

The Salamanca Corpus

VNIVERSITAS
STVDII
SALAMANTINI



Louisa Parr's Hero Carthew. (1873)

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Mary L. Cutting

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To Leslie Buckingham

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LEISURE HOUR SERIES

HERO CARTHEW

OR

THE PRESCOTTS OF PAMPHILLON

A NOVEL

BY

LOUISA PARR

Author of "Dorothy Fox"



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HERO CARTHEW.

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE CONTRE-TEMPS.

AMONG the inhabitants a tradition existed that when the great naval port of Dockmouth was a fishing village, Mallett was a thriving town, and sent two members to Parliament. It needed a considerable amount of faith to credit this assertion, and of imagination to picture the quiet, old-fashioned place as other than it now stood—a quaint, ill-built cluster of houses stretching from the water's edge by a steep street to the high road above, and terminating in a straggling colony of pretty cottages, villas, and pleasant detached houses. These last were the residences of military and naval men, with large families and small means, and retired officers, maiden ladies and widows, who formed the principal gentry of Mallett. The noses of the Mallett folk were not at all offended by the odor of fish, seaweed, and old rope, which pervaded every nook and corner of their primitive village. When strangers, pointing to the refuse heaps rotting here and there, declared that even the delicious breezes from the adjacent commons could not counteract such baneful poison as this, the Mallett folk only smiled. They treated as new-fangled notions the talk of the Dockmouth people about the drainage being so bad that visitors could not stand it. And when a suspicion dawned upon their untutored minds that some slur was thus intended to be cast upon their beloved home, they would

turn suddenly, as was their wont, quick and fierce, and ask, "Who wanted strangers? Not they. Folks as couldn't abide a good wholesome stink o' fish had best stay away. Who was they, they wondered, for whom Mallett must be altered? 'Twas good enough for the Capen and Miss Hero; and if any man or woman at Dockmouth, or at any other port, would say that they could lay fingers on their betters, why p'raps they'd stand out and say it." And this challenge being given by men, who, noted as wrestlers, are strong and sturdy of limb, it was rarely taken up, and a surly silence, an unintelligible growl, was accepted by the Mallett champions as an acknowledgment that the Capen, the King o' Mallett, as many fondly called him, ranked second to none.

The Captain would most assuredly have sided with his friends. It was his boast that no one could tell the time when there hadn't been Carthews in Mallett. From his father he inherited Sharrows, an unpretentious, rambling sort of residence, visible from the high road, while the grounds—if such the tangle of flowers and shrubs could be designated—ran down to the sandy beach below. Captain Carthew had married somewhat late in life, on account—so he said—of his having been little on shore, and not having been a good hand at keeping up a running fire in the shape of epistolary wooing. When at length he had made his opportunity, he did not long enjoy domestic felicity. His wife died soon after the birth of their first child, named Hero, in honor of the dashing frigate which the Captain then commanded. Since that time, by his ardent admiration of the fair sex, and his devoted attentions, Captain Carthew had raised many a fluttering hope among the spinster portion of Mallett society; but one by one these illusions fell to the ground. It gradually came to be understood that these flattering gallantries were only part of the Captain's chivalrous manners, that they meant nothing in particular to anybody, and that it was more than improbable that the dead mistress of Sharrows would ever have a successor.

Twenty years had passed since Mrs. Carthew's death,

during which time the Captain had been placed upon the retired list, the navy had gone to the dogs, and his daughter had grown from the "Capen's little maid," who shouted with delight as her rough devotees swung her in their brawny arms, into a bright fearless girl, whose presence was greeted with delight by every inhabitant of Mallett. It took outsiders some time to comprehend, or in the least degree to understand, the bond of faith and trust which existed between the owners of Sharrows and their humble friends. It was patent to all that a man with nothing beyond his pay and good service pension could not win popularity by gifts or money. Yet not a joy or sorrow entered one of the village homes without sympathy and help, to the best of their means, coming from Sharrows; and there was not a man or woman in all Mallett but felt securely confident that no matter what happened, the doors of Sharrows would never be closed against them; that if the Capen had but one loaf of bread he would share it with them, and that if he had a fortune left him they would be all gainers.

This trust formed the basis of their loyalty, and was a good reason why the inhabitants, while they freely tendered their respects to the rector, the doctor, and the whole of the Mallett gentry (with most of whom either they or their children had served or were serving the Queen), Captain Carthew was "*the Capen*," their councillor in difficulties, and their sheet-anchor in trouble or sorrow. When complimented on his popularity, the Captain would shake his head, saying, "But you know it ought not to be so; the master of Combe should be port-admiral at Mallett. Why, do you think I'm blind, because I won't see the things which people, who turn up their noses at us, are pointing out? But there's no getting Sir Stephen down here, and until he knows us, he'll never care about us. Ah! it's a thousand pities to see the old place going to rack and ruin."

The place referred to was Combe-Mallett—an estate which would have found little favor in the eyes of most landowners. The house was moderately large, and old-fashioned enough to look picturesque; but the land attached to it had, from neglect, become all but useless; the park,

by which it was surrounded, looked a wilderness of unconvertible timber, stunted trees and brushwood, forming excellent cover for the game, which, on account of Sir Stephen's desire to let Combe, as it was usually called, Mr. Truscott, the agent, kept strictly preserved.

Sir Stephen inherited Combe through his grandmother having brought it as her wedding portion to his grandfather, Sir John Prescott. Sir John had left two sons. In the elder (who succeeded him) he had little pride, simply because he was his heir, and a peculiarly eccentric young man, who preferred his hobbies, and the two or three friends who could share in them, to the county society or his own family. Such things were, of course, looked on by them as unworthy of a man born to be master of the Pamphillon estates, and, as such, a leader among Grasshire magnates.

The tongues of rich and poor, for miles round, echoed the feelings which rankled in old Sir John's breast; loudly declaring it too bad, that while a churlish bookworm had honors thrust upon him, which he neither valued nor graced, the only prospect for Stephen (the second son), who was jovial and free-handed enough to be a duke, was to wait to step into the shoes which his elder brother, in spite of his lantern jaws, might fill for many a long year. That sooner or later Mr. Stephen Prescott would succeed, no one doubted. Sir Bernard, it was felt, would never marry, on account of the only woman he had ever been seen to look at, or speak to willingly, having preferred his brother. People who, if *they* did not know the rights of it, nobody could tell them, had said that it was on account of Mrs. Stephen Prescott that Mr. Bernard kept away—living nobody knew how or where, and was a greater stranger to his family than they liked their neighbors to know of. Certain it was, that from the time of his brother's marriage until some twelve months after his father's death (when he had become master of Pamphillon) he had never set foot in his native place; and then he only returned because the brother, who had been his rival in all he set store by, lay in the family vault, with a newly-cut inscription on the church wall, telling how he had met his death by an untimely fall

from his horse, leaving a widow and only son to deplore their loss.

When Mrs. Prescott spoke of retiring with her boy to Combe, which had been left to her husband by Sir John, Sir Bernard begged her to remain near him, as he should need her assistance and help, if he lived at Pamphillon among his tenants, as she said it was his duty to do. At first the widow hesitated—recollections made her irresolute, and she would only consent to defer her decision for a time; but she quickly found she had no hidden motive to dread in accepting Sir Bernard's invitation. The offers he had made at their first meeting, to be a father to her child and a brother to herself, he fulfilled to the letter, but nothing more. Never did he allude to any warmer feeling ever having existed between them. Mrs. Prescott smiled a little sarcastically when she thought how much unnecessary pity she had wasted upon a man who could so readily forget a disappointment, which he had told her he should carry to his grave. Yet she felt it was far better as it was. No brother could be more thoughtful, nor father more indulgent. He took as much pride in little Stephen as if he had been his own son. All reserve on her part was at last thrown aside, and she, as well as every one who knew them, uncontradictedly spoke to Sir Bernard of his nephew as his heir.

The boy was scarcely ten when he and his mother were recalled to Sir Bernard's bedside from a visit they were making in Wales. They hurried back with all speed, to find him already dead, and Stephen his successor—but successor to what? To a name, and nothing more. The estate was mortgaged, tied up, ruined, by the speculations of a man, who had been one of the most splendid tools a set of sharpers ever lighted upon. It seemed as if people would never tire of asking of each other what possible motive could have induced this man (whom all his neighbors had regarded as a bookworm and a miser) to enter into speculations and schemes which would have staggered the most desperate gambler. No one being able to solve the enigma, they settled the matter by concurring that he was mad, that he always had been mad, and ought never to have

been allowed the handling of a fine property, which had been in the family for generations. Poor Mrs. Prescott, bent on living on bread and water to try and keep it for her son, lived in terror that she would not be able to hold out till Sir Stephen was of age, but would have to take the lawyer's advice and sell it. But, impossible as it had seemed, hold out she did; and at twenty-one Sir Stephen Prescott found himself called upon to manage a large estate, which was hampered by liabilities of every description, and which kept him in a continual strait by forcing him to contract new loans to pay off old scores.

Thus it was, that while the simple Mallett folk regarded him as a Cræsus, who lived a life of thoughtless pleasure, and could turn their poor village into an earthly paradise, without being obliged to deny himself a single luxury; he refrained from asking his agent one word about them, dreading to hear of distresses which he could not remedy, or suggested improvements which he had not the money to carry out.

The agent, Mr. Truscott, lived at Dockmouth, and for the last five or six years, on account of Sir Stephen having been abroad, had reigned supreme over Mallett, ruling with so strict a hand that people rather let things go on, however bad they might be, "than knuckle down to that Truscott, who had swept out Glynn's offices for all he rode on horseback, switching his whip as flourishin' as if he was his master." During the past year, however, hope had greatly revived. Sir Stephen had not only returned to England, but had announced that he should most probably pay Mallett a visit—an announcement which, a few weeks before, had been confirmed by Mrs. Tucker, the housekeeper at Combe, receiving a letter from Sir Stephen himself, saying that she was to get a couple of rooms in order, as, in the course of a week or so, he would be at no great distance, and would probably run down to Mallett for a few days.

What was to be done? How was he to be received? When would he come? These, and a dozen other questions were speculated upon, without any conclusion being arrived at, except that something must be done; but it was

agreed that what this something ought to be need not be decided upon until Sir Stephen wrote again, which most assuredly he would do before he came.

"One thing I am glad of," said Hero Carthew, who was seeing her father as far as Ferry Bridge, on his road to Dockmouth; "I am glad Sir Stephen has chosen this season to pay his visit to Combe. It never looks so lovely as in the spring."

"I wonder when the fellow means to make his appearance?" said the Captain. "These youngsters want such a sight of backing and filling. Why, in my day——"

"Now, you dear old thing, it's your day now," interrupted Hero; "and Sir Stephen never positively said how soon he intended coming."

"Oh! of course, you'll take his part," replied the Captain. "You women are all alike, ready to wager any mortal thing against the likelihood of a full-blown baronet doing wrong."

Hero laughed.

"I hope he will turn out to be as nice as we want him to be," she said. "It would be a little trial to give up going in and out of Combe, as I suppose we should have to do, if Sir Stephen came to live there. Find out if you can, papa, whether Mr. Truscott knows when he is coming, and how long he intends to stay."

"And what do you mean to do with yourself while I am gone?" asked her father.

"I! Oh, I shall go to the Joslyns, and see Alice. You are certain not to be back until five or six o'clock. Be sure and bring me the parcel from Home's, and the wool from Miss Gregory's, and don't forget my brooch and Betsy's orders, whatever you do."

"All right," said the old gentleman, bidding his daughter good-bye.

"Take care of yourself, and don't get into mischief," she called after him; and then, with sundry nods, lookings-back, and shouted messages, the two parted, Captain Carthew to take his place in Ned Wallis's boat for Dockmouth, and Hero to strike across Passmore Fields, which would

bring her, by a short cut, close to the coast-guard station of which Mr. Joslyn held command.

Hero Carthew fell very far short of a beauty, and yet she generally contrived to carry off the lion's share of admiration and attraction. There was an unstudied grace about her figure, an elastic freedom in her movements, which attracted notice before perhaps you had even caught sight of her face, which was, like her nature, sunny and loveable, yet with plenty of character, and showing very openly its likes and dislikes, its pleasure and its pain. It would have thoroughly unhinged the nerves of many a town-bred belle or beau to have followed Hero's track to Winkle station. She walked and ran, climbed hills, jumped gates; singing merrily, and whistling familiarly to all the animals who chanced to lie in her road. Perfect health, temper, and spirits, what more was wanted to make her, what she declared herself to be, as happy as the days were long?

It always gave her additional pleasure to spend a day with the Joslyns. Alice was her greatest friend, the three boys were all in love with her, and Mr. Joslyn was her father's oldest shipmate. However long she had to stay at Winkle, the hour for return came all too soon; so that in this case none of them would credit Mr. Joslyn's assertion that it was already four o'clock, and high time to get into the boat, or the tide would not serve for landing Hero at Combe Point, and thus save her a three miles' walk. It did not take them long to reach Cape Farewell, as they had dubbed the narrow spit of sand which stretched out here; and, after a very reluctant leave-taking, and many promises of another such meeting, Hero was landed, scrambled up the rugged path, and stood waving her hand, watching the little boat as it tacked about, until it finally caught the wind and sailed swiftly out of sight.

Then she turned and began to look about for a certain old bullace tree, which jutted conveniently out of the cliff. By mounting a stone placed there for the purpose, you could catch hold of a branch and swing yourself down into the park below. It was some time since Hero had availed herself of this mode of ingress, and she had wondered if she

should hit the exact spot. She critically examined the bough to ascertain if it would bear her weight; and being satisfied on that score, with a one—two—three—the top was gained and by the reaction, of the bough she came down together with a shower of blossoms, loose stones, and dust at the feet of a gentleman whose hat she knocked off, and flattened under her feet.

“Oh! what have I done?” she exclaimed, as she endeavored by beating the cloud to disperse the dust in which she had enveloped him; “I beg your pardon—I am so sorry—I had no idea that any one would be here; why didn’t you call out?”

“Call out,” he said, in a somewhat injured tone, “really that was an impossibility; I only heard a rustle, and before I had even time to look up, you had descended.”

Then, seeing the look of unutterable confusion which came into Hero’s face, as her eyes fell on the hat all battered and spoiled, he burst into a hearty laugh, saying,

“Pray, don’t mind it; but you must pardon a stranger for being ignorant that the young ladies here have a way of dropping from the clouds.”

Hero tried to smile, but the hat weighed heavily upon her.

“Can’t something be done to it?” she asked anxiously, trying to restore it to shape, “I feel so dreadfully ashamed of myself.”

“Don’t do that,” he said, looking admiringly at her pretty confusion, “it will come right again, I dare say; and if not, I have some more luggage coming this evening, so don’t distress me by distressing yourself.”

His luggage! who could he be? Hero looked at him inquiringly, and then a dreadful suspicion arose that this must be Sir Stephen Prescott.

“I had no idea that there was any path outside the cliff,” he said, trying to divert her from the unlucky accident.

“Nor is there,” stammered poor Hero, who felt that, if her last conjecture proved true, she ought to add an apology for this unwarrantable mode of entrance. “I have been to Winkle station; and, as the tide prevented me from getting back by the beach, Mr. Joslyn landed me at the Point

below, and I climbed up here to get home through the park. People have always been allowed to come this way; Sir Stephen Prescott has never objected to it;" and then with a blush and half-smile she asked shyly, "Are you Sir Stephen Prescott?"

"Yes, I am; what made you think so?"

"Because, for one thing, I did not know you, and we seldom have strangers here; and then you look—at least you are not quite the same as the people we generally see."

Sir Stephen smiled.

"May I venture to ask," he said, "whom I have the honor of addressing?"

"My name is Hero Carthew. I am Captain Carthew's daughter, of Sharrows, round Combe Point;" and she pointed in the direction where the house lay.

"Sharrows! I think Mr. Truscott has spoken to me of Sharrows—is it not the next place to this?"

"Yes, we are neighbors, though not very near ones. Papa will be so pleased to see you. We heard that it was likely you would come, but no one expected you to-day, or you would have had a proper reception. How did you get here?"

"I came by train from Garston to Dockmouth, and took a carriage on to this place. The old housekeeper seemed perfectly aghast at seeing me. She kept on insisting that she expected I should have written. I told her that I had written *once*. But this was of no use, she kept repeating that she expected I should have written again."

"So we all thought," said Hero. "You know you only said in your letter that she was to get the rooms ready, as it was probable you might run down while you were in the neighborhood. Mrs. Tucker brought it for me to read the morning she got it, and I believe almost every day since; she was so afraid there might be some mistake. How vexed the poor old soul will be, that everything is not in apple-pie order! Of course, nothing was ready."

"Ready!" echoed Sir Stephen. "In all your life, you never saw such scrubbing and cleaning as was going on

there; only that the horse would have been dead beat, I should have returned to Dockmouth without delay."

"Oh, that would have been too bad," exclaimed Hero energetically; "you must not think of such a thing. You have no idea how every one has been looking forward to your visit. We have talked of nothing else."

"Very flattering, and all that kind of thing," replied Sir Stephen, laughing; "but practically, I know of nothing more disagreeable than to arrive where you fancy you are expected, and find no rooms ready, and no chance of dinner—an event which this sea air makes exceedingly important to me just at present. I really think it would have been better to have gone back to the hotel at Dockmouth," he added, reflectively.

But Hero shook her head at this. While he had been speaking, she had been rapidly running over in her mind the contents of the home larder. Of course, she decided that she must ask Sir Stephen to return with her. Her father would be very vexed if she did otherwise; for Captain Carthew's principles of hospitality consisted in offering freely what he had, not in withholding his invitation because he had not that which his liberal heart desired to place before his guest. Turning, she said,

"Papa went to Dockmouth this morning, but by this time he must be back again. I hope you will not stand upon ceremony with us, but return with me, and at least give us the satisfaction of knowing that you are not alone the first evening of your arrival."

"Really, you are very kind, Miss Carthew; but—," and as he hesitated, Hero said—

"You will only be saving papa a walk, for I know he would set off to fetch you the instant I told him that you were all by yourself."

"I should be sorry to give him that trouble, so perhaps, as I wish very much to make his acquaintance, you will permit me to accompany you back."

CHAPTER II.

A FIRST WELCOME.

"Shall we go by the cliff path?" asked Hero. "Perhaps you will not care to go through the village."

"Hardly, if it can be avoided. I do not fancy that at present my appearance is calculated to inspire the authority I am supposed to possess."

"I don't think any one would see it unless they were told," said Hero coloring, as she glanced at the unfortunate hat. "It was too bad of me, and at our first meeting."

"Oh no, it has but made us better friends," replied Sir Stephen. "A little *contre-temps* is often most successful in putting people at their ease. Don't you think so?"

Hero shook her head.

"I was in an awful state of fright," she said, "when I began to suspect who you were."

Sir Stephen laughed.

"It is evident I ought not to have come here. I shall never be able to keep up the character to which distance lent enchantment."

"Oh, yes you will; and if we can only make you like the place, and come and live here sometimes, the people will be ready to do anything for you, as they are for papa."

"Ah! Mr. Truscott told me that Captain Carthew has immense influence among the villagers."

"Yes, papa understands them. Mr. Truscott does not; one must live among them."

"Rather a heavy penalty to pay, though," said Sir Stephen. "In winter it must be fearfully dull."

"Oh, no! it is not; though perhaps you would feel it so; I am forgetting that I have never lived in any other place."

"And you are quite content here?"

"Perfectly. Of course, I am longing to go to a hundred places, and see all one hears about, but I know I shall never find another Mallett."

Here a bend in the path brought them to a cottage, at the door of which a fresh-colored middle-aged woman was standing.

"Well, Lois," said Miss Carthew, with a friendly smile, "has Osee come home yet?"

"Yes, miss, and the Capen, he said, comed back with 'em."

"Oh, that is all right;" then, turning towards Sir Stephen, she said,

"Lois, this is Sir Stephen Prescott."

"My dear life!" exclaimed the woman, dropping a succession of curtseys. "Well, I never did. I'm sure, sir, you'll be as welcome as the flowers o' May to Mallett. Why, Osee!" she called, "do'ee come out here then. He will be took aback sure enuf," she added, as a square-built, weather-beaten, sea-faring man made his appearance, and was duly pushed forward by his wife with the introduction, "This is my man, Osee Triggs, sir, and at your service by night or by day. 'Tis Sir Stephen Prescott, Osee," she wound up with.

Osee's astonished face beamed again, as with several touches at an imaginary cap he said,

"I'm proud and happy, sir, as you 'be come among us at last, as Miss Hero will tell ye, 'tis what we've all hoped for for ever so long, 'til some of us thought 'twas never to be; but the Capen he stuck to his colors; says he, he'll come yet, never you fear that, he says; and you may always take yer Davy to what the Capen says; he never hauls his colors down, he don't."

"Sir Stephen has not seen papa yet," said Hero, nodding her adieux. "So good-bye."

"Good evening," said Sir Stephen.

"Good evening, sir, and thank'ee for coming."

"And thank you too, Miss Hero," called out Osee. "I shall just ha' somethin'," he added, "to tell my mates, as I was the first as clapped eyes on un."

"These people seem very odd to me," said Sir Stephen, as he and Hero walked away, laughing over his first welcome.

"Odd!" echoed Hero, who was not quite certain of his meaning.

"Yes," he answered, "they are so completely different from the general class of villagers. They have none of the chronic shyness with which most country people seem oppressed."

"Oh, no; they are not shy; but they have nothing to be shy about."

"Neither have my other tenants; but they would never think of telling me that they were glad to see me, or of entering into any conversation with me."

"No? Well, they are odd then, if you like; but prepare yourself to answer all sorts of questions here; for Mallett people ask anything they want to know."

"So I find," said Sir Stephen. "My driver, and the pedestrians we met and passed, kept up a running fire of 'Why, where ever be *you* going, John Hicks?' 'To Combe, to be sure.'"

"And then," laughed Hero, "I know came, 'Why, what be goin' to do there?'"

"Oh yes, and the answer was given by a turn of the whip, and a jerk of the head towards me, accompanied on selected occasions by the advice to ask Mary somebody at the pike, her'll tell'ee."

"I don't think you imagined that we were quite so primitive as you have found us," said Hero, "although I don't consider that we are regular country folks; we are too near Dockmouth for that. There is our house; you just catch sight of it round that corner. We have only to go up this hill and we shall be there."

"We have done nothing else but go up hill," said Sir Stephen, a little out of breath, while Hero's pace never slackened, neither did her voice falter. He could but look admiringly at her lithe figure and elastic step, bespeaking perfect health and no small amount of bodily strength.

"I must induce my mother to come here in the sum-

mer," he said; "she is somewhat of an invalid, and the air seems to be delicious."

"Oh, I am sure it would do her good. It is always said that a doctor cannot live nor die at Mallett. People are never ill here."

"I shall tell her that as a certain inducement."

"Yes do," she said, stopping half way down the lane before a black painted wooden gate. "Here we are. This is Sharrows, and there is papa," and she pointed to a rather stout-looking figure in a short jacket and broad Panama hat.

"Papa! papa! He doesn't hear me; he is a little deaf, but I'll soon make him look up," and, to Sir Stephen's great amusement, she put her two fingers into her mouth and gave a long shrill whistle.

"Shocking," she said, turning to her companion, with a little shrug at herself, "but he sees us now;" and, waving her hand, they descended the path towards which Captain Carthew had turned to meet them. As soon as they were within speaking distance Hero called out—

"Papa, who do you think I have brought to see you? This is Sir Stephen Prescott."

"Sir Stephen! God bless my heart, you don't say so!" and Captain Carthew, hurrying forward, seized the long-expected visitor by both hands, giving them a grip they were totally unaccustomed to, as he said heartily—

"Welcome, very welcome. So you've found your way to Mallett at last. Well, I'm very glad to see you. Why, you've regularly stolen a march upon us. When did you come?"

"This afternoon."

"And," broke in Hero, "he was going back to Dockmouth, because nothing was ready at Combe. Mrs. Tucker expected that he intended writing again, as we all did."

"Now," said the captain, "didn't I tell you she had best set to and get everything square at once? I expected from the first that you'd come and catch us all napping; but these women folk make as much fuss over setting their chairs and tables straight, and getting their sheets out of lavender,

as we should in rigging out a 'seventy-four.' But there, there; it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and since we've got you down here I won't say any more. Run round to Betsy, Hero, and say she must give us the best dinner she can. Get her steam up," he added, with his hand to his mouth and a jerk of his head towards Sir Stephen, "by telling her who's going to eat it."

Hero ran off by some shorter way, and the captain, putting his arm in Sir Stephen's, the two proceeded towards the flat upon which the house stood.

Sir Stephen had intended making an elaborate apology for the unceremonious way in which he had accepted Hero's invitation; but somehow he quite forgot about it, and before an hour had elapsed he found himself chatting away to Captain Carthew as if he had known him all his life. When he casually spoke of leaving Mallett the next day the captain would not hear of it.

"No, no," he said, "now you are here don't run away directly. I want you to take an interest in the place and the people, and you'll never do that until you've seen a little of them. Why, there are no such sailors in the world as the Mallett men—fine, hardy fellows, true to the backbone, rough and ready to shed their last drop of blood for those they're bound to. Then the place; I've been half over the world, but I never saw anything to touch Mallett. Talk about foreign scenery, pshaw! stuff and nonsense! Look at Winkle; go to Silver Sands. Why, when you've been here a month you won't know yourself for the same man. Except of old age people *can't* die at Mallett; when they come here they get a fresh lease of their lives. So don't talk of running away—and what's the use of going back to Combe? No, no; I shall send for your traps, and you just take up your quarters here, and then I can lay an embargo upon you whenever I see any signs of weighing anchor."

And so finally the matter was settled. Sir Stephen demurred at first, and put forward several feeble objections, which—as he was nothing loath to remain—he was not sorry to have overruled. The end was that he consented to

remain, and owned himself very much obliged to Captain Carthew and his daughter for asking him.

By the morning of the next day there was not a man, woman, or child in all Mallett but knew that Sir Stephen had come, and was staying with "the Capen" at Sharrows. Ann House had been up with some whiting pout which her man had caught the night before. Ned Wallis had picked out the finest of the shrimps that he was taking to Dockmouth market, and left them with his duty. Mrs. Carne would be bound that Betsy was put to it for butter, and sent her boy Johnny up with a fresh pound and a pot of cream. The general thought was how they could assist the "Capen" in duly entertaining his distinguished guest. Nor was it in the village alone that this feeling existed. Mrs. Thompson remembered that Hero had said some days before that their stock of jam was nearly exhausted, so she must supply that default. Miss Stevens routed out some choice ginger that her brother the chaplain had brought from China. Old Mr. Jamieson, the paymaster, thought he'd take down a bottle of his old Constantia (he'd only four or five left), that the captain might give Sir Stephen a taste of something he did not get every day. And so all through the small community each drew on his or her little store of dainties, trying to assist their neighbor in setting before his guest those things which his hospitality would prompt, but his resources they knew would not supply.

CHAPTER III.

AT SHARROWS.

“There is one thing which must be done,” said Hero, as Sir Stephen, on the second morning after his arrival, stood waiting for Captain Carthew to accompany him to Combe; “so it is of no use talking about your going away. Stay you must, ‘for it is your duty to.’”

“And, pray, what is my duty?”

“Well, your duty to your neighbor, in this instance, is that you remain, and I invite all Mallett and its environs to tea, and to meet Sir Stephen Prescott.”

Sir Stephen laughed outright. The whole thing was to him so irresistibly comic; in fact, during the last few days, his life had been so entirely altered from its usual routine, that, after the fashion of the ancient dame who fell asleep on the king’s highway, he had asked himself, over and over again, “Can this be I?”

A man accustomed to a certain amount of luxury, amusement, and society, found himself suddenly domesticated among comparative strangers, who, though they did their best to entertain him, could offer him nothing beyond the simple enjoyments of their homely life.

Hero’s light-hearted face and merry gossip, Captain Carthew’s quaint stories, the primitive, out-spoken village folk whom they met on their rambling investigations—all combined to amuse him wonderfully, and somehow the days had seemed very short. But when he called up some of the queer-looking old men and antiquated ladies who had been pointed out to him as of Mallett gentry, and pictured himself doing the agreeable to them at a tea-party, the idea tickled him more than he would have cared for his present friends to see.

"It is of no use laughing," said Hero, trying to look grave. "I really mean what I say; they would be so disappointed if they were not properly introduced to you, just as we should have been if you had stayed somewhere else, and had gone away without our seeing anything of you. People have so looked forward to your visit, and they are really all so good and kind-hearted, that I fear if you went away, and did not meet them, they would feel hurt, and fancy you took no interest in the place. If you think you can stay, you would be granting me a favor by doing so."

"My dear Miss Carthew, say no more. I would do a great deal more than that to please you; besides which, you and your father are so good to me, that, unless I was absolutely obliged to get back to London, I doubt very much whether you would not experience considerable difficulty in getting rid of me."

"Then you really will stay?"

"Of course I will."

"That is kind of you—thank you so much. I shall invite all I can for to-morrow evening. They know my heart is good to ask everybody, but as papa says, our stowage is not large enough."

"Now I have a brilliant idea," said Sir Stephen, "if you will oblige me by helping to carry it out."

"What is it?"

"Why, this; instead of asking them here, ask them all to Combe-Mallet; the rooms are already dismantled, the people have nothing to do, and I'll send my man off to Dockmouth to order some supper."

"Why, we could have a dance," exclaimed Hero, twisting round in an imaginary waltz; "what a glorious idea! Everybody can be invited there, can't they? They will be so delighted; oh, thank you, Sir Stephen; I am so much obliged to you. You don't know how kind every one will think it."

"There is really no great kindness in it from me, not one quarter as kind as you were going to be; see to what trouble you intended putting yourself."

"Trouble! oh, I do not call that trouble; you should

see us at Christmas time. We always give two parties then; one to our friends, and one to the village, although they nearly all come to each. The whole house is turned upside down, the rooms are decorated with flags and holly, and festooned with bunting; you would not know the place, it looks so gay and pretty."

"And you really enjoy that?" said Sir Stephen, looking rather incredulously at her.

"Enjoy it! why it is the greatest fun in the world. Alice and the Joslyn boys from Winkle always stay here, so I have their help; then Jack Pringle, Jervis Randall, and any of the young men at home or the girls who think they can be of use, come down. Joe Bunce, the carpenter we went to yesterday, nails it all up for us, and papa walks about declaring he does not know where to go or what to do, but really enjoying it twenty times more than any one else. Last year Alice and I were so tired afterwards that we could hardly move. We never sat down all day, and danced all night."

Sir Stephen looked admiringly at the young girl's animated face, and then he said, "I wonder if you know how much you are to be envied. I could tell you of dozens of people who would give the half of their fortune to possess your wonderful capacity for enjoyment."

"I don't understand you," said Hero, puzzled.

"Well, I mean this; most of my acquaintances are people who every night of their lives go to operas, balls, theatres, or have amusement of some kind."

"How delicious!" exclaimed Hero.

"But they do not think so."

"Why do they go then?"

"Just that! They go because they have no pleasure in staying away, although they enjoy nothing by going out. They are moped to death if they stay at home, and bored to death by the society they seek."

"Poor things!" said Hero. "Surely they must be ill."

"No, it is not that; they are well enough. Why, do you know," he added, "I am but describing what is very frequently my own condition."

"You, Sir Stephen! Ah, now I know that you are laughing at me."

"Indeed, I am not; you must not think, because I have not shown my hoof, that it is my wont to be as cheerful and happy as I have felt since I came here. I cannot make my contented self out, and can only put it down to the influence of the atmosphere by which I am surrounded. You are all so good and happy that you diffuse it to those less fortunately constituted."

"Fancy!" ejaculated Hero. "Do you know, I have been envying you so much. I fancied that people who lived in London, and went to court and into grand society, where they actually saw and heard all the things that we can only read about, could have nothing left to wish for; and yet you mean to say that you are really sometimes dull and unhappy?"

"Very frequently; although I believe I am not tormented half as sorely as many. Whether," he added, smiling at Hero's incredulous face, "it is the curse entailed on riches, or the penalty enforced on those who have the power to supply every wish and want, I cannot tell; but this I can assure you, that I have heard women in satins and jewels envy some poor girl whose merry face they have caught gazing with admiration into their carriage. I have a cousin who, having a large fortune at her command, is regarded by most people with especial envy. She is still young, and by many considered very handsome; yet she is always complaining of low spirits and depression—complaints which, I expect, you hardly know the meaning of."

Hero shook her head.

"When I was a child," she said, laughing, "I remember feeling cross some days, and inclined to cry about everything, which Betsey, my old nurse, took as a sign that I needed a powder, and, I believe, it generally cured me; but now,—Well, if papa is away, I may feel a little dull sometimes, and then I put on my hat and run up to the Rاندalls or the Thompsons, and I am soon all right. One can never be dull with Mrs. Thompson: she is so full of fun. She has seven children, and only one real servant,

and she makes everything they wear, because a captain of marines' pay is so small. I hope she will be able to come to-morrow."

"I hope she will," replied Sir Stephen. "I should like to make her acquaintance: she must be a wonder."

"Oh, no! she is not. I know several people who do or have done the same."

"And would you be contented with that kind of life, Miss Carthew?"

"Well," laughed Hero, "it is somewhat startling to contemplate just now, but it comes on one by degrees, and—oh, yes, if it was my fate, I should not be very miserable under it; the worst to me would be the partings and the long separations," and she gave a little sigh.

"Yes, that would be exceedingly disagreeable; supposing, of course, that you cared for one another."

"But I mean husbands and wives," said Hero, getting a little red.

"So do I," said Sir Stephen; "but I have known husbands and wives not at all sorry to part, after they discovered they could not live happily together."

"Yes, I know that. Of course *all* do not get on well; in the village some of the married people disagree terribly. They come up here with such stories of each other, and quarrel and fight constantly. But even then, I suppose, a sort of regard exists between them; for if any one else takes sides or interferes, they are sure to leave off and fall upon the unlucky interloper. Papa can always separate two men or two women, but he says he shears off when it's a matrimonial squabble."

"What an influence your father has in the village!" said Sir Stephen; "I quite envy him his popularity."

"Come and live here, then, and you'll soon share their favor."

"More unlikely things than that might happen," said Sir Stephen, gravely; "sometimes one's life seems to remain stagnant for years, then suddenly an opening is made for new hopes, resolves, and interests. Perhaps this visit which

I have paid without even telling my mother that I intended coming, may be a turning point in my life—who knows?"

"It would be the making of the Mallett people if you did come to Combe," said Hero; "you might find it dull at first, though we would do all we could to make you like the place. Papa! papa!" she called out, seeing her father pass the window. "I want to speak to you. Only think, Sir Stephen says I may ask all the people to Combe instead of here. Won't it be nice? I must go to the Joslyns, and ask them; Alice *must* come, you know!"

"Oh! that means the boat and Bunce, I suppose?"

"No, I'd rather go with Jim."

The Captain shook his head. "The wind is sure to drop in the afternoon," he said.

"And if it does we can manage, and perhaps," she added, turning to Sir Stephen, "you might like to come with me."

"I should very much, if our Combe business is over."

"Very well, then, I will be at New Quay by three o'clock, and I shall wait until you come. Good-by, now I am off to issue the invitations."

Hero had not at all overestimated the amount of pleasure which the news, of which she was the happy bearer, would give.

"So thoughtful, I call it," said Mrs. Jamieson, turning it over in her mind as to whether her best cap would do. "You know, my dear, it is not every young man in his exalted position who would care to know us simple folks."

"It's all your doing, Hero," said Mrs. Thompson, "and sorry I am my Terence isn't here to enjoy it with us."

"Yes, I wish he was; and that Leo was here too. He knows my step so well; nobody dances as well as Leo—at least I think so."

Mrs. Thompson shook her head. "I often wish now," she said, "that you didn't think quite so much of Leo Despard, Hero. I'd far sooner see ye listening to Jack Pringle, poor boy; and he hanging on your words like the bee does to the flower, and finding nothing but honey in it. Leo thinks too much of himself, and not enough of other people; and you and Aunt Lydia just tickle him with a feather out

of his own tail. I suppose she'll hardly venture so far in the night air."

"No," said Hero, thinking it best to let the remarks on Leo go unanswered; "I am going to her next, but it is not at all likely that she will come; she is so afraid of taking cold;" and, after some discussion regarding the dress Mrs. Thompson meant to wear, Hero left for the cottage where the late rector's sister, Miss Despard, or Aunt Lydia, as she was more generally called, resided.

As had been anticipated, the old lady would not hear of it being prudent that she should accept Hero's invitation; although she was equally obliged to Sir Stephen for asking her, and it was only like the Captain to offer to fetch her, and see her home. "But I don't feel equal to it, my dear; more particularly as Leo is not going to be there."

"You'd go to see him, wouldn't you, Aunt Lydia?" Hero said, with a look which made Miss Despard take the girl's hand and press it in token of their sympathy on that point.

"Ah, dear fellow! that I would," she replied, with a burst of pride. "Sir Stephen, or fifty Sir Stephens, I know there'll not be one to equal my Leo in that room. You are right to be very proud of being his choice, Hero, for I don't know where you'd go to find his equal."

Hero smiled approvingly; she liked to hear Leo's praises sung, for though there was no openly-acknowledged engagement between them, everybody knew that there was to be as soon as his ardently longed for promotion came.

Not a few of Hero's friends shook their heads disapprovingly over this arrangement, and hoped that something might happen to prevent a marriage of which they did not heartily approve; for Leo was not universally popular in Mallett. He did not belong to the place, nor the county, but came from London, which was like belonging to no place, and next to being a foreigner; then there was a little air of mystery about him, inasmuch as no one knew for certain who he was, or who his parents were before him. He had come to Mallett some twenty years before with Mr. Despard, the late rector. Two or three different stories had been given out at odd times about the boy, whether true or

false nobody could undertake to say, for Mr. Despard himself was a stranger to Mallett, and held the living because he had been a friend of the former baronet, Sir Bernard Prescott, in whose gift it was. When Leo was sent to Dockmouth grammar-school, the rector gave him his own name in place of the one he had heretofore borne, announcing to Mallett that he meant from henceforth to adopt the boy as his own son, and that they were in future to call him Leo Despard. These circumstances, combined with an undue reticence on the rector's part, and a confusion in his sister's manner whenever the relationship was alluded to, led to the conclusion that perhaps the less said about Leo's birth and parentage the better. On one point every person was agreed—that no parents could have shown more tender love towards the boy than did the shy, reserved rector and his ailing spinster sister. By them Leo's wishes, his likes and dislikes, were regarded as those of a genius who ought not to be trammelled with the ordinary rules by which youth is usually governed; and it naturally came to pass that this blind affection strengthened the faults that should have been curbed, and killed the unselfishness and thoughtfulness for others, which in most characters is the result of early training, and accumulated small self-denials.

It had been Mr. Despard's wish that Leo should follow his profession, and, after him, take the Mallett rectorship; but to this plan the boy would not listen, he would be nothing but a soldier; and, as most people agreed that such a handsome young fellow seemed made for a soldier, Leo was in due time gazetted to a regiment, where his hardest task was trying to keep pace with his brother officers, most of them men more moneyed than himself. Few, if any, of his associates guessed that their pleasant, popular companion imposed upon himself cares and worries which cankered all his happiness, because his false pride had rebelled against his originally acknowledging his true position; and having commenced his career by announcing a cleverly concocted falsehood, he had now to keep up the fraudulent statement.

All this was unknown to his Mallett friends, who based their opinions of him on the foolish way in which he rebelled

against the small economies which Aunt Lydia, in common with her neighbors, had to practise; and he often vexed Hero by seeming to be ashamed of the unpretending mode of living, and the small house to which he had to return. Knowing nothing of such feelings herself, she had no sympathy with them, and she tried to assure herself that in time she should make Leo forget them, and teach him to love Mallett as she loved it.

“If he were but at home now to meet Sir Stephen, and hear his admiration of the place and the people, it would be more likely to do him good than anything else.” But unfortunately that was impossible, so she must trust to the impression which her repetition of all that her new friend said and did would produce; and with this thought uppermost in her mind, she bade Aunt Lydia good-by, and proceeded to deliver her round of invitations.

The news “that doings was to be up to Combe” very soon spread through the village, and infected the humbler inhabitants with a general air of excitement. All who could be of any service volunteered their help to Mrs. Tucker, the steward, Betsey, and the captain, until Sir Stephen, infected by the unwonted stir and bustle, declared that there must be two gatherings, and that, if Captain Carthew would assist him and give him quarters for a day or two longer, they would contrive to get up something for the village people, whose cheerful alacrity he considered was really deserving of recognition. This idea so delighted the Captain that he could scarcely contain his joy until he got down to the water’s edge, and no sooner had he reached there, than he roared out to the men gathered about the quay,

“Here, listen to me, my men. Sir Stephen Prescott has asked his friends and neighbors to his house to-morrow evening, that he may become better acquainted with them; and now he proposes the next evening to have you and your wives and sweethearts, that he may have the opportunity of knowing you too, which I call a very kind action on his part, and every one of us, I am sure, feels it as such, and therefore I say Three cheers for Sir Stephen Prescott, and God bless him.”

"Three cheers for Sir Stephen Prescott, and God bless him," shouted idle loungers, sturdy young sailors, weather-beaten tars, and the small fry of ragamuffins, who seemed to thrive equally well above or below their native element. Then, after a momentary pause and consultation, Joe Connor, who was generally spokesman, stepped forward, and taking off his hat, into which he gazed intently, said,

"If we might make so free, we thanks your honor for your kindness, which us and ours hope ever to deserve, and that your honor will never regret the day you set foot in Mallett, where 'twould be our pride to know you'd live for ever and die at a good old age, covered wi' medals and glory. With," turning to his comrades, whose pleased faces bespoke their admiration of his eloquence, "a hip, hip, hooray," and out ran the women, children, and occupants of the near-by cottages, ready to join in any fun or fray which might happen to be going on.

"One more for the Capen," and up rose the cheery shout again; then seeing Hero approach, and Sir Stephen turn to greet her, Ted Connor, who declared he envied the very ground she trod upon, called out, "Once again, boys," and the rocks resounding and seeming to echo back again the enthusiastic outburst, Sir Stephen, laughingly, put his hands to his ears, saying, "This is the price we pay for your popularity, Miss Carthew."

CHAPTER IV.

“HARD TO PLEASE IN REGARD TO SHE.”

“We are going to have some one besides a boy?” asked Sir Stephen, looking at the little boat, which the surf running up the beach was handling rather roughly.

“It will be right enough outside,” said Hero; “when we have rounded the point you’ll find the sea as calm as a mill-pond.”

“Because I am nothing of a salt-water sailor; I can contrive to manage a boat on the river, and that is about all.”

“Jim will take care of us; he is not a boy; Jim,” she cried, and starting up from the bottom of the boat, where he had been taking a siesta, appeared a wiry, under-sized man, whose age, from his agility, might have been forty, and from his face, might have been seventy. Sir Stephen felt more satisfied, until, after a minute or two’s inspection, he exclaimed,

“Why, he has only one arm.”

“Oh! that’s nothing,” replied the captain; “except for rowing he never misses it, and if the wind veers round or drops, as I think it will, you must lend a hand, Hero.”

“Is rowing one of your accomplishments, Miss Carthew?”

“Yes,” replied Hero, laughing, “I have not many, but I *can* manage a boat.”

“Oh, she’s a capital oar,” said the captain, with pride. “She’d get her rating on board any Queen’s ship.” Then putting his two hands to his mouth to form a speaking trumpet, he roared out to Jim,

“Sir Stephen wants to know if Miss Hero can take an oar?”

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the man, in the low distinct kind of whisper, so often used by very deaf people. "That she can; I'd back her agen Ann Granville, Jinny Adams, or any o' the Saltashers."

"That's a compliment you won't appreciate until you have been to one of the regattas and seen the women row," said Hero; "then you will fully understand the pride I feel at Jim's flattering opinion of my stroke."

The boat tumbled and tossed in the foam, pretending every minute that its intention was to be upset. To get into her it needed the agility of a cat, which Hero seemed to possess; for, seizing her opportunity, she sprang in first. Sir Stephen was not so fortunate, but thought himself lucky in meeting with no worse fate than 'breaking his fall' on Jim, and bundling on top of Hero.

"Never mind," shouted the captain, who stood watching their departure from the shore; "you'll shake down all right by the time you get outside. Don't you bother about the ropes, he'll manage them with his hook and his teeth."

"I hope you can swim," shouted Sir Stephen, as soon as they were fairly off. Jim put his hand to his ear and looked at Hero.

"Sir Stephen hopes that you can swim." Jim shook his head.

"Not I," he answered, "'taint lucky, sir; so far as I've a seed, most o' they as puts their trust in swimmin' is pretty nearly certain to be drowned. Uncle Bill could swim like a fish," he said, turning to Hero, "so could Seth Lavis, and Osee Triggs, and what comed of it? Why they all three went down like lead, and I by their side was saved. No, no, sir, don't 'ee put no hold by swimmin'; set your trust in One above, who never fails to save they who is to be saved, and if you'm born to be drowneded, drowneded you'll be; 'taint swimmin' will keep your poor sinful body above water.

"Comforting!" ejaculated Sir Stephen.

"Oh! we are safe enough," laughed Hero, "though I see yours is only make-believe fear. In the summer, Jim and I go out for whole days together, and he tells me sto-

ries and I sing him songs. I am telling Sir Stephen how we amuse ourselves when we go out fishing, Jim," she said, seeing the old man's bright listening eyes fixed upon her.

"Ah!" — and Jim gave a long sigh of satisfaction. "Them's the times. I haven't heerd nothin' nat'ral like, never since the 29th o' last October; that's the day we went to Battern Reach."

"What does he mean?" asked Sir Stephen.

"Well, if you speak to him you have to roar at him, and he says the noise is like thunder, but he can hear singing—at least he says he can hear mine—and it so delights him to listen to his old sea songs, that I often repeat them over and over again for his amusement."

"You refused the other evening; you told me that you could not sing."

"Neither can I; but when I was a child papa taught me several of his favorite nautical ballads, which are not exactly company music, you know."

"I dare say they are very much prettier."

Hero shook her head.

"Let me hear one?"

"Oh, no, I could not; they are not in the least what you would care for."

"You cannot tell that. Jim," he called out, "ask Miss Carthew to sing one of your favorite songs."

"Will 'ee, Miss Hero?" said Jim; "'es now, do 'ee, like a dear," he added in a coaxing voice.

"Yes, do'ee, like a dear," said Sir Stephen, trying to imitate Jim's insinuating voice.

Hero held up her finger reprovingly, but she nodded assent to Jim's pleading and further request that the song should be "The lass who loves a sailor." After a momentary pause she began: her voice rose clear and sweet, doing justice to the tuneful melody, which she sang with heartfelt feeling. Her face was turned so that the old man might hear, and he, with his eyes on the sail and his hand to his ear, sat listening with a rapt expression, which made his thin, worn face seem to beam with delight.

