the scene before her. The night had come on, with quick but still unperceived approach, as it does in those parts; for the twilight there is not prolonged as it is with us more northern folk. The night had come on, but there was a rising moon, which just sufficed to give a sheen to the water beneath her. The air was deliciously soft;—of that softness which produces no sensation either of warmth or cold, but which just seems to touch one with loving tenderness, as though the unseen spirits of the air kissed one's forehead as they passed on their wings. The Rhine was running at her feet, so near, that in the soft half light it seemed as though she might step into its ripple. The Rhine was running by with that delicious sound of rapidly moving waters, that fresh

refreshing gurgle of the river, which is so delicious to the ear at all times. If you be talking, it wraps up your speech, keeping it for yourselves, making it difficult neither to her who listens nor to him who speaks. If you would sleep, it is of all lullabies the sweetest. If you are alone and would think, it aids all your thoughts. If you are alone, and, alas! would not think,—if thinking be too painful,—it will dispel your sorrow, and give the comfort which music alone can give. Alice felt that the air kissed her, that the river sang for her its sweetest song, that the moon shone for her with its softest light,—that light which lends the poetry of half-developed beauty to everything that it touches. Why should she leave it?

Nothing was said for some minutes after Kate's departure, and Alice was beginning to shake from her that half feeling of danger which had come over her. Vavasor had sat back in his chair, leaning against the house, with his feet raised upon a stool; his arms were folded across his breast, and he seemed to have divided himself between his thoughts and his cigar. Alice was looking full upon the river, and her thoughts had strayed away to her future home among John Grey's flower-beds and shrubs; but the river, though it sang to her pleasantly, seemed to sing a song of other things than such a home as that,—a song full of mystery, as are all river songs when one tries to understand their words.

"When are you to be married, Alice?" said George at last.

"Oh, George!" said she. "You ask me a question as though you were putting a pistol to my ear."

"I'm sorry the question was so unpleasant."

"I didn't say that it was unpleasant; but you asked it so suddenly! The truth is, I didn't expect you to speak at all just then. I suppose I was thinking of something."

"But if it be not unpleasant,—when are you to be married?"

"I do not know. It is not fixed."

"But about when, I mean? This summer?"

"Certainly not this summer, for the summer will be over when we reach home."

"This winter? Next spring? Next year?—or in ten years' time?"

"Before the expiration of the ten years, I suppose. Anything more exact than that I can't say."

"I suppose you like it?" he then said.

"What, being married? You see I've never tried yet."

"The idea of it,—the anticipation, You look forward with satisfaction to the kind of life you will lead at Nethercoats? Don't suppose I am saying anything against it, for I have no conception what sort of a place Nethercoats is. On the whole I don't know that there is any kind of life better than that of an English country gentleman in his own place;—that is, if he can keep it up, and not live as the old squire does, in a state of chronic poverty."

"Mr. Grey's place doesn't entitle him to be called a country gentleman."

"But you like the prospect of it?"

"Oh, George, how you do cross-question one! Of course I like it, or I shouldn't have accepted it."

"That does not follow. But I quite acknowledge that I have no right to cross-question you. If I ever had such right on the score of cousinship, I have lost it on the score of—; but we won't mind that, will we, Alice?" To this she at first made no answer, but he repeated the question. "Will we, Alice?"

"Will we what?"

"Recur to the old days."

"Why should we recur to them? They are passed, and as we are again friends and dear cousins the sting of them is gone."

"Ah, yes! The sting of them is gone. It is for that reason, because it is so, that we may at last recur to them without danger. If we regret nothing,—if neither of us has anything to regret, why not recur to them, and talk of them freely?"

"No, George; that would not do."

"By heavens, no! It would drive me mad; and if I know aught of you, it would hardly leave you as calm as you are at present."

"As I would wish to be left calm—"

"Would you? Then I suppose I ought to hold my tongue. But, Alice, I shall never have the power of speaking to you again as I speak now. Since we have been out together, we have been dear friends; is it not so?"

"And shall we not always be dear friends?"

"No, certainly not. How will it be possible? Think of it. How can I really be your friend when you are the mistress of that man's house in Cambridgeshire?"

"George!"

"I mean nothing disrespectful. I truly beg your pardon if it has seemed so. Let me say that gentleman's house;—for he is a gentleman."

"That he certainly is."

"You could not have accepted him were he not so. But how can I be your friend when you are his wife? I may still call you cousin Alice, and pat your children on the head if I chance to see them; and shall stop in the streets and shake hands with him if I meet him;—that is if my untoward fate does not induce him to cut my acquaintance;—but as for friendship, that will be over when you and I shall have parted next Thursday evening at London Bridge."

"Oh, George, don't say so!"

"But I do."

"And why on Thursday? Do you mean that you won't come to Queen Anne Street any more?"

"Yes, that is what I do mean. This trip of ours has been very successful, Kate says. Perhaps Kate knows nothing about it."

"It has been very pleasant,—at least to me."

"And the pleasure has had no drawback?"

"None to me."

"It has been very pleasant to me, also;—but the pleasure has had its alloy. Alice, I have nothing to ask from you,—nothing."

"Anything that you should ask, I would do for you."

"I have nothing to ask;—nothing. But I have one word to say."

"George, do not say it. Let me go up-stairs. Let me go to Kate."

"Certainly; if you wish it you shall go." He still held his foot against the chair which barred her passage, and did not attempt to rise as he must have done to make way for her passage out. "Certainly you shall go to Kate, if you refuse to hear me. But after all that has passed between us, after these six weeks of intimate companionship, I think you ought to listen to me. I tell you that I have nothing to ask. I am not going to make love to you."

Alice had commenced some attempt to rise, but she had again settled herself in her chair. And now, when he paused for a moment, she made no further sign that she wished to escape, nor did she say a word to intimate her further wish that he should be silent.

"I am not going to make love to you," he said again. "As for making love, as the word goes, that must be over between you and me. It has been made and marred, and cannot be remade. It may

exist, or it may have been expelled; but where it does not exist, it will never be brought back again."

"It should not be spoken of between you and me."

"So, no doubt, any proper-going duenna would say, and so, too, little children should be told; but between you and me there can be no necessity for falsehood. We have grown beyond our sugar-toothed ages, and are now men and women. I perfectly understood your breaking away from me. I understood you, and in spite of my sorrow knew that you were right. I am not going to accuse or to defend myself; but I knew that you were right."

"Then let there be no more about it."

"Yes; there must be more about it. I did not understand you when you accepted Mr. Grey. Against him I have not a whisper to make. He may be perfect for aught I know. But, knowing you as I thought I did, I could not understand your loving such a man as him. It was as though one who had lived on brandy should take himself suddenly to a milk diet,—and enjoy the change! A milk diet is no doubt the best. But men who have lived on brandy can't make those changes very suddenly. They perish in the attempt."

"Not always, George."

"It may be done with months of agony;—but there was no such agony with you."