Sir Stephen gazed on the pair, and then the beauty of

the whole scene seemed to suddenly come over him; the calm "great heaven of blue" which reflected itself in the water below, the high sapphire-patched rocks fantastically jagged and broken, the foam dashing and lapping against them, frothy and white above the sea's borrowed depth of color.

"Surely," he thought, "my mother's prejudice would give way before this wild scenery, which she always admires. I hope I shall succeed in getting her to feel an interest in these people. They have made me somehow take to them wonderfully; they have such simple ways and pleasures, and are so different to the common run of country folks. What a sweet face this girl has, and such a pretty air of coquetry; conscious but not vain of her beauty; a real unspoilt woman, with a heap of weakness to make the man who loves her proud of his strength, and a heap of strength to turn his pride into weakness." And then the vision of another face rose up before him—a face which had once to him been the fairest in all the world, but which now was shadowed by clouds of distrust and bitterness, lived out but not forgotten.

"God bless you for that sound to the deaf ear," said old Jim, reverently. Sir Stephen, roused from his reverie, smiled at her, saying, "I can say nothing but that I am very much obliged to you. It must make you feel very happy, Miss Carthew, to be so beloved and have it in your power to make people so happy."

"If you will but stay here and live among us, I will promise you an equal share of popularity. As long as I can remember, people have been wishing that you lived at Coombe, and now we know you, and have seen you, nothing but your doing so will content us."

"I won't promise you to come and live here altogether, but I shall certainly come and stay some part of each year. Your father has been showing me that it is not fair to hold land and yet do nothing for those who live upon it. We decry Irish absentees, and yet in many instances follow their example, and I feel I have been very much to blame."

"But you knew so little about us," said Hero.

"For the reason, I suppose, that I asked so little; and then, as Mr. Truscott said that they never complained in any way, I tried to hope they were in a very flourishing condition."

"Mr. Truscott," said Hero, in a scornful voice, "is a Dockmouth man, and does not understand Mallett people; it was not at all probable that he would hear many complaints by riding over when it suited his convenience, and stopping such as he chose with, 'Well, my man, and how does the world serve you?'" and Hero's imitation of the hand on the hip, and the wave of an imaginary whip, was so life-like that Jim, who was watching her, chuckled out, "That's Lord Truscott to a T."

"There you see," exclaimed Hero significantly, "*he* was not very likely to gain their confidence."

"True, I see now that things must be managed very differently in future. As I explained to Captain Carthew this morning, I am anything but a rich man; my other estate of Pamphillon was left to me encumbered with debts, so that instead of deriving any income from it, I have to spend money on it every year. The fact is, when I came of age I ought to have sold that place, but my mother would not hear of it; and I, shrinking, as one naturally does, from giving up what has been in one's family for generations, tried to see if, by any means, it was possible to keep it. Afterwards I went abroad for some years, and gave up attending to business matters; but now I see so plainly what is the right thing to do, that I shall hesitate about it no longer, but put Pamphillon into the market directly I return to town. I dare say I shall find a bidder," he added with a sigh, "it's a fine old place."

"What a pity to have to sell it!" said Hero.

"Yes; better never to have had it at all. My poor uncle, whom I succeeded, was a most eccentric man. He had no need to speculate; he had a good income, and nobody to spend it upon, for he abhorred the sight of women, and never married, or went into society; and yet, after his death, it was found that he had entered into the very wildest speculations, and completely beggared the pro-

perty. I was quite a child, and my mother had to economise and retrench in every possible way, in order to try to get things a little straight during my minority. How she managed to keep things from going to the dogs I can never tell, but it completely broke down her health, and people all say that she has never been the same since. The strain on her nervous system was too great; she overestimated her responsibility in the desire to keep Pamphillon for me, and it has ended in her throwing herself into a fever of anxiety at the bare mention of selling it, and yet disliking the place so that she hates to go near it."

"Poor thing," said Hero compassionately, "what will you do to avoid paining her?"

"Say as little about it as I can, and induce her to come down here. I think you and she would soon be excellent friends; she is very fond of young people's society."

"You have no sisters?"

"No; my cousin always lived with my mother until she got married, and since then she has preferred to be alone."

"I hope she may come here, then," said Hero. "I should be very glad to try and make her like me."

"That would not be a difficult task," said Sir Stephen; "the difficulty will be to get her to come; she declares Mallett is at the world's edge,—and perhaps the journey is a fatiguing one for her."

"But not in the summer?"

"Oh, no; I must contrive it somehow; and if I can then manage to interest her in the people, we shall soon set everything straight. I hope," he said, speaking to Jim, "that you will not have so much to complain of another winter. I am very sorry to hear how much many suffered during the past one."

"Thank 'ee, sir," said Jim, "mostly times *is* a little hard then, but as I says, 'Take heart, mates, the summer 'ill come,' and come it does, and so it will, I reckon, for 'while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease,' and after 'twill all be changed, and there'll be winter no more, but to they that praise the Lord light and sunshine allays."

"He is a local preacher," said Hero, answering Sir Stephen's surprised look, "and a very eloquent one according to Betsey's opinion, which is that preaching is a free gift, and not to be picked up like verses by reading books. Her sayings used to amuse poor old Mr. Despard greatly. You knew him, did you not? I mean the late rector," she added.

"No. My mother gave him the living when I was a boy; he had been, I believe, an old friend of my uncle's, and, through him, she had formed a high opinion of Mr. Despard. I don't fancy they were personally acquainted."

The sudden shift of the sail, as they tacked into Winkle creek, put an end to the conversation. Their approach had been made known to Captain Joslyn by the signalman, and by the time the boat reached the shore, a line had been formed by the fine stalwart coast-guard men to run her out of the surf up the beach, where they could step out high and dry, and be welcomed by the whole family, who were standing to receive them. Mrs. Joslyn willingly acceded to Hero's request, that they might carry off Alice, a pretty, shy girl who looked upon her friend Hero as the standard of perfection; and, only waiting until she was ready to accompany them, they set off on their return to Sharrows.

The wind dropping as the captain had prognosticated, Hero's services were put into requisition; and Sir Stephen, instead of attending to the tiller, found his eyes straying from the undulating movements of Hero's lithe figure to her sweet face flushed by exercise, her hair a little tossed by the gentle breeze, and her eyes sparkling with fun and enjoyment of his pretended surprise, and his assertion that he was afraid to stir, although as soon as the boat touched he sprang upon shore, and insisted upon lifting her out, with a care that made old Jim eye him suspiciously. The boat landed them at the foot of Sharrows, and as Alice wanted to unpack her bag the two girls went off together, leaving Sir Stephen to follow.

"Here, Jim," he said, putting a few shillings into the old boatman's hand, "you must drink my health."

Jim shook his head.

"I gived it up years agone, sir. For more than half of my life through love o' drink the devil stuck to me like a limpit, but, bless the Lord, who has overthrown the powers o' Satan in that respect as in many others."

"Well, then," said Sir Stephen, "keep it and do what you like with it."

"Thank'ee, sir, but there's lots in Mallett who has more need for it than me."

"Nonsense; Miss Carthew told me that you had been ill, and not able to do any work for a long time."

"'Twas only a touch o' the screws," said the old man, smiling; "the jints is gittin' a little rusty, I reckon, sir; but our Heavenly Father was good to me; and as for Miss Hero," and he took off his cap, seeming to forget Sir Stephen's presence, and said reverently, "May God send her the blessings I asks for her—amen," he added, after a moment's pause, turning with the money still in his open palm.

"Keep it for my sake, Jim," said Sir Stephen, patting the old fellow's shoulder; "I hope soon that you and I will get good friends."

Jim smiled his satisfaction.

"I hope so, sir; but," and he gave a knowing shake of his head towards Sharrows, "you musn't mind us being main hard to please in regard to she."

Sir Stephen nodded. "She?" he thought, as he walked up the path; "I wonder what the old chap means?" and at something which seemed not distasteful to himself he smiled, and then indulged in a quiet laugh, and finally lighted a cigar, and sat down on one of the numerous seats the captain had placed up the steep ascent, as resting-posts to the aged and weary.

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CHAPTER V.

KATHERINE DOUGLAS.

As Sir Stephen sat dreamily watching the shadowy mists gradually encircling the sea-bound hills and rocks, he asked himself again the cause of his present content. He recalled the journeys he had taken, the money and time he had spent, and the fatigue he had undergone; seeking, in the first instance, a remedy against hopeless depression, and afterwards, when his bitter disappointment had ceased, to ward off those fits of unutterable weariness which threatened to take the place of an anguish he had finally succeeded in mastering. He was neither particularly energetic, nor easily moved to fresh action; but he had a wholesome horror of falling into a condition in which there seems nothing left to give attraction, or afford interest to the end of a useless and wasted life. Cramped as he had been by his position and inadequate income, he always felt there was but one step by which he could right himself—selling his estate of Pamphillon. But from the only two persons whose opinion affected his actions, he met with determined opposition. His mother declared that such an act would be her death-blow. She entreated her son never to part with an inheritance which had been theirs for generations. She reminded him of the struggle which she had made during his boyhood to prevent an acre of the land being parted with; and she asked him whether now, when by a hundred ways a man of energy and talent could build up anew the fortunes of his house, he was going tamely to sacrifice it all, and bury himself alive at a place which was out of reach of all civilized society, and where he must sink to the level of the people with whom he would be compelled to mix. Mrs. Prescott was a fragile, delicate-looking woman, in all other

things willing and ready to be guided by whatever best pleased her son; but whenever mention was made of this subject, she seemed to grow obstinate and unreasonable.

When Sir Stephen left England on his lengthened tour, she had obtained a promise from him that all should go on as usual until his return—a return which for years she sighed after; for, excepting a few hurried visits for the express purpose of seeing her, Sir Stephen was always bent on some fresh expedition, and for six or seven years he had been roaming about in all quarters of the globe. When at length Mrs. Prescott received the welcome announcement that now he intended to settle at home altogether, her joy knew no bounds. She hardly asked herself, and dare not ask him, the reason of this resolution; whether the excitement of travel had been worn out, or whether the cause which had led him to seek diversion no longer existed. Could it, she asked herself, have anything to do with Mr. Labouchere's death, and that Katherine was again in England? Katherine! whose name had never been spoken between them for years. Katherine! for dread of meeting whom he had banished himself, for bitterness of whom he called all womankind hypocrites. What had wrought this wondrous change? And Mrs. Prescott would sit musing until a softened expression, stealing over her face, hailed the revived hope that, after all, the dearest wish of her life might still come to pass.

There had been a time when any doubt that Katherine Douglas would be Stephen's wife had never entered Mrs. Prescott's mind. Katherine was her favorite brother's daughter, and had been almost entirely brought up by her aunt, who, next to her son, bestowed upon her the greatest share of her affection.

When children, the two cousins had scarcely ever been apart; and, as they grew into man and womanhood, it gave Mrs. Prescott the greatest satisfaction to see this early attachment ripen into a love of a more serious nature. Many persons (knowing how much Sir Stephen's fortune stood in need of repair) wondered that his mother should be content to see him woo a girl with nothing but her good looks to

recommend her, but Mrs. Prescott loved her niece dearly, was proud of her beauty and talents, and, without either mother or son knowing or irksomely feeling it, Katherine entirely ruled both. She possessed her cousin's love so completely, that he willingly gave in to every wish and plan she formed; and her aunt leaned so confidently upon her, that the idea of thwarting Katherine never occurred to a mind thoroughly convinced that whatever Katherine did must be right.

To a formal engagement between herself and Stephen Miss Douglas objected, on the ground that her grandmother Dormer might raise obstacles. They understood each other, she said, and, as they could not marry for two years (when Sir Stephen would get an addition to his income), what was the use of being talked of, and perhaps annoyed about it? Mrs. Prescott thought there was a great deal of truth in what Katherine said, and between them Sir Stephen was overruled. The time of probation was within a few months of being accomplished, when Mrs. Dormer summoned Katherine to attend her to Nice, where she had been ordered for change of air, and from which place she lugubriously announced that it was highly improbable that she should ever return. What was to be done? Mrs. Dormer must not be offended, or, though Katherine was her favorite grandchild, she would be safe to leave her money elsewhere.

"Well, let her," said Sir Stephen, "I would willingly give up every chance you have of her money, rather than let you go away from me, and we be parted all these months."

"Stephen!" said Katherine, and she looked at him reproachfully, "how foolishly you talk! You know of what importance money is to us. Without this prospect from grandmamma it would be madness in you to think of marrying *me*, but I hope that with it we shall be able to set everything right."

"She may live for years," he said, moodily; "I am sure I don't desire otherwise. The safest and only sure way out of my difficulties is to sell Pamphillon, pay off the mortgages,

and live on what is left. A very fair income it would be—and then if Mrs. Dormer left us anything—” but the cloud on Katherine’s face would stop the indulgence of further hopes, and she would say in a voice which bordered on a sneer,

“Have you no ambition, Stephen? for it seems to me that except as an object of barter Pamphillon has small value in your eyes;” and this, or some such misinterpretation, wounding the young man, the two would grow vexed, he angry and sharp of speech, and she stubborn and cold.

Mrs. Prescott quite held with Katherine, that to refuse compliance with Mrs. Dormer’s request would be folly. She, too, counted on the expected fortune, entered into Katherine’s schemes, and would remonstrate with her son on his seeming rashness and selfishness.

“Is not Katherine making a sacrifice equal to your own?” she would say. “Can it be pleasure for her to leave you, and shut herself up with a fidgetty old woman?”

“Why does she go?” Sir Stephen would answer; “she is doing this for my sake, she says, but I don’t want the sacrifice. I would rather a thousand times never touch a farthing of the money than gain the whole by giving her up for months.”

And Mrs. Prescott turning away would sigh, and ask herself if men ever appreciated the heavy burdens borne by women for their sakes.

Before any of these discussions commenced, Katherine had determined to join her grandmother; during the time they were going on she settled her plans and made her necessary arrangements, so that when, after every artifice had been used to soften the matter, an unwilling consent was forced from Sir Stephen, it was but an absurd matter of form, the whole thing having been finally settled several days before, and Mrs. Dormer having heard from her granddaughter the very day and hour she intended joining her. Under the cloak of Mrs. Dormer’s continued illness, Katherine’s stay was greatly prolonged; her letters grew shorter, with longer intervals between. She gave up an-

swering any questions, and seemed distressed, often cold, and entirely different from herself.

Mrs. Prescott tried to soften down the varied moods her son was thrown into through this air of mystery. She attributed it to anxiety, over-exertion, being among strangers, Mrs. Dormer's caprices. But all to no purpose; Sir Stephen's suspicions were aroused, his fears increased, until he determined to go to Katherine and learn from her the meaning of her strange behavior; but a stop was unexpectedly put to his journey by an announcement in the morning paper:—"At Carabacel, Nice, Katherine Prescott Douglas, second daughter of the late Stanhope Douglas, Esq., of Pentarn, to John Pitman Labouchere, Esq., of Endor Court and Great Danesfield."

CHAPTER VI.

RICH AND FREE.

Little by little, from friends who knew them and people who had met them, Mrs. Prescott learnt what there was to learn of her niece's extraordinary conduct. All of this she had to keep to herself; for, after a burst of outraged love and trust, on the receipt of a few lines from Katherine in defence of a step which she said he would one day understand and pardon, Sir Stephen would never hear her name mentioned. He began at once making preparations for a lengthened tour, and, as soon as was possible after the announcement of the marriage, he was on his way; leaving poor Mrs. Prescott solitary and heart-broken, to brood over her shattered hopes. Many a bitter tear did she shed over Katherine's letters, which she had given a promise to her son she would not answer. Eagerly did she catch at every straw of gossip relating to the strangely-matched couple; how that it was impossible for Mr. Labouchere to live a year; that his wealth was enormous; and that Mrs. Dormer (who had managed the whole business) said everything was left solely to her granddaughter, who, she did not hesitate to add, would in all human probability soon be free. Free? And if so, would Stephen ever forgive her? And Mrs. Prescott, remembering the fierce words her son had spoken, the bitter accusations he had brought against Katherine, shuddered as hope was swallowed up by fear. In a letter written the night before her marriage, Katherine had said, "It is to save our hopes from total wreck that I make a sacrifice, which you at least will comprehend, for you have often told me all that you have suffered for Stephen's sake; and surely it is worth giving up a few years of my life to know that our ambition is attained, and our

aim accomplished, for I can make a will to-morrow leaving to whom I please the reversion of the money which will virtually then become mine, aunt. If Stephen will not see this, if he is bitter and misjudges me, entreat, plead for me, remembering that you have taught me that for those we love we can endure all things."

Yes, that was true; for what had not she, his mother, endured for his sake—a burden which had robbed her of peace, health, and all internal comfort; a sorrow repentance for which, in all save reparation, was complete?

Under the shelter of delicate health and over-strained nerves, Mrs. Prescott hid the storms of agonized fear and remorse which every now and then would sweep over her. Though quite innocent of the cause of these attacks, no one could soothe and manage her like her niece. Her son pitied her from his heart, but, not one whit understanding the reason of her, to his mind, causeless depression, he generally attempted to rouse her when she needed sympathy, and to sympathize with her when she only wanted to be assured and rallied. Until her support failed her, Mrs. Prescott never knew how entirely she had leaned upon Katherine. No one else understood her, no one else was a companion to her: and when mutual acquaintances would speak of her niece's altered appearance, how she avoided all society, looked pale and worn by the devoted attention she paid to her sick husband, whose side she seldom left, Mrs. Prescott's heart would ache for the girl's sufferings, and she would long to take her in her arms, and seek comfort for both in their mutual bond of sorrow. Well she knew that, though Katherine no longer wrote to her, her love was in no way diminished. Each birthday or recurrent period of home festivity, some simple gift would arrive, with no word or donor's name, but showing how fondly the heart of the absent one still clung to the old memories. These little tokens Mrs. Prescott hoarded and treasured, often wondering, as she fondly handled them, if the old hopes, now growing dim, would ever be realized; for nearly five years had passed away, and Mr. Labouchere still lived, kept alive, it was said, by the unwearied care of

his young wife. He had never dared to leave Italy, but moved from one invalid resort to another, according to the change of season and temperature.

Old Mrs. Dormer had not lived to see Katherine sole possessor of the fortune she had secured for her. When she died, she left her all she had to leave, so that not a few spoke of the wonderful catch Mrs. Labouchere would one day be, and rather hinted that Sir Stephen would not remain long abroad after he heard that she was a widow.

And at length the long-looked-for event came to pass, and Katherine, with her dead husband's body, returned rich and free to the country which, nearly six years before, she had left an affianced bride, poor in all save the love she had seemingly set small store upon.

"Forgive me, Stephen, if I have been weak," wrote Mrs. Prescott some two months after her niece's arrival; "but when I learned that Katherine was in London, sorrowful and lonely like myself, with health gone and spirits broken, I could not refuse her entreaties to see me."

Sir Stephen's answer was that, if seeing his cousin afforded his mother any pleasure, he should be sorry to think any misgivings on his account would prevent her from gratifying her desire. Further, he begged that she would entirely follow her own wishes, and if she desired to renew her old terms of intimacy with her niece, he should be the last to place any barrier between them.

Gradually, therefore, and by slow degrees, Mrs. Prescott and Katherine saw more and more of each other. At first Stephen's name was hardly mentioned; but as their conversations grew more lengthy and confidential, reserve was thrown aside, and they combined their energies to bring back the heart-broken lover as they both secretly pictured him. So in each letter Mrs. Prescott wrote to her son, increased mention was made of Katherine; and because, though he did not answer, he did not forbid these remarks, much hope was indulged in that all might yet go well.

Mrs. Labouchere's first year of widowhood was over, before Sir Stephen announced to his mother that he was on his way to England and home.

"I shall go to Scotland at once," Katherine said, as soon as their delight at the welcome intelligence had somewhat subsided. "It will be best for us not to meet until you find out how he feels towards me."

"I fear," said Mrs. Prescott, "that we must be prepared for coldness at first—and bitterness, too, Katherine. Stephen's love for you was of no common kind, and he has always been unreasonable about money. Oh! what a time that was!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, as if in thankfulness for its being over. "I often wonder that I am alive after all I have gone through:—you lost to us, Stephen mad, reckless, not caring what became of anything. Why, each time he has come back, I have to plead for keeping Pamphillon as if I was begging for a life."

"Forget it now, dear aunt; you *have* forgiven me?"

"Entirely;—a temptation of that kind is so terrible. But Stephen will never understand it. Men forget that love makes women weak and prone to act from impulse. In some things Stephen is very hard."

"Will he ever forgive me, aunt?"

"Oh! love changes a man's whole nature, and your slightest word had always more weight with Stephen than a volume spoken by any one else. Dear fellow, how I long to see him! It seems hard that you should go, Katey."

"But it is best, aunt, and I know you will do better for me than I could do for myself. I feel I cannot know any real happiness until Stephen is reconciled to me and we are friends again."

For thus the two, woman-like, fenced with the word, and though they each knew the other's meaning, no warmer name than friendship had ever been given to the tie sought to be renewed between the cousins.

From this time until her son's arrival Mrs. Prescott's whole mind was engrossed by the one object of effecting a reconciliation. Not a moment of the day but she was going through imaginary scenes in which she delicately, and seemingly unconsciously, led round to Katherine's name. This diplomatic opening well received, she proceeded to imagine what *she* should say, what *he* would say, the answers she

should make, the arguments she should use, until she had the crowning happiness to know that her point was gained, and Stephen and Katherine brought face to face.

Indeed, so much time did she spend in arranging and perfecting her plans, that she felt quite vexed when Stephen, on the evening of his arrival, during their after-dinner chat, said, in the most easy manner and unemotional tone of voice,

"And so you have seen a great deal of Katherine lately. How is she, and how is she looking?"

Was it possible? Had she heard aright? She could scarce stammer out her confused answers. The tables were indeed turned. It was she who was to have been calm, and he ill at ease and agitated, and when he went on to make further inquiries about her plans, her house, her fortune, Mrs. Prescott was entirely puzzled and completely perplexed.

"Perhaps you have no objection to meet her?" she asked timidly.

"I! not the least; I expected to find her in town, perhaps here."

"Certainly," reflected Mrs. Prescott, "Stephen is peculiar." And she decided that it was quite impossible to know how to deal with men, whom she began to think had very little sensitiveness in their natures.

"I only thought," she said, nettled by his coolness, "that after what has passed you might still feel unwilling to meet her."

"What, bear malice all my life," he said, stretching himself into a more comfortable position, "because once upon a time she preferred a rich old gentleman to a spoony boy? On the contrary I have lived to applaud her for such an uncommonly sensible decision, which has tended to enlarge my views considerably. In love those who are first cured are best cured."

"My dear boy, pray don't lay down those horrid maxims as any rule of life," said Mrs. Prescott, regarding her son with a troubled gaze, "I am sure they only tend to shake one's faith in everything and every person."

Sir Stephen laughed.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear mother," he said. "My doctrines are most sound, and my faith unshaken. All I want you to understand is this, that, as long as it affords you pleasure to receive your niece, it will give me no in easiness to meet her."

Mrs. Prescott kissed him as she thanked him, but she could not recover from her disappointment. Reflecting, after they had parted, on what he had said, she felt that her son had very much altered during these past six years. Each time he had returned to her she had noticed a change, but now all the slight alterations had seemingly culminated in producing a man who thoroughly differed from the ardent impassioned lover Katherine Douglas had ruled and slighted. From a natural love of home, and the constant companionship of the two in whom all his affections were centred, Sir Stephen had formerly seen but very little of the world, and so had retained a boyish freshness which his lady-love did not always appreciate. But these six years of absence and constant change now told in his altered bearing, and Mrs. Prescott saw but a fresh cause for fear lest Katherine should disapprove of the change, and her regard diminish in consequence. She betrayed, however, none of her anxiety in the letter which she at once dispatched to Mrs. Labouchere. After giving a minute account of his arrival, his looks, and what he had said and done, she went on,

"And suddenly he spoke of you, asking me how you were, if you were at home, and how you were looking?"

And with the triumphant smile which the reading of these words produced on her face, what wonder that Katherine Labouchere was satisfied with the answer her presence would give the man, who, she elected, should now own the beauty he had so often praised?

Yes, she had wonderfully recovered her good looks; her eyes were no longer surrounded by dark rims; her cheeks were fast regaining their roundness; and her fair pale complexion had once more the hue of health, which for a long time seemed gone forever. "Oh! that time!" the shadow of it passing across her memory caused a shudder to run

through her, and she turned away and sat down again to her letter, lingering over, and dwelling upon every sentence which related to Stephen and herself.

"Rich, handsome, and free," not a few mouths watered over the good gifts fortune had so liberally lavished upon Katherine Labouchere; and thought, that if any one in the world was to be envied, it was the woman thus happily situated. Katherine herself perfectly concurred that the position she held was most desirable, and yet she wondered, whether to obtain this heaven of worldly good, many, knowing all, would consent to pass through the purgatory by which she had attained it.

Influenced greatly by all she had heard from her aunt, it has Katherine's earliest dream of ambition to become the means of restoring the decayed splendor of Pamphillon. Many a long hour had she beguiled in weaving a tangle of schemes and plans by which this purpose was to be effected. Her aunt was to do this, Stephen was to become that, various people were to lead up to the end by various ways; but she was the showman who held the puppet wires; she piped, while they but danced to her music. Of course Stephen would marry her, about that she never entertained a doubt; and when the time came, and he told her of a love different from aught he had ever felt, called into-being and fresh born for her alone, she cheated herself and him into the belief that she shared the feeling, instead of regarding it primarily as an essential to the scheme she was resolved to carry out. Not but that Katherine had more love for Stephen than her self-imposed restraints permitted her to indulge in; but hers was a nature to undervalue all that she was thoroughly secure of, and, believing that Stephen's love could never be shaken, she became indifferent, and made her own plans and wishes the sole guide of her actions. Her marriage with Mr. Labouchere was mainly brought about by Mrs. Dormer's influence. It was throwing away the gifts of Providence, she said, for a portionless girl to give up a fortune which the man, who could not carry it to his grave, was imploring her to accept. Every one knew that Mr. Labouchere was suffering from a mortal complaint;

every doctor he had consulted agreed that nothing could keep him alive beyond a few years. He was not ignorant of all this himself, and indeed had freely spoken to Katherine on the subject.

And then the old temptress drew cunningly devised pictures to the girl of herself, possessed of a large fortune and able to marry whom she pleased. She constantly intimidated her by saying, that if she set so little value upon money, she would take care that hers should be left to some one with more sense; until, harassed by the dread of losing all, on the one hand, and, on the other, buoyed up by the idea that there was something grand in sacrificing herself for the man she loved, Katherine gave a sudden consent, and, when all was over, she began gradually to realize that, to a woman not unprincipled nor hardened enough to calmly wait for the end, which Mr. Labouchere's fits of illness seemed to constantly threaten, her true position was by no means an enviable one.

At each attack Katherine, knowing how greatly in her secret heart she desired the sufferer's death, was seized with misgivings, grew anxious and nervous, was tormented by conscience, until the very guilt of a murderer seemed to weigh her down. To still these reproaches she would devote herself to her husband by day and night; calling in every available aid, consulting each authority, carrying out the most minute suggestions, until those around her marvelled at an anxiety, which was so evidently unfeigned, as to leave no doubt that aught but love could call it forth.

In addition to her self-inflicted torments, she had to listen to Mr. Labouchere's praises, and accept his thanks and blessings, every word of which seemed to humiliate and stab her. And, when to the wonder of all about him, the invalid would begin to rally again, then Katherine's strength seemed to fail, her spirits began to droop, and hope would sicken and die out while contemplating visions as far out of reach as ever. It was a terrible life of struggle, although she hid the conflict from all who saw her. But when Mrs. Dormer, feeling death drawing near, called her to her bedside and said,

“Katherine, I have left everything to you. In spite of what I used to say to urge you to a marriage which I foresaw would turn out happily, I never meant that any but you should ever possess a farthing of my money—” her misery seemed greater than she could bear, and, hiding her face in her hands, she cried out that fate had dealt very hardly with her.

But why recall these clouds now, when all their darkness has passed and only the silver lining remains in the shape of wealth and hopes which make life again look rosy and smiling?

Mrs. Prescott's letter concluded by begging that her niece would not delay her return to London, and that immediately after her arrival she would come to her; and as this was the very thing Mrs. Labouchere longed to do, the next week saw her back again in town and driving towards her aunt's house.

CHAPTER VII.

"A SCHEME OF HIS."

Never had Mrs. Labouchere dressed herself with more care, surveyed herself more critically, nor found more reason to be satisfied with her personal appearance, than on the morning of her long wished-for visit. Her heavy mourning was particularly becoming to her fair face and slender figure. Excitement gave a pretty flush to her cheeks, and made her eyes brighter than usual. Her chief perplexity arose from her doubts as to the manner in which Stephen would meet her. She had already decided that she would take her tone from him. If he was distant and frigid, she would be silent and grave; if he seemed agitated and embarrassed, she felt certain she should break down, for her nerves seemed strung up to a high pitch.

Finding that Mrs. Prescott was in the morning room, she desired the man not to announce her, but, opening the door herself, she went up to her aunt, around whose neck she threw her arms, and clinging there for an instant, as if to gain courage, she raised her head, and timidly turned her eyes towards Sir Stephen, who, to her great mortification, came most composedly towards her, holding out his hand as he said,—

"How do you do, Katherine? Glad to see you looking so much better. Mother tells me you have not been well lately. What an age it is since we met!"

Mrs. Labouchere felt her face grow crimson. Do all she could, she found it impossible to steady her voice to answer as she wished. Her confusion, however, seemed quite lost upon Sir Stephen, who went on,—

"I have been half over the world since I saw you. I expect you find this climate rather trying after such a so-

journal in Italy. I felt myself shivering in the biting wind of yesterday."

And this was the meeting she had yearned for and looked forward to? Yes; and this, too, was the meeting that he had spent whole days and nights in picturing when, and where, and how it would take place. So devotedly had Stephen Prescott loved Katherine Douglass, so implicitly had he trusted her, so thoroughly had he believed in her, that for years he could not separate the ideal which had called forth his love, from the fair shape with which he had identified it. Now that his eyes were opened he saw that Katherine was no more that sweet creation, than is the player the mimic queen whose name for the hour she bears. Had her love been false to his, he could have made more excuse for her than for the cold calculating nature, which set love aside until death untied the money-bags, that had weighed down the scale against plighted troth and passionate devotion. When he read those passages in his mother's letters, speaking of the sacrifice which Katherine had made, and which devotion to him alone had prompted, he laughed bitterly; but when, as she grew bolder, Mrs. Prescott ventured to say, that Katherine could not disguise her anxiety to gain any atom of news about him, and that it was plain, to one who watched her narrowly, that her hope of happiness lay in the thought that some day he might forgive her, renew their shattered ties, and live over again those days of peace and joy, about which she never wearied of talking, Sir Stephen felt all his old feelings of hatred and bitterness come back. So, she was going to try and carry out her scheme, and he was to be lured back and cajoled into a marriage.

He could fancy himself portrayed by the hands of his mother, how she would picture him heartbroken, wandering in a distant land, banished by a grief he could not overcome, reckless, mad;—so he had been once, but not now. "My love is dead," he exclaimed joyfully, "dead for ever;" why then keep away? Ah, why indeed? he would go back at once; he would go home, meet Mrs. Labouchere, and by treating her with the unceremonious indifference relatives

often exercise towards each other, show her that not only was his love for her dead, but that even the memory of it was forgotten. And truly, if he sought revenge in the success of this plan, he secured it. Katherine felt humbled to the dust. Nothing could have so completely overthrown her. Had he refused to meet her, to speak to her, had he poured forth a torrent of reproach against her, she could have met it. But with this present manner how could she act, what fault could she find? She was not a woman to be easily cast down, but her heart sank at the blurred prospect before her.

Between this first meeting and the time when Sir Stephen paid the visit to Garston, which ultimately resulted in his going down to Mallett, nearly a year had elapsed. During this period Mrs. Labouchere had tried many plans, and laid innumerable snares, into which she hoped her cousin would fall. She had remained in town, gone away from town, stayed with his mother, absented herself from the house; had been distant, friendly, sad, lively, all in turns, and all to no purpose. Sir Stephen's manner was unaltered, and he remained indifferent and apparently unconscious.

A complete change seemed to have been effected in their characters. In place of devoted worshipping Stephen, and calm calculating Katherine, he now was perfectly self-possessed, while she found herself racked and tossed about at the mercy of the man who had formerly been her slave; watching for his presence, craving for his love, and guilty on his account of a thousand weaknesses which she lacked the sense or the strength to conceal.

Money was now valueless in her eyes when compared with Stephen's love; the past glory or present decay of Pamphillon quite forgotten in straining after the goal she was at present putting forth all her energies to gain; and while the object of her solicitude was enjoying the fresh breezes and briny odors of Mallett, Katherine stayed with her aunt, indulging herself by listening to Mrs. Prescott's assurance that, in spite of his altered manner, Stephen's love was unimpaired.

In his home letters Sir Stephen had not thought fit to enter into much detail about his visit to Mallett. He had merely told his mother, that having found it necessary to give his personal attention to several matters at Combe, he should be detained there longer than he had anticipated. He felt sure, he said, that she would be pleased with Mallett; and, as he should go there again in the summer he hoped that he should induce her to accompany him. The scenery was wild and picturesque, the people very primitive, and the air delicious and invigorating. A postscript added that he had accepted an invitation to stay while there with his neighbor, Captain Carthew, to whose house she would please to forward his letters.

"Stephen knows that I will not go to Combe unless you will go with me, Katherine," said Mrs. Prescott; "I wonder now if this is a scheme of his to get us all down to some quiet retired spot." Poor Mrs. Prescott was so anxious for the fulfilment of her heart's desire that she ran every event into that groove.

"I don't suppose Stephen would wish you to ask me, aunt, and if you did he would not care about my going."

"Now that is not fair of you, Katie; you seem to expect that Stephen is to suddenly ignore the past, which is utterly impossible. When a great love has been shaken it takes a long time before it can trust again. Do you think that if he did not like to see you he would be always telling me to ask you here?"

Mrs. Labouchere restrained herself from giving utterance to the wish that he would object to see her, avoid her, do anything but ignore her.

"I am sure," added Mrs. Prescott, "I hardly ever receive a letter from him without constant mention of you, and that does not look like indifference."

Katherine sighed.

"He must find it very dull at this place," she said; "he does not speak of having met any one there."

"Oh, no! there is no society of any kind; it is a most out-of-the-way place. Your uncle has been there in his boyhood, and he used to speak of it as being most wild and

un-get-at-able. The inhabitants in his day were a set of semi-barbarous smugglers and wreckers. Of course things are changed for the better there as elsewhere; but I fancy it is still very far behind the rest of the world."

"Combe is a small estate?" asked Katherine.

"Quite, in comparison to Pamphillon. I hope Stephen will not be induced to lay out a lot of money on the place. It would be very foolish, for he could never live there."

"Ah! how valueless is money when one cannot do the good with it one longs to!" said Katherine, sadly.

"I know what you mean, dear;" and Mrs. Prescott pressed her niece's hand tenderly; "but we must have patience. I fear Stephen's pride is a strong bar to his happiness; perhaps thrown, as he must be now, entirely upon himself, he may see things in a very different light. Poor fellow, I wonder how he gets through his evenings?"

Very merrily, she would have said, could she have seen the despondent swain standing up with the Captain and Hero, perfecting himself in the mysteries of a reel, which Alice played on the old-fashioned piano.

"A little faster, Alice," Hero would call out, her whole energies bent on her pupil's accomplishment of his task. "The other hand, Sir Stephen; come along, papa—don't stop."

"My wig and feathers, child; I must take breath. You youngsters forget the amount of ballast I carry." Notwithstanding which the old man danced away as merrily as his pretty daughter.

"Alice, look round; he does it capitally; isn't it all right? Now, you may sit down, Sir Stephen, and we'll release you. Alice dear, thank you; nobody plays the Fairy dance as you do. I'm longing for to-morrow evening; it will be such fun."

"Remember, you are to be my first partner," said Sir Stephen."

"I am not likely to forget that," returned Hero.

"Oh, I don't know; I daresay I shall have all the beaux of the place looking daggers at me for my presumption.

Miss Carthew is sure to be surrounded by admirers, is she not, Miss Joslyn?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Alice, "I'd advise you to secure her beforehand; for she is always engaged for every dance, and there is generally a contention about taking her home."

"Taking her home!"

"Yes," laughed Hero, "you know there is but one fly in all Mallet, so it is our fashion to walk home with our last partner, and"

"Now you have done for yourself," said Sir Stephen, "for I put in the first claim to the last dance. It is of no use your looking "No," at me; you will have to give up your pre-arranged *tête-à-tête* walk with—"

"Tell me his name," he whispered to Alice; but Alice shook her head, and Hero, with a pretty confusion, which betrayed itself in most becoming blushes, said, "I am sure I would rather go home with you than with any one who will be there to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

S O R R Y T O G O .

"THE doings up to Combe" were over. Both parties had given the greatest satisfaction, and in each cottage and house about Mallett the entire conversation ran on the events, which had taken place on the particular evening, when those who spoke were present. Nothing could exceed Sir Stephen's popularity. He had been so attentive to everybody that, as Miss Batt truly remarked, each for the time felt the favored one. Then it was so nice of him to take Mrs. Randal down to supper. Of course, the captain had told him about her father having been a K.C.B. and the governor at the Cape; for nobody knew better than the captain what was proper—you might always trust to him.

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Jamieson to her deaf sister Miss Kellow, "did you ever see such a magnificent supper?"

"Splendid, and all from Dockmouth too; it must have cost a pretty penny."

"That's what I like to see—the heart to do it, and the means to pay for it. How nice all the girls looked, to be sure! I don't believe there was one but Sir Stephen danced with. As I said to Captain White I'd be bound for it, he didn't often see prettier faces than he met here."

Among the second batch opinions were equally favorable. Sir Stephen had led off the Triumph with Mrs. Carne; joined in the reels, and made a most beautiful speech, the best part of which was, that he was coming again in the summer, and that then he should ask them all back again.

"Capen took good care nobody was passed over," said Hepzibah Bunce, who, uniting the trades of grocer and tobacconist, was generally sure to have several loungers in her little shop.

"I say," she continued, "didn't Miss Hero look a reg'lar booty, all in white with a red rose in her hair."

The heads were nodded in general assent.

"I reckon," said Ned Wallis, "her'd take the wind out the sails of some o' the taller-faced Londoners he sees. Coast-guardsmen was arsking o' me if he wasn't casting a eye that way."

"The very same struck me," said Hepzibah, "and a pretty pair they'd make too; folks do say, her's gived her company to that young Despard, but I for one hope 't isn't so."

"He's a likely young chap," said one of the younger men admiringly.

"Iss, but you mustn't take people by their looks, nor parsons by their books," and Hepzibah gave a knowing laugh, "else I s'pose he wouldn't stand in his own shoes."

"Why, what do'ee mean?" asked the same man, who, not being Mallett born, was but imperfectly up in the domestic history of its inhabitants.

"Mean!" said Hepzibah, "why, nothin' that I know by; only from first to last there's bin a goodish lot o' talk about who this young Despard is. I'm sure he carries his head as high as if he was the Emperor o'Rooshia's son; and so he may be for anything I can gainsay, or anybody else in Mallett, I take it."

"Sir Stephen's still up to Sharrows, I s'pose?" said Wallis.

"Well, the talk was he was goin' a Friday, but he ain't gone yet, for he was in to Joe's this morning."

"Well, I'm glad to see he ain't in no hurry to be off. I'll wager he don't find better quarters." In which opinion perhaps Sir Stephen shared, for the festivities had been over now for four days past, and yet he lingered at Mallett.

He had, however, positively decided upon leaving the next morning—a decision he was somewhat ruefully contemplating, as he stood waiting for Hero to join him in a farewell stroll to Combe Point.

"I feel quite sorry to go," he thought, "I've taken such a fancy to the place, and as to old Carthew, I seem to have known him all my life; I never felt so at home in any house. My mother must like them; that girl has such

pretty, unaffected ways, I'd defy any one to see her at home and not be charmed with her. What a nice wife she'll make! I don't see any one about this place for her to marry though;" and here, giving a rather lugubrious sigh, his meditations seemed to come to an end, and he stood making thrusts in the direction of a clump of old sea-pinks, too sturdy to be easily dislodged. Suddenly a sound above made him look up. It was Hero, running down the steep path with the surefootedness of a goat.

"Take care! take care!" he called out, his admiration of her agility curbed by fear lest she should slip.

"Take care of what?"

"Why, that you don't——" but with the bravado of high spirits and perfect confidence, before he could finish his sentence she had given another run, and with a final jump was at his side.

"You are not tired of waiting, I hope," she said; "papa kept us; Alice and he will be here in a moment, and I ran on in front to tell you."

"And to frighten me out of my life."

"Frighten you! How did I frighten you?"

"Why, by running down the rocks as you did. Suppose that you had fallen, what should I have done then?" Sir Stephen's looks and tone somehow conveyed a great deal more meaning than his words.

"Why, picked me up, of course," said Hero, laughing, and getting a little red, "unless," she added, trying to talk down her slight confusion, "I had tumbled on top of you, as I did before. Oh! dear me! I shall never forget our first meeting; shall you?"

"No, indeed;" and a quickening of his heart, as he looked at her, made him instinctively lower his voice, as he said, not quite knowing why he said it, "And will you promise that you will not forget me before I come again?"

"Forget you, Sir Stephen!" and Hero opened wide her eyes in astonishment, "you don't know what an event your coming has been to us all; we shall do nothing but talk of it until you come back again."

"Then you will think of me sometimes?"

How she wished that her father and Alice would make haste!

"To hear you," she answered, not looking up from the imaginary picture she was drawing with a bit of cast-up stick on the sand, "one would fancy that I had heaps of things to take my attention. Why, I shall think of you fifty times more than you will think of—Mallett."

"Say, of me," and he bent down towards her.

"Mallett and *me* mean the same."

"No, I am afraid not; Mallett is mine already, you know, but——"

"Dear me, what a time they are in coming!" exclaimed Hero, suddenly springing up on the nearest stone; "I think I hear them," she continued hurriedly. "Papa! Alice! come," she called, as Captain Carthew and Alice appeared leisurely strolling down together. "It will be nightfall before we get to the Point."

"I wonder what on earth made her do that," thought Sir Stephen. "By Jove, I believe my head was gone. What odd beings women are! I wonder if she had any idea what I was going to say."

Hero gave him no further chance for a *tête-à-tête*. She so managed it, that they all four walked side by side until they reached the Point, where Sir Stephen proposed they should scramble up to the old bullace tree.

"Yes, do," said the Captain. "I'll stop below, and give the signal of recall; but remember there's no keeping the tide waiting."

"Come, Miss Carthew," said Sir Stephen, as he jumped upon the flat slippery rocks.

"Come along, Alice," said Hero, following him; but Alice shook her head, "No, I am going to stay with the Captain," she answered, "I am too tired to mount that hill."

"We shall only be a few minutes gone," said Sir Stephen, with a great increase of cheerfulness. "Now, you must let me help you, Miss Carthew. Give me your hand." But Hero did not stir.

"Nonsense, Alice," she said, "you are not so tired as all that. Come along, I shall not go unless you go," and she made as if she would step down to the beach again.

"Hero! Miss Carthew," Sir Stephen whispered, "remember it is my last evening. Why cannot you come with me?" She did not answer. "Alice," she repeated, with a look which made Alice very reluctantly prepare to accompany them.

Sir Stephen of course could say nothing, but he felt unreasonably angry. Until Alice proposed staying behind, the idea of going alone with Hero had not presented itself; but directly it did, and was frustrated, it seemed to him the thing he most desired and cared for. It was in vain he tried to conceal his vexation; a cloud seemed to have settled upon them, and it was not long before they rejoined the Captain. During the walk back Sir Stephen remained unusually silent. He had never felt a more irresistible desire to quarrel with any one than he did with Hero, in whose direction he never once looked, although she cast several furtive glances towards him. "I almost wish I had gone," she thought. "If he only knew about Leo, I would not mind; but we won't keep it secret any longer. I would rather now that every one knew. I can see that he is vexed with me." By the time they reached the house, even the Captain began to feel the chill which had fallen upon them. "It's turned quite cold," he said; "I hope Betsey has had an eye to the fire while we have been gone."

Hero ran out to the wood-basket, and returned with a couple of fir cones, which she threw on the fire; then turning round she found Sir Stephen close by her—the others were not in the room.

"It will soon blaze up," she stammered, all her self-consciousness returning; "I'll go and take off my hat, I think;" but Sir Stephen did not move, he only stood looking at her reproachfully. "Let me pass," she said, with a little nervous laugh. "No, I won't let you pass," and he laid his hand detainingly upon her arm, "you shall stay here now, and"—but the Captain was already in the room, exclaiming, "Hulloa! why we're all one color here! Come, Hero, let's have a light on the subject." But Hero had flown, and Sir Stephen began stirring the fire so vigorously that the Captain said, "What, are you cold too? I thought there was a change, somehow."

CHAPTER IX.

LEO DESPARD.

"I CANNOT bear saying Good-bye," said Hero.

"I am so sorry he is gone," said Alice, as the carriage, which was to convey Sir Stephen to the station, finally turned into Ferry-bridge Lane, and was hidden by Parson's Hill. Captain Carthew had gone to Dockmouth with his friend, so the two girls returned alone to the house, by the gate of which, mounted on the hedge, they found Betsey, whose regard Sir Stephen had completely gained.

"Well, you've seed the last of 'im," she said discontentedly. "I run up here to catch sight of 'em rounding Ferry-bridge, but you might so well look for a needle in a bundle o' hay, as hope to see anything for they Norris's clothes; they'm always washin' when any sight's going on."

"Ain't you sorry he's gone, Betsey?" asked Alice.

"Well, I be; and that's the truth," said Betsey, descending from her post of interrupted observation; "for he's one whose face I'd rather see than his back any day, though I can't say so much for that Jackanapes he brought to tend on 'm," meaning his man, whose contempt of Mallett and its inhabitants had given considerable offence. "Mrs. Tucker'll shake off the dust as comes from his feet with a light heart, any how," continued Betsey; "poor miserable toad, with his brass and his brag, as if anybody couldn't see the lies runnin' out of 'm like ile."

"Come, Betsey," said Hero, "I didn't notice so very much amiss with him."