"Who can tell?"

"But you will tell me the cure was made. I thought so, and therefore thought that I should find you changed. I thought that you, who had been all fire, would now have turned yourself into soft-flowing milk and honey, and have become fit for the life in store for you. With such a one I might have travelled from Moscow to Malta without danger. The woman fit to be John Grey's wife would certainly do me no harm,—could not touch my happiness. I might have loved her once,—might still love the memory of what

she had been; but her, in her new form, after her new birth,—such a one as that, Alice, could be nothing to me. Don't mistake me. I have enough of wisdom in me to know how much better, ay, and happier a woman she might be. It was not that I thought you had descended in the scale; but I gave you credit for virtues which you have not acquired. Alice, that wholesome diet of which I spoke is not your diet. You would starve on it, and perish."

He had spoken with great energy, but still in a low voice, having turned full round upon the table, with both his arms upon it, and his face stretched out far over towards her. She was looking full at him; and, as I have said before, that scar and his gloomy eyes and thick eyebrows seemed to make up the whole of his face. But the scar had never been ugly to her. She knew the story, and when he was her lover she had taken pride in the mark of the wound. She looked at him, but though he paused she did not speak. The music of the river was still in her ears, and there came upon her a struggle as though she were striving to understand its song. Were the waters also telling her of the mistake she had made in accepting Mr. Grey as her husband? What her cousin was now telling her,—was it not a repetition of words which she had spoken to herself hundreds of times during the last two months? Was she not telling herself daily,—hourly,—always,—in every thought of her life, that in accepting Mr. Grey she had assumed herself to be mistress of virtues which she did not possess? Had she not, in truth, rioted upon brandy, till the innocence of milk was unfitted for her? This man now came and rudely told her all this,—but did he not tell her the truth? She sat silent and convicted; only gazing into his face when his speech was done.

"I have learned this since we have been again together, Alice; and finding you, not the angel I had supposed, finding you to be the same woman I had once loved,—the safety that I anticipated has not fallen to my lot. That's all. Here's Kate, and now we'll go for our walk."

CHAPTER VI.
The Bridge over the Rhine.

"George," said Kate, speaking before she quite got up to them, "will you tell me whether you have been preparing all your things for an open sale by auction?" Then she stole a look at Alice, and having learned from that glance that something had occurred which prevented Alice from joining her in her raillery, she went on with it herself rapidly, as though to cover Alice's confusion, and give her time to rally before they should all move. "Would you believe it? he had three razors laid out on his table—"

"A man must shave,—even at Basle."

"But not with three razors at once; and three hair-brushes, and half a dozen toothbrushes, and a small collection of combs, and four or five little glass bottles, looking as though they contained poison,—all with silver tops. I can only suppose you desired to startle the weak mind of the chambermaid. I have put them all up; but remember this, if they are taken out again you are responsible. And I will not put up your boots, George. What can you have wanted with three pairs of boots at Basle?"

"When you have completed the list of my wardrobe we'll go out upon the bridge. That is, if Alice likes it."

"Oh, yes; I shall like it."

"Come along then," said Kate. And so they moved away. When they got upon the bridge Alice and Kate were together, while George strolled behind them, close to them, but not taking any part in their conversation,—as though he had merely gone with them as an escort. Kate seemed to be perfectly content with this

arrangement, chattering to Alice, so that she might show that there was nothing serious on the minds of any of them. It need hardly be said that Alice at this time made no appeal to George to join them. He followed them at their heels, with his hands behind his back, looking down upon the pavement and simply waiting upon their pleasure.

"Do you know," said Kate, "I have a very great mind to run away."

"Where do you want to run to?"

"Well;—that wouldn't much signify. Perhaps I'd go to the little inn at Handek. It's a lonely place, where nobody would hear of me,—and I should have the waterfall. I'm afraid they'd want to have their bill paid. That would be the worst of it."

"But why run away just now?"

"I won't, because you wouldn't like going home with George alone,—and I suppose he'd be bound to look after me, as he's doing now. I wonder what he thinks of having to walk over the bridge after us girls. I suppose he'd be in that place down there drinking beer, if we weren't here."

"If he wanted to go, I dare say he would, in spite of us."

"That's ungrateful of you, for I'm sure we've never been kept in a moment by his failing us. But as I was saying, I do dread going home. You are going to John Grey, which may be pleasant enough; but I'm going—to Aunt Greenow."

"It's your own choice."

"No, it's not. I haven't any choice in the matter. Of course I might refuse to speak to Aunt Greenow, and nobody could make me;—but practically I haven't any choice in the matter. Fancy a month at Yarmouth with no companion but such a woman as that!"

"I shouldn't mind it. Aunt Greenow always seems to me to be a very good sort of woman."

"She may be a good woman, but I must say I think she's of a bad sort. You've never heard her talk about her husband?"

"No, never; I think she did cry a little the first day she came to Queen Anne Street, but that wasn't unnatural."

"He was thirty years older than herself."

"But still he was her husband. And even if her tears are assumed, what of that? What's a woman to do? Of course she was wrong to marry him. She was thirty-five, and had nothing, while he was sixty-five, and was very rich. According to all accounts she made him a very good wife, and now that she's got all his money, you wouldn't have her go about laughing within three months of his death."

"No; I wouldn't have her laugh; but neither would I have her cry. And she's quite right to wear weeds; but she needn't be so very outrageous in the depth of her hems, or so very careful that her caps are becoming. Her eyes will be worn out by their double service. They are always red with weeping, and yet she is ready every minute with a full battery of execution for any man that she sees."

"Then why have you consented to go to Yarmouth with her?"

"Just because she's got forty thousand pounds. If Mr. Greenow had left her with a bare maintenance I don't suppose I should ever have held out my hand to her."

"Then you're as bad as she is."

"Quite as bad;—and that's what makes me want to run away. But it isn't my own fault altogether. It's the fault of the world at large. Does anybody ever drop their rich relatives? When she proposed to take me to Yarmouth, wasn't it natural that the squire should ask

me to go? When I told George, wasn't it natural that he should say, 'Oh, go by all means. She's got forty thousand pounds!' One can't pretend to be wiser or better than one's relatives. And after all what can I expect from her money?"

"Nothing, I should say."

"Not a halfpenny. I'm nearly thirty and she's only forty, and of course she'll marry again. I will say of myself, too, that no person living cares less for money."

"I should think no one."

"Yet one sticks to one's rich relatives. It's the way of the world." Then she paused a moment. "But shall I tell you, Alice, why I do stick to her? Perhaps you'll think the object as mean as though I wanted her money myself."

"Why is it?"

"Because it is on the cards that she may help George in his career. I do not want money, but he may. And for such purposes as his, I think it fair that all the family should contribute. I feel sure that he would make a name for himself in Parliament; and if I had my way I would spend every shilling of Vavasor money in putting him there. When I told the squire so I thought he would have eaten me. I really did think he would have turned me out of the house."