"I dessay not; he was mealy-mouthed enuf' before his betters, but his stomachky ways in the kitchen was past bidin.' I only wish I could ha' got'n to chapel with me; wouldn't he ha' had a slap in the face from Mr. Pethewick

to the text of 'All flesh is grass.' He did just speak his mind to a few who needed it, and no mistake; but la! no, my lord must go to church like the gentry. 'I don't hold with chapels and meetin's,' he says. 'No,' says I, 'they tell 'ee the truth there, and that don't suit your complaint, maister.' However, that don't go for nothin' agen Sir Stephen, for he ain't his man, and his man ain't he, or else I shouldn't hope and trust, as I do, that he'll come and live here altogether. This mornin', when he come to wish me Good-bye, he says, 'Betsey,' says he, 'what w'd you say if I was to come to Combe to live?' 'Say! sir,' I says, 'why that you'd cut yer wisdom teeth at last; for I'm sure nobody, unless they was mazed, would live up to London, I reckon.'

"Why not?" asked Alice.

"Why not?" said Betsey, "well, you just hear what Sarah Jane Mudge says of it; why, there ain't a bit o' butter that's fit to eat; and as for the milk, 'tis chalk and mess made up together; they don't know the meanin' o' wholesome victuals. Why, when Sarah Jane asked for a tough cake, the baker busted out laughin', and told her she was welcome to take her choice from they in the window; as for pilchards and hakes, they'd never heerd tell of 'em. Londoners indeed! I shan't ever think much o' they after what Sarah Jane's told, and this poor ha'porth o' cheese we've seed. That minds me I'll pot down a hundred or so o' pilchards and some butter, and get maister to send it to Sir Stephen; I'll wager he'll be half starved when he gets back."

"I wish he *would* come and live here altogether," said Alice, as soon as Betsey had left them. "Do you like him, Hero?" she asked.

"Yes, very much. Why do you want to know?"

"Because I am sure he likes you very much indeed. Hero, I believe he has fallen in love with you."

"Alice! you always think that of everybody. Sir Stephen is not likely to give me a thought, and if he did, it would be of no use, *you* know that."

"Then you have quite made up your mind to accept Leo?" said Alice sadly.

"Quite made up my mind!" repeated Hero. "Why,

Alice, you surely have forgotten him. I never have seen any one with whom I could compare Leo."

"I know he is very handsome and nice," said Alice, with a sigh; "but oh, Hero! he is not half as nice as you are; everybody says so."

"Then I am very angry with everybody, and, as for you, if you were not so weak, you horrid little thing, I'd shake you until I made you confess that the very handsomest, sweetest, most loveable man you ever saw is Leopold Despard, and when I am his wife, I shall think myself the most fortunate woman in the whole world."

Alice laughed.

"Very well," she said; "but I shall still continue to say, I wish you would marry Sir Stephen. I have thought about it since first I saw you together."

"Don't say so any more," said Hero, gravely. "Of course I know the whole thing exists only in your imagination; but if it did not, and he asked me twenty times, I should say No. Why, Alice, I love Leo with all my heart. There, I declare you have made me blush;" and she put up her hands to cover her face. Withdrawing them the next moment, she added, "Not that I am one bit ashamed if all the world heard me, for I am proud of my love and that he has given his love to me."

And had he given her his love? Yes; for as much as was in him to love any one. Leo Despard loved Hero Carthew. He could not change his nature, which was to care more for himself than for anybody else, but second to the worship of self, came his feeling for Hero. Perhaps combined with this was no small amount of vanity, for he knew himself envied by all the young fellows at Mallett as the fortunate suitor, who, in spite of their constant opportunities, had made the most of a short visit, and secured the prize they were all coveting. In his inward reveries Leo could not but regard Hero as a singularly fortunate being. "for," he would say, "I've had capital opportunities, if I'd chosen to go in for rank or money, and it isn't every man would be constant to a girl without a stiver, as I do. Oh, dear! I wish she had a fortune, or I had, or somebody con-

nected with us had, for she's awfully pretty, and very good style too when I take the country rust off her."

Poor Leo! he was always sighing after money, and envying the fortunate possessors of that, to him, all-powerful talisman. Naturally of a weak character, with strong faults, his home training had been most injudicious. Every one yielded to his wishes, pampered his vanity, and glossed over his imperfections. The world, he found, was not inclined to be so indulgent, therefore, having made up his mind to be a favorite, he set to work to accomplish his desire, and so happily did he succeed, that in a short time he was voted by his brother officers a first-rate fellow, and a capital companion. He spoke of himself as being the nephew and adopted son of the late rector of Mallett; and told the Colonel's wife (who made it her business to find out everything concerning each fresh comer to the regiment) that his father and mother had both died while he was a very young child, and that he knew little or nothing about them, as his uncle, wishing to be regarded with parental affection, was always extremely reticent on the subject.

"So very strange," said his sharp questioner, "for, happening to mention you to some friends of mine, they said they used to know Mr. Despard years ago, but they never heard he had a brother, though they knew of a sister."

"Really!" said Leo, with assumed indifference. "Ah! I expect my poor father was not regarded as much credit to his family. I suppose they looked upon a man, who could in a few years run through a large fortune, as something second only to a criminal."

"Indeed! your mother's money, I presume?"

"Oh, yes; the Despards have not been burdened in that way for years," laughed Leo; "the name is about all we have to boast of; that's pretty good, I believe—at least my poor uncle used to tell me about our past glories—our coming over with the Conqueror, and so on; it pleased him, dear old man, though to me it is but sorry satisfaction to be descended from a line, who have left nothing behind them but the boast of Quixotic deeds, by which they contrived to ruin their family."

Then, having already discovered the lady's weakness, he adroitly turned the conversation to the peerage generally; and, plying her with questions relating to her intimates of exalted rank, he escaped further questioning, and was from that moment regarded by Mrs. Fitzgerald as a very gentlemanly young man. She gave out (embellishing his story with native talent) that he was the son of a man of good family, who married an heiress, ran through her money, and killed himself and her in a few years; that his uncle, old Walter Despard, an excellent man, but very eccentric, had brought him up and adopted him, and of course at his death had left him everything that he possessed.

Nothing could have been more fortunate for Leo than this excellent woman's appropriation of every kind of knowledge. She always spoke of persons by their Christian names, and with an air of such intimate acquaintanceship that even those who knew her peculiarities best were never sure how much they ought to believe and what they should give no credit to. There being nothing improbable in this narration it was allowed to pass, and now was so thoroughly believed in that even Leo himself accepted it, and answered any questions or allusions without the slightest qualm of conscience for propagating a story which he took immense credit for not inventing.

Among the people who for many years were most interested about his origin the one least concerned was Leo. As a child he had asked time and again about his dead father and mother, and was satisfied with a simple reply to his question. Later on he grew more inquisitive; but it was not until just before he obtained his commission that the old rector felt obliged to tell him something of the truth, but even then, shrinking from inflicting a wound on the pride of the handsome boy, whom he loved with weak tenderness, he kept back whatever he could, and all Leo learned in this and future conversations was that he had no right to the name of Despard, nor any legitimate claim on any other name; that his mother's origin was humble; that she had in some way attracted the notice of his father, who had been an early friend and college chum of Mr. Despard's.

His father's name was Bernard; he had been of no profession, and had lived on bad terms with his family, who allowed him an income for his support. For some years before and after Leo's birth Mr. Despard had lost sight of his friend, except that he knew he was living in Wales, and that Leo's mother passed as his wife. Suddenly something happened which caused Mr. Bernard to break this tie, and he came to Mr. Despard, who, with Aunt Lydia, was living in London, and asked him to take charge of the child, whose mother had deserted it. To this he consented, and soon became so attached to him that parting was never spoken of; the father had an aversion to see his son, and no inducement on Mr. Despard's part could overcome this prejudice. He kept away from the house, and, except on rare occasions and by letters, they held no communication. When Leo was about nine years old his father wrote, saying that he had just received intelligence of the mother's death, and that now he intended seeing the boy, and taking an interest in him. He appointed a day to pay them a visit; but before that day arrived Mr. Despard was informed of his death, which was sudden, and the result of excitement consequent on the failure of a speculation which had ruined him.

As there was no one to claim him, Mr. Despard gladly adopted the orphan boy who, he said, had been the solace and comfort of his life. Naturally Leo asked many more questions, but this was the sum total of the knowledge he obtained, and with his usual discrimination he saw that the less he knew the less he had to hide. As, therefore, there was nothing to be gained by being placed *au courant* with his history, his wisest course was to accept the present and ignore the past. Few men were more popular than Leo. He seemed to make fresh friends wherever the regiment happened to be, and these, too, were invariably the best people in the best set.

What wonder then that Mallett seemed dull to him, and its inhabitants, excepting Hero, insupportably uninteresting. Besides, he knew that much of his history was known there, and this caused him to dislike the place. He felt

that his attachment to Hero was the great weakness of his life, still he cared for her more than for any other girl he had ever seen; and he had made up his mind that as soon as he conveniently could he would marry her, and, to use his own expression, cut Mallett altogether. "If her old father and Aunt Lydia would only drop off the hooks," he would say, "I could clear myself of these abominable duns. But there's no such luck. In a place like that they live as long as they like. I wonder how I shall get through the time there!"—for, in consequence of a letter which he had received from Hero, he had applied to get the charge of some forts that were to be built close to Combe; and if he obtained the appointment he would most probably spend three or four months there, a longer time than he and Hero had yet been together.

CHAPTER X.

"THAT EXTREME SIMPLICITY."

Sir Stephen found Mrs. Labouchere still staying with his mother, unable to resist the pleasure of meeting him, although her judgment told her that it would be wiser for them to see less of each other.

She gave some slight excuse for having delayed her intended departure, adding; "I have been trying to persuade aunt to go down to Cumberland with me; I think it might give her strength, for she has not seemed at all well lately. Indeed, that is one reason why I have remained here; I hardly liked leaving her alone."

"Thank you very much," said Sir Stephen. "I always feel she is perfectly safe when you are with her; I do not know what she would do without you now."

"I do not know what I should do without her," replied Katherine, without looking up; "she is the same to me that she ever was. Most other things have so completely changed."

"Yes, that's true," said Sir Stephen complacently; "it's wonderful how things alter."

"And people too, I think."

"Well, I suppose they do; as they get older they get wiser and——"

"Colder."

"No, I do not know that that is always the case; less demonstrative, perhaps; but I should be sorry to think I had less power of feeling now than I possessed years ago."

"You have attained the power of keeping it remarkably under control," and Katherine, whose voice shook with suppressed emotion, and whose pale face had turned crimson, got up quickly and went out of the room.

"What the deuce does she mean now?" exclaimed Sir Stephen, as soon as the door had closed upon her; "I have never been favored with anything of this kind before;" and he sat reflecting for some minutes. Then, resuming his newspaper with a relieved air, he decided that it meant nothing but a desire that he should be rather more cousinly, and take a greater interest in her property, about which she had often endeavored to get his advice and guidance.

Katherine had a great deal more pride than to affect the rôle of a love-sick girl. She had scrupulously endeavored that Sir Stephen should see none of her plans, and as, after the first meeting, there had been nothing in her manner towards him which could excite his suspicions, he had come to the conclusion that she was willing to accept matters as they stood. Her annoyance at having, as she conceived, betrayed her feelings, was excessive; and, exaggerating her words and manner to herself, she felt overwhelmed with shame at the thought of meeting him again. He had, however, dismissed the matter from his mind, and was already intent on giving his mother a favorable impression of Mallett.

"I am longing for you to go down there, mother," he said; "I can fancy the sensation your caps and bonnets will produce."

Mrs. Prescott smiled pleasantly. "Poor ladies," she said, "I am sure I should be delighted to gratify them; I had no idea the people were sufficiently cultivated to care about such a thing as fashion."

"Nonsense, mother; why, you forget that they are but six miles from Dockmouth, one of our largest naval ports."

"I thought you told me that you had a drive of twenty miles."

"So I did, but that was because I knew nothing of the boat, and drove there."

"Boat! oh! is there a steamboat?"

"No, a sailing boat; a steamer would never do there. You have no idea of the wildness of the place; magnificent rocks running out in all directions, and a surf that beats against and dashes over them with tremendous force."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Prescott, not entering at all into her son's enthusiasm; "but of course one never need go by water?"

"No, but I'll take odds you will not have been there a week before you will thoroughly enjoy a sail."

"Stephen!"

"You will, I assure you, mother; not at first, I know, for I hesitated at taking Miss Carthew, it looked so rough; but she assured me that it would be all right outside, and it was—like glass."

"Really!" said Mrs. Prescott. "*Miss Carthew*, did you say?"

"Yes, Captain Carthew lost his wife when his daughter was born."

"Indeed! Rather an elderly Miss, I suppose?"

"No, a very young girl."

"You have not mentioned her before," said Mrs. Prescott after a pause, during which she had been eyeing her son sharply. Only unconcern, however, was to be seen in his face.

"Did I not? I was very much engrossed while I was there; the place is in a sad condition. It will take far more time than I can give to it in one summer to get it into anything like decent condition."

"I hope you are not thinking of spending a lot of money on it, Stephen," said Mrs. Prescott dolefully; "it brings you in next to nothing, and you will never find a tenant for it."

"Perhaps some day I may go and live there myself," Sir Stephen answered, with a laugh. "It is getting high time for me to settle down and marry, if I am ever to do so." Mrs. Prescott's manner brightened. Here was a little opening for the introduction of her favorite scheme, which of late she had thought best to keep in abeyance.

"Nonsense, my dear," she said cheerfully. "I hope when you marry, you will contrive to fix upon some one who will bring grist enough to the mill to set Pamphillon going again. It has been, and ever will be, the dream of my life to see you there, Stephen. You have been cruelly dispossessed of your

inheritance, but there is no doubt but your uncle was mad, quite mad, and had been so for many years."

Sir Stephen shook his head.

"Whether he was mad or sane, I don't know; but *this* I know, that I wish he had contrived that any one but me should have been saddled with his ruined estate. It has fettered my whole life, and kept me poor, and made me discontented."

Mrs. Prescott's thin, careworn face twitched, her mouth worked nervously, and her eyes filled with tears.

"You take a painfully exaggerated view of things, Stephen," she said, in a voice that threatened an outburst of tears, to avoid which her son got up, and, taking her hand, said, soothingly,

"Now, mother, don't misinterpret my words. You always take anything I say about this as a reproach to yourself, which is so very absurd. *You* could not prevent my uncle gambling away his inheritance; *you* had nothing to do with the law that made me heir to a beggared baronetcy. God knows! you did your duty, if ever any woman did, and you will have your reward, mother; I shall never be able to repay you all you have suffered and borne for me. There, there," he added, kissing her affectionately, "don't think anything more of it, or you'll be getting one of your bad attacks. I only wish we could settle, and have done with the whole thing. I never shall understand your unaccountable opposition to selling the place. It is the only sensible course left to us."

Mrs. Prescott's whole aspect underwent a sudden change. Her weakness vanished, her face altered, as she said, in a passionate voice,

"I will never give my consent to your selling Pamphillon. I would bear anything rather than see you part with the estate."

"The old cry," said Sir Stephen, in a vexed tone. "Now, mother, I ask you, or any one, what possible reason is there in what you say?"

"Every reason," replied Mrs. Prescott; "and any person with a grain of feeling would admit, that the idea of a man

selling a place which has belonged for hundreds of years to his family, and keeping another in a wild, out-of-the-way unheard-of district, is most unnatural and unaccountable."

Sir Stephen tried to control himself by changing his chair and his position.

"As usual in these discussions, you are putting the matter in quite a wrong light, mother. My feelings have nothing to do with a thing about which I have not the slightest choice. If I had a sufficient income to keep up both estates, I should do so; or if by selling Combe I could keep Pamphilon, I should only be too willing to do it. I can tell you that it will be no light matter to see the old place go from me. But how do I stand? The owner of two estates for which I can do nothing—the houses upon them are tumbling down for want of proper repairs, the people are sickly from bad drainage, and brutalised from the way in which they are compelled to herd together."

"I am sure you do all you can for them," said Mrs. Prescott stolidly; "we live in the quietest manner possible; you are constantly straitened, and in want of money, through building for this one, and repairing for that one, and what on earth more can they expect?"

"Why, this, that if I cannot afford to do what as holder of the land it is my duty to do, I should give up my authority to a man who *could* live among them, could raise them by his influence, and exercise beneficially the only right by which he should hold mastery—the power to advance the well-being of the fellow-creatures dependent upon us."

"Oh, dear, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Prescott; "these new-fashioned sentiments are quite beyond me. In my day it was enough that a place belonged to a family, and that they did their best for those who lived upon the land. No quixotic notions then existed about giving up an inheritance because you couldn't afford to build model cottages upon it, and introduce a heap of new inventions, which, though they may be called improvements, tend to nothing so much as making people discontented with their condition of life."

"It is quite useless to attempt to reason with you, my dear mother," said Sir Stephen, hopelessly; "but, if you

would try and remember that the world does not stand still, and that its progress is not entirely confined to one class of society, you will find that all people in the present day are forming a pretty correct notion of what should exist, and what may not be tolerated. Don't think," he added, "that what I contemplate doing is a pleasant task to me. I shrink from putting my plan into practice, but how am I to avoid making the sacrifice?"

"If you are bent upon sacrifice, there are more ways than one of making yourself a martyr."

"Perhaps so," said her son in a desponding tone; "but I see no other way of obtaining a sufficient income for my purpose."

"There is marriage," and this time Mrs. Prescott felt her voice quiver. "Were I you, rather than part with Pamphilon, I should take a wife with a fortune ample enough to enable me to carry out these plans, which you seem to consider an essential part of a landlord's duty."

"Ah! it is rather difficult to meet such wives nowadays."

Mrs. Prescott's face assumed an expression between a sneer and a smile.

"So I should fancy," she said, "by the way in which a woman known to have money is run after. It is positively offensive to see the way in which some men pursue Katherine, and without ever having received from her a word, or a look of encouragement."

"Indeed! I forgot that she was in the matrimonial market."

"Then you are more obtuse than your friends, my dear;" and Mrs. Prescott, nettled by the tone of his remark, drew herself up as she added, "I can assure you that if Katherine felt so disposed, she might wear a coronet."

"And why is she not so disposed? Does grief for the late Mr. Labouchere preclude even that consolation? What a striking illustration of conjugal fidelity!"

"You adopt anything but a nice tone in speaking of Katherine," said Mrs. Prescott, assuming her most injured air. "You seem to forget, Stephen, that she is my niece."

"I beg your pardon, mother. I never think of her as anything else."

"We all know," added Mrs. Prescott, "that she was guilty of great apparent inconsistency, and, no doubt, she committed a very grave mistake—but, gracious me, is Katherine the only one who has fallen into error? Are we not all open to temptation? and, if contrition and sorrow cannot induce forgiveness, I fear it is but empty mockery, Stephen, to ask that our trespasses may be forgiven as we forgive those who trespass against us."

"I really don't see the application, mother, and we have wandered entirely away from the original discussion. Your niece, Mrs. Labouchere, can have nothing to do with my keeping or parting with Pamphillon, and still less with my marrying, or being given in marriage."

Mrs. Prescott did not answer. She was thinking over what her son had said. Had he really made up his mind to set about this business? or could she avoid the trouble, as she had done before?

"Stephen," she said earnestly, "will you give me a promise?"

"Certainly, if it is in my power to keep it, and is within reason."

"Will you promise me not to take any steps in this plan of getting rid of Pamphillon, until you have been to Combe again, and seen, by the experience of living there for a time, whether it would be possible for you to live there all your life?"

Sir Stephen seemed to hesitate.

"I will promise to go down with you," continued his mother.

"In that case, decidedly, I say, yes."

"And I have your promise that you will not speak a word about selling to Simpson or to your agent?"

"Yes, I give you my word to remain perfectly passive until we have been to Mallett."

"Thank you."

And, with a feeling of respite, Mrs. Prescott left her son,

went to her own room, locked the door, and sitting down, drew a sigh of relief.

"What shall I do?" she murmured after a few minutes of silent meditation. "Am I never to know rest? Ah! if my life could be written, what a warning it would be to those who are prone to give way to impulse! It seems to me now, as if in five minutes I destroyed my entire peace of mind. Not that I did it for my own sake, nor to secure anything for myself. God knows that I should have been contented. But I could not see my fatherless boy defrauded, robbed by a man who acknowledged that he was mad. Ah! truly he has much to answer for! What right had he to remain silent about the state of his affairs? He must have known that he left nothing for his successor but beggary. If I had but known *that*, only known it, oh, how different my life would have been!"

"Who is that knocking?" she asked nervously, hearing some one tapping at the door.

"It is only I, aunt. Never mind if you are engaged, I will go down-stairs."

"No, dear, wait a moment—come in. I was wishing to speak to you."

Mrs. Labouchere looked at her aunt for a moment; then, putting her hand on her shoulder, she said,—

"You have been crying, aunt. Nothing has happened to trouble you?"

"Only the old trouble, Katey;" and her tears began to fall afresh. "Stephen has been talking about Pamphillon. He says, that unless he gets an addition to his income, he must and will sell it."

Katherine sat down, clasped her hands, and looked the very picture of despondency.

"I have feared for a long time past," she said in a low tone, "that things would never be altered."

But Mrs. Prescott had a forlorn hope in view, and it would never do for Katherine to give in. Away from society, thrown upon the constant companionship of his beautiful cousin, much might still be accomplished; and Mrs.

Prescott determined that no stone should be left unturned, while they were at Combe, to bring these two together.

"Katherine," she said, "although Stephen is my son, I cannot be blind to his faults, nor shut my eyes to his overweening pride. I fully believe that he would rather die than let you imagine that he cared one pin's point for you."

"I do not believe that he does," said Katherine, the memory of the morning's conversation still strong within her.

"My dear," replied Mrs. Prescott, "Stephen is far less careful to hide his feelings from me now, than he was at first. He knows the many admirers you have, that it rests with you whether you will be Lady Fareham; he asked me why you did not marry again. Indeed, I am perfectly convinced that it is nothing but your fortune that keeps him silent; if you had returned to us poor and penniless, Katherine, Stephen would long since have been at your feet."

"Oh, aunt!" exclaimed Katherine suddenly. "How bent he is upon misunderstanding me! He little thinks what I would give to be poor dependent Katherine Douglas again."

Mrs. Prescott looked at her niece, and she could not help that look being one of admiration.

"What a strange thing life is!" she said gravely; "almost every one we meet envies you, Katherine. Only a few days since, when Mrs. Constable was telling me of their loss, she said that you were the one person who, it seemed to her, could have nothing left to wish for."

Katherine gave an impatient movement.

"That is what is being dinned into my ears from morning until night, as if wealth was the talisman of happiness. I am ready to admit," she added bitterly, "that its possession has made me wonderfully witty and charming in the eyes of many, who used to be blind to the attractions I believe I did once possess."

"My dear child, you are quite as attractive as you ever were. I often think that I never saw you looking better than you do now. It was only yesterday, when you and Flora Hardwick were standing together, that I was com-

paring you critically, and you are as young and fresh-looking as she is."

Mrs. Labouchere put her arms round her aunt's neck, and kissing her, as in the old days she had seldom done, she said,

"What should I do without you?"

This new feeling of love, combined with the experience of her married life, had greatly softened Katherine's nature; for, as in the case of many another woman, sorrow sat better on her than prosperity. Careless observers would have said that she was far more vain now, than, when confident in her beauty, she seemed to lay little store by it. The truth was, her opinion of herself was not quite so high as formerly; now she was filled with anxious dread lest her beauty was on the wane; she set down the compliments paid to her as so much homage to her money; she envied women to whom Sir Stephen was paying any particular attention, or whom he said he admired. Fears which were groundless; for Sir Stephen seldom met her without acknowledging what a beautiful face she had—very superior, he was obliged to own, in feature and contour to Hero's. The one face seemed to appeal entirely to the eye, the other went straight to the heart. Few people with love in their composition could resist the charm of Hero's winning sweetness. She inspired you with the desire to caress her—to take her soft-rounded cheeks between your hands, and look into eyes that were by unexpected turns tender and mischievous. Since his visit to Mallett, Sir Stephen had often, when looking at Katherine, conjured up a vision of Hero to place by her side; and he congratulated himself that even in absence Hero's witchery carried off the palm; and then he would smile at the odd way in which things had come about. To think that he should have been a wanderer all these years, without seeing any one to awaken the slightest feeling of love within him; and then that, down in this out-of-the-way place, whither he had gone from a sense of duty sorely at variance with inclination, he should meet this "gem of purest ray serene," who in a week had turned his head, and taken possession of his heart. Once

again at Mallett, he determined to have no delay about this wooing, the success of which he felt pretty confident of. The principal person he had to consider was his mother. He wanted the two to care for each other, "and," thought he, "as that dear old mother of mine will need a little management,—perhaps as the time is drawing near for our visit,—it may be as well to say something that will prepare her to take an interest in Hero."

Therefore, soon after, as they sat together one morning at breakfast, he said,

"I think I told you, mother, what a pretty girl Miss Carthew, with whose father I stayed at Mallett, is. I hope you will like her; they were excessively kind and hospitable to me."

Generally Mrs. Prescott had none of those fancies which torment some mothers, whenever their sons speak in praise or admiration of the girls they meet, but anxiety on Katherine's account rendered her painfully watchful. Since their conversation regarding his selling Pamphillon, she had never seen Sir Stephen bestow more attention, than she considered politeness demanded, without being filled with fears, lest her darling plan should be put an end to.

"How old is she?" she asked.

"I hardly quite know—something, I should say, between eighteen and twenty."

"I cannot fancy how I could have been so misled about her," said Mrs. Prescott, taking an instinctive dislike to this rustic beauty. "At first I understood that she was a middle-aged person, then when you spoke of her it was as of a mere child."

"Well," and Sir Stephen, feeling a little guilty, tried to laugh over the false impression he had given. "And really so she is a child, compared with many girls, though I dare say I should offend her dignity very much were I to tell her so."

"Some of these childish young ladies are exceedingly sharp in making good use of their simplicity," said Mrs. Prescott, pursing up her mouth. "I must confess that I am growing rather afraid of that extreme simplicity."

"Come, come, mother, now that is not yourself speaking. Nobody admires a fresh young girl more than you do. Why, I always say I inherit my taste for unaffectedness from my old-young mother."

Mrs. Prescott's eyes beamed with pleasurable emotion.

"Well," she said, "I am glad to think you do. Certainly I greatly enjoy the sight of a pretty young girl; but the world terribly spoils one's heart, Stephen; we meet so many counterfeits, that at last we fail to recognize what is real and true."

"I don't think that Miss Carthew will disappoint you; at least I hope not; for I have set my heart upon you two being great friends."

"Indeed! have you?" and all Mrs. Prescott's fears coming back, she added with a nervous little laugh,—

"And why, I wonder?"

When, from a sense that he owed it to his mother to say something to her on the matter, Sir Stephen commenced this conversation, he had no idea how diffident and awkward he should find it, to give any hint of the feelings he entertained towards Hero. He began to wish he had said nothing about her. He saw that would have been his wisest course. The only one now left was to say as little as possible; so he answered Mrs. Prescott's question with,—

"Oh! for no particular reason, only that I like her, and we have always contrived somehow to take a fancy to the same people."

"That is true." And Mrs. Prescott gave a sigh, which caused her son to look inquiringly at her. "Don't be vexed with me," she said, putting her hand on his; "but where I once set my heart, there it is forever. Ah, Stephen, you little know how I centred my hopes upon you and Katherine, nor what it costs me to see you so parted and so widely severed."

Sir Stephen drew his hand away.

"It is very strange," he said, "that every now and then you *will* enter upon this subject. You must see how distasteful it is to me. Surely, you do not want me to tell you that I once gave Katherine all my love, which she killed so

completely and effectually that, if I desired it, I could no more revive the feeling than I could bring to life a dead body. For years she robbed me of the power of feeling or bestowing love, she took from me every hope of happiness, she made me a wretched, purposeless wanderer; and yet you wonder to see us separated; you say it grieves you to see me utterly indifferent to her—mother!" And he got up, and walked out of the room, leaving Mrs. Prescott overwhelmed by this unusual display of passion. She sat for some time, looking hopelessly at the door by which her son had gone out, then, roused by a noise outside, she arose, saying,—

"God help me to endure it to the end; it cannot be long if I have much more to bear."

CHAPTER XI.

A MISUNDERSTANDING.

Early in July Leo Despard arrived in Mallett and took up his abode with Aunt Lydia, whose joy at having him with her was only equalled by Hero's light-hearted happiness. What a summer this promised to be for her!—Leo near, and the prospect of Sir Stephen and Mrs. Prescott's visit to Combe.

"I am so glad you are going to be here, Leo," she said.

"And I am so glad that you told me at once about these forts. I set about getting the appointment that very day."

Hero's face glowed with happiness.

"How good of you! I hope you will not find it very dull. Do you think you will?"

"Well, perhaps away from you I shall; so you must be very good to me, and let me bother and worry you to my heart's content."

"Only fancy," laughed Hero. "When I told you at first about the forts it was only as news. I never dreamed that you would think of getting charge of them. How long do you say they will take to build?"

"Three or four months at the least; so you see it would have been very disagreeable to have had one of our fellows poking and prying into everything, and getting to know about everybody's ways and means, which I am not at all anxious should be known. I dare say Stavely Pierrepont might have got it. His people are no end of swells. It would have been confoundedly awkward."

"Would it," said Hero; for Leo's words jarred, as they sometimes did, against her frank nature. "I don't know that. I have not met many grand people, certainly; but

I rather fancy they are like ourselves, and take very little notice of how people live, as long as they are nice. It was so with Sir Stephen."

"Sir Stephen!" repeated Leo. "Upon my word, I am sick of hearing that man's name. The way you Mallett people have fallen down and worshipped him amuses me immensely. By all I hear of him, he must be a precious snob."

"Indeed, he is nothing of the kind," said Hero warmly. "Nobody could be more unaffected and simple. I suppose it must be our fault that we have given you such a wrong impression. However," she added, cheerfully, "directly you know him it will vanish entirely."

"I am not at all likely to know him. Tuft-hunting is not my forte. If a man needs to be toadied he had best steer clear of me."

This was completely one of the sentiments Leo was in the habit of announcing; for he saw that if a man credits himself with good qualities, but few people ever give themselves the trouble to find out whether or not he really possesses them. In some matters the world is wonderfully credulous, and is seldom opposed to those who carefully contrive that the faults they acknowledge and the virtues they vaunt shall find no echo in their hearers' natures, and shall bring no blush of accusation to their cheeks.

Rank and wealth had no greater sycophant than Leo Despard, and these two qualities were absolutely necessary in the men whom he intended to make his friends. He was kind and courteous to every one he met; but he seldom took pains to lay himself out to those he was not likely to reap some worldly advantage from. Though, for various small reasons, he had taken a decided dislike to Sir Stephen, and chafed to hear him spoken of in such high terms, he fully intended to make himself agreeable and necessary to a man who, he felt, might in a thousand ways be useful to him. But it would never do to risk his reputation in Mallett by appearing to follow in the general lead. So he affected to laugh over their weakness, their country love of greatness, and their capacity for taking in all that a man said and did because he happened to be a baronet.

"Good heavens!" he would say, "what an awful nuisance I should become if I did nothing else but bore you with all the grand people I meet!" apparently forgetting that he did entertain his friends with a continual succession of stories of Lord This and the Countess of That—only the good simple Mallett folk lent a friendly ear to what they fancied was told to them out of kindness of heart, and a desire that they should hear something of people whom they had no opportunity of seeing.

Fond as Hero was of Leo, she would not allow him to cast these imputations upon Sir Stephen without standing up for her absent friend. It was a part of her nature to side with the weak, or those who could not do battle for themselves, and so well was this known that many a transgressor had left some village conclave more cheerfully after Hero appeared among them, thinking, "I know Hero Carthew will stand up for me when I am gone."

Leo, therefore, finding it impossible to bias her opinion, and nettled at what he called her obstinacy, feigned jealousy, and at length accused her of having a more than friendly feeling towards her new acquaintance.

"Remember, you know nothing of such men, Hero," he said severely, "and never dream of the constructions most of them are likely to put on the freedom of manner which, solely from your having lived in an isolated place, you are a little apt at times to give way to."

Hero's face turned scarlet.

"I do not understand you," she stammered. "I am not aware that I make the slightest difference with people."

"That is precisely what I am saying. Of course, here you know every one, and every one knows you. But that is not the case in society. There, if you wish to keep up anything like position, you must draw a line. Why, for example," he added, seeing her look puzzled and unconvinced, "if we were married, you don't suppose I could permit you to go running after and helping every soldier's wife whom you chanced to meet, as I saw you doing yesterday."

"Leo, don't be so absurd. Why, that was old Nanny Triggs carrying home her bread for all those grandchildren

of hers. The poor old soul has been dreadfully ill this last winter, and is as weak as she can be. I've known her since I was a baby. She did not see that I was close behind her when she set down her basket to give herself a rest, and it was only fun made me catch it up and run on with it, and when I found it was so heavy, I could not but help her with it up the hill."

"Nonsense; if she could carry it as far as Church Hill she could have carried it home. Suppose she had not met you, what would she have done then?"

Hero shook her head.

"If that is what you mean," she said resolutely, "I am sure I shall never be otherwise, and I do not wish to be either. I care a great deal more for Mallett and its people than you do, Leo, and I cannot help showing it; so, as we are not likely to agree on that point, it is wisest to make up our minds to differ. But," she added, after a pause, fearing he was a little vexed with her, "you know, I would do anything I could to please you, and I feel sure that there is very much in me that needs mending. So please tell me of whatever you see wrong, and I will try and be exactly what you wish me."

Hero's sweet face and pretty pleading manner were generally irresistible; but Leo was put out, and determined to be annoyed. So he answered coldly,—

"Oh! I see nothing that I have any right to find fault with, only it is rather hard, after we have been parted so long, that the whole of our time should be spent in discussing the people of Mallett, or singing the praises of a man who seems to have found a great deal more favor in your eyes than it was ever my good fortune to do."

"Now, Leo, that is unjust, and very unkind."

"Is it?" he said, sulkily; "I don't mean it to be. Of course, I have no right to complain. What chance can a poor beggar like me have against a man credited with every good quality under the sun? What fools men are," he exclaimed, "for the sake of one woman giving up everything, longing for a sight of her, thinking of nobody but her, while

she is perfectly happy ; more particularly if somebody new is paying her sufficient attention !”

This was rather too much for Hero to bear. Good-tempered as she was, she had plenty of spirit, and this being roused, she drew away her hand from his arm, where she had coaxingly laid it, and said—

“Leo, you know perfectly well that the accusations you are making are quite false. I should never have suspected you of the meanness which gives rise to such charges. I have every right to think and to speak of Sir Stephen Prescott as I do. He was exceedingly kind to me, and to those I am interested in ; and I like him, and I always shall like him ; but when you speak of such motives, and say that my feelings are more than friendly towards him, you make me very angry with you.”

“So it seems ; but anger against the accuser does not prove that the accusation is false.”

“Leo ! you cannot mean seriously to tell me that you believe I could prefer the attentions of any other man to those I receive from you, or that I could be so engrossed in his society as to make me forget you ?” and Hero regarded her lover earnestly.

“I did not say that you could,” he answered doggedly. “What I complain of is, your doing nothing but talk about and praise a man whom I don’t know, and don’t want to know.”

“But you often tell me about people you meet while you are away. I don’t know Lady Jane Heathcote, or Miss Majoribanks, and yet I like to hear about them.”

“Perhaps if I had chosen to tell you the very great interest they both took in *me*, you would not have cared about it quite so much,” and Leo gave a little laugh. “There was not a man at York but was dying to know Miss Majoribanks. They manœuvred to meet her, and tried everything they knew to get invited to the house. Whereas, I had *carte blanche* to come whenever I felt inclined, and before she accepted anything, she always contrived to find out from somebody if I was likely to be there. As you know, I am the last man in the world to have any vanity about

me; but I sometimes think that in this world-forgotten place you do not understand the temptations we have to go through, and when these are resisted, you must own, it is a trifle hard to find the love which made you do it treated as a matter of course, and a thing of no value."

Hero was silent. She would not trust herself to answer—indeed, words were not forthcoming in which she could express her feelings. There was something despicable in a man hinting at any personal weakness a woman had betrayed towards him. She had always felt certain how much Leo must be admired and sought after, and the assurance that, in spite of all the clever, beautiful girls he saw, he still remained true to his little country love, had been a triumph Hero had hugged to her heart a hundred times.

Was it possible that Leo was not all that she pictured him? Hero had not had very great opportunities of personal judgment. Her knowledge of Leo's character was principally formed from his letters, which were always perfect: for letter-writing was an art upon which he prided himself greatly. Since she had been capable of judging, he had never lived for any time in Mallett, and during the occasional weeks he had spent there, when everything had been given up to his amusement and pleasure, Leo had been charming. He was naturally good-tempered, and, so long as nothing interfered with his personal comfort, vanity, and love of rule, he was a perfect companion, always entertaining, obliging, and delightful. Love of self was his grand passion—a passion rooted in his heart and nature, bearing as fruit those captivating qualities which gained him the popularity and adulation upon which he lived.

Putting down Hero's silence to jealousy, he considered he had made a successful hit, and thought he, "It is just as well for her to know that it is not every man who would give up the many chances I have had." Often when dunned to death for debts contracted, that he might look like other fellows, Leo had felt tempted to put an end to the engagement. He knew he could not marry until these debts were paid, though when they would be paid he had

no idea. However, as Hero was content to wait, he supposed that wait they must.

This was the first positive quarrel he and Hero had ever had, and Leo determined that he would not afford a precedent by seeking forgiveness, or condoning the matter too easily; so looking at his watch, he said,—

“I see it is time I was off.” Then, taking his hat in one hand, and holding out the other, he went on in the same measured tone, “I hope the next time I have the pleasure of seeing you we may prove more agreeable companions to each other.”

“Don’t go yet, Leo,” Hero said in a low tone, and without raising her eyes to his: “We have never really quarrelled before, and never parted angrily.”

“I had no wish to quarrel, neither am I at all angry;” and Leo assumed a most injured air. “But I must say, that the first time I have ever hinted at a fault in you, you have chosen to receive it in a manner that teaches me I must be more cautious for the future, and not quite so candid and plain-spoken as my stupid disposition leads me to be.”

“Oh, Leo! why will you misunderstand me?” and Hero looked at him reproachfully. “If I have misunderstood you—and I am sure I must have done so—forgive me. We love each other, Leo, do we not?” and she clasped his hand tightly between both of hers. “Let us forget it all, and part friends, and never allow anything like this to come between us again.”

“My dear Hero, will you please to remember that it is you who have been angry, not I. However, I am quite ready to forget it all, only I have no more time to spare now. I promised Aunt Lydia not to be late, and it is already nearly four o’clock; so I must be off at once. Good-bye.”

And he stooped, and bestowed a particularly unloverlike kiss on Hero’s upturned face.

Hero let him go as far as the door; then she said,—

“Is that your good-bye, Leo?”

“I really have not an idea of what you require of me, Hero. I have told you that I am not angry, agreed to for-

get our conversation, and already said good-bye. I do not know what more I can do, except I repeat the same all over again, and, as I tell you, I am pressed for time."

"Then pray do not let me detain you;" and, feeling that she had been over-bountiful in her concession, Hero turned to the window, and Leo, after a moment's pause and another "Good-bye," which received no answer, went out of the house, and up the walk, without once turning round or looking in the direction where he had left Hero standing.

She watched him out of sight, then sitting down, she burst into a flood of tears.

"How did we drift into this?" she said, as, her fit over, she began to dry her eyes. "I suppose I was partly to blame; but I wish he had not said what he did. I hope no one will call. Anybody could see that I had been crying; indeed, I should begin again if any one spoke to me. I think I'll go and look for Jim, and get him to take me out for an hour."

Putting on her hat, she walked quickly down by one of the most unfrequented paths to the beach below, and, after a few minutes spent in looking about, found the object of her search busily employed at his usual occupation of sail-mending.

"Jim, are you very busy?" Hero asked, hardly liking to take him away from his more profitable labor.

"That all depends on who wants me," answered the old man, with a look that told his readiness to do whatever his questioner might require.

"I want you to take me out in the boat for a little while. I don't feel inclined to go for a walk to-day. Can you come?"

"Surely I can," said Jim, rising with alacrity. "I ain't doin' nothin' that can't wait till to-morrow. You sit down, and I'll be ready for 'ee, Miss Hero, in a brace o' shakes."

And certainly an incredibly short time had elapsed when the little boat was ready and off.

It was a lovely afternoon, and as Hero leaned back, hearing no sound but the ripple made by her own hand in the water, she gave a sigh to think how different all would seem

if Leo were with her. Then she began to take herself to task on the subject of their quarrel.

Did she think too much of Sir Stephen? Had she been too open and friendly with him. Something whispered that there had been more than friendliness in his manner.

Never before had she felt the difficulties of her position; for, in spite of the misunderstanding between themselves, and the knowledge all her friends possessed of her preference for Leo, he had not spoken to her father, nor had they entered upon any formal engagement. This was not an unusual state of affairs in Mallett, where mothers and fathers would say they would not hear of anything binding until the promotion was certain. But in this case the objection came, not from Captain Carthew, but from Leo, who said he could not endure long engagements, and therefore theirs should not be called an engagement, to be canvassed and talked over by the Mallett gossips; until he was in a position to marry, he would not ask Captain Carthew's formal consent. Under these circumstances, Hero could hardly tell Sir Stephen that she was engaged.

"If he sees us together," she thought, "he will understand, and I feel I can depend upon him afterwards. Suppose there was no Leo?"

After this surmise for a few moments, Hero seemed lost in thought, the chain of which she rudely snapped, and giving a resolute shake of the head, she looked up, to find Jim's scrutinizing gaze fixed upon her.

"You'm moody hearted, Miss Hero," he said sympathetically.

Hero smiled as she nodded in assent,—

"The world—at least, my world—is looking rather dark, Jim."

"Well, don't 'ee be cast down at that. If the sun was niver to hide hisself behind a cloud we shouldn't know how to valley his brightness when he bustes out again. Have 'ee heerd anything from Sir Stephen o' late?" he asked, after a pause, during which it had occurred to him that this might be a reason for her low spirits.

"No; but he is coming here this summer."

"Ah!" said Jim in a tone of satisfaction, adding confidentially, as he rested on the oar with which he was assisting the small sail, "he warn't much to look upon—not for a Sir, was he? But, mind you, I reckon his heart is in the right place. The talk here is, that he's mazed about you, Miss Hero; and, by what I've seed, though I don't tell they so, 'tis my belief they baint so far out, neither. Would 'ee hab un, Miss Hero? I wish you would. He's made nearer after your pattern than somebody else I could name."

And he gave a significant glance towards the point where the forts were building.

"It is very odd," thought Hero, "that none of the village people care for Leo; they seem to know that he dislikes them."

"But you must try and like Mr. Despard for my sake, Jim."

Jim shook his head sadly.

"'Tis cos' o' you, Miss Hero, that I turns agin' un. He's no more fitted to be mated with you—why, than I be."

"That is only because he is a soldier, Jim, nothing else."

"No, now that it aint," replied Jim stoutly. "Why, I never said nothin' agin' Cap'n Ellis, and he a marine too; nor neither that young Crozier, from Dockmouth, as used to be allers a busnacking about 'ee; and that time when you comed to chapel with Betsy, and they two foller'd, didn't I change the hymn, and give out, 'Gird thy loins up, Christian soldier,' a purpose to show to 'em—

'The way we preach is free to all,
And happy they who come.'

No, don't 'ee say that, Miss Hero. 'Tis the heart I looks to, not the color o' the coat that kivers 'im; though, mind you, I niver seed the sodjir yet that, if I was a maid, I'd marry, there now. But you're a young lady, Miss Hero," added Jim, apologetically; "and the ways o' simple and gentlefolks, in many respects, is altogether contrarywise."

CHAPTER - XII.

RAY S O F H O P E .

That same evening Captain Carthew told Hero that he had met Mr. Truscott.

"He came over," said the Captain, "to see what more furniture would be wanted to set the place ship-shape. The rooms that look towards the water are to be fitted up for Sir Stephen's mother, he tells me."

"I hope she will be like him, papa."

"I hope so too, for I took an uncommon fancy to him. He's a straightforward, plain-sailing fellow. I shall be very glad to see him again. Here, I say, Hero, we must crowd on all sail in the way of picnics and tea-fights, so that the time will pass quickly with her ladyship. These fashionable folks are accustomed to plenty of pleasure-taking. Leo will be able to help us there; it is just in his line. I suppose that you and he understand each other, Hero," he continued, after a little pause; "because Leo has never really asked my consent. He certainly did once say something about expecting his promotion, and then he should have a favor to ask of me; but that is all."

"But you said that he might come here, papa."

"Yes, my dear; and I have no objection to his doing so. Only, as I don't quite know what tack he's upon, I wanted to hear in what light you consider that you two stand towards each other."

"We look upon ourselves as if we were engaged. I thought you understood that, papa."

"Yes, from you, but not from him; and as he is stationed here, and will want to come philandering about, I thought I'd speak to you, and then to him."

"Not to him, papa."

And Hero went over and sat on a little stool between her father's knees.

"And why not to him?" asked Captain Carthew, rubbing his hand against his daughter's round, peachy cheek.

"Because I know that Leo thinks that until a man can marry it is best not to enter into an announced engagement."

"In that case a man is wrong in speaking to the girl herself."

"Well, but he did not—he wouldn't have spoken to me. Oh!" she exclaimed, taking hold of the old man's hands and hiding her face in them, "I don't know—I can't tell how it all happened; but, in some way or other, I knew that Leo cared for me, and he knew that I cared for him, and that whenever he could afford to marry he would ask your consent."

"A very pretty state of things!" exclaimed Captain Carthew; "and I'm expected to say yes, am I? Ah, well, I suppose oldsters and youngsters never see alike in these affairs; for, had I the choosing of a husband for you, Hero, Leo Despard would not be the man I should fix upon."

"No, papa? Why not? He is such a favorite; everybody likes Leo."

"Perhaps so; and I don't say I don't like him—only—I—well—"

'I take him for a thief, you see,
I know he'd steal ye, Molly darlint.'

And the rest of the song was stopped by the tightness of the hug which Hero bestowed upon her father, whose glistening eyes told what it would cost him to part with his treasure.

To the bluff old sailor Hero was the very apple of his eye, the sunlight of his life. It was not a love shown in much outward demonstration, but in the thorough understanding and companionship which existed between them, and had so existed from the time that his little dark-eyed maiden could toddle after him.

Sir Stephen had gradually taken notice of all the small, silent attentions which Hero paid to her father—services

which the mind of a man often unknowingly dwells upon more than the most elaborate display of accomplishments, or the most studied toilettes. Hero Carthew possessed very few accomplishments. Her dress was simple, and, to the initiated eye, old-fashioned; yet Sir Stephen found himself watching her with admiring gaze as she moved about doing all sorts of homely duties.

Since his return he had seen many women far more beautiful and fascinating, yet not one had touched his heart, and made it feel fresh and young again as she had. He almost smiled at his own impatience to see her again.

"I must remember the lesson I have been taught," he said, "and not be guilty twice in my life of such folly as I then indulged in. Good Heavens! when I recall the misery a few sharp words or a cold look would give me, I wonder can I be the same man. I shall never love again like that; but I shall love her very dearly, and it shall go hard if I do not make her happy, as one so sweet and fresh deserves to be. She will do me all the good in the world, and bring back a heap of things that of late years seem to have been slipping away from me. I was getting into a state of disbelief in everything; but that queer old Mallett and its people took a sight of nonsense out of me. By the way, I may as well find out when we shall be ready to start, so as to give old Dame Tucker plenty of time."

Accordingly, after dinner he said,—

"Mother, when do you think it will suit you to go down to Combe? I should like to give the housekeeper fair notice."

"I am going to Horndean on the 8th, and after that I have promised to pay Julia a visit. Would it suit you if I said the 2nd or 3rd of August?"

"Perfectly. I shall have finished my fishing engagement, and be able to meet you here, and take you down."

There was silence for a few minutes, during which Sir Stephen conjured up the vision of Hero, which he most loved to recall, and which was graven most vividly on his memory. He could bring back the sharp rocks, the green sea glittering in the bright April sun, the little boat, and Hero singing her quaint song to the deaf old boatman.

Mrs. Prescott, on her part, was busy thinking how best she could put the question she was bent on asking, and she suddenly broke the spell by saying,—

“Of course, Stephen, you have no objection to Katherine coming with us?”

“Indeed, I have—a very great objection.”

“Now, my dear, how very inconsistent you are! I told you that I had promised her that we would spend the autumn together.”

“Just so. But you added, if it fell in with my plans.”

“Most certainly, I put in that proviso, as I always do, which meant, unless you wanted me to go to some place where she could not go, or did not wish to go; but I never supposed for an instant that this applied to Combe, a place of all others where I should need her company.”

“I do not see why you should need *her* company. You will have me with you.”

“Now, do not be unreasonable, Stephen. There is no occasion for me to tell you that your place can never be filled by anybody else; but, when you are at Combe, you will want to enjoy all this boating and shooting you have so dwelt upon, and you certainly do not for one moment suppose that such things can possess any attraction for an old woman like me. Why, my dear, I would not get into a small boat for all that the world could offer me. I could not do it—my nerves would not stand it. Then, what is to be done? Are you to be deprived of all your enjoyment? If not, I must sit in the house, or wander about the grounds alone.”

“But, mother dear, you speak as if I proposed taking you into a wilderness. There are plenty of people there for you to know. There is Miss Carthew, whom I spoke to you of. You could not have a nicer girl about you than she is.”

Mrs. Prescott felt her back stiffen.

“That she may be,” she said; “but you forget, Stephen, that I have passed the age for making new friends. It is a thing quite beyond me now. However, I have no wish to force Katherine upon you. She would never forgive me if

I did such a thing; so I must tell her that I am very sorry that I should have so misled myself and her, but that I find you prefer going to this place alone. It is putting me in rather an awkward position, for I have left so many things for us to do together down there. I fancied that while you were off on your excursions, we should be left to our own devices; so I arranged our little plans accordingly."

Sir Stephen looked as he felt, thoroughly vexed, and out of temper. It had never once entered his mind that his mother would ask Mrs. Labouchere to accompany them. Certainly, she had said something about being engaged to Katherine, but had added that it could all be arranged; and this mode of arrangement he had most assuredly never counted upon. It was now more than ever his wish that his present relations with Katherine should not be disturbed, as when he married it would be a great comfort to leave his mother with her.

He felt certain, from his mother's tone, that she had set her heart upon having her niece with her, and that if her plans were thwarted, she would go to Mallett determined to dislike it, and everybody connected with it. Besides which, he knew that if she was sighing after Katherine, Hero would find no favor in her eyes. What had he best do? He so much wanted her to like Hero; but let her once imagine that it was for Hero's sake that Katherine was kept away, and, though she were an angel, Mrs. Prescott would do nothing but find out her faults and failings. So, disturbing the perusal of a gloomy tome, in which she was pretending to be engrossed, he said,—

"Do not say anything to Katherine for a day or two, mother, and I will think the matter over."

Mrs. Prescott's heart sung again at this ray of hope, though she was too true a woman to say, "So be it." She fancied that she saw a safer way of gaining her point than immediate acquiescence; so she answered, lugubriously,—

"Thank you, my dear; but I think it is best to let your present decision stand. You know that I always wish to act towards others as I should like them to act towards me;

so I feel it would not be fair to permit that Katey should be an unintentional intruder. Never mind what I said," she added, smiling faintly as she took his hand, "I shall get on very well alone. I own that for a moment I felt a little hurt on Katherine's account, as well as my own; for it was very unselfish of her to be ready to give up her tour with the Ingestres to go down to Combe with me. She hesitated at first; but, when I said I should be alone, she wrote, and put them off directly. I fear it is a little late to renew the arrangement now, but still I can try, and I will write to Mrs. Ingestre, and give her a hint that I find it will not be convenient for me to take Katherine. She never need know about it."

Sir Stephen began to wish that he had never proposed taking his mother down to Combe. It had arisen solely out of his love for her, and that she should have an opportunity of seeing and knowing those who had so taken his fancy, and won his good opinion. The expression of his face betrayed his vexation, which, his mother noticing, she said soothingly,—

"I see that I have acted foolishly, Stephen; but you must forgive me, my dear, for it is your own thoughtful goodness which has led to it. You have said so frequently, that with regard to Katherine I was only to consult my own pleasure and comfort, that I fear I have got into the habit of so doing, and not studying you sufficiently. I thought you would not care how I settled about her."

"That is just as I have wished you to feel," said Sir Stephen.

"Then, my dear, why this sudden alteration? But there, there, I will not ask. You show too much consideration for me to doubt but you have some sufficient reason for denying me this trifling pleasure. Say no more about it. I will make the best excuse I can to Katherine, and you shall have no reason to complain of the efforts I will make to render myself agreeable to your new friends. I think you said there was a doctor within reach; for that will now be of rather more importance. When I have Katie at hand I feel comparatively easy; for she understands me far better

than any strange medical man would. I am always terrified of their experimentalising upon me."

Mrs. Prescott said this as she was going out of the room, in answer to a summons from her maid to look at some travelling-dresses which had been brought for her inspection, leaving Sir Stephen under the conviction that she was contemplating herself as a positive martyr.

Well, after all, perhaps it was a little inconsistent to want to take her down by herself; if what he hoped really came to pass, she must necessarily be often alone. Then again, supposing she was taken ill—not at all an improbable event—she would declare that no one understood her, and it simply meant returning home with all speed. Katherine would certainly be a great companion to her, and she need not interfere in any way with him. His desire was that they should all be friendly and nice together, and it was his wish that his cousin should like Hero. "There is no littleness about Katherine," he thought; "and I believe that if I was married she would be kind to my wife; and I daresay there are some small niceties that society requires into which she might initiate Hero, not that she lacks anything in my eyes."

So, waiting for no more reflections, he ran up to his mother's room, and, knocking at the door, said,—

"Mother, just speak to me for a moment." Then, lowering his voice, and half shutting the door, he continued, "I have thought the matter over, and I have decided that, upon the whole, it is best that Katherine should go with you."

"Now, my dear," began Mrs. Prescott; but her son interrupted her by giving her a kiss, saying,—

"Don't let us argue the point any more, only let everything be as you had arranged."

Mrs. Prescott shook her head, as if protesting against compliance; but when she turned away, it was with a great inward rejoicing that victory had come so easily, so swiftly, and without more battling or diplomacy; for her mind had been made up that nothing should induce her to go to Combe without Mrs. Labouchere.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PICNIC.

Now, about the same time that Mrs. Prescott and her son were holding this conversation in London, at Mallett, Hero Carthew, with a somewhat heavy heart, was preparing for a picnic, given by Mrs. James, in honor of her daughter's approaching marriage. It was three days since Hero and Leo Despard had parted, and during that time she had neither seen him nor heard from him. Hero felt that all overtures at reconciliation ought to come from him, and therefore she had avoided going into the village, except when she knew that he was at the forts, or had gone to Dockmouth. Her heart beat very fast as she walked up the lane to Stubbing's field, the place of rendezvous. She did not believe he would be there; most likely at the last moment he had sent some excuse; but, if not, how would he meet her? She must school herself not to betray any sign of agitation before people, and not to evince emotion at whatever might take place during the day.

A large elm-tree hid the field from view, but no sooner was that passed, than she saw Leo leaning against the gate, and in an instant he was walking rapidly towards her.

"Hero," he exclaimed hurriedly, taking possession of both her hands, "can you forgive me? I have not dared to come and ask, and I was ashamed to write to you. Say yes before we get up to the others, for I am so miserable," and his handsome face wore an expression of most becoming despondency.

Forgive him! why, in a moment, she felt she had nothing to forgive. All her anger vanished, and she answered, in a quivering voice, while tears of joy trembled in her eyes,—

"You must forgive me too, Leo. We ought, both of us, to have known from the first that neither meant what was said."

"You will be quite afraid of me, now that I have betrayed my horrid temper," he went on dolefully. "You never knew before what a jealous beast I am. I feel that you must despise me, Hero."

"Oh! I do," she replied, looking laughingly into his face; her sweet brown eyes betraying her love and happy trust.

Of course, a great deal of banter was levelled at them from the party assembled in the field.

"Ah me!" sighed Mrs. Thompson, "what it is to be young. Now, girls, make the most of your time; for, take my word, it won't last for ever. There wasn't a more devoted lover in the world than my Terence. His sighs and groans would have melted an iceberg, and just to look at him now."

And she turned admiringly round to her little, fat, merry-looking husband, who, in a nankeen costume, much favored in the West Indies, was standing, breathless from the exertion of stowing the donkey-cart with the necessary baskets and hampers of provisions.

"Sure the women are hard to please now," he got out, after a great effort; "for ain't I still puffing and panting like a grampus, and doesn't that and sighing both come under the same category?"

"Leave room for Betsey, Captain Thompson," called out Hero.

"The Lord preserve me! And will I have to hoist up Betsey. Then it's a fellow-feeling I've got for the donkey, poor animal."

"No, no; her basket I mean. I fancy I see Betsey mounted up there," added Hero, laughing.

"Awh, do 'ee?" said Betsey, who, assisted in carrying her burden by her faithful swain, Joe Bunce, had come up at this point, "then you'm keener at pictering than I be. Lor bless the man," she exclaimed suddenly, addressing Joe, "why don't 'ee set the things down, 'stead o' gapin at the donkey? Folks 'll think you've met with a relation!"

This speech having the desired effect of turning the laugh against Joe, Betsey recovered her good temper, and began to take her place as head and chief of the commissariat department.

A picnic, or merry-making of any kind, which entailed a tolerable amount of preparation and bustle, was a source of much gratification to Betsey, who was never more delighted than when pooh-poohing in a triumphant way the eulogiums which her bill of fare, her cookery, and her general arrangements in the substantial matters of comfort, drew forth. Her presence and surveillance were deemed essential to secure a perfect success; and, certainly, she contrived in some mysterious way that everything should be remembered. Although she invariably demanded, "Whatever was the use of having that Joe?" she would have been highly offended if he had not been asked to assist her; for it was her boast that she and Joe had "bin on and off for the last twenty years," and it was universally understood, that some day, when Joe got a coast-guard, and gave up the flesh and the devil in the shape of a weakness for an occasional over-glass of rum and water, Betsey would condescend to take him in hand, and be the saving of him.

Joe was the mildest of giants, as well as the smartest of sailors; as easily pleased and amused as a child, and quite proud of the state of subjection in which his lady-love kept him. His severest trial was that, during his stay on shore, Betsey insisted on his accompanying her each Sunday evening to chapel. Through the whole service she kept an eagle eye on poor Joe, fearing that his attention should wander, or that he might be tempted to doze. During the sermon, each allusion that was made to the especially wicked, or more than ordinarily miserable sinner, was followed by a significant nod of her head, or a vigorous nudge of her elbow to the unfortunate Joe, who thus became the centre of attraction to both parson and people.

Betsey, in common with most of the Ebenezer brethren, rejoiced in having had a call; one of the privileges of which was, that it enabled her to securely congratulate herself that she was not like other men, "more partickelary

they Bunces;" for Joe's family were not shining lights in the village, and it soothed her immensely to listen to the vivid descriptions of the yawning pit, and the gnawing worm—the certain doom of such reprobates as laughed at Mr. Petherwick as a ranter, and called his followers blue lights.

On this especial day the picnic party were bound for the Swallow Sands, which could be reached either by a tolerably good road, along which went the elderly people; or a scrambling rocky path, chosen, of course, by all the younger folk, who soon paired off at a respectable distance apart, so as not to interfere with each other.

The sun shone brightly, the great cliffs afforded shade, the breeze from the sea came cool and pleasant, and Hero Carthew, led by Leo Despard, thought what a difference a few hours had made. Instead of feeling sorrowful and downcast, she seemed by contrast to be happier than she had ever been, and certainly Leo had never before been so thoughtful and devoted. He tried by every attention to make amends for his outburst of temper, which he still deplored, although Hero felt she would not mind an occasional quarrel if it entailed such a making up. As for Leo, he was thoroughly disposed to be pleased with himself and everybody around him. He had that morning received an unexpected invitation for the 12th of August; and though he told Hero, with an attempt at dissatisfaction, that it really was too bad of Curzon to accept Lord Shipwith's invitation for him, and so put it out of his power to refuse, in his heart he was jubilant over the distinguished party of which he was to form one, and he repeated for Hero's edification the names of some of the guests.

"Fancy, Leo! his asking you," exclaimed Hero, quite awed by several grand sounding titles.

"And why not, my dear child; I think myself quite as good as they are."

"And I think you are a great deal better," she said, clinging more closely to his arm, and regarding with pretty pride his handsome face; "but still it is very nice of them, and it shows how much they must think of you. Oh, dear me!" she laughed, "what a frustration I should be in, if I

was asked to meet a lot of grand ladies and a countess ! I should think of nothing else but how I should look, and what on earth I could wear."

Leo smiled upon her condescendingly, as if such small anxieties never troubled him, although the first thing he had done was to consider what would be the most effective shooting costume, and he had already written off proposing an arrangement with his tailor, by which means he hoped to obtain what he had decided upon.

"Will any ladies be there?" asked Hero.

"I believe not; why?"

"Because," and here Hero assumed a little make-believe pout, "if so, I think I should be jealous."

"Ah! no you would not," and Leo gave a little sigh, as if to say she did not care enough for him to be that; "I was going to say," he added, "that if I thought so, nothing should induce me to go; yet I hardly know, I should be terribly tempted to try."

"Why, Leo!" said Hero, looking earnestly at him, "and do you think that when I know you are constantly meeting girls who can sing and play, and do everything beautifully, that I never feel jealous of them? I cannot help it, and when you have been telling me about them, sometimes I have hated them; but only for a minute, you know. Then I have felt quite ashamed, and punished myself by asking you to tell me more."

Leo took her hand, and pressing it in his, said, "You never need be jealous of any one, Hero, for I cannot help loving you. In some way or other you have so completely bewitched me, that I never think of any one else; all I want is to have you and," he added with a hopeless sigh, "money enough to give you all you ought to have."

"That will come in good time, Leo dear. Why, you are almost certain of your promotion in another year."

Leo shook his head.

"Well, two at the longest."

"No, nor in two; and when it does come, what a beggarly pittance it is, just enough to keep soul and body together."

"Oh, you'll see that we shall manage very well on it," said Hero, cheerfully. "Why, look at the Blakes, they have nothing but his pay."

"Yes, I think I see my wife going about like Mrs. Blake. Why, you little goose, you have no idea how proud I should be of you."

Here their conversation was interrupted by a turn in the path which brought them in front of the Swallow Rock, and within sight of the road party already arrived, and busily engaged in unpacking hampers, and spreading out the dinner on the sands below.

"Why, Betsey!" exclaimed Hero, as they suddenly came upon that notable with her gown tucked up, and her bonnet perched hindside before, "how hot you look!"

"Ah! and you'd look hot too, I reckon, if you'd had the drivin' o' that dunkey."

"You should have let Joe drive him," said Leo, with a knowing look at the giant.

"Joe!" ejaculated Betsey, with the severest contempt, "beyond rattlin' a tin cup with stones he's a fine help, surely. Besides," she added, decisively, "I can't abide to see a man a larruping a dumb animal," although, as the unfortunate beast could have testified, this aversion did not extend to her own free use of the stick.

"Have you got anything for me to do?" asked Leo, languidly.

"You, lor no," retorted Betsey, with a snort; "only for'ee to get out o' my way, for I'm like a toad under a harrow, I don't know whichee course to steer. Here, come along, Miss Hero, I'll soon put you to work."

"Then I suppose you intend me to stand by, and admire you as Joe s doing," said Leo.

"I should like to catch'n at it," and Betsey gave another snort and a defiant look towards Joe, which caused him to hastily wipe away a rising smile with the back of his hand.

"Why, now, you know that he does admire you, Betsey," Leo continued, bent upon teasing her. "If not, he would be master of the *Prince William Henry*, for Mrs.

Burt says, that until she sees Joe marry you, she'll never marry any one else."

Joe's lips involuntarily formed themselves for a whistle, which all but escaped them in his anxiety to see how his fiancée would take this banter, which, though not true in detail, had a certain amount of foundation in the landlady's acknowledged partiality towards her late husband's first wife's cousin. But Leo had not in the least miscalculated his effect, and though Betsey gave a toss of her head, by which her bonnet completely lost its balance, she could not conceal her inward satisfaction, as without turning round, she answered,—

"Don't you think, now, Mr. Despard that I don't know, as well as if I'd spoke the words myself, that you'm only smearing at me; thought mind," and here she confronted Joe, "her's fool enough to say that, and more a top o' it too, but wishin' her no harm, for she's none of my acquaintance; all I says is take un and a good riddance of bad rummage 'twould be for me any day."

At which speech Joe went into a burst of exultant merriment, in which, after a momentary struggle, Betsey joined, causing the Captain to call out from below,—

"Here, what's all that jacking going on up there?"

"'Tis Maister Despard, sir," Betsey answered, wiping away the tears her laughter had caused her. "There do 'ee take'n away, for gracious goodness sake, Miss Hero, or nobody 'll have a bit o' dinner. 'Tween he and that Joe, I can't get a minute's peace."

"I thought I should put her into a good temper," laughed Leo, as he followed Hero down to the sands below, where, when the various arrangements were completed, they sat down to dinner, in the middle of which the Captain, who was by this time overflowing with enjoyment, said,—

"How much I wish that our good friend Sir Stephen could have been one of us to-day! However, we'll drink his health, and as Truscott tells me that they may be expected now very shortly, we'll put off any more junketings until after they arrive, I think."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Randall, "that we must all offer

them some kind of entertainment. For my part, I almost wish Sir Stephen was coming by himself; ladies take so much more notice of make-shifts than gentlemen do; but there, they must take us as we are, we'll do our best, and the best can do no more."

"And you'll see they will not want more," said the Captain.

"Do you think they will trouble themselves much about us?" asked Leo, rather amused at this discussion about people who he felt sure would regard Mallett society with the well-bred contempt he secretly held it in. "Don't you think the Dockmouth great guns and the country people will call upon them?"

"Call! of course they'll call," replied the Captain, "why shouldn't they? The Prescotts are as good a family as any about here. You may depend upon it that every one in the neighborhood will do what is right, and contrive, I hope, to give them a hearty welcome. Here, Joe," he called out, turning round, "just you pass the word in the village for the place to be kept well holy-stoned, and tell 'em not to be backward with the tar-brush. We'll show the Dockmouthers that when we choose we can stand muster with *them* any day."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Joe.

"And, p'raps too, you'll mind that charity begins at home," sarcastically chimed in Betsey, delighted to get a sly hit at 'they Bunces,' whose neglect of the scrubbing-brush and dislike to soap and water was one of her favorite topics.

"Come, come, Betsey," said Hero, "keep your proverbs to yourself, or I shall let Joe into a secret, and tell him that we are always in danger of breaking our necks over your brooms, and falling over your buckets."

"Oh, well," retorted Betsey, "if he ain't to die till he kicks the bucket in his own home, you'd better get 'un to lease his life upon your houses, Miss Hero, he'll be a Methusalem that way, any how."

"Never mind, Betsey," said Leo, "I'll take your part; what stunning pies you do make!"

"Ah!" laughed the Captain, "Sir Stephen found that out,

didn't he, Betsey? Why, he'd never heard of pasties until Betsey made him some, and then, Rule Britannia! didn't he walk into them!"

"Awh come!" said Betsey, modestly refusing to take more than her share of credit. "'Twarnt all Betsey there. If I made 'em, Miss Hero filled 'em, and pinched 'em fitty, and he knew that fast enough."

"Nonsense, Betsey," Hero exclaimed, "I'm sure he knew no such thing," and she stole a furtive glance to see if Leo had taken notice of the insinuation. Apparently he had not, or if so, he was evidently not annoyed by it, for leaning across he whispered,—

"When you are ready, we'll go for a stroll."

CHAPTER XIV.

“AWKWARDLY PLACED.”

During the next month, scarcely a day passed without Leo devoting some portion of it to Hero; apparently never happy except he was in her society, and in truth, his love for her had during this time grown so rapidly, that it threatened to overcome the selfishness and false pride which were the predominant evils of his character. Each time he left her, he declared to himself that she was far sweeter, and more loveable, than he had dreamed it possible for woman to be; and he asked himself if, after all, in spite of lack of means, they might not contrive to be supremely happy.

This increase of love made him far more attentive and devoted than he had ever yet been, notwithstanding which Hero was depressed and her spirits variable. As long as they were alone, Leo was perfect; but let them join their friends, and the faults, to which Hero could no longer be blind, would come to the surface, and jar against her generous nature. To sit thinking of the time when she should be Leo's wife, was no longer the unruffled dream of happiness it had once been; and when Alice Joslyn confided to her that Norman Randall had asked her to wait for him, so that perhaps after all she and Hero might both be married about the same time, in the midst of her good wishes Hero broke suddenly down, and though she declared her tears were tears of joy, there was an unaccountable feeling of sadness respecting her own future.

The torch of hope which had once burnt so brightly seemed now extinguished.

But whence came this change? Perhaps, because she resolutely refused to admit to herself that her depression arose from any other cause than not feeling well, Hero never

asked herself a question, the answer to which it would have been difficult to solve. By hard speeches and little acts of assertion and selfishness, trivial and unnoticed by himself, Leo had gradually discovered his real disposition; and, though Hero loved him still, the bloom of love was rubbed off and destroyed for ever.

By one of those not unfrequent freaks of fate, it happened that Hero's eyes were opened to these faults at the very time that Leo was making a first effort to overcome them. Never before had he so resolutely determined to seem satisfied by society which bored him more than he could express; never had he striven to avoid showing the dislike in which he held Mallett and its people

"My dear girl," he would say to Hero, "I could live a hermit's life here with you, alone, and always with me; but this set of old fogies, with their long-winded advice and stories about things they know nothing about, is more than I can stand. The world! what do they know about the world? Their idea of having seen the world is being stationed at the Cape, or China, or having a bout of four years or so on the coast, looking after the slave trade; and they set to work to tell me what to do. One thing I can tell them; that after I get the good fortune to call a certain little girl my own, it's very little I shall trouble Mallett or them."

"And yet, Leo, I should be very sorry to leave Mallett. Why, you forget that we have lived here all our lives—ever since we were little children."

"Well, I don't know that it recommends itself much to my regard on that account. I detest that way they have of coming up with, 'Oh, Mr. Despard, I recollect you as a boy, sir, at Mallett.' I could say, 'I'm sorry your memory is so sharp.'"

"But you always help a Mallett man, Leo?"

"Yes, help him on to another regiment as soon as possible," said Leo, laughing. "You know, darling," he added, seeing that Hero was not quite pleased, "it's different if a fellow's a greatswell; then he likes the men to know all about him and his people. Oh, Hero! why can't I change

places with some I know? Such fools, but heirs to estates as big as all Mallett put together; it's no wonder that I kick against the want of money."

"And yet," said Hero, hesitating whether she should give her authority, "rich people are not always so very happy. Sir Stephen told me that he knew those who, with all they could possibly wish for, were perfectly miserable."

"Ah yes! just the rubbish a man like that *would* talk. Let him try my beggarly pittance, and then see what he'd say."

"But Sir Stephen is not rich. He says himself that he is comparatively a poor man."

"Comparatively!" echoed Leo scornfully, "but who does he draw his comparison with? Some fellow who has as many thousands a year as I have pounds. I would not mind that kind of poverty. Tell him I'll readily change places with him." Then pausing for an instant, he broke out: "Oh! if Fortune would but turn her wheel in my direction, how happy we'd be. Wouldn't I make you dress, Hero; and we'd have such a stunning turn-out, that all the men I know would turn blue, and the women yellow."

Hero laughed at this picture of felicity—one of the many which Leo was always conjuring up—though, as she said, what was the good of sighing after things they should never possess? Better far to think of themselves as they would really be.

But Leo could see no pleasure in contemplating any picture of happiness which was not set in a gilded frame; and so frequently and openly did he give his opinions, that even the Captain, lenient as he was, began to shake his head, saying that he must give Master Leo a hint to draw in his horns a little when Sir Stephen came.

"I know him," he would say, "and know that he doesn't mean half he says. But with those who do not, he lets that red rag of his run at too many knots an hour; and you know Sir Stephen might be able to give him a leg up with his promotion, so I want him to make a good impression—eh, Hero?"

Hero nodded her head in assent, although she felt in-

wardly certain that the two men would never be friends. Formerly she had looked forward to the time when they would meet, and be mutually pleased with each other; now, she was almost relieved that before the 14th of August, the date fixed for Sir Stephen's arrival, Leo would have left to keep his engagement in the North.

The 14th day of August was a busy day at Mallett; for the village determined that this time it would not be behind-hand in its welcome to Sir Stephen. Accordingly, arches were erected, flags waved, and garlands hung all along the road, from the turnpike gate to the entrance to Combe, giving to the place such a gala aspect, that Mrs. Prescott could not help her motherly heart warming towards a people with such ready appreciation of her dear son, who at Pamphillon was not quite so popular as she knew he deserved to be. Sir Stephen, too, was in high spirits, and had been so during the whole journey, vividly recalling to Mrs. Labouchere's mind the Stephen of days gone by, when he was wont to enter with (what she then contemptuously termed) boyish ardor into very simple pleasures and amusements. But things were changed with Katherine, and now she hailed whatever savored of the happy past.

At Combe gates stood a knot of Mallett men, who, with Joe Bunce at their head, had just taken the liberty of running up to lend a hand with the traps. Inside they found Captain Carthew waiting to say a few words of hearty welcome, and the old sailor's air of devotion and courtesy immediately won Mrs. Prescott, who presented him to her niece as their nearest neighbor and Stephen's great friend.

"And upon my veracity," said the Captain, as an hour or so later he retailed every minutiae of the interview for Hero's benefit, "I don't know that I ever set eyes upon a more lovely woman."

"Is she fair or dark?" asked Hero, interested at once in Mrs. Labouchere, to the exclusion of everything else.

"Fair as a lily, and beauteous as the rose," quoted the Captain; "and I expect, between you and me and the door-

post, I'm not far out in taking her to be the future Lady Prescott."

"I am longing to see her. I do hope they will like the place, papa."

"They seemed delighted with it. By the way, Sir Stephen sent his love to you, and said he should run down and see you"

"His love, papa?"

"Well, something of the sort. I'm not so sure that I did not give him yours. I rather fancy he expected that you would have been with me."

"I did not like to go, as I do not know Mrs. Prescott yet. I am sure I wanted to be there. Hark, papa!" she exclaimed, as a crunching sound on the gravel announced some one's approach. "Perhaps that is he;" and she ran out upon the flat in front of the open window. "Yes, it is. Oh, Sir Stephen, how good of you to come so soon! I am so glad to see you."

"Then, why were you not at Combe to meet us?" he asked reproachfully.

Hero did not give her reason.

"I *was* looking out for you," she said; "I went up to Tilly Mound quite an hour before you came to watch for the carriage."

"Then I suppose I must forgive you, but I am very impatient for my mother to know you. Will you walk back with me, and be introduced to her."

"What, now, do you mean?"

"Yes, if it is not too far. I will bring her back safely," he added, turning to Captain Carthew, who nodded a pleased acquiescence.

"But shall I go as I am?" demanded Hero, looking down at her plain muslin dress.

"Perfectly, I want you to be just as you are."

"Then, wait until I get my hat;" and in a few minutes after the two were on their way towards Combe.

"Papa tells me that you have another lady with you—your cousin, I think. He says she is lovely."

"She is generally considered handsome," said Sir Stephen,

almost unconsciously assuming an air of profound indifference.

"Don't you think her so?" asked Hero, beginning to have some doubt as to her father's romantic surmises being correct.

"Yes, but she is not nearly as good-looking now as she was before she married."

"Oh, is she married?"

"She married years ago, and is now a widow."

"Poor thing! how very sad!"

"My mother almost brought her up; she and I were quite children together."

"Then you must be very fond of each other, of course."

"Well, I do not know about the 'of course,'" said Sir Stephen, laughing. "After her marriage she lived entirely abroad, and we saw nothing of each other. Since her widowhood, and while I was out of England, she has been a great companion to my mother, by whose wish she has come here. When I said how much boating I intended having, my mother seemed a little nervous about being dull here, if she was alone; for I do not suppose we shall get her often on the water. I am longing for a sail. I wish we could go this evening, but I suppose that would be high treason to Mrs. Tucker's preparations. Never mind, to-morrow we must have one. You see the result of spoiling. I intend to monopolize you quite in the old way."

Hero did not answer except by a sign, which pleased Sir Stephen more than words would have done. How could he tell that her blushes arose from a consciousness that he ought to know about Leo?

As Mrs. Prescott afterwards remarked to Mrs. Labouchere,—

"How inconsistent men are! Who could have supposed (knowing how fatigued and wholly unprepared to see visitors we both were), that Stephen would have brought a strange young lady to call upon us? At least, Miss Carthew ought to have known better than to come at such an unreasonable time."

No sign, however, of this disapprobation was betrayed in

the manner in which Hero was received. On the contrary, Mrs. Prescott said it was very kind of Miss Carthew to give her such an early opportunity of making her acquaintance, and of thanking her for the hospitality she and Captain Carthew had shown to her son during his former visit to Mallett. She hoped she had not found them looking dreadfully untidy, for they had really not felt equal to any dressing, and were trying to rest a little before dinner.

"You must stay and dine with us," said Sir Stephen, to his mother's unutterable dismay.

"Oh no! I thank you," replied Hero, while Mrs. Prescott, feeling bound to say something, faintly murmured about being very pleased, if Miss Carthew did not mind their being in a little confusion.

"Thank you very much," said Hero, who felt that somehow it would have been better had she stayed away, "but I have had my dinner. I dined in the middle of the day."

"Then I know you are quite able to eat another dinner now," said Sir Stephen, nettled into a greater show of cordiality by not being satisfied with his mother's reception of Hero.

"Sir Stephen! indeed, it is too bad to proclaim my country appetite! Thank you, but I am obliged to decline," she added, turning to Mrs. Prescott; "I must return almost immediately. I told papa I should not be away long."

"I hope that both you and your papa will give us the pleasure of your company at dinner very soon," said Mrs. Prescott.

"Why not fix the day now, mother?" put in Sir Stephen. "If Miss Carthew has no engagement for to-morrow, you have none."

Poor Mrs. Prescott tried to smile, and say cordially, "No, I shall be most happy." As for Hero, she had seldom felt more awkwardly placed. She hardly knew how best to act. She feared to appear unwilling to come, and yet it seemed as if Sir Stephen were forcing her upon his mother.

"I am not able to say yes," she said, "because papa might be going to Dockmouth—perhaps it would be better to defer it for a little time."

"No, no! I'll manage about Captain Carthew; and if he is engaged, then all the more reason why you should not be alone—eh, mother?"

"I can only repeat, my dear, that it will give me great pleasure to see Miss Carthew; after that we must leave her, I think, to consult her own wishes a little."

"Oh, I have every wish to come," said Hero frankly; "but I fear that you may be tired or busy to-morrow, and, unless you don't mind me, I might be in the way."

"In that case I shall expect you, and I hope to see Captain Carthew with you." And Hero having risen to take her departure, Mrs. Prescott bade her good-by.

"We dine at half-past seven, do we not?" said Sir Stephen. "I shall be back before then."

"I hopeso." And the expression of Mrs. Prescott's face made Hero say—

"I beg you will not come with me, Sir Stephen. I know my way perfectly—fifty times better than you do—but really," she added, seeing him still resolute, "I would rather go alone. It is quite light, and I shall run all the way home. Please don't come."

But a mocking bow was the only answer he would make; and, feeling that outside he would listen to her more forcibly expressed wishes, she made a final adieu to Mrs. Prescott, and received a frigid shake of the hand from Mrs. Labouchere, who had sat silently observing her during the whole of her visit.

As the door closed, Katherine rose from her seat and went to the window, whence she watched the two figures, after a minute's pause outside, pass down the short avenue out of sight. Then she turned round, saying,—

"Aunt, had you heard any mention of this girl before we came here?"

CHAPTER XV.

A GREAT CATCH.

WHILE Mrs. Labouchere was listening to the little her aunt had to tell her about her previous knowledge of Hero, Sir Stephen was making an appointment with that young lady for a sail together to Winkle, under the feigned anxiety of being wonderfully desirous to see his friend Alice Joslyn.

"But will your mother like it?" said Hero, who, with a woman's sharp instinct, felt a little shadow of distrust about how the ladies of Combe meant to treat her.

Sir Stephen laughed. "I am afraid I have been out of leading-strings for this many a long year," he said; "besides, it will take them all to-morrow to get those wonderful boxes they brought with them unpacked; so do take compassion on me."

"We shall try to get up some picnics while Mrs. Prescott stays here. I hope she will like the place."

"I hope so too, for I have nearly decided upon living here altogether."

"Have you? How delighted everybody in Mallett will be!"

"And will you be delighted?"

"*I?*"—and Hero's face grew very rosy—"yes, you know"—she added with a little confused hesitation—"that if I don't always tell you what I feel, it is because I have been brought up so entirely with papa, that I am afraid of saying too much what I think."

Hero considered this a very subtle way of guarding herself against the misinterpretation which Leo had spoken of; but Sir Stephen knowing nothing of these warnings, read a happier meaning in her words, and looking at her earnestly, he said—

"Always say what you think to me, Hero." As he let her name slip she glanced at him with a look of inquiry. "Ah, I did not intend to say that until I had obtained your permission," he said, by way of apology, "but every one calls you Hero, and I think of you as Hero; it is such a pretty name. Miss Carthew sounds dreadfully formal, does it not?"

"Yes, *I* think so, because I am so seldom called Miss Carthew. Even the village people say Miss Hero." And yet she suddenly felt it would not be right to give him the permission to do so. In the midst of her hesitation it was a relief to see Betsey standing with a smiling face by the gate of Sharrows, as far as which, in spite of all her entreaties and arguments, Sir Stephen had insisted upon coming.

"Baint'ee glad to be breathing the fresh air agen, sir?" she called out, with an expression of beaming satisfaction at having her favorite back. "I just took a run to see Combe Gate, and the doin's up there, why 'tis for all the world like Dockmouth streets when the Queen comed there."

"I did not know that you had seen the Queen, Betsey?" said Sir Stephen.

"Well, I hav' and I haven't, as the sayin' is, for I looked—as anybody else would hav' done—to see her with the crown 'pon her head, and while I stood a gawking after that, lor! her goes by with a bunnet on, and a parachute held up over it like anybody else. But now you'd best be going back, sir," she said suddenly to Sir Stephen, "for Mrs. Tucker told me dinner was to be at half-past seven o'clock, and it's nigh on the quarter now."

"I wanted Miss Hero to stay and dine with us, but she was obstinate, Betsey, and would not be persuaded."

"Well, then, why didn't ee, Miss Hero? I'm sure you only had a lairy dinner at home, for what with one and t'other droppin' in, the cupboard was pretty nigh cleared out afore dinner time; and," she added, continuing the subject after they had bid Sir Stephen good-by, and Hero and she walked together down the path, "there'd ha' bin plenty sure/*ly*, for I've bin to the house; and down in

the kitchen there was a dozen things bein' made, fowls roastin', and tarts bakin', and I don't know what all; nor I didn't stop to see neither, for there was a fire fit to roast a ox, and the cook was a sweatin' like a bull."

"Did you see Mrs. Prescott?" asked Hero.

"Yes, I was stood up to Joep's, and they waited a minute or two there. Sir Stephen spied me out to once—I thought he would—'Betsey,' he calls out, 'is that you? Why how *are* you?' he says, and then the ladies looked."

"And what did you think of them?"

"Well," replied Betsey critically, "so far as I could see, the young one would be pretty if her wasn't so putty-faced."

"But don't you think Sir Stephen's mother very nice-looking?"

"Oh! her looks is well enough, but I didn't care for that bunnet her wore. I can't abide 'old rams dressed up lamb fashion.' But that ain't sayin' nothin' agen her ways. How was you took with her?"

"She was very kind and nice," I thought.

"Why didn't ee stay there, then, my dear?" asked Betsey, whose devotion to the girl, she had tended and watched from babyhood, made her familiar with every expression of her face and each inflection of her voice.

"They were so tired that I thought it best to come home. You know, they have come a long way to-day."

"Hem!" snorted Betsey, "I don't know what they'd got to tire 'em, savin' bein' squatted up together in that coach."

"I am going there to-morrow to dinner, and papa too."

"Aw, that's all right!" and Betsey's tone became more cheerful, than when the doubt was before her that the new arrivals had not been all that she desired they should be to her darling, who in her eyes was the very perfection of grace and goodness.

That evening Hero wrote a long and full account of the day's doings to Leo, not omitting to give a glowing personal description of Sir Stephen's cousin, Mrs. Labouchere, who, she said, was a widow, and had come to stay at Combe with Mrs. Prescott. It was a rule of Leo's to try

and find out who people were, and all about them; so he casually mentioned, during a *tête-à-tête* with a fashionable fellow-guest, that he had been asked by some friend of his to meet Sir Stephen Prescott of Pamphillon and his cousin, a Mrs. Labouchere, a widow, very pretty, they told him.

"What a fortunate dog it is!" ejaculated his companion; "I'd give all I know to get a fair start with that woman. Why, she is one of the best matrimonial catches out. Old Labouchere was worth no end of tin, and he left every farthing to her."

"What is Prescott like?"

"I don't know much of him; he's been a good deal out of England. Rather close-fisted, I should say, or else hard up; for Pamphillon's a fine old place, but you never hear of him doing anything."

"I wonder *he* does not go in for his rich cousin."

"She wouldn't have him! He has tried his luck there already. His mother brought her up. She's awfully handsome, but has an unpleasant way of making a fellow keep his distance; so you'll have to be on your best behavior, for of course you mean to go in for the prize."

"Not I.

"You'll be a great fool, then."

"Very likely. I am that already, I suppose," he added to himself, feeling confident that under different circumstances he might have secured a prize as readily as any man there; and a feeling which before had sometimes oppressed him came over him again, making him say to himself that it was really a great pity, seeing how circumstanced they both were, that he should care for Hero as he did. His vanity was greatly stimulated by the banter of the smoking-room, where, directly it was known that Leo had been asked down to an out-of-the-way place, described as somewhere near the Land's End, to meet that rich Mrs. Labouchere, every one took, or pretended to take, it as granted that a marriage was settled.

"Hang it, Despard," one would say, "if with an open field, a good-looking fellow like you cannot carry off the prize, I shall say you're nothing better than a bungler."

“Don’t you alarm yourself,” another voice would answer. “Skipwith has offered odds in his favor, and he never risks his money without being pretty sure of his man. I congratulate you, old fellow, and hope you will give me an early opportunity of congratulating the future Mrs. Despard.”

This and like idle badinage formed the thin end of a wedge, which from that time forced itself into Leo’s heart, and threatened to overthrow the fair image of his early love. “It would be far the best thing for both of us,” he would say, reflecting on the temptation which had taken hold of him; “it is not fair to keep her waiting year after year. If she were free she would be certain to get half a dozen better offers.” And the assurance that she would be benefited seemed in a measure to justify the sacrifice, he began to tell himself it would be his duty to make. These doubts caused his letters to Hero to be short, constrained, and written with an effort, which made him fling his pen away, and exclaim, “I wish that I’d never come near this place. I can’t explain to these fellows, and they’ll all vow I tried my luck and failed. Then when any of them meet this Mrs. Labouchere, as they’re sure to do, it will all come out about Hero—and Mallett. I should not mind so much if it were an old woman, who’d soon drop off and leave me her money. Money! there’s the rub. What is life worth if you cannot enjoy it?—and how are we to live on a couple or three hundred a year? What Forster says is quite true—a man who cannot afford it is a brute to drag a woman down by a marriage; far better give the wrench beforehand. There was something between him and Helen Seymour, but he gave her up; and now she has married Dacres, and has more money than she knows what to do with. Forster told me that it was an awful pull to him, and very nearly sent him altogether to the dogs, but he saw it was the only thing to be done.”

Thus Leo continued to think, plan, and resolve until the time arrived for his departure; and though, up to the last moment, he continued to declare he had no intention of becoming a suitor to Mrs. Labouchere, he laughed at the

banter, allowed the bets, and listened to the advice by which she was to fall a victim to his well-planned assiduities; so that when he reached Mallett the nearest approach he had made to a decision was that he would impress more forcibly upon Hero the necessity of their engagement being still kept a secret; and as for the other matter—it was of no use worrying and bothering—he would let things drift, and leave the end to chance.

CHAPTER XVI.

SOMEBODY.

THE day following their arrival was not very far advanced before Sir Stephen set off for Sharrows. He had already learnt a short way of getting there, and as he walked briskly along, invigorated by the bracing air, fresh from the wide expanse of sea to which the place lay open, he felt more determined than ever that, as soon as possible, he would sell his large estate, and settle at Combe. The whole surroundings of the place accorded with his tastes; he had always been fond of the sea, and of the people who lived by it. Their simple lives and outspoken ways interested him. Here he could be of service, identifying himself with all that concerned those to whom he desired to be of use.

From the very reason that Pamphillon had never been aught to him but a clog, and a continual source of dissatisfaction and annoyance, he disliked the place. The landowners near were not men he cared for; the better class of his tenantry were opposed to a landlord, who did not do as much for them and the land as, in their opinion, he ought to do, and would do, did he live among them. Without troubling themselves to understand his complicated difficulties, they made it a grievance, that instead of looking after his estate, he was roaming all over the world. Whenever he did go to Pamphillon, it was to listen to a long list of complaints and vexatious losses, which he could not redress; and, to see abuses which galled and fretted him, without his having the means of remedying the evils by which they were caused. He felt that he was never seen at such a disadvantage as when at Pamphillon, where his advice was treated as interference, and his silence re-

garded as indifference. One of his reasons for keeping away from Mallett was the fear lest the circle of his evils should be enlarged. But in this he had been agreeably disappointed, and from the moment Hero and Captain Carthew introduced him to Mallett, his life had brightened; for he found himself welcomed with trust and confidence by his neighbors, while in the village his presence was hailed as the forerunner of good, and the sure remedy against existing exils. Consequently, his eyes rested with far more pleasure on the old-fashioned house of Combe than they had ever done on stately Pamphillon. The cheery looks and voices of the cottagers, as they ran to their open doors to greet him, pleased him. Their free inquiries as to where he was going amused him, according with his own straightforward and genial disposition.

As, with a smiling face, he turned into Sharrows, the swinging to of the gate caused Hero, who was sitting on the window-sill below, to look up, and wave her hand. Sir Stephen returned the salutation, saying in his heart,—

“God bless her. I believe she is the chief cause why I feel so happy.”

He had come to claim her for their sail to Winkle, and after he had spoken to her and the Captain, he asked her how soon she would be ready to start, and whether they were to have Jim.

“I want to establish a boat of my own,” he said to Captain Carthew, “if you’ll tell me how best to set about it, and recommend me a man to look after it.”

“Joe Bunce would do exactly, papa,” exclaimed Hero; “he doesn’t want, and Betsey doesn’t want him, to go to sea again.”

“We couldn’t find a better man, nor a smarter sailor,” said Captain Carthew. “I’ve had my eye on a little craft at Clarkson’s that will, I think, just hit your fancy. We’ll go round to-morrow, and see it. Here, Betsey!” he roared out, “where’s that fancy chum of yours to be found? I saw him busnacking about here when I turned out this morning.”

“Well, ’tis more than I did, sir, or I’d ha’ given ’un a

job to do, and no mistake, but if you wants 'un for anythink, I dessay I could find 'un for ee."

"Sir Stephen is going to have a boat," said Hero, "and he will need a man to look after it, and I thought it would just suit Joe."

"I dessay 'twould," returned Betsey, trying not to betray her pleasure. "The parlor suited the dunkey, only he was rather out of place there."

"Why, there's not a sharper sailor in the service than Joe, Betsey," said Hero, standing up for her favorite.

"No, not when they pipes to grog, I know there bain't."

"Ah, well, he's just the man I want, Betsey," put in Sir Stephen; "so you tell him to come to Combe, and speak to me, and he shall have the management of my boat—the *Hero*, I mean to call it."

"What, after me?" said Hero, with a pleased face.

Sir Stephen nodded assent.

"Is it not a pretty name, Betsey?"

"Oh, 't does well enuf for a boat, Sir Stephen; but what for ever anybody should choose such a outlandish name for a Christian, I couldn't tell 'ee if you was to pay me. And then to call it a maid's name. Tine a by!" she added with infinite contempt, "if a 'era ain't a man, why what is he?"

"That is what she always says," laughed Hero. "Now, is it not a proper woman's name, Sir Stephen?"

"Certainly it is, and a very celebrated one—among the heathens, Betsey," he added slyly.

"The *heathens!*" repeated Betsey. "Aw' well, I'll give in to it bein' *their* fancy; though why for ever anybody should want to follow lead to a passel o' Turks and niggers, is more than I can tell. But there, as I allays says, the mercy is 'tain't no worse; for if by chance the Cap'en had had the *Harrythoosa* or the *Billyruffian*, 'twould ha' bin all one to he, and a nice handle that had a bin to 'av' fitted anybody else's name on to, surely."

"I'm afraid that Betsey's familiarity will shock Mrs. Prescott," said Hero, when they were out of her hearing. "She has been so long with us, that we never mind her. I hope

you don't; for she says that she never remembers you are not a common gentleman."

Sir Stephen laughed.