"And serve you right too after what had happened."

"I didn't care. Let him turn me out. I was determined he should know what I thought. He swore at me; and then he was so unhappy at what he had done that he came and kissed me that night in my bedroom, and gave me a ten-pound note. What do you think I did with it? I sent it as a contribution to the next election and George has it now locked up in a box. Don't you tell him that I told you."

Then they stopped and leaned for a while over the parapet of the bridge. "Come here, George," said Kate; and she made room for him between herself and Alice. "Wouldn't you like to be swimming down there as those boys were doing when we went out into the balcony? The water looks so enticing."

"I can't say I should;—unless it might be a pleasant way of swimming into the next world."

"I should so like to feel myself going with the stream," said Kate; "particularly by this light. I can't fancy in the least that I should be drowned."

"I can't fancy anything else," said Alice.

"It would be so pleasant to feel the water gliding along one's limbs, and to be carried away headlong,—knowing that you were on the direct road to Rotterdam."

"And so arrive there without your clothes," said George.

"They would be brought after in a boat. Didn't you see that those boys had a boat with them? But if I lived here, I'd never do it except by moonlight. The water looks so clear and bright now, and the rushing sound of it is so soft! The sea at Yarmouth won't be anything like that I suppose."

Neither of them any longer answered her, and yet she went on talking about the river, and their aunt, and her prospects at Yarmouth. Neither of them answered her, and yet it seemed that they had not a word to say to each other. But still they stood there looking down upon the river, and every now and then Kate's voice was to be heard, preventing the feeling which might otherwise have arisen that their hearts were too full for speech.

At last Alice seemed to shiver. There was a slight trembling in her arms, which George felt rather than saw. "You are cold," he said.

"No indeed."

"If you are let us go in. I thought you shivered with the night air."

"It wasn't that. I was thinking of something. Don't you ever think of things that make you shiver?"

"Indeed I do, very often;—so often that I have to do my shiverings inwardly. Otherwise people would think I had the palsy."

"I don't mean things of moment," said Alice. "Little bits of things make me do it;—perhaps a word that I said and ought not to have said ten years ago;—the most ordinary little mistakes, even my own past thoughts to myself about the merest trifles. They are always making me shiver."

"It's not because you have committed any murder then."

"No; but it's my conscience all the same, I suppose."

"Ah! I'm not so good as you. I doubt it's not my conscience at all. When I think of a chance I've let go by, as I have thousands, then it is that I shiver. But, as I tell you, I shiver inwardly. I've been in one long shiver ever since we came out because of one chance that I let go by. Come, we'll go in. We've to be up at five o'clock, and now it's eleven. I'll do the rest of my shivering in bed."

"Are you tired of being out?" said Kate, when the other two began to move.

"Not tired of being out, but George reminds me that we have to be up at five."

"I wish George would hold his tongue. We can't come to the bridge at Basle every night in our lives. If one found oneself at the top of Sinai I'm afraid the first feeling would be one of fear lest one wouldn't be down in time to dress for dinner. Are you aware,

George, that the king of rivers is running beneath your feet, and that the moon is shining with a brilliance you never see at home?"

"I'll stay here all night if you'll put off going to-morrow," said George.

"Our money wouldn't hold out," said Kate.

"Don't talk about Sinai any more after that," said he, "but let's go in to bed."

They walked across the bridge back to the hotel in the same manner as before, the two girls going together with the young man after them, and so they went up the front steps of the hotel, through the hall, and on to the stairs. Here George handed Alice her candle, and as he did so he whispered a few words to her. "My shivering fit has to come yet," said he, "and will last me the whole night." She would have given much to be able to answer him lightly, as though what he had said had meant nothing;—but she couldn't do it; the light speech would not come to her. She was conscious of all this, and went away to her own room without answering him at all. Here she sat down at the window looking out upon the river till Kate should join her. Their rooms opened through from one to the other, and she would not begin her packing till her cousin should come.

But Kate had gone with her brother, promising, as she did so, that she would be back in half a minute. That half minute was protracted beyond half an hour. "If you'll take my advice," said Kate, at last, standing up with her candle in her hand, "you'll ask her in plain words to give you another chance. Do it to-morrow at Strasbourg; you'll never have a better opportunity."

"And bid her throw John Grey over!"

"Don't say anything about John Grey; leave her to settle that matter with herself. Believe me that she has quite courage enough

to dispose of John Grey, if she has courage enough to accept your offer."

"Kate, you women never understand each other. If I were to do that, all her most powerful feelings would be arrayed in arms against me. I must leave her to find out first that she wishes to be rid of her engagement."

"She has found that out long ago. Do you think I don't know what she wishes? But if you can't bring yourself to speak to her, she'll marry him in spite of her wishes."

"Bring myself! I've never been very slow in bringing myself to speak to any one when there was need. It isn't very pleasant sometimes, but I do it, if I find occasion."

"But surely it must be pleasant with her. You must be glad to find that she still loves you. You still love her, I suppose?"

"Upon my word I don't know."

"Don't provoke me, George. I'm moving heaven and earth to bring you two together; but if I didn't think you loved her, I'd go to her at once and bid her never see you again."

"Upon my word, Kate, I sometimes think it would be better if you'd leave heaven and earth alone."

"Then I will. But of all human beings, surely you're the most ungrateful."

"Why shouldn't she marry John Grey if she likes him?"

"But she doesn't like him. And I hate him. I hate the sound of his voice, and the turn of his eye, and that slow, steady movement of his,—as though he was always bethinking himself that he wouldn't wear out his clothes."

"I don't see that your hating him ought to have anything to do with it."

"If you're going to preach morals, I'll leave you. It's the darling wish of my heart that she should be your wife. If you ever loved anybody,—and I sometimes doubt whether you ever did,—but if you did, you loved her."

"Did and do are different things."

"Very well, George; then I have done. It has been the same in every twist and turn of my life. In everything that I have striven to do for you, you have thrown yourself over, in order that I might be thrown over too. But I believe you say this merely to vex me."

"Upon my word, Kate, I think you'd better go to bed."

"But not till I've told her everything. I won't leave her to be deceived and ill-used again."

"Who is ill-using her now? Is it not the worst of ill-usage, trying to separate her from that man?"

"No;—if I thought so, I would have no hand in doing it. She would be miserable with him, and make him miserable as well. She does not really love him. He loves her, but I've nothing to do with that. It's nothing to me if he breaks his heart."

"I shall break mine if you don't let me go to bed."

With that she went away and hurried along the corridor, till she came to her cousin's room. She found Alice still seated at the window, or rather kneeling on the chair, with her head out through the lattice. "Why, you lazy creature," said Kate; "I declare you haven't touched a thing."

"You said we'd do it together."

"But he has kept me. Oh, what a man he is! If he ever does get married, what will his wife do with him?"

"I don't think he ever will," said Alice.