"I like to have a chat with Betsey. Her queer speeches amuse me immensely. How wonderfully fond she is of you!"

"Yes, but not more fond than I am of her, dear old soul! Still, I know that strangers might think she made rather free, although it is only her manner. She has no thought of being disrespectful. If Mrs. Prescott or Mrs. Labouchere should make any remarks on her, please explain how it is. I don't wish them to have a wrong impression of her."

"I'll make it all right," said Sir Stephen. "What a lovely day it is! there is not a ripple on the water."

"Yes, it is smooth enough to satisfy any one. Did you ask your cousin to come?"

"No, I did not; I didn't want her," he answered, "I only wanted you. You promised to teach me to row and steer, and we must not have an audience so long as I am in danger of catching a crab. Here is Jim and the boat. Let us jump in, and be off."

"You see I have kept my word, Jim, and come back again," he said, nodding in acknowledgment of the old seaman's silent greeting.

"Iss, so I sees, sir, and I'm main glad of it, and so is somebody else, too, I reckon." And, his hand and his hook being employed in steadying the boat, he jerked his head in Hero's direction.

"I wonder if that is a true supposition on Jim's part?" Sir Stephen asked as they settled into their places.

"I don't know. What did he say?"

"That *somebody* would be glad that I have come back."

"*Somebody!* I don't know who he means."

"Don't you? I must ask him. Jim, Miss Hero wants to know who you mean by somebody?"

"Do she? Then you tell her, sir;" and his eyes twinkled with significance. "Lord love 'ee," he said with a quiet chuckle, "I knows more than you thinks for. Why, I had a somebody o' my own once upon a time—ah! and

as likely a maid as you'd see in a day's walk. 'Twas all plain sailing afore me, as I thought. Howsomedever, close into port, for I'd bought the ring, and was going to put up the bains, I missed stays, and I never managed to get in the right tack afterwards."

"What does he mean?" asked Sir Stephen, with a puzzled expression.

"Why, that just before they were going to be married he offended her, and he could never set things right again. I am sure it is plain enough to understand; and if you keep so in shore, we shall get under the lea of Combe Point, and lose the wind, and then before we can make Winkle you'll have a practical illustration."

"You bain't so handy in a boat as Miss Hero," said Jim, who watched with great pride the instruction she was bestowing upon Sir Stephen. "Why, when her was six her'd handle the oars or the tiller as fitty as another little maid would a dolly."

"Do you remember her then, Jim?" asked Sir Stephen.

"Remember her! I should think I do. Why, I've a got her in my mind's eye from the time her was a dinkey thing hoisted up on the Cap'en's shoulders, till now. Don't 'ee take her from us altogether, sir," he cried out, as the fear of losing her swept over him, "though as far as a human eye can judge o' a human 'art, you're the one I hopes to see standin' in somebody else's shoes."

"What is that old stupid talking about?" Hero exclaimed, her face getting scarlet at these delicately-conveyed hints. "Jim," she called out, "if you don't hold your tongue this minute, I'll throw the tiller at you."

"No, don't 'ee, Miss Hero, I don't mean nothing by what I says. Marriage is a honorable institootion in all. Ye know,—

'The Lord o' weddin's did approve
And smiled on wedlock's happy love;
In token of—he gived a sign,
And lo! the water turned to wine.'

CHAPTER XVII.

A DINNER PARTY.

THE sail to Winkle resulted in Sir Stephen and Hero being accompanied back to Sharrows by Alice Joslyn, that she might be introduced to the new arrivals; and six o'clock found the two girls, with Captain Carthew between them, setting off to keep their dinner engagement.

The trio were in high spirits; they enjoyed a little outing, and this one being entirely beyond the common order, was an event to them all. The old man looked with pleasurable pride at the two young faces, giving vent to his admiration by trolling out in a voice which was beginning slightly to quaver, "How happy could I be with either!"

"No, no," exclaimed Alice. "You're happy with us both. Leave Sir Stephen to sing that—though," she whispered, "I know which he'd be most happy with, don't you?"

"Alice!" and Hero gave a warning glance in that direction; while the Captain, with a knowing wink of significance and a nudge of the arm in token of his appreciation of the allusion, said—

"Mum's the word."

He was in the habit of teasing his daughter about all sorts of admirers, without thinking very seriously about any of their attentions; therefore, though he had noticed Sir Stephen's evident liking for Hero, he had formed no other conclusion but that he had taken a fancy to her, as it was but natural that any man should do. "Bless her heart! There wasn't another such in the world."

"You think that Sir Stephen will come here to live altogether?" Alice asked.

"So he says," replied the Captain. "He seems to have taken a fancy to the place, and what wonder? Where else,

I should like to know, could you see anything like that?" and he wheeled round to look at the sea, over which the sinking sun was casting its warm glow. "He's just the man for Mallett," the Captain continued as they resumed their walk. "Plain sailing; no starch about the gills. That's what I like in a fellow, and if we get him to settle down among us, by Jove! 'twill be the making of old Mallett."

"And how gay we should be certain to get!" exclaimed Hero, executing two or three steps in anticipation. "Only fancy, Alice, a dance at Combe every Christmas at the very least."

"Up the middle and down again," the Captain called out, setting all three into an imaginary "Triumph," which ended in a run that brought them very nearly in sight of the house, where their presence was being anticipated with greater anxiety than any of them could have possibly dreamed of.

The principal interest was centred upon Hero, about whom, from the first mention of her name, Mrs. Prescott's fears had been aroused. Since seeing her, these fears had been greatly increased, and she now only waited for a further opportunity to be assured, that the opposition she was bent upon making was really necessary.

Mrs. Labouchere's thoughts, as she sat silent and absorbed under her maid's skilful hands, ran solely upon the same subject. "Had Stephen been caught by this girl?" her heart kept repeating with jealous uncertainty; until, her toilette completed, she surveyed her perfectly-attired self. Then, almost a smile came into her face as she recalled the straw-hatted, blue-muslined figure. "Surely no, there could never be a thought of rivalry between them;" and with a renewed feeling of security she descended to the drawing-room, where her aunt and Sir Stephen were already sitting.

"What a lovely dress, Katie!" Mrs. Prescott exclaimed as her niece joined them. "Stephen, is it not beautiful?"

"It is indeed, and most becoming," he added, regarding her with visible admiration. "You should always wear those rich shades of color, Katherine." And while Katherine smiled a pleased acknowledgment of these, of late,

rare compliments, Sir Stephen began to wonder with sudden anxiety how Hero would be dressed. It had not occurred to him before, but now he was filled by a desire that she should look her best, and in order to be satisfied before she submitted herself to general inspection, he made an excuse for going to speak to Mrs. Tucker, whose room overlooked the approach by which the expected visitors would come.

He had not long to wait, and by the time they reached the door, he was standing ready to bid them welcome. As Hero shook down her soft muslin skirt, Sir Stephen said in an approving tone—

“This is the dress you wore at the dance, is it not? I am glad of that; and have you red roses for your hair?”

“Yes, real ones this time. See,” and she held up a couple of fragrant buds, which she had been carefully carrying to pin in on her arrival.

“Delicious!” he said, sniffing their sweetness. “Remember not to pin them too low. Just there is the place,” and he touched her bright silky hair with his hand.

“What are they about, my dear?” asked Mrs. Prescott pettishly, as Mrs. Labouchere returned from the survey which her curiosity had led her to take of the party from over the banisters.

Katherine’s lips trembled with jealous anger. “Apparently Stephen is engaged in arranging Miss Carthew’s hair.”

“My son!” exclaimed Mrs. Prescott, starting from her seat. “Really, my dear Katie, you must be mistaken. Why I—” but a movement from Mrs. Labouchere caused her to stop as the half-closed door was thrown open by Sir Stephen, who entered with Captain Carthew. Hero and Alice did not join them until some minutes later, and then so full of excitement were they, and so struck with admiration and astonishment at Mrs. Labouchere’s toilette—each portion of which was something new and quite beyond even Dockmouth fashions—that the over-polite greeting and stiff coldness of the two ladies was entirely thrown away and lost.

“Will you take my mother, Captain Carthew?” Sir Ste-

phen said, when dinner was announced, offering his arm to Hero.

"Miss Joslyn, Stephen," Mrs. Prescott half-whispered, giving a significant glance towards Alice.

"Mrs. Labouchere and Miss Joslyn will have the mutual pleasure of going down together," said Sir Stephen; "an advantage which they both will appreciate, but which must never be permitted to them again."

"Why did you take me down?" said Hero, who felt an undue honor had been thrust upon her. "You ought to have taken *her*."

"Who is *her*?" asked Sir Stephen, ready to accept any opportunity for lingering behind.

"You know," and Hero nodded her head towards Mrs. Labouchere. "How lovely she is!"

"The only person I see is lovely—"

"Oh, you're always laughing at me," Hero said with a pretended pout. "I have a great mind to be very cross with you, Sir Stephen."

"Cross because I am telling you the truth, Hero!"

And some mischievous sprite, echoing the sound in Mrs. Prescott's ears, she looked up, and the expression she saw in her son's face made her heart grow sick within her. She went on smiling mechanically to Captain Carthew, hearing without taking in his words, for her thoughts were busy as to what would put the most effectual stop to Stephen's infatuation.

Her more than ordinary silence was put down by Mrs. Labouchere to the usual cause, a coming headache. What other reason could there be? for rarely had Katherine found more occasion to be pleased with Sir Stephen's manner. Towards her he seemed to have suddenly become his old self again. He spoke of the days when they were children together, recalled to her memory a trivial incident which she fancied he had long forgotten, encouraged the Captain in his outspoken admiration, and laughingly egged him into paying the most high-flown compliments until Katherine felt triumphantly radiant under the certainty that all was coming to pass as she had willed it. How silly had

been her jealousy of a mere child, whom she now saw that Stephen could never for a moment have seriously thought about! This discovery made her thoroughly unbend to Hero, and Sir Stephen, well-pleased to see his cousin adopt the kindly tone he had wished to exist between them, continued in his gratitude to mislead her more completely.

But not so his mother. To her every turn of his face was known by heart, and her quick eye detected the softened expression, which came up into his eyes every time they rested upon Hero. "I cannot make her manner out," she thought. "That she sees it I am sure, but she seems rather to ignore than to encourage his attentions. Cunning! artifice! for who would not be eager to secure such a man as Stephen?" And, if not—her motherly love was at once in arms at the bare idea of this country girl, who should never win her son presuming to disdain his love. "It is evident Katherine does not see it as I do," she added to herself as she gave the signal to retire, "and I must strive to keep her in ignorance. Poor Katey! I can see that she is deceiving herself."

And certainly Katherine was most completely.

The key to this sudden change in Sir Stephen's manner lay in the determination he had come to, that as soon as possible he must hear from Hero's lips the assurance that she loved him. During his absence from her he had repeatedly congratulated himself on the calm tranquillity of his love—a tranquillity which had taken flight at first sight of her sunny face, and which had ever since been working itself into a storm of feverish anxiety. The fear of betraying to others that which he had not yet openly declared to Hero made him impose on himself a greater restraint than usual, and his spirits rising with the hope of speedy happiness led to that light-hearted feeling of freedom which was so bitterly misleading Katherine.

No sooner had he and Captain Carthew joined them in the drawing-room, than Sir Stephen, seizing an opportunity when the others were engaged, drew Hero towards Mrs. Prescott, saying—

"Mother, do you remember what I said to you a little

while since about you and Miss Carthew becoming great friends? It will be a very easy task to love her, will it not?" and his whole face seemed to soften and grow tender, as he turned towards Hero, who stood blushing to the roots of her hair.

Mrs. Prescott did not speak, and her son, feeling certain that tears were the cause of her silence, involuntarily put out his hand for an assurance that she understood him; but, instead of tears, Mrs. Prescott was looking straight in front of her with a fixed, hard gaze, and, before Sir Stephen had time to recover from his surprise, she got up, and going over to Alice, said—

"I hope you will sing me something, Miss Joslyn. I am sure you do sing. You have a singing face."

"I don't think my mother can be well this evening," Sir Stephen managed to get out by way of apology. "She does not seem at all herself."

Hero did not answer him; she turned away towards where her father was standing. "It is time that we thought of going, papa," she said.

"Is it, my dear? All right. She's time-keeper," he laughed, addressing Mrs. Prescott. "I used to say it took a good deal to get me out, and a good deal more to get me home, but now I'm under petticoat government. You see I haven't a voice of my own. Take my advice, Prescott, my good fellow, and don't give up your liberty. You keep Cap'en of your own ship as long as you can. Now, Hero, what about this little gathering we propose having? Have you asked these ladies to settle the day?"

"The people about Mallett are very anxious to be introduced to you, Mrs. Prescott," Hero said, hesitating, and with a confusion of manner. "Papa would be so very pleased if you would allow them to meet you at our house."

"Papa would be pleased!" broke in the Captain. "Why, you monkey, it was your own happy suggestion."

"Yes, but I think that you will be a greater inducement, papa."

"Bless her heart!" exclaimed the old man, pinching her already rosy cheek. "She fancies everybody must think

as much of her old father as she does. And here's another young monkey just as bad ;" and he put his arm round Alice. "Ah, they're a nice pair. I don't know who but me would be bothered with two such rascals."

"Papa, we have not had Mrs. Prescott's answer yet. I thought, if you had no engagement for next Wednesday or Thursday, or any other day that will suit you and Mrs. Labouchere—All days are alike to us."

"Thank you very much. I am sure you and Captain Carthew are very kind ; but I so seldom go out. I have long since given up parties."

"But this will not be a party. It would be only seeing some people who are very anxious to tell you how glad they are that you have come here."

"I am sure they are very kind ; but I really hardly know what to say."

And she looked imploringly at Katherine.

"Say that you will go, aunt ; for I am sure you will make the effort, as you always do, to give others pleasure. I shall quite look forward to it. I think we might say Wednesday—if that is perfectly convenient to Miss Carthew, and suits Stephen."

Sir Stephen felt he could have hugged Katherine in his gratitude. As it was, he took hold of her hand, and gave it a silent squeeze, never noticing the quick blood which leapt into her pale face at the remembrance that this was the first voluntary pressure he had ever bestowed since that hand had gone out of his recognized keeping.

So it is with the very best of us. So self-absorbed had Sir Stephen become, that it never once entered into his mind to recollect that Katherine could not see his reasons, his altered resolves, his fresh resolutions.

Mrs. Prescott shook her head.

"You see, I have my despot," she said to Captain Carthew, "and if Wednesday will really suit you, in spite of my perhaps seeming not to appreciate Miss Carthew's thoughtfulness, I shall be happy to accept your very kind invitation."

"I am going to smoke a cigar, mother," Sir Stephen

said ; " so, if you and Katherine have retired before I return, good-night."

" Are you coming with us?" Alice asked, as they stepped into the full moon's light. " Then do let us go home by Sharrow Sands."

" Oh, no, it is much too late, Alice."

" Fiddle-string nonsense, too late!" exclaimed the Captain. " It won't be too late for you two fellows' tongues to go running on at nineteen knots the hour for half the night long. I know you both. Come along, Ally, my girl, and we'll have 'Lovely night, lovely night,' or 'Meet me by moonlight alone.' Come, which shall it be, for 'my heart, my heart is breaking for the love of Alice Gray.'"

While these snatches of appropriate melody were being indulged in, Sir Stephen had taken Hero's hand, and drawn it through his arm.

" It was silly to put the Sands into papa's head," she said ; " the walk home is quite long enough, and I am tired."

" Are you?"

And Sir Stephen took her hand ; but, before he could hold it in his own, Hero had drawn herself away from him, saying :—

" We cannot walk arm-in-arm. I have my dress to hold up." And she gathered the muslin round her.

" One hand will do for that," Sir Stephen said ; " give me the other." And this time he let her rest on his arm, and they walked on without speaking, Sir Stephen silent, because he could only talk on one subject, and the place was not yet reached where he could ask the question which was repeating itself in every pulse and beat of his heart ; Hero not talking, because she had determined she would no longer delay speaking about Leo, and the easiest way to broach the subject would be, by allowing Sir Stephen to remark on her taciturnity.

But this, to her disappointment, Sir Stephen did not intend doing ; and she was at length forced to say herself :—

" How very silent we both are !"

"Are we?" and, the pathway ended, he gave a deep sigh of relief.

Poor Hero! she could have echoed the sound, at which her heavy heart sank still deeper down. She felt that it was right that Sir Stephen should know that she was not free and unfettered, as he thought her; but the feeling which prompted her to tell him was accompanied with a bitterness, such as she had never known before, as if she were putting an end to all her happiness; and her repeated self-assurance that it would make no difference to Sir Stephen, and that they should still continue friends, did not soften the pain one atom.

With these separate objects to be attained, neither of them had offered any opposition to a little lagging; so that Captain Carthew and Alice were tolerably well ahead, and out of sight, by the time they reached the rocks where the bay opened out.

Here they stood, and silently gazed at the calm waves swiftly gliding up the great stretch of pale yellow sand, until, arrested by a mighty hand, they retired murmuring and slow, leaving behind myriads of gemmed and sparkling drops. Not a sound was to be heard but the sea's hushed melody; saving themselves, not a living thing was to be seen. The clouds, rolled up in great masses of feathery down, shrank back from the luminous trail in which the moon, shedding her soft light on all around, sat calmly shining.

Familiarity had but endeared the scene to Hero, and, after she had stood for some moments drinking in its witchery, involuntarily she turned towards Sir Stephen. Her eyes met his, that which lay around vanished, and a little shiver ran through her, for she saw there was to be no more delay.

Only an instant before, and the words which Sir Stephen meant to say lay on his lips; but now they were gone—drowned in the great surge which rushed into his heart, and set it beating so wildly, that the very power of speech seemed forgotten. The moon hid herself behind an attendant cloud, and, before she again unveiled her splendor,

Stephen Prescott held Hero to his heart, and the passionate love which had taken sudden possession of him was no longer a secret from her.

Had she spoken before? Was it because he would not listen that she cried out in a voice sharp and strained,—

“No! no! Sir Stephen!” and then, as if with the knife which was to sever them she first pierced her own heart, she added slowly, “I—I am engaged already.”

As in the midst of wedding chimes discordant comes the passing bell, so Sir Stephen heard these words. They fell upon his ear, and then dropping down within him, made his heart of a sudden cease its quick motion, his tingling pulses die away, and the nervous strength which a minute before had made his arms seem iron bands, relax and fail him; and, with no power to stay her, Hero released herself, and again they stood side by side looking at the calm bay, the yellow sands, and the moonlit waves, but seeing nothing but the dark shadow which had fallen between them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEST AND EARNEST.

BOTH Sir Stephen and Hero felt it a relief when Sharrows came in sight, and they saw the outline of two figures waiting at the gate for them to come up. Their walk from the Sands had been almost a silent one. Sir Stephen had learnt that he had never seen the man to whom Hero had given her love; that the engagement was unacknowledged, that it had been entered into by themselves, and that even her father's sanction had not been formally asked.

He refused Captain Carthew's invitation to come in, under a plea that the hour was too late; and then, when the door had fairly closed upon them, he deliberately retraced his steps back to where he had so recently heard his hopes crushed.

Leaning his arms on a rocky projection, he stood, going over the whole scene again. Surely he had a right to feel rebellious. Was his love never to find a resting-place? He had been so confident, so secure—seeing no one whom Hero cared for, he had felt sure that she cared for no one. Who could it be? Who had forestalled him in securing the love he now longed and thirsted after with an intensity of feeling before unknown to him? Every now and then his fancy took a wild flight, and he imagined some catastrophe—absence—time—a thousand obstacles snapping the chain which bound the object of his desire to any other but himself. He could do anything, wait any time; but he could not give her up. He would not forego hope. Surely, in that moment when their hearts seemed to beat a language for which the tongue finds no utterance, he had read her rightly. If so—come what might, she should be his.

Hero in the meantime was screening her pale face and darkly circled eyes under that woman's shield, a headache. She said she must go straight to bed, she could hardly speak, she felt so ill; and Alice promised in her stead to light the Captain's pipe, and talk to him while he smoked it.

Betsey, with the intuitive sharpness which love bestows upon all, saw something had gone wrong with her darling; but she never asked a question or hazarded an inquiry. She waited upon her and undressed her with motherly care, and finally putting her great strong arms round her, as she had done when Hero was a little child, she called her her pride, her cosset, "Betsey's dear, she was," until the icy hold which gripped the girl's quick emotions melted away, and clinging to her old nurse, she sobbed as if her heart would break. She did not ask herself why these tears came. She only knew that it was a relief to give vent to her misery, and to take her fill of sorrow. In the midst of all her troubles, her one definite thought was that Leo was coming back either to-morrow or the day after: then their engagement must be made public—there must be no more concealment—and her tears flowed afresh, feeling that the one who should have known it had only learned it too late. Love is blind in more ways than one. Sometimes the mischievous urchin closes the eyes of his victims to his own presence, lulling them into a security which he employs in forging the fetters which, until felt, are seldom seen.

Knowing the hour that Sir Stephen and her father had appointed to start on their boat-buying expedition, Hero contrived that before that time arrived she and Alice should have left home with the avowed intention of issuing the invitations for the following Wednesday.

"Here, I say," said the Captain, suddenly noticing Sir Stephen's haggard face; "why, you look as if you'd been draining the blood of a turnip field. Why, what's the matter, eh?"

"I don't think that wine suited me last night," said Sir Stephen. "Somehow, I never can drink port."

"I see!" and the Captain eyed him mournfully; "you're

a bad ship to put a cargo into. Well, upon my life, if I know what you young fellows are coming to. You do look uncommonly seedy, though; perhaps we'd best put off going for a day or two."

But to this Sir Stephen would not listen. The sail to Cargill, he said, would do him good—not that there was anything the matter with him.

"No, no," laughed the Captain; "you only feel as if the cat had got you, and the Emperor of Rooshia had got the cat. I know all about it. But you must brisk up as we go through the village, or they'll give us credit for having been three sheets in the wind last night; for they know I dined up at Combe. And how are the ladies this morning?"

"I have not seen either of them. I spoke to my mother through the door, and heard that she was all right; but I was off for a good spin before they were down."

"Then you'll be tired before we return, for I suppose we are to go on to Dockmouth?"

"Yes; I want to see Truscott. I must begin to set this place in order without delay. I shall find plenty to occupy me for months to come. I dare say," he added, after a pause, "that you will not think it is saying much for myself, but do you know that until quite recently I never knew that this property was anything but a handsome incumbrance?"

The Captain indicated his surprise by a comical pursing up of his face.

"Of course," Sir Stephen continued, "if I had taken the slightest trouble to find out, I should have seen that the reason of my receiving next to nothing from Mallett was, that it was all but drained dry to keep up Pamphillon, which my uncle left in a terrible state. My mother sold what property she possessed to raise money. Combe she could not sell, but in one way and the other the lawyers contrived to make it contribute pretty freely to the general fund without its getting the slightest credit."

"Terrible fellows, those lawyers!" said the Captain.

"Oh! it was not their fault. I ought to have come

down here long ago, but somehow I was brought up with a prejudice against Combe. My mother never could bear to hear the place named—not that, except by hearsay, she knew anything of it.”

“That’s the way,” laughed the Captain. “Give a dog a bad name, and hang him. However, we won’t talk of what you might have done ; here you are now, and better late than never.”

Sir Stephen did not answer. He could have said, that having delayed so long, it would have been for his happiness now had he never set foot in the place. Everything he did and said seemed to connect itself with the bitter disappointment uppermost in his mind. All the while he was talking to the Captain he was longing to ask after Hero, but something made it impossible to mention her name, without the Captain seeing that he was making an effort to appear the same as usual. At length he got out—

“Miss Carthew has stolen a march on us this morning?”

“Yes, she is asking her friends for Wednesday. I tell her she must brisk up a bit before then ; she complained of not feeling well this morning. Betsey says she’s not been well for a week, but I didn’t notice it before.”

“She complained last night,” Sir Stephen said, with a mingled feeling of pity and exultation. If she had no love for him, surely she would not take his sorrow so to heart.

“Your cousin, Mrs. Labouchere, is an uncommonly fine woman,” said the Captain.

“Yes.”

“She must have married very young. What did her husband die of?”

“Well, I am not quite certain—old age, I think.”

“Old age! pack of stuff and nonsense! don’t tell me that she married an old man. What in Heaven’s name made her do that?”

“Ten thousand a year is the supposed inducement.”

“By Jove! what a sacrifice!”

“Oh, I don’t know ; she has what she married for. He left her everything he possessed—an estate in Scotland, and a place near the lakes.”

"I say," said the Captain, with a confidential nod of his head, "I should throw in my hat there. By Jove! a fellow doesn't often get such a chance, eh?"

Sir Stephen laughed at the meaning conveyed. "She flies far too high for me," he said.

The Captain gave a low whistle. "Nothing short of a prince of the royal blood, I suppose?"

"Oh! I don't mean that. I don't think she cares much for rank—indeed, I believe she has refused a title already: but she has too much money for any poor man—that is, speaking personally. Unless I loved a woman very much, I could not stand being dependent upon her."

"'Twould be a shame for her to marry a rich man, though."

"Well, perhaps yes. She must find some one willing to be saddled with her benefits."

"I think I could find two or three who'd stand pretty quiet under the burden," laughed the Captain, "though I won't answer about kicking over the traces after. You know the old proverb, 'Set a beggar on horseback——' Hulloa!" he exclaimed, looking up a lane towards a pretty cottage, "a soldier at Aunt Lydia's? Then I suppose Mr. Leo is back again."

But Sir Stephen took no heed of this remark; his thoughts had gone back to Hero. What was she doing, feeling, and thinking—and was she, like him, sad and heavy-hearted?

Could he have read the innermost thoughts of Hero's heart, it is probable that he would have been satisfied, for never had the poor girl passed such a miserable day. She had learnt from Aunt Lydia that Leo was expected to arrive during the afternoon, and she sat in nervous anticipation of their meeting, and of the conversation she intended having with him. Mr. Joslyn had early taken Alice back to Winkle, so that Hero was able to enjoy alone the full misery of her own companionship. She dreaded, yet longed for Leo's presence; her heart beat violently with each sound, and died away when she discovered that her fears were unfounded. Sometimes she thought that she

would go up and see if he had arrived; then she would fancy she heard his step; until five o'clock struck, and she knew that if he did not soon come, she had little chance of seeing him alone. While she was wondering whether he had been delayed, Betsey came in to lay the cloth for dinner, and before these arrangements were completed, Captain Carthew arrived.

"I wanted Sir Stephen to come in," he said, "but he wouldn't; he isn't the thing at all to-day. I could hardly get a word out of him."

Hero bent her head to avoid her quick color being seen.

"Oh, by the way, has Leo been down? He's back."

"No, I have not seen him."

"Ah, he'll turn up soon, I dare say," said the Captain, with the unpleasant conviction that there was no getting rid of almost the only visitor to whom he could not always give a cordial welcome.

Hero tried to assume an interest in all her father had been doing; he, in his turn, asked if everybody was coming on Wednesday.

"Very nearly. Aunt Lydia won't; she says she does not like meeting strangers."

"Who does she call strangers?"

"Mrs. Prescott and Mrs. Labouchere, I suppose. I cannot fancy why, but she always seems to speak slightly of Sir Stephen, as if she did not like him."

"Like him! Why, she doesn't know him. Oh! she's jealous, poor old body; she fears that he'll take the wind out of Leo's sails. Ah, it would need a pretty stiff breeze to do that, in his own opinion."

"Don't say that, papa."

The Captain gave a something between a grunt and a sigh; and then, fearing he had wounded his daughter, he said, "But, my dear, I don't know that I think worse of the young fellow because he thinks well of himself. I never met a red-coat yet that I shouldn't have liked to buy at my price and sell at his own. It's a way they've got in the army." Then turning the conversation, he began telling Hero the different good points of two boats he and Sir

Stephen had seen, and between which their choice still halted.

After dinner old Mr. Jamieson and Captain Thomson dropped in, and finally Leo Despard appeared.

"I expected that I should have seen you before this," Hero said in a low tone. "I waited in all the afternoon."

"I am very sorry, but it was not my fault. I was obliged to go up to the Forts first. I found everything at sixes and sevens. During my absence nothing seems to have been attended to. I expect I shall have to spend a great deal more time there than I bargained for. It is an awful nuisance that none of those fellows can be trusted."

This excuse was Leo's first step towards curtailing his visits to Sharrows; and so much had it cost him to keep away, that he felt quite aggrieved at being taken to task for his self-denial. Without either of them uttering a word which did not sound kind and cordial, each was sensible of a difference, and by mutual consent they studiously avoided their eyes meeting. Gradually, as Hero became silent, Leo, with the desire to seem perfectly at his ease, grew more than usually talkative; and in answer to the Captain's questions as to how he had enjoyed his visit, he gave an animated account of the whole party, how they had spent their time, and what the place was like.

"I hear that the Combe people have arrived," he said, turning towards Hero. "What are the ladies like—have you see them?"

"Seen them! I should think so," answered the Captain. "Sir Stephen's mother is a very nice woman—just like him—no nonsense about her; and as for his cousin—

'She's—all my fan—cy painted her,
She's lovely, she-e-e's *di-vi-ne*.'

I say, Jamieson," he added, addressing his old shipmate, "do you remember, when we were at Cadiz, in the old *Thetis*? Well, she puts me just in mind of that Spanish girl Tommy Holmes was so nuts upon."

"But Mrs. Labouchere is so fair, papa."

"Yes, they're different there; but Jamieson'll see what I mean—just built on the same lines."

"Tommy found out that the old don he took for her father was her husband," said Mr. Jamieson.

"By jingo! so he did," exclaimed the Captain; "and strange to say, that this one married an old fellow with one leg in the grave then—and both now;" and he laughed, heartily pleased at his joke, and the still further similarity between the two beauties. "Would you believe it, that woman's worth £10,000 a year—*ten thousand a year*," he repeated. "Sir Stephen was telling me the whole thing this morning. The old man left her every penny he possessed, and two estates in the bargain."

"Of course Sir Stephen intends sharing the benefit," Leo said, wanting to hear how the land lay there.

"Not he—she has too much money for him. He says he is too poor to be dependent."

"Quixotic creature!" and Leo laughed derisively; "he has come to that conclusion very lately, then. Some men at Dunross knew them both, and they gave rather a different version of the story."

"I don't know what you may have heard," said the Captain, "but I am sure that whatever Sir Stephen told me was the truth. I asked him if she was waiting for the Prince of Wales, and he said no—that she had refused several titles, and he didn't think she cared much for rank."

"Ah! doubtless that was her reason for refusing the greatness he sought to thrust upon her," and Leo laughed more heartily still, as if all this bore upon some excellent joke which he possessed, but did not intend imparting.

He continued to rattle on with an unusual appearance of high spirits, hoping to keep down the gnawing canker at his heart. With his anger rose his love, and though he determined to punish Hero for sitting silent and, as he thought, sullen, never had she seemed so dear to him; and in the midst of the stories he was repeating, and the jokes he was retailing, he ever and anon found opportunity to assure himself that he could not give her up, and that it was of no use trying.

All this while Hero was wondering what had wrought this change in his manner, and while her attention was diverted from the general conversation, a footstep outside made her heart stand still, the blood rush to her face, and every sense seem obscured until she heard herself saying, "Mr. Leo Despard, Sir Stephen Prescott!"

CHAPTER XIX.

WIDELY OPPOSED.

SIR STEPHEN excused himself from staying beyond a few minutes at Sharrows by saying he had only strolled out to have a cigar, and that finding himself at the gate, he thought he would ask Betsey to send Joe Bunce up to him the next day ; the truth being that from the moment dinner was over he had done nothing but make and break resolutions.

He would have been ashamed to acknowledge to himself how many times he had turned back from Sharrows gate, trying to keep to his purpose of not seeing Hero that evening. He had petulantly said that he was behaving like some lover of eighteen, possessed by a first mad passion, which submits to everything but common-sense and self-control, two things which told Sir Stephen it was best and wisest not to seek another immediate interview. But what was the strength of these elderly spinster virtues compared with the young giants, who made his eyes hunger, and his ears thirst, for a sound or a look from her, who suddenly seemed to have cast out every object in life, and to have taken sole and undisputed possession of him. He must go to her, he would ask for a further explanation—who was his rival, what were the circumstances of an engagement, which hope said was perhaps nothing but a form. He would tell her that, until he began to try and quench his love, he had never dreamed of the mastery it had gained over him ; that with her his happiness must stand or fall ; and then he would entreat her to be frank with him, and to tell him everything, and if aught but love of that other were the obstacle, nothing on earth should keep her from him. And these thoughts filling his heart, he walked

swiftly on into her presence, and found himself face to face with Leo Despard. It needed but a glance at Hero to tell him who this new guest was; and, after that one look, he kept his gaze steadily averted from her until he said good-by; then the coldness of her hand irresistibly drew his eyes towards the poor little face, which, the hot color having died away, looked like a faded flower, white and ashen.

"Leo Despard—Despard—Despard," and Sir Stephen repeated the name over and over to himself as he walked slowly and moodily along. "I have heard that name somewhere before, but I cannot think where," and he stopped, took his hat off, and stood straining his memory; but it would not serve him, until, when he had nearly reached home, and was thinking about something else, it suddenly flashed across him that it was the name of the late rector of Mallett. "He was called Despard, of course." He remembered now that, after his first visit, his mother asked him whether he had met any one of that name. Perhaps she meant this young man, and, anxious to hear something more of him, he turned his loitering pace into a quick walk, and soon reached home, where he ran up at once to the drawing-room, hoping to find his mother; but Mrs. Prescott had already retired, and he had to wait until her maid had left her, then he knocked at the door, and asked if she would admit him.

"Certainly; come in, my dear. I am only reading."

Sir Stephen sat down opposite to her, and after a few indifferent sentences, he said—

"By the way, mother, you once asked me if I had seen any one called Despard here. Who did you mean?"

The book in which Mrs. Prescott had been placing a mark fell out of her hand, and as she stooped down with unusual alacrity to pick it up, her son just caught sight of her face.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Matter, my dear?"

"Yes, you looked as if something had given you pain."

"Oh, my head; it often does when I stoop."

"Then why do you stoop? I would have picked it up,"

and then he looked at her for an answer to the question he had asked.

"Oh, yes, the Despard's. Well, Mr. Despard was an old friend of your uncle's, and I gave him the living of Mallett."

"Had he sons?"

"I don't know, I know nothing of them, except that, because he was your uncle's friend I gave him the living."

"But he has been dead for some years. He died when I was in Canada. I recollect it because I was so vexed to think that the living had not been given to Carr."

"It was much better to give it to the man who has it," said Mrs. Prescott decidedly.

"Well yes, according to your showing, it seemed, after he had done the duty with that prospect for so long, to be almost his right. Then who were these Despard's you asked if I had met?"

"My dear Stephen, don't I tell you I know nothing of them? What makes you ask?"

"Simply because at Captain Carthew's I was introduced to a fine-looking, soldierly young man, called Despard; and, remembering that when I returned from Mallett you asked me if I had met any one so named, I considered you would probably know who he is. You could not have supposed I had seen anything of an old man, who, you knew, had been dead for years; therefore, when you made the inquiry you had certainly some one in your mind."

"Some one in my mind!" repeated Mrs. Prescott. "Really, Stephen, I think it rather hard for me to be questioned and taken to task as if I was a child. I tell you," she continued, speaking with unnecessary emphasis, "that I know nothing of these people. How should I, pray?"

"I don't know; but surely, mother, there can be no possible reason why I, promising this young man to be the son of the late rector of Mallett, should not ask you if you can tell me whether such is the case. Really you appear to take it quite as an offence that you should be thought to know anything of the place, or the people."

Sir Stephen was not in a pleasant humor, and was ready to take umbrage at a thing he would, at another time, have passed over as his mother's odd way of taking things.

"Don't let us misunderstand each other, my dear," Mrs. Prescott said soothingly. "You know that I never intend to vex you."

"Perhaps not; but you have done so since we came here," and, bent upon relieving his feelings, he added, "Last evening I thought you anything but cordial to Miss Carthew, although I had told you how very kind they were to me."

Mrs. Prescott hesitated; what should she do? Tell her son her suspicions? No; for if he meant nothing serious by his attentions she might be putting it into his head; so she said:—

"Well, Stephen, to be candid with you, I was disappointed in Miss Carthew. In the first place, I expected to have found her far prettier than she is; and secondly, I had pictured a simple, timid, artless girl—an *ingenue* in fact."

"Well!"

"Well, my dear, I found a young lady quite able to hold her own and give her opinion, and not at all backward in doing so either."

"Why should she be?"

"Oh, I have nothing to say against her, only your taste was so utterly opposed to anything like hoydenism or fastness."

"So it is now, and there is not a trace of either in Miss Carthew. She is perfectly natural, simple, and unaffected, exactly what a woman ought to be."

"Indeed! I am rather old to have opinions thrust upon me in this way, Stephen. I should have considered, and, in spite of what you may think, I still do consider, myself quite equal to forming a correct opinion of my own sex, and I say that if you met Miss Carthew in any drawing-room she would be described as uneducated, inclined to be loud, and not in good style."

"Then the description would be utterly false."

"Ah, people see differently."

“They do indeed, but I am very sorry that you and I should find ourselves so widely opposed.”

Mrs. Prescott saw that she had let her temper outrun her discretion. Altering the tone of her voice, she said:—

“Surely, Stephen, I can speak to you as I speak to myself. You know me too well to suppose that I am going to make myself rude or disagreeable to any friends of yours, for I suppose you and this young lady are only friends?” and she looked fixedly at her son.

Sir Stephen gave an off-hand kind of “Certainly,” over which his mother rejoiced greatly, feeling confident that if he had any intention of making Hero his wife, he would not have treated the question in that way. She was softened at once, and going up to him she put her arms round him, saying:—

“Let us have no more discussions of this kind. Perhaps I have been a little severe, and said more than I meant, but I will make amends for it, and you shall not again have cause to complain of my coldness towards Miss Carthew. Come, Stephen, you must not be vexed, I always tell you that you have to make the best of a foolish old mother.”

But though Sir Stephen put his arm round her, he did not entirely relax, as was his wont under these circumstances.

“You look so pale, dear; what is the matter?” and she looked up at him with nervous anxiety.

“I told you something in my dinner, or the wine disagreed with me. I am bilious, I suppose. I have not been able to touch anything to-day.”

“Is that *all*?”

“All! and enough, surely. I do not know when I have felt so thoroughly out of sorts.”

“You had best take a dose. I can give you—”

“Nothing, thank you. A dose of sleep will be my remedy, so good-night.”

“Good-night, dear. You are quite sure nothing has worried you?”

“Quite. What could I have to worry me here?”

“Ah, my dear, don't think Pamphillon is the only place

with troubles and anxieties attached to it. Annoyances will find you out here as well as there."

Sir Stephen only repeated his good-night, walked off to his own room, about which he moved for some time, trying to master himself, and think of anything rather than the heavy burden which was lying close to his heart. Suddenly he flung himself into a chair, and resting his arms on the table, he buried his face in them, and sat there for a long time immovable. When at length he raised his head he was paler than before.

"It's the old story over again," he said. "I didn't think I should have taken it like this. I'm a greater fool than ever."

Somehow, the sight of Leo seemed to have crushed all the hopes he had before been entertaining. The first glance at his handsome face and soldier-like bearing filled him with the dreary certainty that such a man was safe to call forth love. He had pictured a young fellow similar to those whom he had lately been introduced to; but here was a rival of quite another kind. Then he began speculating how long this attachment had lasted. If he was the rector's son, most likely they had known each other from childhood, and he sighed hopelessly, feeling it would be utterly vain to cherish any illusions about setting aside the claims of such a suitor as Leo. Hero would naturally care for a good-looking pleasant young fellow like him; and *he*, particularly if he had seen much of the world, how he must value her—worship her. Hero's fresh, unaffected gayety gave her a peculiar charm in Sir Stephen's eyes, a charm which, unknown to himself, he admired now far more than if he had been ten years younger. His spirits seemed to rise to the level of hers, his heart grew light in the sunshine of her joyousness—she seemed able to infuse into him that youth which his great disappointment had prematurely quenched. He saw that she was neither so clever, nor so beautiful, as many of the women he constantly met; but all she said and did seemed to find an echo within him, and was thus invested with an interest, which daily grew more and more necessary to his happiness.

That same night, after leaving Hero, Leo on his part underwent a tolerably sharp struggle with, in his case, that most formidable of all opponents, his own inclination. This prompted him to go the next day, and upbraid Hero with her coldness and ill-temper. But if he did this, there would be an end to all his plans and schemes; for, of course, after a quarrel would come the making up, and he would have to be more lover-like than ever. And then that fatal tempter, the temporizing spirit, stepped in, and whispered a suggestion that he should defer all this until Wednesday, when, having met Mrs. Labouchere, he would be in a better position to judge how he should act. He might see that he had not the ghost of a chance, and then the matter would be settled, and he could indulge in quarrelling with and forgiving Hero to his heart's content. But suppose that chances seemed favorable, what then?

"I don't know that I could give her up," he sighed; and after a pause, he added, "If I only thought of myself, I should let things stand as they are; but a man of honor is bound to think of the woman who loves him. Who knows, Sir Stephen might take a fancy to her, though I would not give much for his chance? His title and fortune would be nothing in Hero's eyes. Poor darling! she has seen too little of the world for that, and it is this makes it so difficult for me. Ten to one if she would believe I was sacrificing anything for her good."

His reflections finally ended in the decision to go to Dockmouth on the morrow, and so try for the present to avoid a *tête-à-tête*.

The next morning, therefore, Hero received a note from Leo, saying that he was going to Dockmouth on duty. He was obliged to start at once, and if Hero had any commissions for him, would she give them to the orderly, who would meet him on the Hard?

Hero experienced a momentary feeling of relief, that the explanation, which was to end in a general announcement of their engagement, must be deferred for another day. Still, come it would, and the sooner it was over the better.

Poor Hero! it is hard to brood over sorrow—to sit cast-

ing it away one moment to hug it closer the next—to battle with it—to sink under it—but each is easier than when, with these very feelings combating for mastery, one stands, as it were, apart from self, and refuses to recognize the cause for struggle. The most bitter tears are sweet, compared with the efforts made to bring the smiles and mask the woe.

Happily for the avoidance of scrutiny, Betsey was up to her eyes in the business of preparation, and well pleased to find, that Hero was so willing to lend her a helping hand in the various delicacies, which she was bent upon setting forth before the Combe ladies. To Hero's suggestion, that it might be advisable to get a few additions to the table from the pastry-cook's at Dockmouth, Betsey would not listen.

"Lor', don't 'ee let's have no cotch," she said; "they have enuf o' that sort o' trade up to London. When they gets a chance o' wholesome vittals, why, do 'ee let 'em have their fill o' it, poor souls."

"I hope it will keep fine," Hero said, looking anxiously at the sky; "I don't mind for the others, but it would be dreadful to have it wet with Mrs. Prescott and Mrs. Labouchere here."

"Why, they b'aint salt nor sugar, to melt under a drop o' rain, any more than other folks."

"No; only Mrs. Prescott seems so afraid of damp, and the gravel here gets so wet if it rains."

"Suppose it do; the place 'aint a church nor chapel neither, where you'm made to lave your pattens outside. Nonsense, my dear, nobody can't fly in the face o' Providence; and the whole blessed day that old bull o' Jackman's has bin a belving and the donkeys a hootin', and sooner or later they allays brings the rain."

CHAPTER XX.

AT MALLET.

BETSEY'S unlucky auguries were doomed in this instance to be falsified, for never did a more lovely day dawn than the auspicious Wednesday which was to make the gentry of Mallett acquainted with their new neighbors. The pleasure at the fineness of the weather was but natural.

Hero had said, "If we can only be out, I hope all who can will come; for if we can entertain Mrs. Prescott and Mrs. Labouchere, we are sure to be able to amuse ourselves."

Of this no one had any doubt, and armed with this certainty, the guests began to arrive, and were received by Hero, whose smiling face betrayed nothing of her heavy heart; its heaviness, for the time, considerably lightened by the unusual excitement, which made her eyes sparkle, and her color brighter than usual. She looked very pretty, standing in her fresh muslin dress, with a background of the thick fuchsias, hydrangeas, and dark-leaved myrtles, with which the front of the house was adorned.

The Combe party had not yet made their appearance, and, in consequence, the other guests, instead of wandering off, remained grouped near, that they might be duly presented. Each approaching footstep down the gravel walk caused a little stir, but at length the sound of wheels was heard—the sound suddenly stopped, all doubt was at an end, they were coming. A silence fell upon those around, and in a few minutes their anxiety was relieved by seeing Sir Stephen, with his mother on his arm, and his cousin at her side. Then a soft buzz went round, the unmistakable meaning of which caused Mrs. Prescott's face to flush, and a pleased expression to come into her eyes; and,

remembering her promise to her son, she returned Hero's greeting so warmly, and the Captain's so cordially, that any lurking distrust as to whether they should like her died out, and the admiration was universal. Mrs. Prescott confessed afterwards that Miss Carthew showed to great advantage in her own house; and certainly Hero was possessed of that true basis of good breeding, the desire to forget everything but the comfort and amusement of those she had gathered around her. Aided by Sir Stephen, she so dexterously managed to introduce Mrs. Prescott to most of the people present, that instead of being fatigued or bored, as the good lady had prognosticated, she was quite amused and in good spirits. In truth, she found it rather pleasant to be the centre of so much homage, springing, as it evidently did, from admiration of everything which belonged to Sir Stephen. Mrs. Labouchere inspired far more awe, and, do all she could, Hero found it impossible to get any one to talk to her freely and unconstrainedly. Her stately beauty and magnificence completely overwhelmed the youth of Mallett; and Leo, upon whom Hero had placed her greatest dependence, had not yet arrived. Egged on by Hero, Jervis Randal had plucked up courage enough to ask, would Mrs. Labouchere like a little scramble over the rocks? But Mrs. Labouchere, with her sweetest smile, had said she thought not, it was so very pleasant sitting where she was; and then, as he stood near, wondering what he had best say next, she begged he would not allow her to detain him, as she found sufficient amusement in watching the others. Whereupon Norman bounded off like a cricket-ball, and as suddenly stopped to consider whether he had done the right thing. Perhaps he had best go back, and offer some other attention; but while he debated in what form this should be, he caught sight of Leo Despard coming down the path, and with a feeling of relief, that the question of who should entertain Mrs. Labouchere was not decided, he hastened on to join Alice, who had until now discreetly attached herself to a party of four. The Captain was attending to some of the indoor arrangements, Sir Stephen had gone to get Miss Batt

some tea; so that, beside the group surrounding Mrs. Prescott, there was only Mrs. Labouchere sitting a little apart with Hero, who was trying to interest her by pointing out the different headlands.