"Don't you? I dare say you understand him better than I do. Sometimes I think that the only thing wanting to make him thoroughly good, is a wife. But it isn't every woman that would do for him. And the woman who marries him should have high courage. There are moments with him when he is very wild; but he never is cruel and never hard. Is Mr.. Grey ever hard?"

"Never; nor yet wild."

"Oh, certainly not that. I'm quite sure he's never wild."

"When you say that, Kate, I know that you mean to abuse him."

"No; upon my word. What's the good of abusing him to you? I like a man to be wild,—wild in my sense. You knew that before."

"I wonder whether you'd like a wild man for yourself?"

"Ah! that's a question I've never asked myself. I've been often curious to consider what sort of husband would suit you, but I've had very few thoughts about a husband for myself. The truth is, I'm married to George. Ever since—"

"Ever since what?"

"Since you and he were parted, I've had nothing to do in life but to stick to him. And I shall do so to the end,—unless one thing should happen."

"And what's that?"

"Unless you should become his wife after all. He will never marry anybody else."

"Kate, you shouldn't allude to such a thing now. You know that it's impossible."

"Well, perhaps so. As far as I'm concerned, it is all the better for me. If George ever married, I should have nothing to do in the world;—literally nothing—nothing—nothing—nothing!"

"Kate, don't talk in that way," and Alice came up to her and embraced her.

"Go away," said she. "Go, Alice; you and I must part. I cannot bear it any longer. You must know it all. When you are married to John Grey, our friendship must be over. If you became George's wife I should become nobody. I've nothing else in the world. You and he would be so all-sufficient for each other, that I should drop away from you like an old garment. But I'd give up all, everything, every hope I have, to see you become George's wife. I know myself not to be good. I know myself to be very bad, and yet I care nothing for myself. Don't Alice, don't; I don't want your caresses. Caress him, and I'll kneel at your feet and cover them with kisses." She had now thrown herself upon a sofa, and had turned her face away to the wall.

"Kate, you shouldn't speak in that way."

"Of course I shouldn't,—but I do."

"You, who know everything, must know that I cannot marry your brother,—even if he wished it."

"He does wish it."

"Not though I were under no other engagement."

"And why not?" said Kate, again starting up. "What is there to separate you from George now, but that unfortunate affair, that will end in the misery of you all. Do you think I can't see? Don't I know which of the two men you like best?"

"You are making me sorry, Kate, that I have ventured to come here in your brother's company. It is not only unkind of you to talk to me in this way, but worse than that—it is indelicate."

"Oh, indelicate! How I do hate that word. If any word in the language reminds me of a whited sepulchre it is that;—all clean and polished outside with filth and rottenness within. Are your

thoughts delicate? that's the thing. You are engaged to marry John Grey. That may be delicate enough if you love him truly, and feel yourself fitted to be his wife; but it's about the most indelicate thing you can do, if you love any one better than him. Delicacy with many women is like their cleanliness. Nothing can be nicer than the whole outside get-up, but you wouldn't wish to answer for anything beneath."

"If you think ill of me like that—"

"No; I don't think ill of you. How can I think ill of you when I know that all your difficulties have come from him? It hasn't been your fault; it has been his throughout. It is he who has driven you to sacrifice yourself on this altar. If we can, both of us, manage to lay aside all delicacy and pretence, and dare to speak the truth, we shall acknowledge that it is so. Had Mr. Grey come to you while things were smooth between you and George, would you have thought it possible that he could be George's rival in your estimation? It is Hyperion to Satyr."

"And which is the Satyr?"

"I'll leave your heart to tell you. You know what is the darling wish of my heart. But, Alice, if I thought that Mr. Grey was to you Hyperion,—if I thought that you could marry him with that sort of worshipping, idolatrous love which makes a girl proud as well as happy in her marriage, I wouldn't raise a little finger to prevent it."

To this Alice made no answer, and then Kate allowed the matter to drop. Alice made no answer, though she felt that she was allowing judgement to go against her by default in not doing so. She had intended to fight bravely, and to have maintained the excellence of her present position as the affianced bride of Mr. Grey, but she felt that she had failed. She felt that she had, in some sort, acknowledged that the match was one to be deplored;—that her words in her own defence would by no means have satisfied Mr. Grey, if Mr.. Grey could have heard them;—that they would

have induced him to offer her back her troth rather than have made him happy as a lover. But she had nothing further to say. She could do something. She would hurry home and bid him name the earliest day he pleased. After that her cousin would cease to disturb her in her career.

It was nearly one o'clock before the two girls began to prepare for their morning start, and Alice, when they had finished their packing, seemed to be worn out with fatigue. "If you are tired, dear, we'll put it off," said Kate. "Not for worlds," said Alice. "For half a word we'll do it," continued Kate. "I'll slip out to George and tell him, and there's nothing he'd like so much." But Alice would not consent.

About two they got into bed, and punctually at six they were at the railway station. "Don't speak to me," said George, when he met them at their door in the passage. "I shall only yawn in your face." However, they were in time,—which means abroad that they were at the station half an hour before their train started,—and they went on upon their journey to Strasbourg.

There is nothing further to be told of their tour. They were but two days and nights on the road from Basle to London; and during those two days and nights neither George nor Kate spoke a word to Alice of her marriage, nor was any allusion made to the balcony at the inn, or to the bridge over the river.

CHAPTER VII.
Aunt Greenow.

Kate Vavasor remained only three days in London before she started for Yarmouth; and during those three days she was not much with her cousin. "I'm my aunt's, body and soul, for the next six weeks," she said to Alice, when she did come to Queen Anne Street on the morning after her arrival. "And she is exigeant in a manner I can't at all explain to you. You mustn't be surprised if I don't even write a line. I've escaped by stealth now. She went up-stairs to try on some new weeds for the seaside, and then I bolted." She did not say a word about George; nor during those three days, nor for some days afterwards, did George show himself. As it turned out afterwards, he had gone off to Scotland, and had remained a week among the grouse. Thus, at least, he had accounted for himself and his movements; but all George Vavasor's friends knew that his goings out and comings in were seldom accounted for openly like those of other men.

It will perhaps be as well to say a few words about Mrs. Greenow before we go with her to Yarmouth. Mrs. Greenow was the only daughter and the youngest child of the old squire at Vavasor Hall. She was just ten years younger than her brother John, and I am inclined to think that she was almost justified in her repeated assertion that the difference was much greater than ten years, by the freshness of her colour, and by the general juvenility of her appearance. She certainly did not look forty, and who can expect a woman to proclaim herself to be older than her looks? In early life she had been taken from her father's house, and had lived with relatives in one of the large towns in the north of England. It is

certain she had not been quite successful as a girl. Though she had enjoyed the name of being a beauty, she had not the usual success which comes from such repute. At thirty-four she was still unmarried. She had, moreover, acquired the character of being a flirt; and I fear that the stories which were told of her, though doubtless more than half false, had in them sufficient of truth to justify the character. Now this was very sad, seeing that Arabella Vavasor had no fortune, and that she had offended her father and brothers by declining to comply with their advice at certain periods of her career. There was, indeed, considerable trouble in the minds of the various male Vavasors with reference to Arabella, when tidings suddenly reached the Hall that she was going to be married to an old man.