"Here is another friend," Hero said, as an excuse for leaving her; and she walked towards the gate, and, after listening to Leo's apologies for being unavoidably so much later than he intended, she took him up, and said, "Mrs. Prescott, will you allow me to introduce Mr. Despard to you?"

Mrs. Prescott bent in acknowledgment. Leo murmured something about the great pleasure it gave him, and the next minute Mrs. Grant was saying in a whisper,—

"Our late rector's adopted son—really his nephew."

"His nephew!" echoed Mrs. Prescott, with a cough, which brought Mr. Jamieson stumping up to inquire if he should bring a glass of water.

"Oh dear, no—nothing but a tickling;" and she looked at Mrs. Grant for her answer.

"Well, there's some little mystery about him; and old Miss Despard (the rector's sister, only she wasn't well enough to come to-day) never likes to speak of the matter. I fancy he was the son of some one who was not a credit to the family."

"It is not known, then, who his father was?" Mrs. Prescott said, looking towards Leo, now standing in front of Katherine.

"Well, not positively. I *believe* it was a brother, but the old gentleman never alluded to the mother;" and a significant shake of the head conveyed Mrs. Grant's suspicions.

"He is a fine-looking young man."

"Very." And here Hero's approach caused the *tête-à-tête* to cease.

"I hope," she said, "that Mr. Despard will persuade Mrs. Labouchere to have a stroll. I left him assuring her that the paths are perfectly easy, and he trustworthy."

"Ah! he won't tempt her."

"I don't know; see, she is getting up."

"So she is! Why, Katie dear, you are never going to venture on the Sands?"

"I am just going a little way, aunt," and Mrs. Labouchere began laughing.

"What are you laughing at, dear?" asked Mrs. Prescott, who felt as if a sudden weight had been lifted off her, and that she could join in any one's mirth.

"Mr. Despard is offering to carry me over the rough places. I tell him he volunteers for rather a heavy burden."

Leo of course protested against this assertion, and slowly the two began to descend.

"Now, you must not be in a hurry," he said, as, gaining confidence, she grew more independent. "Stay one moment, or," he added, as he freed her light dress from a sharp angle, "your dress will suffer, and I should not easily forgive myself."

"I ought to have worn something thicker," she said; "I see that this one is not quite appropriate."

"I only see that it is very charming," Leo answered, "and that the young ladies ought to be very much obliged to you."

"Why?"

"Because it may improve their taste a little. It is high treason, you know, here, to say one word against Mallett or Mallett people; but did you ever see such a gathering in your lifetime?" and he pointed to the various groups below.

Mrs. Labouchere could not refrain from laughter. Certainly they were not exactly the everyday guests she was in the habit of meeting; added to which, she was somewhat weary of listening to the praises of everything and everybody connected with Mallett with which Sir Stephen had rather overdosed her. To Katherine's disappointment, the sudden accession of intimacy between them, on the day when Captain Carthew dined at Combe, had not been followed by any other result than the most cousinly intercourse; and she did not find herself in a humor to take quite such a rose-colored view of Mallett as she had then done.

"You do not live here, I suppose?" she asked.

"Thank Heaven! no. I had a dear old uncle, who was rector of the place, and brought me up; so that I spent my boyhood here, and now I am superintending the buildings of those forts close to Combe. I don't know if you have noticed them."

"Yes, we have driven past them every day; but I have not seen you there."

"No, I have only just come back from Dunross. I have been shooting there with Lord Skipwith."

"You must find it very dull here," Mrs. Labouchere said, after a pause. "How do you get through your time?"

"Well, really I can hardly tell you."

"Perhaps you admire Miss Carthew. My cousin says she is very attractive. I suppose that is when you know her. Do you think her pretty?"

Leo hesitated for an instant.

"Yes," he said, "I do think her pretty; but she wants style."

"That is just what my aunt and I said; but my cousin insisted that she had a style of her own—which she certainly has." And the tone in which she said this put a stop to any praise Leo had thought of bestowing.

"Sir Stephen Prescott seems an enthusiastic admirer of Miss Carthew," Leo said, laughing to recover his slight confusion.

"I do not know that he is quite that; but he thinks her simple and unaffected."

"Indeed!"

"Why, don't you?"

And Katherine looked up rather sharply as she asked the question.

"I? Well, really, I never considered the question—perhaps because I care very little for nature unadorned."

Leo felt that he was sinking deeper with every word; but, in conversation the pathway of small deceits had become so familiar to him that he slid down it without much self-reproach, and any slight sting he now felt arose solely from Hero's close proximity. He tried to draw Mrs. La-

bouchere from the subject, by asking her if she knew various people, to whom he had lately been introduced; but, after answering his questions, Katherine returned to the subject which she had at heart—the determination to find out all she could about Hero.

“Miss Carthew is by far the prettiest girl I have seen here,” she said. “I suppose she has a great many admirers?”

“There are very few men here to admire her,” said Leo.

“Is she engaged to anybody?”

“Really, you must not ask me,” he answered laughing. “I have not been taken into her confidence.”

“But in a place like this, where everybody knows everybody else’s business, you would be sure to hear whether she is or not?”

“No, I have never heard it spoken of.”

“Then we may conclude that it is not the case.”

“Yes, I think we may. Sir Stephen may safely continue his eulogiums on her simplicity.”

In spite of himself, Leo said this with a sneer—a sneer which made Katherine give a little laugh as she said,—

“I fear I have aroused your jealousy, Mr. Despard.”

“My jealousy, Mrs. Labouchere!—how? What makes you say that?” And he felt his face was betraying his vexation.

“Unless casual remarks give pain or pleasure, they are seldom remembered. But you need not try and defend yourself,” she added playfully, “for I could excuse the falling in love with one’s own shadow here. That is the mischief of these places; they dispose one towards sentiment, and afford no eligible object on which to bestow it. That, of course, does not apply to Miss Carthew.”

Leo made a poor attempt at seeming to be amused.

“I see you are bent upon teasing,” he said. “Well, as long as it amuses you it amuses me.”

“Thanks,” said Katherine, with a smile at the hit she had unsuspectingly made, for in her own mind she felt convinced, that unless she had gone pretty near the truth, Leo would not have been so anxious to assure her that she

was mistaken. She was not nearly so easy as she had been about Sir Stephen. His manner of speaking about Hero did not please her, and she saw that during his former stay he had evidently made himself very much at home. In another man this might stand for little; but in Stephen it meant a great deal, as, unless he cared very much for people, he never broke through a certain air of reserve, which had hitherto been a barrier to his forming quick friendships.

"My cousin seems to have made a very favorable impression here," Mrs. Labouchere said after she and Leo had been chatting on various subjects.

"Yes, I found him the universal topic of conversation. I dare say he pays rather heavily for his popularity. These sort of people must bore him terribly."

"Oh dear no! On the contrary, he admires them immensely, and threatens to settle here altogether."

"But I thought he had another place much larger—Pamphillon?"

"So he has, but he does not care for it. He says he much prefers his tenantry here, they suit his tastes better."

"Ah! more simple and unaffected."

Mrs. Labouchere nodded her head.

"I see you cannot forget or forgive that," she said. "I must warn my cousin that he has a rival."

"He has a great many, I fear."

And Leo directed a look towards her which made her say:—

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing—only a little bird at Dunross whispered all manners of secrets about a certain cruel lady who said No to a certain poor gentleman, who let concealment—"

"You are speaking enigmas," Katherine said coldly.

Though she did not intend Leo to see it, she was none the less pleased, that Sir Stephen should still be thought a disappointed lover; and, as the reward of imparting pleasant news is a certain connection with the pleasure, Mrs. Labouchere said, with a favorable disposition towards Leo:—

"I think it is time for us to return to the house. I have quite enjoyed our quiet stroll."

And when they reached the top, Katherine, after saying a few words to Mrs. Prescott, asked:—

"Has Mr. Despard been introduced to you, aunt?"

"Yes, Miss Carthew kindly made us known to each other by name," Mrs. Prescott answered; and then, knowing what was expected by this question, she added, "I hope Mr. Despard will allow me an opportunity of extending our acquaintanceship. My son will be very pleased to see you at Combe. Stephen," she called, as she caught sight of Sir Stephen hovering about in Hero's vicinity, "I have been telling Mr. Despard that we shall be very pleased to see him."

"I hope that Mr. Despard will avail himself of your invitation, mother. Miss Carthew has promised to come tomorrow," he added, slightly lowering his voice. "Perhaps you will come with her."

Leo did not remove his eyes from Mrs. Prescott, but he wondered greatly whether Hero had betrayed him. He repeated his thanks for their kindness, and said, that if he could be of any use to Miss Carthew, and if she would accept him as an escort, he was at her service; and then, finding that Mrs. Labouchere wished to sit near her aunt, he found her a chair, and left Sir Stephen free to wander off to his unsatisfactory occupation of dogging Hero's steps, and hanging about any place she was nearest to.

"You'm looking at Miss Hero, Sir Stephen," said Betsey, who had come up from behind him unobserved; "and no wonder, neither. I dessay you'll doubt whether I speaks the truth, when I says that not a bite nor sup hasn't passed her lips the whole o' this blessed day, and as for sitting still a moment, you might so well ask it from anybody with the St. Vitus's dance. Her'll be laid up, that'll be the end o' it; I told the Cap'en so to-day. But lor'! men never sees nothin' till it comes to pass, and then it's, 'Who'd a thought it?' Do 'ee think that you could tempt her, sir, with anythink?" she added, after a minute's pause; "'tis o' no use my speakin'."

"I'll try, Betsey."

"If her'd only take a drink o' tea 'twould be somethin' in her inside," Betsey said lugubriously; and so urged, Sir Stephen went over to where Hero stood talking to Mrs. Jamieson.

"Miss Carthew," he said, "will you grant me a favor?"

"If I can I will."

"Then drink a cup of tea which Betsey has for you in the next room."

"Yes, do, my dear," said Mrs. Jamieson. "Go now, like a good girl. I know what it is when one has friends—self is the last one attended to; and as my dear old father used to say, Sir Stephen, 'An empty sack can't stand.' He had been brought up in the country, and he never forgot his early days. Dear me! I often think of his funny sayings.

"I will leave you to take my place then," said Hero.

"Oh, no! I must see that you fulfil your promise. Mrs. Jamieson will excuse me, I am sure."

"My dear, don't you stop here on my account. You go with Hero, and see she takes something to eat with her tea—or else," she added, with a significant nod, "we shall think a certain gentleman has taken away her appetite."

"I recognize who Mr. Despard is, Hero," Sir Stephen said as they moved away. "You can never guess how all my hopes vanished at sight of him. Ah! he little thinks how I envy him."

"Now, whoever have you got call to envy, Sir Stephen?" exclaimed Betsey, whose quick ears had caught Sir Stephen's last remark.

"I was envying Mr. Despard, Betsey," he answered, taking the tea from her to give to Hero, who had sunk down wearily on a chair near.

"Then you needn't for to, I'm sure. As I often says, 'tis a thousand pities folks can't be turned inside out, then they'd be know'd at their proper valley. Not that I want to say anythink agin Mr. Despard—far from it," she added, glancing down at Hero; "for I've know'd un since he was a boy, and he comes nat'ral to me. But handsome is as

handsome does, Sir Stephen, and Brag's a very good dog, as the sayin' is, but Holdfast's a better."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Leo himself, who came to say that "Mrs. Prescott thought it would not be prudent to stay longer; and," he continued, "as I have to go up to the Forts, Mrs. Prescott has very kindly offered to take me through the park. I am sure you will be glad to be quiet," he said, bending over Hero's chair. "You are looking more tired than I ever saw you. Promise me to take some rest."

But Sir Stephen could not endure to listen to another word. The under inflection of Leo's voice seemed like pouring oil on the fire of his jealousy, and he walked quickly away.

"My poor darling," Leo began, seeing they were out of hearing; but Hero checked whatever sympathy he intended to offer by saying, as she looked at him with a face pale and resolute,—

"Leo, I want to speak to you, very particularly; I have not had an opportunity before, but to-night you will be disengaged. Come here after you have left the Fort, and I will walk down to the beach with you."

"Certainly; but I may be rather late."

"Never mind if you are; I shall wait for you."

"Very well."

And so they parted, Leo filled with conjecture not un-mixed with dread, lest it should be to say she wished to give him up. Forgetting all his own resolves, and recently planned schemes, he tried to reassure himself by saying,—

"It cannot be *that*—impossible! Hero is not the girl to break a man's heart, and she knows how I love her."

When the carriage reached the gate at which Leo was to descend, Sir Stephen got down also, saying he would walk up to the Forts with him.

"Will you be detained here long?" he asked.

"No, I shall not be ten minutes."

"Then if you are going home, I will walk back with you. I want a cigar."

Leo hesitated.

“Well,” he said, “I am not going straight home. Some of those dissipated people at Sharrows made me promise to make one of a moonlight party for the Sands.”

“In that case, good-night.”

“Good night,” Leo said. “I am sorry that we cannot have a stroll together. I feel much more inclined for that, and to go quietly off to bed, than anything else; but I could not well refuse.”

“Oh, of course not;” and Sir Stephen had hard work to get his voice to sound as it had sounded before,—“then I shall walk back at once.”

Instead of which, an hour later found him within sight of Sharrows, and there he remained until two figures slowly descended towards the Sands below. He watched them until they were out of sight, and then turned away with a gloomy face and heavy heart; for the two were Hero and Leo Despard, and they were alone.

CHAPTER XXI.

HIDDEN MOTIVES.

WITH the exception of a few of the Captain's particular cronies, all the guests had taken their leave, and Hero had already gone outside the house to wait for Leo's arrival.

The wind, which had considerably freshened since the moon had risen, caused the flying scud every now and then to obscure the light of the lover's lamp. The air felt chilly and cold, yet Hero was glad to take off her hat, and let the breeze play about her head. Her impatience to have this conversation over increased the hot fever which had all day oppressed her. She thought that after she had spoken to Leo she should feel more at ease, and she clung to the hope that in some way he would help her.

At a sound of footsteps she rose, walked to the gate, and listened; it was Leo, and they turned at once down the same pathway by which he had lately led Mrs. Labouchere. They soon reached a grassy ledge planted with shrubs, which formed a screen behind, while a projection sheltered it from view in front.

"We will stop here," Hero said, leaning against the rock, so as to bring herself face to face with Leo.

"And now what have you to say to me?" he asked, trying to hide his nervousness under a smiling demeanor. For a moment Hero did not answer; she was trying to gather up her courage, and swallow down the great lump which threatened to dissolve into an outburst of passionate tears. She longed, but feared, to obey her natural instinct, which said, "Tell him all; say that your love has been tempted, but only to show how greatly it stands in need of him to cling to." Had Leo's love been stanch and honest, he would have had no cause for distrust, for out of the

truthfulness of her nature came these promptings, and from the moment her confession reached his ear any rival would have ceased to exist.

"Hero, darling, what is the matter?" for Leo could not withstand the troubled beauty of the sweet face before him.

If Hero had known every art of bewitchment she could not have looked more dangerously lovely than her grief had this night made her. The slightly-swollen lids, and the dark circles round her eyes; her cheeks white as her low forehead, round which the breeze was tossing the little dark rings of stray hair, the drooping curves of the sad mouth, the quivering lips, told without words the workings of her sorrowful heart.

"Hero!"—and this time the answer came; not prefaced as she intended, for Leo's tender looks and tone stirred up something within her which made her feel secure and certain of herself. She knew that when, as Leo's future wife, she took her place by his side, openly and before the whole world, nothing would make her swerve again; and acting upon this she raised her tearful, trusting eyes, and said—

"I want you to make our engagement public, Leo; let every one know about it."

Leo gave an involuntary start of amazement. This request was the last one he had expected her to make. Since she had told him that she wanted this conversation with him, a dozen conjectures had entered his mind; some of them (such as a suspicion that she intended giving him up for Sir Stephen) making him feel angry and bitter, but that she only wanted to say this about the engagement was what he never once dreamed of. Was she jealous of Mrs. Labouchere? and so determined to settle these misgivings at once! Leo's nature was not a generous one, and certainly one not given to judge others more highly than himself; and these thoughts, clashing as they did with his recent plans, considerably damped the present ardor of his love, and his voice sounded quite differently as he asked—

"Why, Hero, what is your reason for saying this now?"

"Because I feel that people ought to know it."

"I think there are very few people in Mallett but do know I love you, Hero."

"Yes, and because of that—before it did not matter, but now—when strangers to us have come here, it would be better to have it properly understood. I wish it to be so, and you have no objection, have you?" and she looked earnestly at him, and then drew back a step.

"Objection! what objection could I have? only, upon my word, I do not know quite what there is to say. It seems rather awkward to go up to Mrs. Prescott and Sir Stephen—I suppose it is to them you allude—for the purpose of telling them that I am in love with you, and that some day—God knows when!—we hope to get married. You judge these people," he added, seeing the changed expression in her face, "by your own warm heart, Hero; whereas, among that class, they care nothing about what you or I are going to do. The amusement of the hour is all they want from us; not to be bored with our hopes and plans. Ah, my darling! I know them, and have suffered from them too. Fellows often say, 'Despard knows such a heap of swells; he's sure to get his promotion.' So I thought once," and Leo sighed hopelessly; "but though they are glad enough to laugh and be entertained, just attempt to hint at a favor from them, and see how they'll soon choke you off."

"I don't think you would find the Prescotts are of that class, Leo."

Leo shook his head.

"You do not know the world, dear. If I were to go to Combe to-morrow, and say, 'Miss Carthew has promised to marry me as soon as I get my captaincy,' the first thing that would occur to Sir Stephen would be, 'This fellow wants me to use my interest for him,' and there'd be a change in his manner at once."

Hero did not answer. Leo's words and tone jarred upon her. A vague feeling of distrust came into her mind, and with it a shadow of resentment against him. She stood with her eyes fixed upon the ground, unconscious of the look of mingled love, pain, and humiliation which her com-

panion had turned upon her as he told himself it was best not to put the question beyond doubt, and proclaim the toils in which his love still bound him. Every feeling pleaded on the side of her who had never before seemed so necessary to his happiness.

"Oh, Hero!" he exclaimed, allowing his tongue this time to give utterance to his thoughts, "how a man like Sir Stephen is to be envied! What wonder if a poor beggar like myself is miserable and discontented? He can do what he likes; can have what he likes; can marry when and whom he pleases. I'd freely give the best half of my life to exchange places with him at this moment."

"You might not find the position so very enviable," Hero could not help saying.

"Pshaw!" and Leo gave a contemptuous movement of disbelief. "You will put faith in the bosh he tells you." Jealousy was successfully drifting him away from love now. "You really seem always to have more pity for him than you have for me."

"I do not see anything to particularly pity you for."

"You don't? Then I'll tell you. While you have been light-hearted and happy here, I have been scheming and striving to see how it was possible for me to get my step, or whether, by any means, I could scrape together the purchase-money—who would help me; whose interest I could get—until what with dwelling morning, noon, and night on the one thing; trying to secure this one's favor, and the other's patronage; full of hope one day, to be cast into the depths the next—my brain has been pretty nearly distracted. Not see anything to pity me for! If that is not enough, I'll tell you something more, Hero, and it is this—that look the whole thing fairly in the face, I see no possible chance of being promoted for ten years to come; and instead of going to Combe, and saying that 'Miss Carthew has promised to wait for me,' the only honorable thing left for me to do is not to breathe a word about the matter, so that at any time you may release yourself from a promise which I ought never to have drawn from you. I always said and knew it was wrong to fetter a girl, more especially one who

is safe to have the opportunities you have ; but love makes most men cowardly, and I was so full of hope that something would surely turn up—" He paused for Hero to speak, but finding she remained silent, he went on—"All that is over now. It is folly trying to deceive myself any longer, and worse than folly, it is dishonorable to deceive you."

"I am not deceived," Hero said coldly ; "I quite understand you. Before, you wished for the engagement ; now, from something which has happened, you wish for it no longer."

"Hero ! do I hear aright—can you be saying these words to me ?" and Leo turned towards her.

Hero clasped her hands in distress. Was she wronging him ? Something within her said he was deceiving her. Could he be doing so, or was it the knowledge of all she had lost by his tardy avowal which was making her bitter or suspicious ? Yes, perhaps that was it, and laying her hand on his arm, she said—

"Leo, if I wrong you, forgive me. I have no wish to believe my suspicions are true ; only be frank with me, and if you have any reason for this—this determination, tell me what it is."

"I have told you my reasons," he answered, without lifting up his head ; "and if I had not by my original selfishness given you cause to suspect my honor, you would never have thrown such an accusation at me."

"There was nothing dishonorable in what you did, Leo. You used no persuasions, nor did you need them. I was as willing to wait as you were. From the first you told me you had an objection to a formal engagement—I never saw any, and that is the only mistake we made ; it should have been open, or not at all."

"And that is all I have said and all I have to say. I am not in a position to be engaged—no man is until he sees a prospect of marriage ; therefore I have no right to bind you." Then, after a pause, he added pleadingly, "But why need things be altered, Hero ? We have always been happy—why not continue so ? All I want to feel certain about is

this, that I am not a drawback to you in any way—not standing in your light, darling. Many who have loved as dearly as we two love, have been separated by circumstances which they had not foreseen; and I cannot tell what may happen. For instance, somebody in a better position or better off might make an offer to you, and I don't know whether it would not be right that you should accept, or at least that I should counsel you to accept, what would be for your advantage." Then catching sight of her face, he broke out, "Hero, how hard and cold you are!—bent upon misunderstanding me, feeling nothing but resentment in return for the sacrifice I am striving to make. Most women would take it as a proof of love, that a man offers to give up his dearest hopes rather than be a dead weight round her prospects. I gain nothing by setting you free. You know well enough, perhaps too well, that do what I may I can never love you less. All I ask is to remain as we are, trusting to fate and each other. But to draw down the strictures which such people as the Prescotts would make—to have my actions doubted, and my honor questioned, I could not stand it."

Leo had by this time lashed himself into the talk by which nothing is ever accomplished. Hidden motives are very prone to gobble speech, and lead the conversation straying into channels by which, though the end may be gained, the way is not the smooth path along which it was intended to go. To explain his motives to himself would have been a hard task for Leo. Believing that her request arose solely out of jealousy, his faith in her remained unshaken. Had he entertained the barest suspicion of the truth, Leo would have proclaimed their engagement from pole to pole, rather than have given up one, whom he loved with all the strength and fervor of which he was capable.

After delivering his last speech he had turned away, and a silence of some minutes reigned between them. At last Hero said, in a weary, saddened voice—

"Don't think that I am reproaching you, Leo—I have more cause to reproach myself, perhaps. I suppose we cannot help changing."

"I can never change towards you," Leo said.

"We must be friends in future," she went on, not heeding him.

"Friends!" he echoed bitterly; "and you can say this, Hero, so calmly?"

"Yes, Leo, as long as we live we can never be anything but friends. I see, now, that neither of us knew the other; and as we were, we never should have known each other."

"I think you should speak for yourself," Leo said. "I am glad to say I am no more mentally than physically blind."

He felt that he could afford to take a higher stand, now that Hero was displaying "all this temper."

"I am not going to be frightened into giving in," he said to himself. "If I get a chance the next time we are all together, I'll give her something to be jealous of. I'll seem to take her at her word now, and see how she likes that." So he said—

"You seem to look upon this as a final separation between us?"

Hero nodded assent.

"Then you are as fickle and heartless as the rest of your sex!" he exclaimed; "and I believe you never gave me the love you professed. I would have sworn that, come what might, you would have been true to me—that it would have broken your heart to have given me up; but I find I was mistaken—I deceived myself."

"No, you did not—at any cost I should have been true to you, and I have never said a word to you that was not from my heart. But, Leo, I distrust you—I cannot help it. What you have said, and the reasons you have given me, may be just and true, but they are utterly unlike you."

"Thank you," he said angrily. "One of the first privileges of friendship is the right to be candid with your friends; and at length I have the pleasure of hearing your true estimate of my character. This is something quite new."

Hero gave a sigh. The excitement of the last few days had been too much for her, and a weariness such as she had never felt before took possession of her.

"I must go home," she said, "I seem to be tired out,"

and she quickened her steps, and began reascending the path,—Leo walking silently and moodily behind her, fighting a little internal battle between love and discretion. Love said, "Make it up;" discretion said, "If you give way now, she will take you to task again." They reached the house. Leo stopped, and said sullenly—

"I suppose others are to know nothing of this alteration between us."

"No. People will gradually come to see, and know, that we are changed. Of course I shall tell papa, and you will tell Aunt Lydia. They are the only two who have any right to be further informed."

"May I still come and see you?"

"Come whenever you like—only say good-night now, for I feel as if I could not say another word."

CHAPTER XXII.

"CROOKED AS A RAM'S HORN."

"I AM sorry that our excursion has fallen to the ground to-day," Leo said, as, luncheon over, they sat chatting together at Combe.

"Yes," said Katherine; "but as Miss Carthew is absent, and my cousin unexpectedly engaged, perhaps it is better to postpone it; besides which, I doubt if the water is quite as smooth as it was yesterday. You are going to buy a boat, are you not, Stephen?"

"Yes; it is that calls me away this afternoon."

"I hope you have engaged a safe man to go out with you and take care of it, Stephen," said Mrs. Prescott anxiously.

Sir Stephen nodded. "Make your mind easy, mother; I am to have one of the best sailors in the village, Joe Bunce," he said, turning to Leo; "you know him, of course?"

"What! Betsey's friend? Oh, yes. He's a first-rate fellow."

"Who is Betsey?" asked Mrs. Prescott.

"Ah!" laughed Sir Stephen, "you have a treat to come in Betsey—she is Captain Carthew's old servant and factotum—quite a character."

"You surely don't mean a plain elderly woman who stood at the table?" said Mrs. Labouchere. "Why, Stephen, she was my horror. She did nothing but press me to eat all sorts of things."

"Well, there was nothing horrible in that. You may depend upon it that she only offered you what was good. She is a capital cook."

"I wondered at the time how Miss Carthew could en-

dure such a person about her. I fancied she must have come up from the village. I never thought she could be one of the servants."

"Complimentary to the opinion you have formed of the village!" said Sir Stephen, not caring to enter into a discussion of the Sharrows household.

"Well, you must allow that they are dreadfully uncouth and rough," said Mrs. Labouchere. "I can afford to discuss them with you now," she added smiling, "for Mr. Despard is quite of my opinion. He says that ships only touch here on their way to England."

"Oh, too bad!" and Mrs. Prescott shook her head at them, "particularly from you, Mr. Despard."

"Yes," said Sir Stephen. "It is your native place, is it not?"

"Oh, no!" and Leo wished the conversation had taken any other than a personal turn. "I came here a small boy with my uncle when he got the living."

"I regret that I did not know your uncle," said Mrs. Prescott, "he was a great friend of my brother-in-law's—the late baronet," she added, seeing Leo did not seem to understand to whom she alluded.

"Was he? my uncle was rather eccentric in many things; his reticence at last became really painful, and he seldom or never spoke of his young life. I believe one motive for this was, that he wanted me to look upon him as my father, and he could not bear to enter upon any subject which might lead to my asking any questions."

"Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Prescott, "then you know very little about your own parents?"

"Nothing, except that my mother died when I was a baby, and my father," he added with a little laugh, "waited until he had spent all her money and his own, and then he very obligingly died and left me on his brother's hands. I have an aunt still who lives here, but she perfectly worshipped my uncle, and holds his slightest wish as sacred, so that knowing how it would pain her to refuse me, I have never asked her any questions."

"And quite right," said Mrs. Prescott, while Sir Stephen,

who was fidgeting to get away, wondered if his mother would sit listening to this uninteresting gossip all day.

"Why don't you offer Mr. Despard a seat to the Forts, mother?" he said, "you are going that way."

"I shall be most happy, but perhaps Mr. Despard will not care to go round by the road. I do not feel equal to that hilly lane to-day."

"I don't want to get to the Forts before five o'clock, and if you will have me I shall enjoy the drive immensely; I was thinking how disinclined I felt to walk."

This was said under the certainty that Mrs. Labouchere intended to accompany them; but to their surprise, she asked,—

"Are you going to walk across the park, Stephen?"

"I? Yes. Oh, don't mind me. You know I hate driving. I want a walk."

"So do I." And the hearts of the two men sank as the words came out. "If you will have me, I will go with you?"

"Now I feel I am inconveniencing you."

"You see I am going down the village on to the Hard," Sir Stephen and Leo exclaimed together.

"Then I will go as far as the top of the lane, Stephen."

"No, indeed," she said, turning to Leo. "I am much obliged to you for going with Mrs. Prescott; I wanted to walk. Shall I get ready now, Stephen?"

"Yes, do."

Sir Stephen tried to assent cordially; for, after thinking and arguing with himself during the past three hours, he had arrived at the conclusion that it would look very odd if, after Hero had sent an excuse to his mother of not being well enough to lunch with her, he did not go down and inquire after her. He would not go in, that he was determined upon. The engagement to see his boat was quite an impromptu one, which any other time would suit as well. Of course, as he said to himself, he had no right to complain that Hero had chosen to go with Leo, and yet he longed to unburden himself of his bitter jealousy. Anyhow, Katherine would be completely *de trop*.

Leo was equally disgusted at having to spend a couple of hours with that "stupid old woman," who wanted, he could see, to pry into everything, and find out all she could about everybody. How he wished that he had known Mrs. Labouchere was not going! he would have seen her aunt at Jericho before he would have wasted his time upon her. He might have gone down to Sharrows, inquired after Hero, and left his card. He would not have gone in, and that would rather have touched her, for, of course, he knew why she stayed away from Combe. While the two ladies were getting ready, Leo and Stephen were left alone.

"I am sorry to find Miss Carthew is not well," Sir Stephen said, apropos of nothing leading to the subject. "I suppose that moonlight excursion was too much for her?"

"Oh! she did not go," Leo answered.

He rather prided himself on the coolness with which, if a lie had to be told, he told it, and, of course where a woman was concerned, any denial was admissible.

Sir Stephen felt his face get crimson, but, as without seeming to avoid his questioner, Leo did not look him straight in the face, the surprise manifested passed unnoticed.

"Did not anybody go then?" Sir Stephen asked, after a moment's pause.

"No; I was detained at the Fort longer than I expected; and when I got back, with the exception of two or three old chums, everybody had left."

"What a fine old fellow Captain Carthew is!" Sir Stephen said after a pause, intending to give Leo a chance of seeing that he knew more of his affairs than he thought.

"Yes, quite one of the old class of sailors—looks upon steam as the ruin of the navy, and a 'boiler buster' as a creation of the devil."

"I took a very great liking to him when I first came down here; he and Miss Carthew made me so thoroughly at home."

It was Leo's turn to become inquisitor. "I'll find out," he thought, with a twinge of sudden jealousy, "what he really thinks about her."

"I heard that you admired Miss Carthew immensely," he answered.

"*You* heard! From whom?"

"Oh! Mrs. Labouchere told me so yesterday."

And Leo laughed at the surprise his announcement had caused.

"I do admire Miss Carthew," said Sir Stephen, "and I have spoken of my admiration to Mrs. Labouchere; but she is hardly warranted in speaking of it to a stranger—for such you were yesterday."

"Means nothing serious, and is afraid of being misunderstood," Leo thought, with a feeling of relief. Hastening to soften down Katherine's share, he said,—

"It is hardly fair to say that of Mrs. Labouchere's simple remark. The truth is, she noticed herself how very superior to most of the Mallett ladies Miss Carthew is, and I agreeing with her, she began a little teasing, and laughingly told me I had a rival. I made more of it to you than I was warranted in doing."

"I don't know that—if you had a right." And Sir Stephen hesitated.

"A right!" echoed Leo. "What do you mean?"

"He is trying to pump me," he thought as he added,—

"I have the same right that every other man has to admire the young lady."

"Nothing more?"

"No, certainly not. I don't understand what you mean."

But Sir Stephen had abruptly turned from him, and was speaking to the groom.

Before Leo had time for further reflection, Mrs. Prescott joined them, and a few minutes after they had started on their different ways.

"A well-mannered man this Mr. Despard," Katherine said. "I rather like him."

"I don't," said Sir Stephen in his most decided tone.

"No? Why not?"

"Oh, for no particular reason except that—well, that I don't like him."

"No other but a woman's reason," quoted Katherine; "I think him so, because I think him so. He does not admire Mallett as much as you do; but then," she added, laughing, "he knows it better, and—though I am not drawing a similar inference—he does not particularly admire your friend Miss Carthew. He thinks she wants style—which she certainly does—and he laughed when I said she was simple and unaffected."

"His mirth is easily provoked," said Sir Stephen, not daring to give vent to his indignation, for fear of betraying Hero and himself.

But should Hero sacrifice herself to such a man as this?—never; and, in his excitement, he so quickened his pace, that his cousin exclaimed pettishly,—

"If you are going to run, Stephen, I will give in at once. I generally walk at a tolerably brisk rate, but this is rather too much for me."

"I beg your pardon. I did not know that I was walking so quickly." And he slackened his pace to suit his companion.

"I suppose most of these paths lead to the water below?" she said, as they neared the gate.

"All of them do."

"Are they tolerably easy? Could one sit half way down?"

"Certainly; and very pleasant it would be. I cannot offer to go down with you; but, if I am not detained too long, I will join you."

"Then I will turn down the one we are coming to."

"Very well," said Sir Stephen, well pleased that she had not accompanied him to Sharrows. "I will get done as soon as possible—only you will not wait for me. Let that be understood—directly you feel inclined, you will go home."

"Yes, au revoir."

They parted, and Mrs. Labouchere slowly descended the path she had pointed to, her thoughts all the time following Stephen. His altered looks, his variable spirits, had not escaped her quick eyes; and since she had seen

the way he had hovered about Hero, she had connected the change some way with her. What could it be she could not fancy. It was hardly credible that Stephen should be playing rejected lover to a little common-faced country girl, who would regard being my lady as second only to being the queen. "Still, if I find that he has made excuses to me, and gone there, I shall know there is something between them." And with an angry feeling within her, she hastened on as fast as she dared, and, gaining the Sands, walked along, wondering which path would take her to Sharrows.

It had seemed easy enough to find while she was above, but below she could see nothing but the overhanging cliffs. Suddenly her ear caught sound of a voice, and looking, she saw a man seated on the Sands busily employed in some occupation, over which he was singing,—

"Oh, what a dis-i-mal state was this!
What horrors shook my feeble frame!"

"Can you tell me the path by which I shall get to Sharrows?"

But though she was nearly close up to him, he neither raised his head, nor seemed to notice her approach, but continued,—

"But, brethren, su-urely you can guess—"

Here Mrs. Labouchere's impatience overcame her dislike of touching such people, and she gave him a little shake, which made him look up, and, in his amazement, while regarding her over his horn spectacles, say, rather than sing,—

"For you perhaps have felt the same."

"Can you tell me the way to Sharrows?"

"Ay, ay, my lady!" for the singer, who was Jim, having by this time recognized her, proceeded to bundle his bits of sail-cloth together, disengage his hook, from its office of keeping his patch taut, and get on his legs as fast as he could.

"I have missed my way," Katherine said in explanation.

"I reckon you must speak up a bit more than you'm used to, my lady, for I'm terrible hard o' hearin'. Do 'ee want to go 'pon the watter?"

"No," roared Katherine, exerting herself far more than was necessary, "I want to know the way to Captain Carthew's house."

"Iss sure," replied Jim. "Will 'ee please to come along o' me?"

"Can't you tell me the way to go?"

"I could—iss—but you'd niver git there. You'd better let me go with 'ee, me lady."

Mrs. Labouchere nodded her acquiescence, and they proceeded on side by side.

"Might ye be goin' to see Miss Hero?" asked Jim.

Mrs. Labouchere gave a haughty little movement of her head—not lost on Jim; for he added, by way of apologizing for his curiosity, "cos' her's out. I met her not more than half n'our agoe goin' to ole Miss Despard's."

Mrs. Labouchere stopped.

"Did you!" she said. "Are you sure it was Miss Carthew?"

"What! sure about it bein' Miss Hero? Lor', mum!" added Jim, after a surprised pause, "why I've a knowed her ever since her was born. Her's like our own to us about here. 'Twould be like snappin' o' our heart-strings the day she was a took from among us."

"Is she likely to go, then?" asked Mrs. Labouchere, with sudden interest in Jim's conversation.

"Well, me lady, not as I knowed by, though there's many hard after her, as I dare say you, bein' a married lady, don't doubt."

Katherine smiled; and Jim, launched on one of his favorite topics, continued,—

"'Tis a matter o' prayer with me that her chice 'll be guided; for, notwithstandin' he'd a uncle who's, depend upon it, me lady, a saint in glory—though he was a church-goer—Mr. Despard aint fitted to tie her shoe-string."

"Mr. Despard?" said Katherine.

"A tallish, fine-looking young chap," Jim explained, "up to the Forts."

"Oh, yes, I know him; and is he Miss Carthew's lover?"

"Well, me lady, it's bin goin' on ever since they was boy and girl. 'Tain't reg'lar gived out that they'm walkin' together you know, but anybody with half a eye can see he's got the measure o' her tread."

"Is the liking all on her side then?" Katherine asked, sauntering back with Jim; for his information had decided her upon not paying her visit.

"No, not by no means, me lady; 'tain't for me to say that he ain't fond, but he arn't a got the same ways as your gentleman has. Lord! *he* wouldn't let a fly pitch upon her, he wouldn't."

"You mean Sir Stephen Prescott," Katherine said, feeling inwardly disgusted that she should stoop to gain her information from such a source.

"If it ain't a takin' too great a liberty, me lady—"

"Oh! I know," said Katherine, struggling to seem gracious, "that he is very fond of Miss Carthew, and Captain Carthew also."

Jim looked his delight at this intelligence.

"If so be you could bring it round, me lady, there's many 'ed be beholden to 'ee, for it don't want a Malletter to see they'm cut and dried for one another."

"Any of these paths will take me back into Combe park?" said Katherine, stopping suddenly.

"I reckon you comed down by that one," said Jim, pointing out one they had just passed.

"Yes, you are right: I will return by the same, thank you," and she held out a half-crown.

But instead of taking it, Jim shook his head, "Excuse me, me lady, but I'd rather not take it; 'tain't what we've bin used to hereabouts. If I've a bin o' any little service to 'ee, 'tis my dooty to thank *you*, me lady, which I humbly do, and begs God's blessin' on you and your belongings."

"Thank you," said Katherine; then giving a doubtful

glance at the old man's face, and another at the money, she returned it to her purse, and with a parting inclination towards him she began reascending the cliff.

From Mrs. Labouchere Sir Stephen had gone straight on to Sharrows, to be met at the gate by Betsey, who exclaimed:—

“Well, I niver! if things baint so crooked as a ram's horn, to-day, sir. There's Miss Hero just a gone out.”

“Gone out! where? I thought she was too ill.”

“And so her was this mornin', Sir Stephen, cruel bad, and you'd ha' said so, too, sir. I was all for sending off for Dr. Cross, for when anybody near to 'ee ails, 'tis fly to the doctor, as if he'd a got the orderin' o' folks' insides. I don't trouble 'im much about mine, that's one thing; a dose o' salts, or a cup o' organ tea, and after that put your trust in a higher than a human hand. I can't abide their pills and drenches. Winkle churchyard has a taught me a lesson there:—

‘If daily draught and nightly pill
Us mortals saved, I've took'd my fill:
But reader, as sure as you'm alive,
I was sent here at twenty-five.’

And you may read that headstone any day, Sir Stephen.”

Sir Stephen, who had been waiting to get in a word, now managed to ask where Miss Hero had gone.

“Up to the ole Miss Despard's; her sent down to say her wanted Miss Hero most particular. I dessay 'taint nothin' after all,” she added, vexed that Sir Stephen should be disappointed, “but you'd think the world was made a purpose for some folks and their nevy; I s'pose you don't happen to be goin' back by Shivers Lane, sir, do 'ee?”

“No; why?”

“Because you might by chance ha' met Miss Hero; her promised to leave a message at Mrs. Kemp's for me, that's to the botton, just afore the farm turnin'.”

“Shivers Lane, let me see, that is the second turning to the left?”

"Yes."

"No ; I shall not be able to go that way to-day, I fear. Good-by, Betsey ; tell Miss Hero that I only called to inquire after her."

"And that you'll call again?" Betsey added coaxingly ; "do 'ee, Sir Stephen, and cheer her up a bit ; he'll look as spry as two after you comed, sir."

But Sir Stephen shook his head.

"Not to-day, Betsey," he said as he turned away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LEO'S MYSTERY.

AUNT LYDIA'S summons was for Hero to come to her that afternoon, as she was alone, and wished to see her most particularly. The poor girl did not feel very equal to going, but she was anxious to retain the old lady's love and esteem, and she could not tell how far this difference with Leo might endanger both.

Directly they met, Aunt Lydia's manner betrayed her changed feelings, and Hero began wondering how much of the truth Leo had seen fit to tell her. For, between standing much in awe of her nephew, and having a very humble opinion of her own powers of comprehension, it was nothing unusual for Hero to be summoned to explain some announcement which Leo had made, and which Miss Despard could not understand.

"You had best take off your hat while you stay, Hero," she said, as soon as they were alone; "for what I have to say to you cannot be put into a few words."

Hero did as she was requested, and seated herself on the chair which Miss Despard pointed out opposite to her own.

"Well, Hero," said Miss Lydia, "to make a short beginning to a long story, I have not been pleased with you of late."

"No, Aunt Lydia?"

"No, my dear, I have not; and as you know it is my way to say what I think, you must not take offence if I speak plainly."

Hero gave a movement significant of willingness to take in good part Miss Lydia's candor.

"Perhaps," continued the old lady, who found it a very difficult task to find fault with her favorite, "what you have

done has been done thoughtlessly; for I cannot suppose that you would willingly wound or hurt any one, least of all"—and here her assumed firmness grew somewhat quavery—"my dear boy."

"How does he say I have wounded him?" asked Hero, in a manner which conveyed to Miss Lydia's mind an idea that the culprit meant to defend herself, and thereby instantly brought back all her anger.

"He does not say anything, Hero; but I am not blind, neither am I deaf, or I should not have heard remarks and observations, which, directly Leo told me that your engagement with each other was over, made me know the reason, although he would not say one word as to the cause."

"I assure you I do not know what you mean, Aunt Lydia, nor can I imagine the reason you allude to."

"Oh, don't say that, Hero," and Miss Lydia shook her head reprovingly. "You must know how everybody has been talking about you and Sir Stephen Prescott. It was only the day before yesterday that Miss Batt said, that she had heard several say, that it was generally remarked how much attention Sir Stephen paid you."

"Indeed! I think people might mind their own business," exclaimed Hero, her face turning scarlet.

"Well, I don't know but that it is the business of every one to comment on actions which call forth remarks. Perhaps you think that it is no business of mine to interfere, and that I ought to sit quietly by and see my poor boy's heart broken, and his peace of mind destroyed. But I cannot do it, Hero. Who is Sir Stephen Prescott, I should like to know? If every one had their right, and God's laws were the world's laws, as good a man as he would be in his shoes, I can tell him that."

"I don't understand you, Aunt Lydia."

"Perhaps not, Hero; but your friends at Combe would, though I beg you don't repeat a word I may say either to them or to Leo. Oh, Hero, I cannot tell you how disappointed I am in you. I would never have believed that you could be turned on one side by riches and vain-sound-

ing titles." And in spite of her efforts to control them, the tears came rolling down Miss Despard's thin cheeks, melting away every spark of Hero's indignation.

Rising hastily from her seat, she knelt down by the old lady's side and said—

"Aunt Lydia, tell me exactly what you mean, and what Leo has said to you, and then I shall know if you understand him."

"He spoke words plain enough to be understood this time," sobbed Aunt Lydia. "I'm sure he looked like a ghost this morning, and didn't care to speak a word. I couldn't think what had put him out until I began to say something about you and him; and then, Hero, he said I was not to speak as I did, for it was nothing of the kind, and that you were not engaged to each other, and you were free to marry whom you pleased; no one should say he was standing in your light. Then I knew that he had either seen or heard something. You'll repent it, if you do, Hero," she added, following out the flight her fancy had taken; "you may marry a dozen Sir Stephens, but they won't be Leo Despards—mark my words, if they are."

"Do you suppose, then, that I am engaged to Sir Stephen, Aunt Lydia?"

"No, I don't think as badly of you as that; but I do think your head has been turned by a prospect which may never come to pass, for men were deceivers ever, and that you may prove to your cost, yet, my dear. You and Leo never fell out before—why should you now?"

"We did not fall out, Aunt Lydia. I will tell you the exact truth, as I intend telling papa. You and he are the only two who have any right to be told. You know that, though there was no formal engagement between Leo and myself, we looked upon ourselves as engaged."

"Certainly; that is how I have thought and spoken of you."

"From different things, I wanted it now to be known by everybody, like other people's engagements are, and I asked Leo to speak openly of it."

"Well?"

"Well, he objected. He said that he should not get his promotion for years ; that he had tried all his friends, upon whose interest he had formerly depended, and none of them would or could help him ; therefore it was dishonorable to openly bind me to him, and rather than do it he would accept the alternative—that for the future we should be only friends."

"And you could take him at his word?—oh fie, Hero !"

"I did not object to anything but secrecy, Aunt Lydia. I had made up my mind that I would have no more of that. I only told Leo that we must be properly engaged, or not at all."

"And what objection had he to make ?"

"The objections I have given you—that he should not be promoted for ten years to come. He says he has been wretched about it for a long while, because he has tried every means, and all have failed. I don't understand him ; he always seemed to me so over sanguine, that I do not know why he should suddenly become so cast down—do you ?"

Aunt Lydia did not answer. She sat with a troubled far-off gaze, intent upon the working of her thoughts. At length she murmured—

"What is best—what is best ? If Antony could but tell me how to act—surely he would say, do anything, to secure our boy's happiness."

"Leo would not allow you to sacrifice your income, Aunt Lydia, I feel sure of that."

But Aunt Lydia did not seem to hear, so wrapt was she in arguing some question with herself. Suddenly she said—

"I suppose these Prescotts hardly know the beginning or end of their wealth ?"

"I don't know. Sir Stephen often says he wishes he had more money to spend on Mallett."

"Their proper estate is a magnificent place. I remember, in former days, my dear brother often speaking of the splendors of Pamphillon."

"I thought the rector knew about the Prescotts," said Hero, "and I told Sir Stephen so ; but he did not seem to remember Mr. Despard."

"A short memory is sometimes very convenient," said Miss Despard sarcastically. "How did he and his mother meet Leo yesterday? Did Mrs. Prescott seem to be taken aback at all?"

"Mrs. Prescott!" said Hero, with a look of surprise. "No; she was the same to Leo as she was to everybody else, very kind and nice. I wished so much that you had come."

"Oh no, my dear, I have no wish to be mixed up with them in any way. All I want is justice to whom justice is due, and while they'd never miss it, it would be the saving of Leo."

"Oh, Aunt Lydia!" exclaimed Hero, fearing the old lady's fondness was affecting her senses. "I really do not see what they have to do with Leo—a perfect stranger. Sir Stephen is a most generous man, but—"

"Sir Stephen is nothing of the kind," said Miss Despard with a flushed face and excited manner. "There may be a great deal of brag and boast, but actions speak louder than words; and, so far from being generous, neither Sir Stephen nor his mother are just. No, not commonly just to those claims which nature imposes upon all."

But before she could say more, a knock at the outer door caused her to stop, and at the sound of a voice she said—

"Oh dear, dear! How unfortunate! it is Mrs. Grant. I dare say she has come to stay. If so, Hero, you must run up again to-morrow morning; and then I shall have decided what is best to be done. In the meantime not a word to Leo, or to anybody."

Hero, who did not want to be detained longer, hurried on her hat, and stood up ready to take her leave.

Mrs. Grant was announced, cap-bag in hand.

"For, my dear, if you will have me," she said, "I've come to tea, thinking you'd like to hear how all went off yesterday: but I expect mine is stale news," she added turning to Hero, who reassured her by saying she had only come up to ask Aunt Lydia a question, and they had not had time to enter upon any descriptions."

"To-morrow, about twelve," Aunt Lydia whispered at parting. "Remember your promise."

Hero walked slowly away from the house, filled with an uneasy dread lest Aunt Lydia had become suddenly demented. She would have felt almost certain that such was the case, but that she recollected how persistently the old lady had always refused to meet Sir Stephen: how doubtful she had seemed to be of his good qualities, croaking forth, in a fashion not at all usual with her, proverbs concerning new brooms sweeping clean, and a flourish of trumpets, etc. Then she began to wonder, whether the speeches Leo made had any deeper foundation than jealousy. But what could they know about him, or if they did know anything, how could they know it? Her thoughts grew more and more perplexed as fresh recollections occurred to her. The road which led to Shivers farm was an unfrequented one, so that her reverie was not likely to be broken in upon, and Hero slowly walked along, turning over the events which had recently given such a different coloring to her life. Suddenly a shadow in her path caused her to start, and, looking up, she saw Sir Stephen.

"I have been watching you for a long time," he said.

"Have you? I never saw you."

"I know you did not. I was wondering what you could be thinking about. Are you better?"

"Yes, much better than I was this morning; but not quite well. I should not have gone out only Aunt Lydia wanted to see me."

"Aunt Lydia? Oh, I remember. Mr. Despard's aunt, the late rector's sister."

Both Sir Stephen and Hero felt a certain awkwardness at finding themselves alone.

Their minds were fixed upon one subject, which they mutually dreaded the nearest approach to; and, in the desire to avoid it, Hero asked a question which at another time she would have hesitated over.

"Do you know anything of Miss Despard's family?" she said.

"No. I do not. My uncle and her brother were

friends, and, knowing that, my mother gave Mr. Despard the Combe living."

"Mrs. Prescott knows them, then?"

"She knows no more than I have told you. Why, what makes you ask?"

Hero did not answer. It was true that Aunt Lydia had desired her to say nothing to any one; but if, by speaking to Sir Stephen, she could show the good old soul that she had misjudged the Prescotts, Aunt Lydia would be the very first to thank her for so doing. And somehow this accusation against Sir Stephen lay rankling within Hero, and so sure did she feel that it was false, that she longed to wipe away the faintest trace of reproach from one, whom, unknown to herself, she was beginning to regard as the model of most perfections.

"Aunt Lydia has been talking about you to me," she began, with a little hesitation. "She spoke as if you knew her nephew before you came here, and had not treated him properly—had been unjust to him in some way."

"I! Oh, the poor old lady's mind must be affected. Until I met him at your house I never saw or heard of Mr. Despard."

"She did not seem to be referring to the present time, but, as if it was something long ago. Poor Aunt Lydia!" and Hero looked quite troubled about her old friend's state.

"Mr. Despard told us that his father was the late rector's brother," Sir Stephen said, after a pause.

"Oh! was he? I never knew who his father was," Hero answered innocently.

"It is very odd," said Sir Stephen, with a puzzled look. "I'll ask my mother again; but I know she told me the other evening that she knew nothing whatever about them. Has Mr. Leo Despard ever alluded to this in any way?"

"Never. And Aunt Lydia made me promise not to mention to him a word that she had said."

"You must tell me if she says anything more to you, and I will—"

But here Sir Stephen was interrupted by the sudden ap-

pearance of Mr. Truscott, who said he was on his way to Combe.

"But, perhaps," he added, "you would rather that I came another day, Sir Stephen."

"I am going to say good-by here," Hero said. "I have to call at the farm for Betsey."

"In that case we will walk across the fields together, Mr. Truscott. I shall tell my mother that she may expect to see you to-morrow," he said, taking Hero's hand. "Good-by."

The business upon which Mr. Truscott had come being rather complicated, upon reaching the house Sir Stephen ran upstairs to say—

"Mr. Truscott will dine with us to-day, mother."

"Certainly, my dear. I have asked Mr. Despard to return, as he did not seem to know what to do with himself."

"All right," and Sir Stephen returned to business, which occupied him until dinner-time.

"I am sorry I was not able to join you, Katherine," he said as they seated themselves, "but up to the time I met Mr. Truscott I was fully occupied, and I knew you would excuse me."

Here Mr. Truscott, who was endowed with the happy talent of saying the wrong thing in the right place, murmured in the voice which he reserved for those who, he boasted, made him feel quite like one of themselves—

"I can assure you, madam, that Sir Stephen had a very fair excuse, for I met him with our friend, Miss Carthew," and he turned a most significant look upon Leo, while a dead silence gave point to his remark.

"I thought Miss Carthew was too ill to leave the house," said Mrs. Prescott; "her indisposition must have been of a very transient nature;" and the ruffled way in which she drew herself up determined Mr. Truscott to withhold any more praise of Miss Carthew.

"She is still far from well," said Sir Stephen. "I met her coming from an appointment she was obliged to keep, and she desired me to say to you how sorry she was to forego her engagement, but she hopes to call upon you to-morrow."

Mrs. Prescott said no more, Mrs. Labouchere entered into conversation with Leo, and Sir Stephen began asking questions relating to the estate. This lasted until the ladies left the dinner table, after which Leo sat about a quarter of an hour, and then got up, saying—

“I will join Mrs. Prescott now, and leave you and Mr. Truscott to finish your business.”

“Mr. Despard is a nephew of the late rector’s, is he not?” Sir Stephen asked when Leo had left them.

Mr. Truscott gave a little laugh.

“I think you had best not be too particular about his family history, Sir Stephen, for, strange to say, no one knows anything more about that young man’s origin than you do yourself. All sorts of stories have been reported, but nothing substantiated. I once took it upon myself to say something to the rector, but he took it in bad part.”

“He told my mother that he was old Mr. Despard’s brother’s son.”

“Nothing of the sort. He may say so to you, Sir Stephen, but that won’t do here. Why, the rector himself never said that; he spoke of him as a friend’s son, and when he got about fourteen, and was sent to the classical school at Dockmouth, the old gentleman entered him under his own name, and only from that time was he called Despard. His brother’s son!” repeated Mr. Truscott derisively, “I dare say, if Mrs. Prescott had charged her memory, she could have told him that he was drawing the long bow there, for old Mr. Despard was known to your mother, Sir Stephen.”

“Not to my mother; he was a friend of my uncle’s. My mother never knew him.”

“But at one time she used to write to him.”

“Ah, perhaps so; that was when she gave him the living.”

“And long after that,” said Mr. Truscott, with a positive shake of his head. “Why, let me see, eight—yes, certainly not more than eight years ago, for it was the last time I saw the old man, I walked with him as far as Collins, the outfitter’s, where he had left Master Leo being measured

for his first suit of regimentals, and his business with me was to get your address, that he might write to Mrs. Prescott. That was only a little before his death; and when Mrs. Prescott wrote and said you wished that the living should be given to some one who was a native of the place or about these parts, my eye fell on Mr. Jago at once."

"He had been doing the duty?"

"Oh, dear, no."

"But he was Mr. Despard's curate?"

"Bless your heart, Sir Stephen, no—nothing of the kind!" and Mr. Truscott laughed complacently to think how much information he was able to impart. "Mr. Despard never had, nor wanted, a curate. Mr. Jago was doing duty at St. Winnols, and when I rode over to sound him on the matter of the Combe living, you might have knocked him down with a feather."

"Oh, I've got hold of the wrong end of the story, it seems," Sir Stephen said, passing the decanter.

"No more, Sir Stephen. No, I never exceed my third glass—*quantum suf.*, sir, that is my maxim. Certainly, I am ready, if you are."

"I want to speak to you, mother," Sir Stephen said, after Mrs. Labouchere had left them the same night. Closing the door, he continued, "I want you to tell me what was the connection between Mr. Despard and our family."

"Connection, Stephen!" Mrs. Prescott stammered, while her face changed under her son's scrutiny.

"Yes; there is some mystery in all this—what is it, mother? I must insist upon knowing."

"Really, Stephen, you are speaking to me in a most extraordinary manner. I do not understand what you mean," for Mrs. Prescott's presence of mind had returned. "Once for all, I never saw old Mr. Despard, neither did I know anything about him."

"You never heard from him, or wrote to him?"

"I write to him, Stephen?"

"Yes, mother. I can see you are trying to hide something from me," he exclaimed impatiently; "what it is I do not know, but from something I have heard from Miss

Despard, unless you choose to be explicit with me, I shall see her to-morrow, and from her have a full explanation."

Something like a groan escaped Mrs. Prescott. Starting up, she said hurriedly, "No, Stephen—you must not, shall not go—it would kill me. I will tell you what there is to tell. There is no mystery," and she sank into a chair as if overcome by her agitation. "This young man is—"

"Who?" exclaimed Sir Stephen, scared by her emotion.

"Your—your—" but in spite of her efforts the rest of the sentence died away, and Sir Stephen saw that she had fainted.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MYSTERY OPENED.

WITH the help of the remedies which were at hand Mrs. Prescott was soon restored to consciousness. Faintness was no unusual thing to her; it was rather the certain result of any undue excitement or fatigue, so that her son was able to attend to her without calling for any assistance.

"I am so sorry, mother," he said, looking anxiously at her.

"It is I who am sorry, Stephen, to let my silly nervousness so completely master me; but I am better now—I shall be able to talk to you presently."

"Never mind to-night, mother; you must not worry yourself. Tell me to-morrow."

Mrs. Prescott pressed the hand in which her son held hers, and was silent for a few moments.

"I will tell you now," she said, "and you must promise me not to be vexed that I have not spoken of it before. Of course you were a boy at the time, and I could not mention it; then as years went on, and all connection between us was broken, I grew almost to forget that such a circumstance had ever happened, and it appeared a pity that you should be given occasion to think less of your uncle. That was the only reason, Stephen. You know, do you not, that I have never kept anything from you? There has been always the most perfect confidence between us."

"So I have believed, mother."

"Yes, and if I kept this to myself, it was on your account; I feared the knowledge might vex you."

"You forget that I have not the slightest idea to what you are alluding. Of course I suppose it relates to this Mr. Despard. Tell me at once, who is he?"

"Your Uncle Bernard's son."

"What! Uncle Bernard's son! Mother, say it again—I cannot believe my ears."

"Ah, Stephen! nor could I my eyes when first I read the letter which told me of it," and she shuddered at the recollection.

"The mother was not his wife, then?"

"Stephen, how could she be?"

"Oh, I don't know!" he exclaimed bitterly. "I am so astounded at this, and that you could keep it to yourself all these years, that I am prepared to hear anything."

"She was a low, bad woman," said Mrs. Prescott, taking no notice of his excitement; "she deceived your uncle in every way. He met her at some of the places he used to frequent, and was struck with her appearance and took her away with him. She never knew what his real position in life was, or she would not have left him, which she did just before your grandfather's death. Not knowing what to do with the child, your uncle asked Mr. Despard to give it shelter for a little time, and, from some reason, with Mr. Despard it remained until your uncle's death, when, in a letter which he left for me, I first heard of the circumstance. While I was considering what was best to be done, Mr. Despard wrote offering to adopt the boy, and bring him up as his own son. I was only too glad to accept the offer, for at that time, God knows, I had enough on my hands. Oh, your uncle was cruel, very cruel! He is dead and gone, Stephen; and I wish to forgive him; but if any man ever wronged the widow and the orphan, he did."

While Mrs. Prescott was saying this, Sir Stephen was walking up and down the room trying to grasp this unexpected revelation. Suddenly he stopped.

"Do you mean to tell me, mother, that you never did anything for this boy, but let the whole cost and burden of his maintenance rest upon this old Mr. Despard?"

"Stephen!" and here Mrs. Prescott's tears came to her assistance; but her son took no notice of them.

"I—I did all I could," she sobbed; "I deprived myself of what ready money I possessed at the time to send to Mr.

Despard—five hundred pounds, which afterwards got the young man his commission ; and I gave the old man this living, a great thing for a struggling London curate, for that was all he was before ; and surely it was far better that the boy should be brought up respectably as the adopted son of a clergyman, than that it should be known that he belonged to nobody.”

“ Belonged to nobody, mother ! he belonged to us. Now I can solve the riddle which has puzzled me all my life. Uncle Bernard’s speculations were made to leave something to this boy. He knew the wrong he had done him, and I suppose he guessed rightly that, with no claim to justice, the lad had little chance of getting it given to him by his family.”

Mrs. Prescott put her hands over her ears. “ I won’t listen,” she exclaimed ; “ I shall go mad ! After all I have sacrificed and done for you, Stephen, to turn around like this upon me. Oh, I am indeed punished ! ” and she rocked herself to and fro.

But Stephen seemed dead to everything but his sense of the injury which Leo had sustained.

“ What opinion could Mr. Despard have formed of us ? ” he exclaimed ; “ what must he have thought of me, inheriting all my uncle had to leave, yet not caring whether his son was alive or dead ? ”

“ Really, Stephen, you are the most unreasonable person I ever met with. So far from having a bad opinion of us, the few letters that Mr. Despard sent me were filled with expressions of gratitude, that he was permitted to have the boy, whom he spoke of as being the greatest comfort of his life. Oh, how I wish now that I had never consented to come here ! I had a presentiment of evil from the first, and though I fought against it, as I have done through life wherever your wishes were concerned, a shudder ran through me each time I thought of the odious place.”

“ Well, mother, I cannot understand you. My only wonder is that you could ever rest anywhere ; the fact—alone—of keeping such a thing from me would have been sufficient, I should have said, to worry you to death.”

"Our anxieties do not kill us, Stephen, or I should have been in my grave long ago. Sometimes," and here her tears began afresh, "I think there is very little for me to live for."

"I see we have talked enough for to-night," Sir Stephen said impatiently, as he rang the bell.

"Of course you will not think of mentioning the subject to any one, Stephen. You see that the young man himself knows nothing of it. It would be cruel to undeceive him; he seems so very happy and contented, far more than—"

But her son interrupted her.

"For Heaven's sake, mother, say no more. Leave me to decide how I shall act for the future."

The sternness of his face and manner frightened her into silence, until, startled by a knock at the door, she said, "Who can that be?"

"Only Davis. I rang for her to come to you. I will assist you to your room."

Many things connected with this disclosure seemed to hurt and irritate him. That his mother, between whom and himself he had believed perfect confidence to exist, could keep an important secret like this from him, was sufficiently startling—and for what reason? Why was he to be kept in ignorance? Who had so great a right to know? Well might Miss Despard wish to avoid him—in her conduct he saw the reflection of her brother's feelings. The odd thing was, that after remaining silent, that is, if she had remained silent for all these years, she should suddenly speak to Hero. What could be her motive? This thought perplexing him considerably, he determined to write a note asking Hero to oblige him by not keeping her appointment, as, from a conversation he had had with his mother, he intended paying Miss Despard a visit himself, and by going at the time she had appointed to see Hero, he hoped in all probability to find her at home and alone.

CHAPTER XXV.

"ALL SOUND TILL WE'RE SIFTED."

THE next morning, having dispatched a messenger to Sharrows sufficiently early to prevent Hero's visit, Sir Stephen, at the appointed time, presented himself at Aunt Lydia's cottage, thereby so startling the old lady that some time elapsed before she knew what she was saying to him, or what he was saying to her. By chatting about Mallett, the people he had met there, and the pleasure it gave him to come among them, he gave her time to recover her composure, and, with a view of leading up to the subject, he at length mentioned Leo's name. Immediately Aunt Lydia's face changed and her manner altered; so, laying aside all further reserve, he said,—

"Miss Despard, I am a very poor diplomatist, and I am sure you understand straightforwardness far better than anything else; therefore you must forgive any seeming bluntness, if I come to what I have to say without more preamble."

Poor Aunt Lydia's heart seemed to beat quicker at every word. Could Sir Stephen have heard what she had said about him and Hero, and had he come to say that it was false, or, worse still, that it was true?

"Until last night," he went on, "I was perfectly ignorant of the debt of gratitude, which I and my family owe to you and your brother. From some mistaken motive, my mother never told me that my uncle, Sir Bernard Prescott, had left a son, and until I came down here, except as rector of Mallett, I never heard of Mr. Despard. Now that I am made aware of his generosity and goodness to my uncle's son, I am grieved beyond measure that I cannot tell him, that what must have seemed unfeeling, selfish neglect arose

solely from total ignorance of the facts. My mother's life had been one long sacrifice of self to duty, so that I know her silence was caused by an idea that she was acting rightly. She says that deference to Mr. Despard's wishes was her principal reason for not speaking to me, or doing anything in the matter."

"It is quite true; she only acted as my dear brother always desired that she would," exclaimed Aunt Lydia, whose anger had vanished before Sir Stephen's truthful, earnest manner. "Antony was most grateful that you never interfered, but let him bring up Leo as if he were indeed our own boy. Ah! Sir Stephen, if ever my poor brother made an idol, it was of Leo. Don't speak of gratitude, Sir Stephen, and tell your mother to be assured that my dear brother blessed her many and many a time for leaving him such a comfort. Two old people, alone in the world, our lives would have been very dull without Leo."

Sir Stephen took the old lady's hand. "Your unselfish goodness," he said, "puts my thanks to silence; but you must now tell me your wishes, so that I may see if I cannot serve your adopted son in some way."

Aunt Lydia sat for a few moments without speaking, but with an expression in her sweet old face which kept Sir Stephen from disturbing her; then looking at him she said,—

"How wonderful are the ways of Him, who worketh all things together for our good! Until two days ago, I never wished that the silence which my brother kept up between Leo and his father's family should be broken; but a circumstance has occurred which has made me hesitate, and think, would it not be best that you should know, as perhaps you could be of great assistance to Leo. I cannot tell you, Sir Stephen, how this thought has worried me, not having any person to speak to on the matter."

"Mr. Leo Despard is not aware, then, of the connection between us?"

"Oh dear no! nothing could be further from his thoughts. He knows that the details of his birth are somewhat painful; for before he went into the world, my dear Antony thought it only right to tell him so much, but no more; therefore I

could not speak to him. I could but seek guidance, and now you come to me, and ask a question which gives the answer to my petition. Mrs. Prescott, you say, has only told you now?"

Sir Stephen, wishing that Aunt Lydia should suppose his mother's communication a voluntary one, answered,—

"Yes; she saw that we were likely to be thrown more together, and she thought it best. You know I am going to sell my larger estate, and settle at Mallett altogether."

"Dear me! that seems a pity. I remember Antony telling me what a beautiful place it was."

"Yes; most people admire it, and that gives me hope that I shall have no difficulty in selling it. I presume," he said, reverting to the subject uppermost in his mind, "that it was Mr. Leo Despard's wish to be a soldier."

"From the time he was a little fellow so high, he delighted in nothing else. He and his dear uncle would play by the hour together at fighting battles and drilling armies. Antony wished him to go into the church, feeling that it was more than probable that you would, in due time, have allowed Leo to take his place as rector here, and there would have been a comfortable provision for him for life; whereas, where he is, the poor boy has a hard task to pay his way; and to put by to purchase his next step, is next to impossibility, Sir Stephen. If he had a friend in power, or any one to lend him a helping hand, he thinks something might be managed. And now, Sir Stephen, I am coming to my request—a very bold one I fear you will think it."

"No, I shall not; only tell me exactly what he wants. This, you know, is strictly between ourselves."

"Yes, I am sure of that, and I feel as if I could really open my mind to you, Sir Stephen, which is such a comfort to one pent up as I have been, through having no one to whom I could speak openly. Well, I dare say you don't know, though perhaps you may have guessed, that there is a great attachment between Leo and Hero Carthew."

Sir Stephen nodded his head, to signify that he was already in possession of that fact.

"Ah, I thought whether you hadn't noticed it. Then I dare say you have also noticed that there's a little misunderstanding between them just at present."

"No. I saw them together on Wednesday."

"Ah, yes ; but it has been since then. They had a fall out that evening. You see, Sir Stephen, that though they have been engaged, it has not been anything formal : and I suppose Hero (and very naturally) now wants it to be known, and she told Leo as much, and he took it into his head it would not be honorable to bind her, and so objected ; and then, as is always the case, one word led to another, until the poor boy in his warmth, let out what we had none of us suspected, that he has been miserable for ever so long, because he can't see his way to getting his promotion, for perhaps ten years to come, and until he gets that they must not think of marrying, you know, Sir Stephen ; and he said at length that, rather than tie Hero down by a long engagement, he would set her free, and she—rather ungenerously, I must say that of her—took him at his word. As he said to me last night, why can't they go on as they've been going on ? But she won't have that. She says things are altered now, and she wishes people to know that she is engaged, and from what I can gather she was a little high and mighty with him, and Leo isn't one to stand that ; and so when she said then they would in future only be friends, he took her at her word, and the consequence is, they are both of them heart-broken, and one won't give way and the other won't give way, so that there is no knowing how long they may go on making each other miserable. However, I shouldn't mind that so much—for young people are pretty sure to get right in the end—if it was not that it has opened my eyes to the dear boy's anxieties about his promotion, which I never knew before, and I am afraid it will affect his health, and he talks of volunteering for some of those dreadful places where a strong young man is taken off like the snuff of a candle in a few hours"—and here poor Aunt Lydia shuddered at the melancholy prospect. "A wife, you see, is such a safeguard to a man in the army, because he knows if he goes throw-

ing away his life, how straitened he must leave his poor widow: so that I shouldn't be a bit afraid if Leo was married—only how is he to marry until he gets his promotion, and how is he to get his promotion without a friend to give him a helping hand?" And stopping, she looked wistfully at Sir Stephen, who sat listening to her words with a grave face.

He had not interrupted her while she was speaking, for every sentence she uttered seemed to send his thoughts travelling off in a fresh direction. Viewed in the light which Aunt Lydia threw upon it, Leo's denial assumed a different aspect and Sir Stephen could readily credit the young fellow was striving to do what he believed to be honorable and right. Until now he hardly knew how strongly hope had sprung up within him; but if this was the explanation of Leo's coldness, he must give up all thought of things being different, and until he had done what was plainly his duty, forget his personal interest in the matter. So, with an effort, which he strove to hide from Miss Despard, he said,—

"If the sum for purchasing a further step will secure their happiness, you need say no more, Miss Despard, as I consider you have every right to claim that from me."

"Oh, Sir Stephen, you are too generous; pray don't speak in that way to me, for I could not think of allowing you to deprive yourself of such a sum; we shall only look upon it as a loan from you which is to be repaid, and I know that Leo will leave no stone unturned to repay it, for he is a good boy, Sir Stephen—a dear good boy, a son whom any man might have been proud to own; but there, I have no right to speak; it is not for us to judge."

"I suppose you never saw the mother?" said Sir Stephen.

"No, never."

"I thought she might have made some attempt to see the boy."

"She never knew where he had been placed, and his dread of her discovering it kept Sir Bernard from coming to the house. It was not until he ascertained that she was dead that he wrote to Antony, saying he should now see

the child ; and we always thought he meant to acknowledge him. But there, it was not to be. Sudden death is very awful, Sir Stephen, and I shall never forget the shock your poor uncle's death gave Antony. You see they were much attached to each other—like brothers, you may say."

"Mr. Despard had seen the mother?"

"Yes, he had ; poor Antony quite grieved, thinking what a thousand pities for Sir Bernard to have made such a mistake, for you know he quite thought Sir Bernard had married her ; indeed, to his dying day it was a mystery to my dear brother. Ah, we're all sound till we're sifted, Sir Stephen, and the man who trusts to his own strength is lost."

While Aunt Lydia was saying this the expression of Sir Stephen's face had gradually become more pained and anxious.

"I shall come again soon, and have another chat with you, Miss Despard," he said, rising from his chair with a heavy feeling of oppression. "In the meantime, how about your nephew? Do you propose to inform him now of our relationship?"

"Oh, that I shall leave to you, Sir Stephen."

"You see that, though I have a large-sounding income, I am from circumstances so straitened for ready money that I could not conveniently spare this sum until I have made some arrangement dependent on my estate of Pamphillon, which is at present for sale. Now, suppose we said nothing about this matter until the money is forthcoming, and then we told Mr. Despard?"

"That is quite as I think, Sir Stephen."

"I hope to be able to do this in the course of a few weeks ; so they will not have a very long term of probation."

Aunt Lydia took his outstretched hand, and while tears of joy filled her eyes she said,—

"My tongue has ever been a very weak exponent of my heart, and never more feeble to express its gratitude than at this moment ; but inasmuch as you have done to me, may it be done to you, so that the burden which lies nearest to your heart be lifted suddenly away, and its heaviness turned into great fulness of joy."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CAPTAIN CLEARS UP SOME POINTS.

AFTER leaving Aunt Lydia, Sir Stephen walked towards the village, at the entrance to which he suddenly came upon Captain Carthew and Leo Despard. Determined upon making restitution for the false impression he considered he had formed of Leo, Sir Stephen gave him a more friendly greeting than their short acquaintance demanded, and when at the turn to the Forts Leo stopped, Sir Stephen said,—

“If you have nothing better to do, will you stroll round, and smoke a cigar with me this evening?”

“Thanks, I will,” said Leo, well pleased at the change; and the Captain and Sir Stephen walked on together.

“That seems a nice young fellow,” Sir Stephen said, debating within himself whether or not he should speak openly to Captain Carthew. “You knew Mr. Despard, the rector, intimately, I suppose?”

“What, old Antony? Ah, yes; he and I were great chums,” said the Captain regretfully.

“Did he ever speak to you as to the antecedents of this adopted son of his?”

The Captain gave a quick look at Sir Stephen.

“I am not asking from idle curiosity, as you will presently see. I really want to unburden myself a little to you on a subject which has just caused me great annoyance. I know I may speak openly to you.”

The Captain, on whom the troubled tone of Sir Stephen's voice was not lost, put his arm through his companion's.

“Let us turn down here,” he said. “We are not so likely to be interrupted.” And they walked on a little distance without either of them speaking. “Now, about this

young Despard," the Captain began. "All I know of him from his uncle is this—as to anything others may say, well, I put it in the same list with what he says of himself—he was the son of a great friend of the old man's, who had got himself into a precious mess through some woman he took up with. He was a queer kind of fish, and Antony thought he had married her, and when he took charge of Leo, then a little chap in petticoats, he still believed that she was his wife, though by this time she had bolted from him, and he was furious against her, so much so, that until she died, which she did a few years after, he wouldn't even look at the child, who was the image of the mother. After her death he softened down a little, and came to see the boy, and talked about taking him home, for he'd come into some property, I fancy—when, poor fellow, he died quite suddenly of some complaint which, it seems, he kept to himself for years, and everything was found to be at sixes and sevens. The next of kin wrote to old Antony, and, as nothing was found of a marriage certificate, or any papers to clear up the matter, the poor little beggar had no claim upon anybody. Old Antony offered to adopt him, and they were only too willing to be ridden of the burden. Mind you," added the Captain, finding Sir Stephen still silent, "if ever any one was certain of a berth aloft, that man was old Antony Despard. He loved his neighbor, he feared God, and honored the king; and if there's anything else that ought to be done to make things square, why, sir, he did it."

And the Captain, in his excitement, pushed his hat farther back, and shook his head defiantly at Sir Stephen.

"You but confirm what Miss Despard told me this morning, and my mother told me last night, when I was first informed that the friend for whom Mr. Despard did all this was my uncle, the late Sir Bernard Prescott, and that this young Despard is therefore my cousin."

"The devil he is!" exclaimed the Captain, stopping, and turning short round in blank amazement. "God bless my soul! why, I thought you were asking on Hero's account! Lord! I never had the wind so knocked out of

me before. Leo Despard your uncle's son! Well, then, for once I should have cut up rough with old Antony, for—" and he grasped Sir Stephen's hand—"by Jingo, if the mother *had* been married, Mallett might have thrown out signals of distress for a month of Sundays, before Master Leo would have come to the rescue."

Sir Stephen smiled.

"You have rather set me thinking," he said. "I suppose old Mr. Despard felt quite satisfied that every justice had been done to this boy. That is the worst of being kept in ignorance. Women do what is right; but they don't always see the necessity of proving that they have done so. My poor mother, for instance, is plagued with such a tender conscience, that she would overstrain and torment herself in any doubtful matter; but very likely she would never think to say this to any one, fancying that they would be sure to judge her as justly as she would judge them."

"And so she was judged," said the Captain; "for I, not knowing who the parties were, have often asked Antony if he was satisfied that it had all been plain sailing."

"And he was?"

"Perfectly. He said his knowledge of the person who wrote to him thoroughly satisfied him; and now I know that he meant your mother, I can understand the high opinion he had of her."

"I am very glad of that," said Sir Stephen, with a sigh of relief; "but the good old man must have thought very meanly of *me*."

"Not a bit of it. He never thought meanly of any one, and, least of all, of any member of your family. On the contrary, you may depend he was very much obliged to you for not interfering; indeed, I've heard him say as much."

"It was very strange that he should not have told the young fellow himself?"

"Well, I don't know that. He'd a good deal more sense than he ever got credit for, and I expect he saw that Master Leo was one rather given to lay hold of fanci-

ful notions. He's a queer mixture is Leo, and I can make more allowance for his twists and cranks now. I am glad your mother told you of the circumstance. These things are better made a clean breast of."

"Her silence has been a terrible annoyance to me," Sir Stephen said. "At least," he added, wishing to screen her forced avowal, "she ought to have told me before we came down here. Directly she did do so I went to Miss Despard, and I have had a long talk with her this morning."

"Does she wish Leo to be told of it?"

"Yes, we shall tell him, but not for a little time to come. I may as well be plain with you. I wish to give him the sum for the purchase of his next step. I cannot do this till Pamphillon is sold; then I shall be able to manage it, and add to it enough, so that he may marry, which it seems he is very anxious to do."

"The deuce he is? And who does he want to marry?"

Sir Stephen hesitated.

"You don't mean Hero?"

Sir Stephen's silence implied that he did mean Hero, and the Captain shook his head.

"Why, it was only last night that she told me that they'd parted company.

"Yes, Miss Despard hinted at some misunderstanding, in consequence of Mr. Despard feeling, that it would be wrong to bind your daughter to one who could not marry for an indefinite time; but that is over now—they can marry as soon as they please." And a something in the tone of these words made the Captain avoid looking at once at the speaker.

"Well, he may get his promotion," he said, "and very glad I shall be to see a pair of epaulettes upon his shoulders; but if he gets my girl, why, I'll eat my head, hat and all. No, no, not a bit of it."

"You won't give your consent?"

"Give my consent! Yes, I'll give my consent if he ever gets hers. But, whereas, a little time ago she'd nailed her colors to Leo, and would have stuck to him through thick and thin, like a true woman—God bless 'em every

one!—now, whether he sinks or swims, the same boat will never hold them, and the longer they live the wider they'll drift apart."

"But how—what has caused this sudden change?" said Sir Stephen.

"Nothing, I believe; only old Time has made a woman of the child, and she cares for something beyond a good figurehead. I always knew that if they were thrown much together her love for Leo would be gone; they're as opposite to one another as the poles. I wish Leo well, and, for my old friend's sake, besides having a liking for the boy himself, I'd do him a service with all my heart; but, for all that, I say, thank the Lord that he'll never be anything more to my girl, and last night when she told me I took an extra glass of grog on the strength of it. Ah! by the bye, that brings me to a promise I gave to our friend Joe Bunce. Do you really think you shall take up your quarters here—I mean, so that you'll keep on your boat, and need Joe as a regular hand?"

"Certainly I mean to engage his services to be a handy man about the place, and to make the boat his especial care."

"Well, then, will you tell him so?"

"Of course I will. I was on my way to the village when we met. If you are going there, we'll walk on together."

"What you have told me," said the Captain, as they turned into the road, "is as safe as if it was unsaid. Until you give the word I shall never speak of it to a living soul."

"I shall be entirely guided by his own wishes," said Sir Stephen. "He may desire that things be left as they are."

"Most probably he will," said the Captain. "You see, it's an awkward thing to be chopping and changing, and I know when Leo has a story to tell he isn't particular to a shade or two." Then, seeing that they were approaching a more frequented part, he added, "but we'll talk this over again. There are two or three things I want to say; but we'll leave them for the present, and finish our business with Mr. Joe, who I can see round the corner keeping a sharp lookout. Come, Joe, here's Sir Stephen—now speak

up!" for the expression on Joe's face had suddenly assumed a bashfulness rather at variance with its bronze color and hairy surroundings.

"Well, Joe!" said Sir Stephen, "are you ready to settle down as a landsman? Is it agreed that you undertake the charge of my boat?"

Joe turned the hat which he held by the brim slowly round, staring hard into the crown, with the hope of gaining an inspiration by which he might duly return his thanks; but these means not succeeding, he got redder than before with the effort to say,—

"Thank 'ee, sir. I ain't much of a hand at speechifying, through allays havin' bin in the carpenter's crew; but my feelin's is the same, and I am uncommon obliged to you, sir, for givin' me this chance, and so the Cap'en can tell, as has often spoke up for me before, when the wind's bin pretty stiff up above," and he rather lowered his voice as he indicated *above* to mean *Sharrows*.

"Ah!" said the Captain, "that's when you've been splicing the main brace, Joe; but we mustn't have any more of that now. You must conduct yourself as becomes a steady-going man, or you'll lose your rating with Betsey."

"Betsey!" repeated Sir Stephen. "Of course, I had forgotten all about that. Why, you want to get married, Joe?"

Joe became more sheep-faced than ever.

"Well, sir, I have bin a-thinking about it."

"Thinking about it," laughed the Captain. "Why, you've been thinking about it these last twenty years."

"Yes, sir, but the difficulty is to get a female twice in the same mind. They don't answer to no helm, they don't—not as I could ever make out. P'raps you gintlemen knows how to strike the right nail on the head; but I've never bin able to hit it. If so be now," and Joe gave a sly look towards Sir Stephen, "I'd a got anybody to give me a hoist up with a wedge o' their own drivin', she'd take me straight off the reel."

"Well, we must see what can be done," laughed Sir Stephen. "I shall tell Betsey that now you have entered into

my service, Joe, I must see you respectably married, and I'll ask her advice about a cottage which I think might suit you."

Joe stood speechless, then suddenly turning to Sir Stephen, he said—

"You couldn't find me somethin' to do now, sir, could ye?"

"No, I am going on some other business."

"Have you got a job of any kind, Cap'en?"

The Captain shook his head.

"Well, then!" exclaimed Joe decisively, "I'll run up and ask Miss Hero to keep a eye on me; for if I stay within hail of the Admiral Nelson, I shan't be able to keep from drinkin' o' somebody's health, and once inside there, 'tain't so easy to get out again."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. PRESCOTT'S REFLECTIONS.

UNTIL dinner-time Mrs. Prescott saw nothing of her son, and then Katherine's presence prevented their touching upon any but general topics. This was only in accordance with her desire that, until she had hedged herself in with clever evasions and discreet denials, there should be no raking up of by-gone memories between them. Her day, which, under the plea of indisposition, she had spent almost alone, had been one of alternating hope and fear—hope, that, now so much was known, the great dread would remain more completely shrouded than before; and fear, lest Sir Stephen should persist in telling Leo the existing relationship between them. By way of consolation she indulged, as was her habit, in imagining the different things to be said and done under different circumstances; and, by hanging these events on suitable hinges, they invariably turned in the right direction, and so were productive of a certain amount of comfort. It seemed hard, that when she had almost succeeded in forgetting those years of endurance they should, all of a sudden, be brought before her as vividly as ever; and as she sat in the quiet of her room, she recounted every hardship she had undergone to keep the estate to which she had so tenaciously clung. She had given up one expense after another, had sold everything over which she had control, and had lived secluded and apart from most of those she cared for. Where would Pamphillon be had she not done this? In the hands of strangers,—and Combe the sole inheritance of the Prescotts. But was this coming to pass in spite of her? Should she yet live to see Stephen possessed of nothing but this paltry out-of-the-world estate? Ah, that would

be bitterness indeed! for Combe had ever been a despised portion; and though, during the struggling years of her son's minority, she had derived from it her only certain income, it had never entered her mind to live there, nor had she considered that either the place or the people had any claim upon her for sympathy or care.

"It must have been fate which induced Stephen to come down here," she murmured; then sighing despondingly, she added, "I suppose it is ordained that I should never know peace of mind; for, whenever there is a lull, it seems but to mean that a fiercer storm is brewing, and that I am to be more tempest-tossed than before. I did think, when Katherine was given back to us again, that things would go smoothly; but, there, I suppose it is not to be." After a time she began considering how soon it would be possible for them to turn their backs on the place, "for it will be no exaggeration to say that if I stay here I shall be seriously ill,—to feel under the constant dread of what Stephen or this aunt, who had entirely slipped out of my memory, may say is more than my nerves could bear. Stephen is so odd in his notions—he takes ideas which no one else would dream of; now, instead of seeing how fortunate it was for this young man to be brought up so respectably and happily, he flies out at me each time I try to impress it upon him, and says that, seeing his uncle evidently intended to do something for him, it should have been our care to see his wishes carried out. Poor Stephen, poor boy! ah, he can never know what I have undergone for his sake."

These and similar thoughts filled her brain, and kept her on the stretch during the day and night which followed her interview with her son; nor was she the only one, whom troubled fancies made restless and disturbed throughout the weary hours. Sir Stephen did nothing but turn and return to the one subject. A hundred things seemed to combine in giving strange interest to this new revelation. That he should ever have come to the place, which he had been brought up to regard as "a barren, uncultivated waste, fit for nothing but to be the home of a rough and

scanty fishing population." How culpable had been his neglect of Mallett! He had taken for granted what his mother had always said, that it brought in next to nothing; and now he found that at the time of his uncle's death the best part of the estate had been mortgaged to relieve the pressing wants of Pamphillon, and since then, nothing had been done for the land or the people. From a repugnance on Sir Stephen's part to enter into matters which overwhelmed and disheartened him, he had acquired the reputation, with his agents and lawyers, of a poor man of business. This, combined with his continual absence from England, made them enter into details far more fully with Mrs. Prescott than they did with her son, and they took it for granted that Sir Stephen was by her made acquainted with everything that took place. But they, like many others, had gauged Stephen Prescott very imperfectly. His weakness arose from his knowledge, that the moment he faced an evil, he must, at any cost, set to work to remedy it; therefore, as much as it was possible, he accepted things on trust, asked few questions; and, while tormented and worried about the state of Pamphillon, felt no twittings of conscience about Mallett, whose inhabitants, when viewed by the light of Mrs. Prescott's hearsay exaggerations and Mr. Truscott's contented state of happiness, he concluded, had not reached that state of civilization in which dirt and discomfort either affect or disturb. When he began looking into the Pamphillon affairs, he decided he would at least see Mallett, and with no more definite interest had he paid that first visit, so fraught with import to the whole future of his life. Had Providence decreed that he should be the scapegoat,—that while he was to be the instrument by which happiness should be effected, he should, in his own person, suffer for the sins of those who had gone before. Surely he had had his share of suffering already, for he now saw the reason of his uncle's reckless speculations,—it was to form a fortune for this son, whom, doubtless, he yearned to make his heir. "And yet," he said, "my mother, seeing this, could allow her sensitiveness to overcome her sense, and, to screen my uncle, commit

an injustice to his son and to her own. I am quite ashamed to think how I hope the young fellow will choose to keep the matter still secret. I know how many would sneer over the false sentiment which kept her silent, while others would do the same at the idea of my pretended ignorance. What will Hero think of it? she, of course, must know what is the meaning of this sudden rupture between her and Despard. Am I to believe the aunt, or the father? Perhaps neither of them know the truth; she may have told him about me, and he may feel bound to release her, and neither of them may be able to speak plainly to a third person. God knows," he exclaimed, after a long pause, jumping up to occupy himself and so drown thought, "but at times I could swear that she loves me."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MUCH MYSTIFIED.

MALLETT church stood at the top of St. Kit's Hill, at about an equal distance from the dwelling-place of any one of its scattered congregation. The toilsome roads leading to it were exposed, the hills were steep; yet neither the weakly nor the aged ever grumbled as Sunday after Sunday they wearily plodded along, for who among them had not some one whose heart had been, or would be, cheered by the sight of its gray old tower, which served as a beacon, and was hailed with joy and thankfulness by all good seamen? Strangers had been heard to say they wondered at a church being built up there; but this remark met with no sympathy from the Malletters, who asked, "Why, for goodness' sake, should it ha' bin put elsewhere than so that the dear blids to sea could catch sight on it, and know they was close home? Why, even the furriners could see the sense o' its placing, as was shown by the painted winder one of 'em had put up a hundred years gone by—a great, hooge man a-carryin' a infant child on his back. Then there was a headstone, with a carved ship a-top, so far back as 1560, showin' that the church was standin' there then. There was some went so far as to say 'twas the 'rection of a Popish lady for the restin' of her son's sawl after his body was washed ashore close-by. If so, many a sailor had had cause to bless her mem'ry since, and wives and mothers too, so 'twas to be hoped, any rate, her was at rest, sawl and body too."

Thus viewed, one began to forget the architectural deficiencies of the mottled, weather-stained old building, with its disproportionately high tower, up to which the people looked with loving familiarity as each Sunday morning they lingered under its shadow, waiting until the cracked tinkle

of the bell should stop before they entered the church itself. The present rector, Mr. Jago, had never attained to the degree of popularity enjoyed by Mr. Despard; and the older folk, especially, were glad of any opportunity afforded for a disparaging comparison.

"Mr. Despard was as reg'lar as clock-work," said one of the old men, with a shake of the head. "Never no waitin' for he."

"No," answered Mrs. Collins, the butcher's wife; "nor no keepin' o' dinners waitin' neither. Our'n was stone cold last Sunday, through standin' in Inch's bake-house. Mr. Jago an't a-goin' to tell me he don't know the hour folks's dinners is drawed at; and 'tain't much good preachin' does anybody, when their thoughts is set upon the meat bein' dried up to a stick."

"He should keep the long-winded uns for the arternoon, missis," laughed one of the hearers.

"Ah, well, he might keep 'em to hisself, and I shouldn't be no wus pleased, for with dinners at twelve, by four yer inside's ready for yer cup o' tay; and so you'd a chance o' gettin' it in ole Mr. Despard's time, and I don't suppose anybody'll contend, but what he know'd how to do the right thing by us so well as passon Jago, who's for everlastin' at the fire and brimstone, so that it makes anybody's blood run cold. I'd so lief go down to Pethewick's, only I don't hold with meetin's, and such like—it's contrary to sense to fancy that folks as is in the grocery, any more than any other shopkeepin' line, can know so much o' religion as gentlefolks, who've nothin' else to do. Besides, it 'ud go agin my grain to sit under one o' my own sort—not a bit of it. I likes to have my say so well as they."

This truism gave rise to a general laugh, in the midst of which the tinkle—preparatory to the five minutes' ringing, when the rector came in sight—stopped, and they all began bustling into church, where the Joslyns, Miss Despard, Hero, the Captain, and the few small farmers about, were already seated.

There was no cause of complaint against Mr. Jago on this day, for the congregation had barely seated themselves,

when old Matthey Cox, the sexton, commenced pulling vigorously to announce his advent, and before the look of amazement had well left their faces, the rector, hot and flustered from his rapid pace, hurried up the aisle, followed, after a couple of minutes' interval, by Sir Stephen, Mrs. Prescott, Mrs. Labouchere, and Leo Despard.

This was the first Sunday that the Combe ladies had come, and the sensation they created was immense, particularly among the female portion, who gave a very divided attention to the service, at which they had come to assist.

Leo sat in the Combe pew, so that Hero had a double reason for not casting her eyes in that direction. The Captain, true to his training, concentrated his whole attention on the duty he had come to perform. So that they remained ignorant of the excitement caused by the dress of the two ladies, and the various small items they had deemed it necessary to arm themselves with. Their ivory-backed prayer-books produced a grand sensation among the Sunday-school children, which lasted until the middle of the psalms, when the whispered fact that "one of 'em was a-holdin' a bottle with a gold cork to her nawse," induced several of the least fortunately placed to heighten themselves on a long rickety stool, which suddenly tipping up, upset them, thereby causing a titter, which was followed by the unmistakable whacks of a cane falling promiscuously among the offenders, who spent the remaining term of their probation in emitting lengthened and dolorous sniffs.

At length the service came to an end, and the humbler portion of the congregation hurried outside, where they stood about with the lingering hope of getting a further look at the gentlefolks. When Sir Stephen appeared, he had a good-natured word for all those near him. Mrs. Prescott, also, to please her son, smiled a gracious acknowledgment of the bobs and curtses; but Katherine, whose temper had suffered from the atmosphere of fish and tar, the shuffling of the men, the sniffing of the children, and the general primitiveness of the whole service, had not recovered herself sufficiently to do aught else than ignore the offenders, past whom she swept without vouchsafing them a

single glance. Leo, bent upon impressing his intimacy with the new-comers upon all around, walked by her side, apparently engrossed by her conversation; so that the quick wrath of all present was stirred up against them both.

"Awh, dear, who be she, I wonder," exclaimed sharp-tongued Mrs. Collins, "flinking herself along as if nobody wasn't made o' flesh and blood but she; and that young Despard, with his pridy airs, as if he—"

"Hush!" said one of the men; "there's ole Miss Despard a-comin' with Mrs. Grant," and the rest of the "gentlefolks" appearing, a general exchange of salutations took place, interlarded with inquiries as to the various absent husbands, sons, and brothers, when letters were last received from them, and what were the chances of their return or promotion.

"Why are you waiting, Stephen?" Mrs. Prescott asked. "I really don't feel equal to much standing, my dear, and I told Masters not to bring the pony up that dreadful hill again."

"I shall not detain you long, mother," said Sir Stephen, craning and peering as if he was looking for some one. "Just wait here one instant," he added, hurrying back to the church porch.