She was married to the old man; and the marriage fortunately turned out satisfactorily, at any rate for the old man and for her family. The Vavasors were relieved from all further trouble, and were as much surprised as gratified when they heard that she did her duty well in her new position. Arabella had long been a thorn in their side, never having really done anything which they could pronounce to be absolutely wrong, but always giving them cause for fear. Now they feared no longer. Her husband was a retired merchant, very rich, not very strong in health, and devoted to his bride. Rumours soon made their way to Vavasor Hall, and to Queen Anne Street, that Mrs. Greenow was quite a pattern wife, and that Mr. Greenow considered himself to be the happiest old man in Lancashire. And now in her prosperity she quite forgave the former slights which had been put upon her by her relatives. She wrote to her dear niece Alice, and to her dearest niece Kate, and sent little presents to her father. On one occasion she took her husband to Vavasor Hall, and there was a regular renewal of all the old family feelings. Arabella's husband was an old man, and was very old for his age; but the whole thing was quite respectable, and there was, at any rate, no doubt about the money. Then Mr.

Greenow died; and the widow, having proved the will, came up to London and claimed the commiseration of her nieces.

"Why not go to Yarmouth with her for a month?" George had said to Kate. "Of course it will be a bore. But an aunt with forty thousand pounds has a right to claim attention." Kate acknowledged the truth of the argument and agreed to go to Yarmouth for a month. "Your aunt Arabella has shown herself to be a very sensible woman," the old squire had written; "much more sensible than anybody thought her before her marriage. Of course you should go with her if she asks you." What aunt, uncle, or cousin, in the uncontrolled possession of forty thousand pounds was ever unpopular in the family?

Yarmouth is not a very prepossessing place to the eye. To my eye, at any rate, it is not so. There is an old town with which summer visitors have little or nothing to do; and there are the new houses down by the sea-side, to which, at any rate, belongs the full advantage of sea air. A kind of esplanade runs for nearly a mile along the sands, and there are built, or in the course of building, rows of houses appropriated to summer visitors all looking out upon the sea. There is no beauty unless the yellow sandy sea can be called beautiful. The coast is low and straight, and the east wind blows full upon it. But the place is healthy; and Mrs. Greenow was probably right in thinking that she might there revive some portion of the health which she had lost in watching beside the couch of her departing lord.

"Omnibus;—no, indeed. Jeannette, get me a fly." These were the first words Mrs. Greenow spoke as she put her foot upon the platform at the Yarmouth station. Her maid's name was Jenny; but Kate had already found, somewhat to her dismay, that orders had been issued before they left London that the girl was henceforth to be called Jeannette. Kate had also already found that her aunt could be imperious; but this taste for masterdom had not shown itself so plainly in London as it did from the moment that the train

had left the station at Shoreditch. In London Mrs. Greenow had been among Londoners, and her career had hitherto been provincial. Her spirit, no doubt, had been somewhat cowed by the novelty of her position. But when she felt herself to be once beyond the stones as the saying used to be, she was herself again; and at Ipswich she had ordered Jeannette to get her a glass of sherry with an air which had created a good deal of attention among the guards and porters.

The fly was procured; and with considerable exertion all Mrs. Greenow's boxes, together with the more moderate belongings of her niece and maid, were stowed on the top of it, round upon the driver's body on the coach box, on the maid's lap, and I fear in Kate's also, and upon the vacant seat.

"The large house in Montpelier Parade," said Mrs. Greenow.

"They is all large, ma'am," said the driver.

"The largest," said Mrs. Greenow.

"They're much of a muchness," said the driver.

"Then Mrs. Jones's," said Mrs. Greenow. "But I was particularly told it was the largest in the row."

"I know Mrs. Jones's well," said the driver, and away they went.

Mrs. Jones's house was handsome and comfortable; but I fear Mrs. Greenow's satisfaction in this respect was impaired by her disappointment in finding that it was not perceptibly bigger than those to the right and left of her. Her ambition in this and in other similar matters would have amused Kate greatly had she been a bystander, and not one of her aunt's party. Mrs. Greenow was good-natured, liberal, and not by nature selfish; but she was determined not to waste the good things which fortune had given, and desired that all the world should see that she had forty thousand pounds of her own. And in doing this she was repressed by no feeling of false shame. She never hesitated in her demands

through bashfulness. She called aloud for such comfort and grandeur as Yarmouth could afford her, and was well pleased that all around should hear her calling. Joined to all this was her uncontrolled grief for her husband's death.

"Dear Greenow! sweet lamb! Oh, Kate, if you'd only known that man!" When she said this she was sitting in the best of Mrs. Jones's sitting-rooms, waiting to have dinner announced. She had taken a drawing-room and dining-room, "because," as she had said, "she didn't see why people should be stuffy when they went to the seaside;—not if they had means to make themselves comfortable."

"Oh, Kate, I do wish you'd known him!"

"I wish I had," said Kate,—very untruly. "I was unfortunately away when he went to Vavasor Hall."

"Ah, yes; but it was at home, in the domestic circle, that Greenow should have been seen to be appreciated. I was a happy woman, Kate, while that lasted." And Kate was surprised to see that real tears—one or two on each side—were making their way down her aunt's cheeks. But they were soon checked with a handkerchief of the broadest hem and of the finest cambric.

"Dinner, ma'am," said Jeannette, opening the door.

"Jeannette, I told you always to say that dinner was served."

"Dinner's served then," said Jeannette in a tone of anger.

"Come, Kate," said her aunt. "I've but little appetite myself, but there's no reason you shouldn't eat your dinner. I specially wrote to Mrs. Jones to have some sweetbread. I do hope she's got a decent cook. It's very little I eat myself, but I do like to see things nice."

The next day was Sunday; and it was beautiful to see how Mrs. Greenow went to church in all the glory of widowhood. There had been a great unpacking after that banquet on the sweetbread, and all her funereal millinery had been displayed before Kate's

wondering eyes. The charm of the woman was in this,—that she was not in the least ashamed of anything that she did. She turned over all her wardrobe of mourning, showing the richness of each article, the stiffness of the crape, the fineness of the cambric, the breadth of the frills,—telling the price of each to a shilling, while she explained how the whole had been amassed without any consideration of expense. This she did with all the pride of a young bride when she shows the glories of her trousseau to the friend of her bosom. Jeannette stood by the while, removing one thing and exhibiting another. Now and again through the performance, Mrs. Greenow would rest a while from her employment, and address the shade of the departed one in terms of most endearing affection. In the midst of this Mrs. Jones came in; but the widow was not a whit abashed by the presence of the stranger. "Peace be to his manes!" she said at last, as she carefully folded up a huge black crape mantilla. She made, however, but one syllable of the classical word, and Mrs. Jones thought that her lodger had addressed herself to the mortal "remains" of her deceased lord.

"He is left her uncommon well off, I suppose," said Mrs. Jones to Jeannette.

"You may say that, ma'am. It's more nor a hundred thousand of pounds!"

"No!"

"Pounds of sterling, ma'am! Indeed it is;—to my knowledge."

"Why don't she have a carriage?"

"So she do;—but a lady can't bring her carriage down to the sea when she's only just buried her husband as one may say. What'd folks say if they saw her in her own carriage? But it ain't because she can't afford it, Mrs. Jones. And now we're talking of it you must order a fly for church to-morrow, that'll look private, you know. She said I was to get a man that had a livery coat and gloves."



"Peace be to his manes."

The man with the coat and gloves was procured; and Mrs. Greenow's entry into church made quite a sensation. There was a thoughtfulness about her which alone showed that she was a woman of no ordinary power. She foresaw all necessities, and made provision for all emergencies. Another would not have secured an eligible sitting, and been at home in Yarmouth church, till half the period of her sojourn there was over. But Mrs. Greenow had done it all. She walked up the middle aisle with as much self-possession as though the chancel had belonged to her family for years; and the respectable pew-opener absolutely deserted two or three old ladies whom she was attending, to show Mrs. Greenow into her seat.

When seated, she was the cynosure of all eyes. Kate Vavasor became immediately aware that a great sensation had been occasioned by their entrance, and equally aware that none of it was due to her. I regret to say that this feeling continued to show itself throughout the whole service. How many ladies of forty go to church without attracting the least attention! But it is hardly too much to say that every person in that church had looked at Mrs. Greenow. I doubt if there was present there a single married lady who, on leaving the building, did not speak to her husband of the widow. There had prevailed during the whole two hours a general though unexpressed conviction that something worthy of remark had happened that morning. It had an effect even upon the curate's reading; and the incumbent, while preaching his sermon, could not keep his eyes off that wonderful bonnet and veil.

On the next morning, before eleven, Mrs. Greenow's name was put down at the Assembly Room. "I need hardly say that in my present condition I care nothing for these things. Of course I would sooner be alone. But, my dear Kate, I know what I owe to you."

Kate, with less intelligence than might have been expected from one so clever, began to assure her aunt that she required no society; and that, coming thus with her to the seaside in the early days of her widowhood, she had been well aware that they would live retired. But Mrs. Greenow soon put her down, and did so without the slightest feeling of shame or annoyance on her own part. "My dear," she said, "in this matter you must let me do what I know to be right. I should consider myself to be very selfish if I allowed my grief to interfere with your amusements."

"But, aunt, I don't care for such amusements."

"That's nonsense, my dear. You ought to care for them. How are you to settle yourself in life if you don't care for them?"

"My dear aunt, I am settled."

"Settled!" said Mrs. Greenow, astounded, as though there must have been some hidden marriage of which she had not heard. "But that's nonsense. Of course you're not settled; and how are you to be, if I allow you to shut yourself up in such a place as this,—just where a girl has a chance?"

It was in vain that Kate tried to stop her. It was not easy to stop Mrs. Greenow when she was supported by the full assurance of being mistress of the place and of the occasion. "No, my dear; I know very well what I owe to you, and I shall do my duty. As I said before, society can have no charms now for such a one as I am. All that social intercourse could ever do for me lies buried in my darling's grave. My heart is desolate, and must remain so. But I'm not going to immolate you on the altars of my grief. I shall force myself to go out for your sake, Kate."

"But, dear aunt, the world will think it so odd, just at present."

"I don't care twopence for the world. What can the world do to me? I'm not dependent on the world,—thanks to the care of that sainted lamb. I can hold my own; and as long as I can do that the world won't hurt me. No, Kate, if I think a thing's right I shall do it. I mean to make the place pleasant for you if I can, and the world may object if it likes."

Mrs. Greenow was probably right in her appreciation of the value of her independence. Remarks may perhaps have been made by the world of Yarmouth as to her early return to society. People, no doubt, did remind each other that old Greenow was hardly yet four months buried. Mrs. Jones and Jeannette probably had their little jokes down-stairs. But this did not hurt Mrs. Greenow. What was said, was not said in her hearing, Mrs. Jones's bills were paid every Saturday with admirable punctuality; and as long as this was done everybody about the house treated the lady with that deference which was due to the respectability of her possessions. When a recently bereaved widow attempts to enjoy her freedom

without money, then it behoves the world to speak aloud;—and the world does its duty.

Numerous people came to call at Montpelier Parade, and Kate was astonished to find that her aunt had so many friends. She was indeed so bewildered by these strangers that she could hardly ascertain whom her aunt had really known before, and whom she now saw for the first time. Somebody had known somebody who had known somebody else, and that was allowed to be a sufficient introduction,—always presuming that the existing somebody was backed by some known advantages of money or position. Mrs. Greenow could smile from beneath her widow's cap in a most bewitching way. "Upon my word then she is really handsome," Kate wrote one day to Alice. But she could also frown, and knew well how to put aside, or, if need be, to reprobate any attempt at familiarity from those whose worldly circumstances were supposed to be disadvantageous.

"My dear aunt," said Kate one morning after their walk upon the pier, "how you did snub that Captain Bellfield!"

"Captain Bellfield, indeed! I don't believe he's a captain at all. At any rate he has sold out, and the tradesmen have had a scramble for the money. He was only a lieutenant when the 97th were in Manchester, and I'm sure he's never had a shilling to purchase since that."

"But everybody here seems to know him."

"Perhaps they do not know so much of him as I do. The idea of his having the impudence to tell me I was looking very well! Nothing can be so mean as men who go about in that way when they haven't money enough in their pockets to pay their washerwomen."

"But how do you know, aunt, that Captain Bellfield hasn't paid his washerwoman?"

"I know more than you think, my dear. It's my business. How could I tell whose attentions you should receive and whose you shouldn't, if I didn't inquire into these things?"

It was in vain that Kate rebelled, or attempted to rebel against this more than maternal care. She told her aunt that she was now nearly thirty, and that she had managed her own affairs, at any rate with safety, for the last ten years;—but it was to no purpose. Kate would get angry; but Mrs. Greenow never became angry. Kate would be quite in earnest; but Mrs. Greenow would push aside all that her niece said as though it were worth nothing. Kate was an unmarried woman with a very small fortune, and therefore, of course, was desirous of being married with as little delay as possible. It was natural that she should deny that it was so, especially at this early date in their mutual acquaintance. When the niece came to know her aunt more intimately, there might be confidence between them, and then they would do better. But Mrs. Greenow would spare neither herself nor her purse on Kate's behalf, and she would be a dragon of watchfulness in protecting her from the evil desires of such useless men as Captain Bellfield.

"I declare, Kate, I don't understand you," she said one morning to her niece as they sat together over a late breakfast. They had fallen into luxurious habits, and I am afraid it was past eleven o'clock, although the breakfast things were still on the table. Kate would usually bathe before breakfast, but Mrs. Greenow was never out of her room till half-past ten. "I like the morning for contemplation," she once said. "When a woman has gone through all that I have suffered she has a great deal to think of." "And it is so much more comfortable to be a-thinking when one's in bed," said Jeannette, who was present at the time. "Child, hold your tongue," said the widow. "Yes, ma'am," said Jeannette. But we'll return to the scene at the breakfast-table.

"What don't you understand, aunt?"

"You only danced twice last night, and once you stood up with Captain Bellfield."

"On purpose to ask after that poor woman who washes his clothes without getting paid for it."

"Nonsense, Kate; you didn't ask him anything of the kind, I'm sure. It's very provoking. It is indeed."

"But what harm can Captain Bellfield do me?"

"What good can he do you? That's the question. You see, my dear, years will go by. I don't mean to say you ain't quite as young as ever you were, and nothing can be nicer and fresher than you are;—especially since you took to bathing."

"Oh, aunt, don't!"

"My dear, the truth must be spoken. I declare I don't think I ever saw a young woman so improvident as you are. When are you to begin to think about getting married if you don't do it now?"

"I shall never begin to think about it, till I buy my wedding clothes."

"That's nonsense,—sheer nonsense. How are you to get wedding clothes if you have never thought about getting a husband? Didn't I see Mr.. Cheesacre ask you for a dance last night?"

"Yes, he did; while you were talking to Captain Bellfield yourself, aunt."

"Captain Bellfield can't hurt me, my dear. And why didn't you dance with Mr. Cheesacre?"

"He's a fat Norfolk farmer, with not an idea beyond the virtues of stall-feeding."

"My dear, every acre of it is his own land,—every acre! And he bought another farm for thirteen thousand pounds only last autumn. They're better than the squires,—some of those

gentlemen farmers; they are indeed. And of all men in the world they're the easiest managed."

"That's a recommendation, no doubt."

"Of course it is;—a great recommendation."

Mrs. Greenow had no idea of joking when her mind was intent on serious things. "He's to take us to the picnic to-morrow, and I do hope you'll manage to let him sit beside you. It'll be the place of honour, because he gives all the wine. He's picked up with that man Bellfield, and he's to be there; but if you allow your name to be once mixed up with his, it will be all over with you as far as Yarmouth is concerned."

"I don't at all want to be mixed up with Captain Bellfield, as you call it," said Kate. Then she subsided into her novel, while Mrs. Greenow busied herself about the good things for the picnic. In truth, the aunt did not understand the niece. Whatsoever might be the faults of Kate Vavasor, an unmaidenly desire of catching a husband for herself was certainly not one of them.

CHAPTER VIII.
Mr. Cheesacre.

Yarmouth is not a happy place for a picnic. A picnic should be held among green things. Green turf is absolutely an essential. There should be trees, broken ground, small paths, thickets, and hidden recesses. There should, if possible, be rocks, old timber, moss, and brambles. There should certainly be hills and dales,—on a small scale; and above all, there should be running water. There should be no expanse. Jones should not be able to see all Greene's movements, nor should Augusta always have her eye upon her sister Jane. But the spot chosen for Mr. Cheesacre's picnic at Yarmouth had none of the virtues above described. It was on the seashore. Nothing was visible from the site but sand and sea. There were no trees there and nothing green;—neither was there any running water. But there was a long, dry, flat strand; there was an old boat half turned over, under which it was proposed to dine; and in addition to this, benches, boards, and some amount of canvas for shelter were provided by the liberality of Mr. Cheesacre. Therefore it was called Mr. Cheesacre's picnic.

But it was to be a marine picnic, and therefore the essential attributes of other picnics were not required. The idea had come from some boating expeditions, in which mackerel had been caught, and during which food had been eaten, not altogether comfortably, in the boats. Then a thought had suggested itself to Captain Bellfield that they might land and eat their food, and his friend Mr. Cheesacre had promised his substantial aid. A lady had surmised that Ormesby sands would be the very place for dancing in the cool of the evening. They might "Dance on the sand," she

said, "and yet no footing seen." And so the thing had progressed, and the picnic been inaugurated.

It was Mr. Cheesacre's picnic undoubtedly. Mr. Cheesacre was to supply the boats, the wine, the cigars, the music, and the carpenter's work necessary for the turning of the old boat into a banqueting saloon. But Mrs. Greenow had promised to provide the eatables, and enjoyed as much of the *éclat* as the master of the festival. She had known Mr. Cheesacre now for ten days and was quite intimate with him. He was a stout, florid man, of about forty-five, a bachelor, apparently much attached to ladies' society, bearing no sign of age except that he was rather bald, and that grey hairs had mixed themselves with his whiskers, very fond of his farming, and yet somewhat ashamed of it when he found himself in what he considered to be polite circles. And he was, moreover, a little inclined to seek the honour which comes from a well-filled and liberally-opened purse. He liked to give a man a dinner and then to boast of the dinner he had given. He was very proud when he could talk of having mounted, for a day's hunting, any man who might be supposed to be of higher rank than himself. "I had Grimsby with me the other day,—the son of old Grimsby of Hatherwick, you know. Blessed if he didn't stake my bay mare. But what matters? I mounted him again the next day just the same." Some people thought he was soft, for it was very well known throughout Norfolk that young Grimsby would take a mount wherever he could get it. In these days Mrs. Greenow had become intimate with Mr. Cheesacre, and had already learned that he was the undoubted owner of his own acres.

"It wouldn't do for me," she had said to him, "to be putting myself forward, as if I were giving a party myself, or anything of that sort;—would it now?"

"Well, perhaps not. But you might come with us."

"So I will, Mr. Cheesacre, for that dear girl's sake. I should never forgive myself if I debarred her from all the pleasures of youth, because of my sorrows. I need hardly say that at such a time as this nothing of that sort can give me any pleasure."

"I suppose not," said Mr. Cheesacre, with solemn look.

"Quite out of the question." And Mrs. Greenow wiped away her tears. "For though as regards age I might dance on the sands as merrily as the best of them—"

"That I'm sure you could, Mrs. Greenow."

"How's a woman to enjoy herself if her heart lies buried?"

"But it won't be so always, Mrs. Greenow."

Mrs. Greenow shook her head to show that she hardly knew how to answer such a question. Probably it would be so always;—but she did not wish to put a damper on the present occasion by making so sad a declaration. "But as I was saying," continued she—"if you and I do it between us won't that be the surest way of having it come off nicely?"

Mr. Cheesacre thought that it would be the best way.

"Exactly so;—I'll do the meat and pastry and fruit, and you shall do the boats and the wine."

"And the music," said Cheesacre, "and the expenses at the place." He did not choose that any part of his outlay should go unnoticed.

"I'll go halves in all that if you like," said Mrs. Greenow. But Mr.. Cheesacre had declined this. He did not begrudge the expense, but only wished that it should be recognised.

"And, Mr. Cheesacre," continued Mrs. Greenow. "I did mean to send the music; I did, indeed."

"I couldn't hear of it, Mrs. Greenow."

"But I mention it now, because I was thinking of getting Blowehard to come. That other man, Flutey, wouldn't do at all out in the open air."

"It shall be Blowehard," said Mr. Cheesacre; and it was Blowehard. Mrs. Greenow liked to have her own way in these little things, though her heart did lie buried.

On the morning of the picnic Mr. Cheesacre came down to Montpelier Parade with Captain Bellfield, whose linen on that occasion certainly gave no outward sign of any quarrel between him and his washerwoman. He was got up wonderfully, and was prepared at all points for the day's work. He had on a pseudo-sailor's jacket, very liberally ornamented with brass buttons, which displayed with great judgement the exquisite shapes of his pseudo-sailor's duck trousers. Beneath them there was a pair of very shiny patent-leather shoes, well adapted for dancing on the sand, presuming him to be anxious of doing so, as Venus offered to do, without leaving any footmarks. His waistcoat was of a delicate white fabric, ornamented with very many gilt buttons. He had bejewelled studs in his shirt, and yellow kid gloves on his hands; having, of course, another pair in his pocket for the necessities of the evening. His array was quite perfect, and had stricken dismay into the heart of his friend Cheesacre, when he joined that gentleman. He was a well-made man, nearly six feet high, with dark hair, dark whiskers, and dark moustache, nearly black, but of that suspicious hue which to the observant beholder seems always to tell a tale of the hairdresser's shop. He was handsome, too, with well-arranged features,—but carrying, perhaps, in his nose some first symptoms of the effects of midnight amusements. Upon the whole, however, he was a nice man to look at—for those who like to look on nice men of that kind.

Cheesacre, too, had adopted something of a sailor's garb. He had on a jacket of a rougher sort, coming down much lower than that of the captain, being much looser, and perhaps somewhat more

like a garment which a possible seaman might possibly wear. But he was disgusted with himself the moment that he saw Bellfield. His heart had been faint, and he had not dared to ornament himself boldly as his friend had done. "I say, Guss, you are a swell," he exclaimed. It may be explained that Captain Bellfield had been christened Gustavus.

"I don't know much about that," said the captain; "my fellow sent me this toggery, and said that it was the sort of thing. I'll change with you if you like it." But Cheesacre could not have worn that jacket, and he walked on, hating himself.

It will be remembered that Mrs. Greenow had spoken with considerable severity of Captain Bellfield's pretensions when discussing his character with her niece; but, nevertheless, on the present occasion she received him with most gracious smiles. It may be that her estimate of his character had been altered, or that she was making sacrifice of her own feelings in consideration of Mr. Cheesacre, who was known to be the captain's intimate friend. But she had smiles for both of them. She had a wondrous power of smiling; and could, upon occasion, give signs of peculiar favour to half a dozen different gentlemen in as many minutes. They found her in the midst of hampers which were not yet wholly packed, while Mrs. Jones, Jeannette, and the cook of the household moved around her, on the outside of the circle, ministering to her wants. She had in her hand an outspread clean napkin, and she wore fastened round her dress a huge coarse apron, that she might thus be protected from some possible ebullition of gravy, or escape of salad mixture, or cream; but in other respects she was clothed in the fullest honours of widowhood. She had not mitigated her weeds by half an inch. She had scorned to make any compromise between the world of pleasure and the world of woe. There she was, a widow, declared by herself to be of four months' standing, with a buried heart, making ready a dainty banquet with skill and liberality. She was ready on the instant to sit down upon the

baskets in which the grouse pie had been just carefully inhumed, and talked about her sainted lamb with a deluge of tears. If anybody didn't like it, that person—might do the other thing. Mr. Cheesacre and Captain Bellfield thought that they did like it.

"Oh, Mr. Cheesacre, if you haven't caught me before I've half done! Captain Bellfield, I hope you think my apron becoming."

"Everything that you wear, Mrs. Greenow, is always becoming."

"Don't talk in that way when you know—; but never mind—we will think of nothing sad to-day if we can help it. Will we, Mr.. Cheesacre?"

"Oh dear no; I should think not;—unless it should come on to rain."

"It won't rain—we won't think of such a thing. But, by the by, Captain Bellfield, I and my niece do mean to send out a few things, just in a bag you know, so that we may tidy ourselves up a little after the sea. I don't want it mentioned, because if it gets about among the other ladies, they'd think we wanted to make a dressing of it;—and there wouldn't be room for them all; would there?"

"No; there wouldn't," said Mr. Cheesacre, who had been out on the previous evening, inspecting, and perhaps limiting, the carpenters in their work.

"That's just it," said Mrs. Greenow. "But there won't be any harm, will there, Mr. Cheesacre, in Jeanette's going out with our things? She'll ride in the cart, you know, with the eatables. I know Jeannette's a friend of yours."

"We shall be delighted to have Jeanette," said Mr. Cheesacre.

"Thank ye, sir," said Jeannette, with a curtsey.

"Jeannette, don't you let Mr. Cheesacre turn your head; and mind you behave yourself and be useful. Well; let me see;—what else is there? Mrs. Jones, you might as well give me that ham now.

Captain Bellfield, hand it over. Don't you put it into the basket, because you'd turn it the wrong side down. There now, if you haven't nearly made me upset the apricot pie." Then, in the transfer of the dishes between the captain and the widow, there occurred some little innocent by-play, which seemed to give offence to Mr. Cheesacre; so that that gentleman turned his back upon the hampers and took a step away towards the door.

Mrs. Greenow saw the thing at a glance, and immediately applied herself to cure the wound. "What do you think, Mr. Cheesacre," said she, "Kate wouldn't come down because she didn't choose that you should see her with an apron on over her frock!"

"I'm sure I don't know why Miss Vavasor should care about my seeing her."

"Nor I either. That's just what I said. Do step up into the drawing-room; you'll find her there, and you can make her answer for herself."

"She wouldn't come down for me," said Mr. Cheesacre. But he didn't stir. Perhaps he wasn't willing to leave his friend with the widow.

At length the last of the dishes was packed and Mrs. Greenow went up-stairs with the two gentlemen. There they found Kate and two or three other ladies who had promised to embark under the protection of Mrs. Greenow's wings. There were the two Miss Fairstairs, whom Mrs. Greenow had especially patronized, and who repaid that lady for her kindness by an amount of outspoken eulogy which startled Kate by its audacity.

"Your dear aunt!" Fanny Fairstairs had said on coming into the room. "I don't think I ever came across a woman with such genuine milk of human kindness!"