He went up to Miss Despard, and after shaking hands with her and the surrounding friends he knew, he said—

"My mother wishes to be introduced to you, Miss Despard. Will you allow me to take you to where she is standing?"

Aunt Lydia was quite fluttered.

"Mrs. Prescott is very kind," she murmured hesitatingly; "but—"

"Let me give you an arm," he said, not heeding the "but."

And before the old lady had time to recover herself, they had reached Mrs. Prescott's side.

"Mother, this is Miss Despard. I have been telling her how anxious you are to make her acquaintance."

Mrs. Prescott started; but her anxiety not to betray her confusion made her throw a much greater degree of *em-*

pressement into her greeting than she desired to do. Finding her beating heart seemed to choke down the words she strove to utter, she took refuge in holding both Aunt Lydia's thin little hands in hers until, after looking into her face for an instant, she got out—

"This is a very great pleasure to me, Miss Despard, I have wanted to see you so much. If I had not been so very unwell, I should have called upon you long before this."

"Leo told me that you were very poorly," said Aunt Lydia, overwhelmed by Mrs. Prescott's cordiality, and nervously afraid lest she should not behave herself, as Leo would think, properly.

"What a pleasure for you to have your nephew with you!" Mrs. Prescott continued, vainly endeavoring to stand apart from Leo and Katherine.

"Oh, yes, he is my greatest earthly comfort," said Aunt Lydia.

"And no wonder," Mrs. Prescott answered, lowering her voice, though not able to prevent the others hearing her. "He must be a universal favorite, I am sure, so amiable and nice. We have all taken a wonderful fancy to him, I assure you."

Aunt Lydia's face grew radiant.

"I wish his dear uncle could have heard you say that," she said. "My dear brother—"

But Mrs. Prescott interrupted her by exclaiming—

"Stephen, my dear, we really must not keep Miss Despard standing. My pony carriage is at the foot of the hill, and she must return with us to luncheon. I have so much to talk to you about, Miss Despard. You will come back with me?"

Aunt Lydia looked towards Leo. If he wished it, she dared not refuse, but to accept was a terrible penance.

"Oh! I know Mr. Despard will not refuse to accompany you," Mrs. Prescott said, with her most winning smile.

And though Leo would much rather that the "dear old bit of antiquity," as he was wont to call her, had been allowed to return to her own solitary dinner, he could but say—

"Come along, Aunt Lydia, it will do you good."

"But I've no cap, you see, my dear."

"Never mind your cap," laughed Sir Stephen; "you have a bonnet."

"I left Hero so abruptly," pleaded the old lady. "She is staying at the Joslyns, you know, and I may not see her for a week again, and I wanted to speak to her very particularly."

"Well, you cannot speak to her now," said Leo, "for the Joslyns have turned the other way. Send the message by Captain Carthew. Come, do not keep Mrs. Prescott waiting."

So urged, Aunt Lydia, very much against her inclination, gave way, and, by Mrs. Prescott's side, walked down the hill towards the carriage. Katherine and Leo strolled on in front, while Sir Stephen returned to the church to speak to Captain Carthew. He knew that, since the day when they had met in Shivers Lane, Hero had been spending the week at Winkle, but Betsey had said she was certain to be back by Sunday, and so he had felt secure in finding her with the Captain, who, in virtue of being churchwarden, always stayed behind, to distribute certain small weekly payments left to seamen's widows.

He was vexed beyond measure that she should have gone away with no other greeting than the general one he had bestowed upon the Joslyns, the Randalls, and the Thomsons. Only once during the service had their eyes met, and then, on looking up suddenly, Hero had found his fixed upon her, and something in the expression of her face, as she hastily averted it, had made his heart beat quickly and hopefully.

"I am so vexed," he could not help saying to the Captain, "that I have missed speaking to Miss Carthew. I had no idea she intended to return to Winkle."

"She was to have come home with me yesterday; but when I went for her Mrs. Joslyn asked me to let her stay a little longer. She says Hero isn't well, and wants looking after, and the child herself seemed inclined to stay, so I told them to keep her by all means; for I knew, if she felt

the thing, she would not have wanted to stay away from home."

"I hope you told her that I had been down two or three times to see if she was at home?" asked Sir Stephen.

"No, upon my honor, I forgot all about you!" laughed the old man, frankly; "and she was so taken up with not coming back, that she never asked a word—a wonderful thing for her, for she's generally full of questions about what you're doing, and so on." Then, turning to the subject uppermost in his mind, he began speaking of Aunt Lydia's introduction to Mrs. Prescott.

Hero's name was not again mentioned. Sir Stephen, however, determined that he would get his mother to write an invitation for her and Alice, and this would be a fair excuse for paying a call at Winkle the next day. He was as much mystified as ever by Leo's conduct. Surely, unless he had purposely determined that Hero should believe his giving her up to be little or no sacrifice to him, he would not come to Combe so often as he had done during the past week. Certainly there was nothing more in his attentions to Katherine than the admiration a beautiful woman invariably calls forth from a young man, more particularly if her position renders any warmer interest between them improbable, if not impossible. Still, Hero was not to know all this, and she might very reasonably feel jealous. If he could see them together, he should be able to judge better; and, apart from all this, in spite of the efforts he made to overcome it, every now and then his love threatened to conquer him. Suspense was so hard to bear, and yet how could he feel certain that these two, while seemingly divided, really loved each other truly?

Such thoughts filled his mind as he walked home after leaving the Captain. He was told by Katherine, with a puzzled look, that her aunt had carried off Miss Despard to her own room, and that neither of them had been seen since.

"Oh, they will come down when the bell rings," said Sir Stephen.

And so they did; but only to retire again as soon as luncheon was over.

A little time after Sir Stephen vanished ; and, to Katharine's increased amazement, when, her curiosity prompting her to see after them, she left Leo, and went to her aunt's little morning room, she found them all talking earnestly upon some subject, which was evidently changed directly she made her appearance.

It was very odd in her aunt and cousin, to strike up such a sudden friendship with this old person, who really had nothing, that she could see, to interest any one in her. What did it mean ?

During her absence, Leo's thoughts were busy as her own. There was but one reading, that he could see, to this sudden cordiality displayed towards him by Sir Stephen and his mother—a cordiality to be now extended towards his supposed aunt—they must have noticed, or Mrs. Labouchere must have said, something which led them to believe that she regarded him with more than ordinary interest. Yes, he believed the game was in his own hands. If not, why should they act thus ? All the talk about Uncle Antony being a friend did not deceive him. If that were true, it was very odd that Aunt Lydia knew nothing of this intimacy. He believed that the key of it all was Mrs. Labouchere, and a gnawing pain at his heart made him say, with a feeling of bitterness, " It was to be—there is a fate in these things." If he could but deaden his love for Hero, happiness seemed within his grasp ; but, the further away she was from him, the greater struggle it was to give her up.

" Either way, I shall regret it," he sighed. " If such a thing were to happen, and Hero were put out of my reach forever, I should only love her fifty times more than I do now ; and if I make it straight with Hero, and let this opportunity slip through my own fault, I shall never cease from thinking what a fool I've been. And so any man would be who threw away such a chance. What is that about ' a tide in the affairs of man ' ?—only one is often disposed to steer against it. Poor Hero ! she will think I have forgotten her. Ah, if I could but make her know that I love her more than ever I did—that if I were a

duke to-morrow I'd rather marry her than any girl living. I wonder what she thinks of me by this time?"

Judging by what had that morning met her eyes when she cast a look at the group, in the centre of which stood the two men who had played so prominent a part in her life, Hero felt she had forfeited her happiness, and entirely separated herself from their thoughts and feelings. Somehow she was much more angry at Sir Stephen's forgetfulness of her, than at Leo's apparent indifference, and it needed all her self-command to listen smilingly when old Mr. Jamieson whispered confidentially,—

"Why, Hero, how is it neither of the beaux is at your side? Come, now, don't you be too trusting, remember,—

'When a widow's in your string
'Tis quite another thing.'

You have my full consent to throwing the soldier overboard if Sir Stephen's made fast. Don't shake your head now," he added, as Hero turned away, "it's of no use waiting for me, and I shan't so much mind being thrown over, if you're to be my lady."

"My lady," thought Hero, as she resigned herself to two young Joslyns, between whom she had promised to walk back to Winkle, "I dare say many would have thought of that, but I didn't. It only seemed to me that what I was doing was right, and yet everything has gone wrong; now they appear to have quite forgotten me."

Poor Hero! many bitter tears had fallen from her eyes during the past week, more especially since her father had been to Winkle, and had left without saying a word of Sir Stephen, who, she had quite expected to hear, had called at Sharrows to inquire after her; and not having done that, surely it would have been no such great thing if he had given her that morning more than a share in the general greeting. "He never really loved me," cried her aching heart, and this cry went on repeating itself all through the day; and at night the waves lapping against the rocks, and washing the sands, in sight of which she had listened to his vows, echoed the same sad dirge, and in the intensity of this new pain Leo was entirely forgotten.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"SUDDEN FRIENDSHIPS."

LEO was a little surprised at the small amount of astonishment expressed by Aunt Lydia, respecting Mrs. Prescott's sudden cordiality; "but there," he thought, "if the queen sent for her as being my aunt, the poor old soul would only look upon it as an uncommon display of sense on her Majesty's part," and feeling tenderly disposed towards such an amiable weakness, he said the next morning, as they sat together,—

"And so you liked Mrs. Prescott, Aunt Lydia?"

"Very much indeed, my dear."

"What on earth were you talking about all the time you were away from Mrs. Labouchere and me?"

"Oh! of all sorts of things," said Aunt Lydia, longing to tell him the happiness that was in store for him, and yet anxious to obey Sir Stephen's desire for present silence, "they did not seem inclined to stir from where we were sitting, and I was as comfortable there as in the garden, indeed more so, for though I had my bonnet on, I felt the wind rather chilly."

"Did they say anything about me?" he asked carelessly.

"My dear, if you had been Sir Stephen's own brother, he could not have said more; and as for Mrs. Prescott, well, I very nearly began to feel jealous; you've found friends who can appreciate you in them, and who can help you on too."

"Why, did they give any hint of the kind?"

Aunt Lydia hesitated—what should she say so as to keep within the bounds of truth without enlightening Leo.

"Come," said Leo, "I can see something was said."

"Now Leo, my dear, promise. Well, my dear, I really do not know that I am at all justified in repeating it, as,

after all, it may not have meant anything, but certainly—when the conversation turned upon marriage, and I happened to say that until you got your promotion you could not think of getting married—Sir Stephen *did* say it would be a great pity that that should stand in your way ; and he added, rather pointedly it seemed to me, that he dare say when the time came you'd find the money was ready."

"How was I to find the money ready?" Leo asked in a sharp voice.

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure, unless he could have had any thought about advancing it."

"Stuff and nonsense!" Leo exclaimed, "what on earth should make him provide it? How could such a thought enter your head?"

"Well, my dear, only because they seem to have taken such a wonderful fancy to you, that it seems to me as if nothing was improbable ; they talk about you, and take quite the same interest in your affairs, as if you were a relation."

"Perhaps I may turn into one some of these fine days," said Leo, laughing, while Aunt Lydia seized with horror, lest she had betrayed Sir Stephen, suddenly discovered that she wanted to say something very particular to Fanny before she went into the village.

During her absence Leo turned over in his mind what she had repeated. Not having heard anything of Sir Stephen's former visit, he naturally concluded that this conversation had taken place on the previous day. Could he in any way accept his aunt's suggestion? It was highly improbable, yet what should make them speak about his marrying? What were his affairs to such people as they? Then, if his suspicions were correct, came the question of motive for it. He was far too well acquainted with the world to imagine that, unless Sir Stephen had some potent reasons for so doing, he could be anxious to further the marriage of his cousin to a penniless stranger. Yet what could the motive possibly be? Leo was sadly perplexed how to take it. Could he be deceived altogether? he asked himself. Forewarned of Mrs. Labouchere's refusal

to allow herself to be drawn into any species of flirtation, he had been most cautious to savor all his attentions with a homage to which the most fastidious could not object, and Katherine noticing this, piqued by Sir Stephen's continued indifference, and thrown most unusually on her own resources, had vouchsafed to him a more than ordinary share of favor. Still there was nothing in all this to warrant Leo's hopes, and until this meeting and conversation with Aunt Lydia, he was in reality more doubtful of success than he liked to own. Nothing is more easy than for a vain egotistical man to connect the every speech and action of others with himself, and by constantly brooding on one subject to imbue it with the rose-color or gray of his own temperament. In the few minutes which elapsed before Aunt Lydia's return, Leo had made the offer, had been accepted, and, with his wife's fortune placed at his disposal, was in the position which he had so often envied.

"Was nothing more said?" he asked as Aunt Lydia seated herself.

"No," replied the old lady, with a twinge of conscience, "I think some one interrupted us."

"Oh! what did you think of Mrs. Labouchere? how did you like her?"

"Well, as far as liking—no—not so much as the others; but she's very beautiful, no doubt—queenly one might almost say—dear, dear, when she came over and stood by my side, I couldn't but think of the oak and the bramble."

Leo smiled.

"She is very much admired," he said, "and no wonder, for she has a heap of money and two estates."

"So Mrs. Prescott told me; she seems very fond of her, in fact, she said that next to her son's happiness came her niece's, and if she could but see her united to some one she could give her heart to, she should be happy."

"She would not have Sir Stephen—he wanted to marry her."

"Well, you surprise me," exclaimed Aunt Lydia. "I thought she was alluding to something between them when she spoke as she did, particularly when she hinted at not

knowing what might result from this visit to Combe. Certainly there was nothing in their behavior; but these young people are often so contrary to one another that there's no knowing what they mean.—You haven't seen anything of Hero lately, I suppose?" she added, after a pause.

"How should I see her when she's at Winkle?" Leo answered pettishly. "I hate that old Joslyn; he's a worse fogie than old Carthew, always on his hind legs about things he knows nothing about, just because his father happened to be a major."

"Ah, my dear, you'll be old yourself, you know, one of these days."

"Perhaps I shall; but I shan't make a fool of myself, as most of the old fellows about here do;" and he rose from the table, and an end was put to the conversation. Miss Lydia sighed as Leo left her with the announcement that he was going to Dockmouth, and should not be back until late. She could not help feeling angry with Hero for going to Winkle; it showed temper, she thought, on Hero's part, because she knew that Leo could never be induced to go to the Joslyns; they were not favorites with him. "If she had but stayed at home now," said the old lady, "all would be right by this time, and she would know the happiness that is in store for them, for I know I could trust Hero, and I should not have said more to her than that Sir Stephen intended doing this out of friendship. Ah! how true it is, as Mrs. Prescott said yesterday, that 'God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.'"

That same morning at breakfast Sir Stephen said—

"Mother, I want you to ask Miss Carthew and Miss Joslyn to spend to-morrow or Wednesday here."

"What, again?" answered Mrs. Prescott.

"Again! why, they have only been here once. You forget that I stayed a week and more at Sharrows, and that, though quite a stranger to them, they made me as much at home as if they had known me all my life."

"Your man could not imagine what made you stay there," said Katherine languidly, without looking up from

the letter in which she had seemed engaged. "He gave Hobson a most amusing account of the *ménage*."

"Did he?" Sir Stephen said in a tone which made Mrs. Prescott put in—

"Oh! I dare say he meant no harm. You may be sure if Fenton was at all uncomfortable, nothing would be right in his eyes. I'm sure I think them very nice people, and if Miss Carthew thinks it worth her while to come, I shall be very glad to see her."

"What do you mean 'if she thinks it worth her while to come'?" Sir Stephen asked, his annoyance anything but cured.

"Why, my dear, I suppose she did not the last time I asked her, for I cannot see why, if she was well enough to go out at all, she could not come here."

"I should have thought that I gave you quite sufficient explanation, and she called here the next day."

"Ah, I was out."

"She was not to know that."

"Of course not. My dear Stephen, how you are arguing about nothing at all! I tell you that I shall be very pleased to see Miss Carthew. What more can I do?"

"Give a more gracious assent, mother, to a thing which, you see, I am anxious you should do, and not, as is invariably the case when I mention the Carthews, raise objections."

Mrs. Prescott looked piteously at Katherine, who said, in the measured, cold manner she adopted when much annoyed,—

"I am sorry that I should have spoken at all on the matter; but these surprisingly sudden friendships are so new to me, that I must be excused for forgetting that people of such recent date are more than mere acquaintances."

The words were scarcely spoken when the servant announced Mr. Despard, and, with many apologies for such an early visit, Leo said, "that just as he got down to the Hard he remembered, that Mrs. Labouchere had mentioned something about wanting some silk; so he had

run up to say he was going to Dockmouth, and might he be allowed to get it for her?"

"But you have not come up all that distance on my account, surely?" said Katherine.

"Oh, it is only a matter of ten minutes, and I deserve the walk for being so stupid. I knew there was something I wanted to remember, and I do believe I thought over every word that you had said except the silk, and then all at once it struck me, and here I am for my orders."

A shadow of annoyance seemed to pass over Sir Stephen's face, which served as an inducement for Katherine to be particularly gracious to Leo. He shall see, she thought, that I can form friendships as sudden and unexpected as his own. At another time she would most probably have noticed that there was a little difference in Leo's manner towards her, a certain air of assured confidence, an unnecessary lowering of his voice when saying the complimentary nothings which all might have heard; but just now she was too much occupied in vexing her cousin to give Leo a thought, and when he at length took his leave, she would have stoutly denied, that anything in her behavior could have given confirmation to the fallacious hopes, in which the mistaken young man was indulging.

"I will write the note to Miss Carthew, Stephen, if you will come for it to my room, when you are ready."

And about an hour after this Sir Stephen went to the pretty little morning-room, which he had had fitted up for his mother's use.

"I have named Wednesday," Mrs. Prescott said, holding the note towards her son. "I thought we might as well have Mr. Despard, and any one else you may want to ask."

"Yes, by the way, mother, I have something to say to you respecting this young Despard;" and he got up and shut the door, which he had left standing open.

Mrs. Prescott winced at these words; but she quickly recovered; her fears were gradually melting away, and since her confidential chat with Aunt Lydia, she had felt a more than complete return of her old security.

"Have you spoken to Katherine yet?"

"To Katherine?" Mrs. Prescott echoed, with apparent astonishment.

"Yes, of course, you will tell her who Mr. Despard is, and the sooner she knows the better. She may feel very much annoyed that she has been ignorantly allowed to form any intimacy with him."

"I don't see that at all; and as to telling Katherine, we have not positively decided that the young man himself is to be told. I should not think of such a thing, Stephen."

"Now, mother, do not wilfully ignore things. Once for all, understand that it is my intention—and no arguments will divert me from this—to tell him as soon as I have got the money."

"What money?"—for Aunt Lydia had been too delicate to refer to Sir Stephen's offer of assistance. It might seem like binding him, she had thought.

"Did not Miss Despard tell you that I intend advancing the money for his next step?"

"*You* advance the money! How, Stephen, I thought you were so pressed just now?"

"I am at present," Sir Stephen said quietly; "but I shall be able to manage it, I hope, before another month is out."

Mrs. Prescott's face turned crimson, and then white, as she said with a gasp to cover her emotion—

"Is this keeping your promise? You gave me your word that nothing should be done until we returned to town."

"No, I did not, mother. I gave you my word, that nothing should be done until I was fully persuaded, that I could settle down contentedly at Combe. Besides which, you seem to forget that things have greatly altered in my eyes, since I have been made aware of this young man's existence; and at any sacrifice I should think it right to do something for him. In my present condition, I need not tell you, that is impossible."

"You could raise the purchase-money."

"Perhaps I could, but I am sick of raising—putting money in with one hand for the sake of taking it out with the other. Thank God, I shall soon have no more occasion for that; so now, let us return to the subject we started with. I wish you to take the first opportunity of telling Katherine."

"Stephen, you are cruel to me, very cruel and hard-hearted. It is only for me to express a strong wish, and you at once thwart it. You treat me as if I were a child."

"Mother!"

"It is true. How do you regard my wishes about Pamphillon—about keeping the fact of his birth from this young man, even about keeping it from your cousin? It is my particular desire that no word of this should be mentioned to Katherine."

"From what motive? Only give me a reason for your wishes."

Mrs. Prescott was silent for a few moments.

"Katherine has always believed that I told her everything, and there is no need for her being undeceived."

"You think she might feel the shock as acutely as I do," said Sir Stephen bitterly.

"Katherine has a very curious temper, Stephen. I had my reasons for being silent, but people do not always see things in the same light."

"I fear very much you will find it a hard matter, to get any one to see things in the distorted way you saw them. Mother, you little think that you laid yourself open to the gravest accusations—so much so that I intend, when I go to town, to make Holmes sift the matter thoroughly for me, and bring together every scrap of information. When I tell this young man, no vagueness or doubts shall be left upon his mind. Everything which can be found out shall be there in black and white to satisfy him."

"Stephen!" exclaimed Mrs. Prescott, but though she strove to say more, the words would not come.

Sir Stephen looked at her for a moment intently. It was evident that she was suffering from some great agitation.

"Could it be?—no, impossible!" But true to his character, the doubt which had sprung up within him must be at once set at rest.

"Mother," he said, "what is in your mind?—do not again deceive me; tell me, is there anything more I ought to know?"

She shook her head, and he stood silent for a moment.

"Then, except that because it has been so long a secret, you still wish it to remain one, you know of no reason why all the world should not know the truth."

Making a violent effort to steady herself, Mrs. Prescott said—

"Certainly not. Go to Holmes, or to any one you choose. Seek and search as much as you like. You will learn nothing more than I have told you."

Sir Stephen drew his breath more freely.

"I do not desire," he said, "that any more of these unhappy discussions should take place between us, mother. Therefore, let us say now whatever there is to say."

"I can have nothing to say where I find every remark I make questioned, and every wish I express thwarted."

Feeling it better not to notice her petulance, Sir Stephen asked—

"Will you tell Katherine, or shall I?"

"Of course you will do whatever pleases you. I distinctly refuse to speak to my niece on a subject which neither concerns nor interests her; and another thing is, I do not intend to remain here. The perpetual worry I have to endure is more than I can bear up against; therefore, I shall return to my own house, as, if you are determined upon living in this desolate, uncivilized place, the sooner I get accustomed to be separated from you the better."

Sir Stephen did not answer. He stood for an instant irresolute, then seeing his mother was looking fixedly away from him, he walked out of the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

“I’LL MANAGE IT.”

IF there was one thing more than another that Sir Stephen wished to avoid, it was the interference, the hindrance, and the thousand and one small oppositions which his mother would be certain to inflict upon him if she were within reach of Pamphillon, or near any one whom her words and wishes could at all influence.

“It would be one constant scene,” Sir Stephen said, as he recalled to himself what she had said about leaving Combe. “I expect that at the bottom of the wish to leave here is the wish to be where she can send for Holmes, get hold of Bradstock, and try to talk them over into offering me every kind of opposition. I must put a stop to this by taking matters at once into my own hands. When the place is irretrievably gone, she will come round.” These reflections arose out of the sudden decision he had taken to go to town at once.

“She would not leave here,” he thought, “during my absence, and this matter about Despard will put her off the right scent. She will suppose I have gone to make these inquiries. As much as is possible I desire to spare her, poor soul! but part with the place I must, and that it should be made harder by her continual entreaties, threats, and arguments, is more than just at present I can stand.”

So almost immediately after leaving his mother, Sir Stephen was on his way to Sharrows, with the intention of asking Captain Carthew to lend an eye to various matters of business while he was absent.

“Perhaps,” he thought, “it will be as well not to say anything to Katherine about Despard until I return. I shall certainly mention the matter to Holmes, who, in spite

of his silence, is very probably in entire possession of the whole thing, and he may be able to give me the details, so that everything is plain and clear to the young fellow. I hate anything to seem doubtful. Of course I know that everything must be right, still I want to see it all straight before me; besides which it will only appear right that directly I *was* made acquainted with the circumstance, I looked into the whole affair for myself."

Just at this point he came suddenly upon Joe.

"Good morning," said Sir Stephen, "I wanted to speak to you; what are you about?"

"Nothin' in partickler, sir. I was only just pokin' about."

"Then come on to Sharrows with me. I am going to London for a few days, and the Captain will look after things while I am absent; so you must go to him for orders."

Joe touched his hat in acquiescence, and, dropping a little behind, he followed for some distance in silence, then by a step bringing himself nearer, he said,—

"I was to Winkle last evenin', sir; I took'd Miss Hero some of her things."

"Oh! and how was she?"

"Not like herself by a brave bit; I can't make it out, sir, for 'tain't like Miss Hero to be wished and moody-hearted, and as for up there"—and Joe gave the jerk by which he usually inferred, without mentioning, Betsey—" 'tis look out for squalls, and no mistake. I reckon her can't help it, tho'. Why if anythink was to go amiss with Miss Hero, sir, mark my words, but Betsey 'ed nivir git up steam again," and Joe, shaking his head over such a melancholy sequel, relapsed again into silence.

Close by Sharrows gate they met the Captain, who willingly assented to Sir Stephen's request, and he added—

"I shall make it my business to drop in upon the ladies each day to see that all is going on square up there."

"Yes, do," said Sir Stephen; "my poor mother takes this parting with Pamphillon dreadfully to heart."

"Poor soul! well, I'll try and cheer her up a bit, and I'll send Hero to see her; she's a capital hand when anything goes wrong with people."

"I have a note of invitation from my mother to Miss Carthew, which I intended taking to Winkle this afternoon. I wonder if I have time to go there before I start for Dockmouth?"

The Captain shook his head.

"Not if you're to catch the five-o'clock train."

"Well, then, will you deliver a message from me to her, and say that I had this note to deliver when this summons to town came, and that I was very disappointed at not finding her with you on Sunday."

"I'll tell her," laughed the Captain. "Bless her heart, I'd sooner have my grog stopped than that she should be from home, and that she knows, the young monkey. What do you say to me seeing you as far as Dockmouth? I've nothing to do."

"Just the thing I wanted. Will you meet me at the Hard?"

"All right; two o'clock, remember. It won't do to start later."

After they parted Sir Stephen returned to the house, to tell Katherine, if possible, of his sudden journey. He found her writing letters, and to his inquiry about his mother, she said—

"Have you been talking to aunt? she was very well this morning, but when I went to her, she did not even open the door, but said she felt a very bad headache coming on, and she wished to be left quite quiet."

"I expected as much," Sir Stephen said; "she got very much excited in a conversation we had, and ended by declaring she would return to London at once."

"Oh! that would be a pity; but perhaps she did not mean it?"

"I don't know; I never saw her so put out, and in consequence I am going to London myself."

Katherine's face changed.

"Only for a few days; and before I go I want to say something to you, which you must not take amiss because I do not fully explain it. I intend doing so on my return."

Mrs. Labouchere looked at him inquiringly, and, in rather an awkward manner, Sir Stephen blurted out—

“I don’t want you to get too intimate with Mr. Despard.”

Katherine felt her face crimson, but she did not look away. “Surely,” she thought, “Stephen can never think me capable of such a thing.”

“I see you do not understand me, and it would be impossible that you should,” he continued; “mother may say something which will enlighten you, but”—and there he stopped, then after a moment’s pause he added, “Perhaps it would have been wiser, as I don’t want to say all, to have said nothing; but situated together as we are, I cannot bear to incur a risk, and I think you know me well enough to trust me?”

“Perfectly; shall I refuse to see Mr. Despard?”

“Oh, no; I don’t want you to alter your manner to him, but—well, I fancied this morning that his was perhaps rather more familiar to you, and until you know what I want to tell you, I cannot have you subjected to that—it is about myself, not reflecting in any way upon him.”

“I will do exactly as you wish.”

“Thanks,” said Sir Stephen, giving her hand a little shake; “I can always rely on your good sense. I wish all women were like you, Katherine. Now,” he went on, “I am going to leave you to take care of yourself and mother. I shall be back on Saturday at the latest. She does not know I am going, so you must tell her, and manage to pacify her as you only know how. Say I wanted to look into something about which I hope she will speak to you; she will understand.”

“I’ll manage it,” Katherine said cheerfully; and by the time he had given Fenton his orders, he found luncheon on the table. When it was time for him to start, he said—

“Perhaps I had better say ‘good-by;’ if she asks I’ll say I am going to Dockmouth,” and he ran upstairs, and knocking quietly at the door, said, “Mother,” no answer, “Mother,” he repeated, “good-by,” but he received no reply, so after waiting a minute longer he stole softly down, saying he supposed she was asleep.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PRESENTIMENTS AND CERTAINTIES.

It was late in the evening before Mrs. Prescott's maid came to say that her mistress felt better, and would be glad to see Mrs. Labouchere. "Say I will be with her in a few minutes," Katherine said closing the book which lay open before her, though she had been so engrossed in her own reflections that scarce a page of it had she turned. On going upstairs, she found Mrs. Prescott sitting by the fire, which the autumnal evenings began to make necessary.

"Oh! I am glad to see you are able to get up, aunt, and you have been having some tea? that is right, you will soon feel better."

"I had no idea that you were dining alone, Katey. Why, where is Stephen?"

"Oh, I don't mind being alone, now and then," Mrs. Labouchere said, wishing for the present to avoid answering the last question. "Davis said she thought you wanted to be left quiet, so I did not bother you about dinner."

"How odd Stephen is!" Mrs. Prescott said in a vexed tone. "I suppose he is stopping at these Joslyns, a horrid wild rocky place, worse than this. I do hope he will not stay late and come back in a boat; I expect if he remains here, he will be brought home drowned some of these days."

"Nonsense," Katherine said with a laugh, "the boatmen all know the coast, and Stephen is not like a reckless boy, aunt."

"Oh! my dear, I shall never rest until I am away from here. I have taken a dislike to the house, and the people, and the country. I feel it does not agree with me, my spir-

its are wretched. I could sit and cry from morning until night."

"But why? you seemed so well at first?"

"Yes, but I think the air must be too strong, it over-excites my nervous system, and then I suffer from the reaction. I have told Stephen that I cannot remain, and I think he is vexed with me about it. Did he say anything to you?"

"I don't fancy he thought you meant it," Katherine said, wondering how she should tell her aunt that Stephen had gone to London. She is certain to declare that she has a presentiment, because she did not say good-by to him, she thought.

"I do mean it," said Mrs. Prescott, firmly. "I believe, if I were to remain, I should have a serious illness. You have no idea how shaken my nerves feel; for instance, of course I know that Stephen is most likely safe and perfectly secure from danger, yet every sound runs through me with a sort of dread that something has happened."

"Oh! dear," thought Katherine, "this makes my communication a pleasing prospect. I had better get it over without more delay."

So rising at this last speech, Mrs. Labouchere took hold of her aunt's hand, saying with a little laugh,—

"What a silly old auntie it is! Well, make your mind perfectly easy, for your son is no more likely to get into a boat to-night than we are; he is on *terra firma*, and will remain there for many days to come."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Prescott, sharply.

"What, not satisfied!" exclaimed her niece, "well, I will tell you why. This afternoon he came up to your room."

"Yes, I know he did, and I did not answer him."

"You heard him then?"

"I heard him call me, and then say good-by."

"Yes, he was going to Dockmouth."

"To Dockmouth! How was I to know he was going to Dockmouth? I fancied he was going to take my note to Miss Carthew. What did he want at Dockmouth?"

“He said I was to tell you—he thought you were asleep—that he has left by the evening express for London.”

“London!” exclaimed Mrs. Prescott. “London,” then letting her head fall forward on her arms which were leaned upon the table, she groaned out, “Katherine—Katherine—Katherine.”

“My dear aunt, listen; he told me to tell you that he had only gone to see Holmes, regarding something which he wished you to speak to me about.”

But Mrs. Prescott seemed only the more distressed; standing suddenly up, she clasped her hands together,—

“What is to be done? how shall I act? Oh! Katherine we are ruined, ruined.”

“Is it about Pamphillon, aunt,” asked Mrs. Labouchere, frightened at her excitement.

Mrs. Prescott did not seem to hear her.

“Aunt, do speak. Tell me, what are you so troubled about?”

“Oh Katey, you’ll know too soon, every one will know. My God, they may put me in prison, in prison—prison,” and she sank back choked by convulsive sobs.

Katherine turned towards the door, but Mrs. Prescott caught her by the arm.

“No, no, let nobody see me,” she cried, “not for the world. Katherine, my child, bear with me. Help me, my poor brain is gone. I seem mad;” and she sank down helpless, but not senseless, at Mrs. Labouchere’s feet.

“My dear, dear aunt,” was all Katherine could say, her tears falling fast from sympathy, to see the agony betrayed in Mrs. Prescott’s ashen face and quivering limbs; and, unable to console her by words, she gave her the mute caresses which were more soothing.

“Katey,” Mrs. Prescott said in a whisper, “help me to rise! Yes, that will do. I’ll sit down here, and come you near me. I must tell you everything. Oh! if I had but told Stephen! had but told him the truth! Let me see—wait.”

Mrs. Labouchere sat down, putting her arm round her aunt; but, with no trace of her usual gentleness, Mrs.

Prescott pushed her away, and sat silently rocking herself to and fro.

"You're sure he is gone, Katherine. Something may have kept him at Dockmouth," and she started up as if to follow him.

"He is not at Dockmouth, aunt. Fenton has returned. He went with him to the station."

"Then we are lost, Katherine," and she dropped her voice to a whisper; "Stephen is not the owner of Pamphillon."

Mrs. Labouchere felt her heart bound with relief.

"My dear aunt, if it is only the sale of Pamphillon, do not so distress yourself. If Stephen is bent upon selling it, it is of no use offering further opposition."

"But he cannot sell it; he must not sell it. It is not his."

"Not his?"

"No. Stephen was robbed and defrauded by his uncle. Bernard Prescott left a son, the offspring of a low, vile woman whom he had made his wife."

Katherine uttered a sharp cry of pain.

"And Stephen?" she said.

"Never heard of him. Until we came here he knew no more of his existence than you do, Katherine. Here he by chance discovered it, and I told him he was his uncle's natural son, and he believed me."

"Who—who is it, aunt?"

"The young man they call Despard."

"Despard!" echoed Mrs. Labouchere, and unable to ask more, she sat gazing into her aunt's face with eyes filled with horror and astonishment.

"Oh, Katherine! do you wonder now at my hating this place? A sword seemed to pierce my heart every time I looked upon that unfortunate Despard; if I had known he was here I would never have come. But I was to be punished; my sin was to find me out."

"Then how long have you known it, aunt? How came you to discover it?"

"Oh, Katey! don't ask me: only help me; tell me what

is to be done. Stephen will go to Holmes, put him on the right track, and we shall be beggared and disgraced. Oh! this is a cruel world, glad and quick to condemn, and what will they not say? But no one can breathe a word against Stephen. If it had not been for his just inheritance, we never could have kept the one they had tried to defraud him of. Where would Pamphillon be now, if I had not striven and starved myself to keep it; and this young man, instead of being happy and contented, would be hampered and tied down by a title which would only be a burden to him."

"How much of this does he know?" Katherine asked, vainly endeavoring to gain some idea of the matter.

"Nothing. He fancies he is Mr. Despard's adopted son. His aunt believes him to be Sir Bernard's natural son, but even that much she would never have told him without our consent; but from the moment Stephen had a suspicion of the thing, he did nothing but upbraid me for my silence, insist on telling the young man himself, and declare that as his uncle evidently intended for him the fortune he lost, we ought to do all in our power for him."

"And why did not Stephen tell him?"

"He is waiting until he has sold Pamphillon, so that he may give him some money he is in want of, and offer him an annual sum. I did not oppose that, but I wanted no one to know. Even when Stephen said he would have you told, I refused to tell you. Oh! how short-sighted I was! Why did I not tell the truth then? We might have escaped."

Mrs. Labouchere did not answer; she was trying to think over and realize their position. Suddenly she was startled by her aunt's returning excitement. She walked about the room uttering disconnected sentences, upbraided herself for the denial she had given her son, called upon her niece to help her, until Katherine felt, if anything was to be done, she must at once assume the control she had always possessed over her aunt; so rising up, she took hold of Mrs. Prescott, saying—

"Aunt, sit down. No, it is of no use pushing me away. For Stephen's sake you must listen to reason. If there is

any way of shielding him from what he would feel far more than the loss of the estate or the title, it must be done, and whatever is done must be done at once. Now try and quiet yourself, and endeavor to tell me the whole story. Don't say you cannot"—for Mrs. Prescott had exclaimed it would kill her—"for a long time you seem to have kept it secret, but now you have begun to speak you must keep nothing back. I have been thinking that if I started to-morrow I might in some way put a stop to the search, or perhaps prevent it altogether. Something may detain Stephen. Holmes may be out of town, a dozen things may prove obstacles to his making this communication."

Mrs. Prescott threw her arms round her niece's neck.

"Oh, Katey, if we could but stop him. I should feel safe if that man did not know; he has a way of asking questions and ferreting into things, which I feel would make me betray myself without knowing it."

"Very well. Now you see how important it is, that you tell me all as nearly as you can; then we may protect you from this. Have no fear, aunt; with Stephen at your side it shall go hard if any ill come near you," and Mrs. Labouchere laid her hand caressingly on the poor distracted head, and after a minute's pause she felt that tears were raining from the hot, dry eyes, and she was certain that now she should hear all her aunt had to tell.

It was some time before Mrs. Prescott was sufficiently composed and collected to commence. After her tears had ceased she sat silent, turning the eye of memory inward upon the past. Katherine, by her side, neither spoke nor stirred, and at length, to her great relief, Mrs. Prescott began—

"Bernard Prescott, as you know, died very suddenly. He was taken ill while I was with your father in Scotland, and before I had time to get to Pamphillon he was gone. Those about him said what a pity it was he would not let me be summoned before, but he put it off until he could no longer forbid it, and he had been two days dead when I reached him. Every one knew that Stephen was his successor, and therefore I, as his natural guardian, at once

took possession of everything. The keys were delivered up to me, and all the people looked to me for orders and directions. Mr. Holmes came down the same evening, and together we looked over the few papers left. There was no will, and until old John told us that after his first fit or faint, Sir Bernard had made him destroy 'a sight of parchments,' Mr. Holmes seemed much surprised at the absence of letters and papers. In the drawer of his private secretaire we found a packet directed to me, which I opened. It contained some letters I had written to him years before, a likeness given then, and a sealed letter, on which was put 'Read this when alone.'"

"Had he not made you an offer before Stephen's father did?" Mrs. Labouchere asked.

"Yes, and I fancied it was about those days he had written; so I put the letter in my pocket, and we continued our search. During it Mr. Holmes asked me, if I had ever heard mention made of any discreditable connection which Sir Bernard had formed. I told him no, and he said, 'There was something of the sort some years ago: but the woman is dead, and so, I suppose, is the child. There was a child, at least so I think.' I did not ask any questions—it was not a time to do so; and not seeing the cause for Holmes's anxiety about the papers, I pleaded the fatigue I had undergone, and went to my room. Bernard Prescott was a very odd man, not one to inspire any personal regard, and, beyond a natural feeling of regret, I felt nothing at his death which could be called sorrow. On the contrary my love for my boy made me happy to know that he was owner of the patrimony I had often sighed to see him the undoubted heir to; for Bernard was a man in his prime, who might live to be old, and then perhaps marry. Doubt was at an end now. I had had during my married life many more troubles than the world knew of; but the mother of Sir Stephen Prescott could afford, in this unexpected fulfilment of her hopes, to forget past disappointments. All at once I thought of my letter, and, taking it out, I sat down before the fire to read it. So sure did I feel as to its contents that, first of all I took

out the likeness, and examined that. I even looked at myself in the glass to see was I much altered ; then I looked over the girlish effusions, written when I was not more than sixteen or seventeen. I thought of Bernard more tenderly, because of his love for me, and remembering that he was now lying in his distant chamber still and cold, and that I had forever lost this faithful, enduring love, I shed the first real tears of sorrow for him. A shiver, too, ran through me at the thought of being in the house of death, a vague fear at being alone, and with it the desire to get into bed as quickly as possible ; so hastily opening the letter, I read it through—and through—and through—until I had no need to look at the words, so stamped were they on my heart and brain. Whether I sat for only a few minutes or a hour I cannot tell ; but, all of a sudden, a flame seemed to fill the room—my hand was empty, and I knew I had destroyed it.”

“Destroyed what, aunt ?”

“The—the—his certificate of marriage. The woman was called Matilda Williams, and they were married at Hatfield. I have never forgotten that. Often when I am ill I get no rest, because I keep repeating those names over and over again.”

“Was there no word of explanation, then ?” said Katherine, fearing she was wandering away from the subject.

“Oh, yes. He wrote to tell me that, in a moment of madness, to which my marriage drove him, he had allowed this woman to cajole him into a marriage, that he had a son, whom, for Stephen’s sake, he would fain disown. But though he had made away with every other trace of his guilty folly, he said he could not destroy this, and by a crime cut himself off from me forever. Therefore, he had enclosed it to me—enclosed it to me, a weak, helpless woman, who had not strength to resist such a temptation.”

And her sobs broke forth again, and her remorse and accusations made it impossible for Mrs. Labouchere to bring her back to anything like a settled detail. She managed to draw from her, how she knew who the child was with, Mr. Despard’s offer, and that he had finally taken entire

charge of him ; but Mrs. Prescott would only just answer the question put to her, and then return at once to her fears, her self-reproaches, and her agony of dread lest Stephen should suffer for her guilt. Her excitement became so painful, that Mrs. Labouchere wisely forbore to ask more, fearing an attack of illness might come on, and she be prevented following Stephen, which the next morning she was determined upon doing. This she told to Mrs. Prescott, who at once promised she would be quiet ; do anything, take anything, if Katherine would but say she would go to London, and start as early as possible.

“I will give you my word, aunt, to have no delay.”

And this assurance seeming to calm Mrs. Prescott more than entreaties or remonstrances, she became at once busy about how Mrs. Labouchere had best act? where she would go? what she would do? until, everything settled, she took the composing draught her niece gave her, and Katherine, sitting quietly down, tried to realize all her aunt had just told her. But the excitement and amazement had been too much ; she could not think—she could only keep repeating “Stephen, Stephen.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

“IF I COULD SAY YES.”

IN her anxiety to begin her journey, Mrs. Labouchere was ready to start a good hour before it was time to leave the house ; but, having been assured that as the tide would not suit until a certain hour, she would only be kept waiting on the Hard, she sat down until the time for departure should arrive. It was a lovely morning, but its fresh beauties were all lost upon Katherine, whose one anxiety was that the water should be sufficiently calm to enable her to go to Dockmouth by water, and thereby save the train, which on the previous day had taken off Sir Stephen. She had ascertained from his man that he intended going on at once to Pamphillon.

“You are certain of that, Fenton?” she asked.

“Oh yes, ma’am, for I heard master say to Captain Carthew, ‘I shall just have time to see about that matter, and then catch the train to Pamphillon ;’ and so he would, ma’am, easily catch the four-o’clock express.”

“In that case,” thought Katherine, “I ought to be prepared to follow him there at once, and if I do not find him in Albemarle Street, that is what I’ll do.”

She was busily intent upon her plans when the door opened, and Leo Despard entered. Strive as she might, Katherine could not meet him in her usual way, and he, noticing her agitation, said—

“I fear I startled you.”

“No, not at all,” she said, freeing her hand, which in his solicitude he was still holding, and then, unable to think of anything to say, she sat down. Leo could not but perceive that she was not quite her usual self, and he wondered what was the cause of her nervous manner.

"My apology for paying such an early visit must be this," he said, laying the skeins of silk before her.

"Oh, thank you! I had forgotten all about the silk; I am going to London."

It was Leo who grew confused now.

"To London!" he exclaimed with a blank look.

"Yes, Sir Stephen went yesterday—about some business."

Leo turned hastily away from the table and walked towards the window.

Should he make the offer now. Her visible agitation might be at parting with him, and this gave him fresh hope. It was no use hesitating; if he did, the chance might be lost. Going back to her with a face pale and troubled, he stammered out—

"This—is so unexpected—I—I never thought about your going away;" and he sat down, half averting his face. "I know you will not listen to me," he began, in a hopeless voice. "I have no right to expect you should; but I cannot hide my love any longer. From the first moment I saw you, I have thought of nothing else night and day. I have striven against what you will call folly, but it has been useless, and now that you tell me that you are going from me, and I may, perhaps, never see you again—Oh! I feel I shall go mad."

At Leo's first word of love, a haughty rebuke had risen to Katherine's lips, for her conscience told her, that she had given him no encouragement to indulge in this presumptuous avowal; but she had hastily checked it. No, she must not offend him, nor be too hard in her refusal, for what influence might not his love give her? So she said somewhat confusedly—

"Oh! pray hush, Mr. Despard, you must not say things of this kind to me."

The tone the words were said in filled Leo with triumph. He was certain that if such a woman as she was had no feeling towards him, she would have made him see at once, that she considered he had taken a liberty in addressing her. He felt success all but certain, and thought he could afford to be more demonstrative, but as Katherine drew away her

hand, he was forced to trust to his eloquent speeches, which, strive as he would, sounded to him forced and tame. For his life he could not remember the protestations and devotions which he had intended pouring forth, and he felt certain Mrs. Labouchere would think him awkward and stupid—an anxiety he might have spared himself, for though his words fell upon Katherine's ears, she hardly heard them, so intent was she on her own motives and interests. When he paused, she knew he was waiting his answer, and as well as she could she endeavored to tone down her refusal so that his self-love should not be deeply wounded.

"I am so very sorry, Mr. Despard, I had not the slightest idea of such a thing. Love and I parted company long ago. In my present position I assume the privilege of being able to enjoy the friendship of your sex, without the possibility of anything else ever entering my mind. It would distress me beyond measure, if I thought I was the unintentional means of giving you pain, or that an end was to be put to our pleasant—intercourse. I really feel quite too old and out of date to inspire any one with a fresh love; beside which, I thought, or dreamed, or was told, that you were very much attached to Miss Carthew."

"Who *could* have told you that?"

"I cannot remember" (Katherine felt it would be too absurd to give an old boatman as her authority); "I only know that in some way I was under that—delusion?"

"Yes, certainly a delusion. I admit that I went to Sharrows much more frequently before you came to Combe, and that I liked to talk to Miss Carthew; but she and I have known each other since we were children, and she perfectly understood the footing that existed between us. Sharrows is not the only house I have ceased to frequent, nor Miss Carthew's the only society I have given up, since you have been here. I have had but one thought—when I could see you; where, and how I could see you. A spell seemed to bind me to this place. Night as well as day found me unable to tear myself away."

"Why, you might have been taken up for a poacher!" said Katherine, trying to make light of what he was saying.

"Ah, you are laughing at me," he exclaimed bitterly. "Well, I suppose that is all I deserve for boring you with my folly. I shall have time to eat my heart out when you are gone," and he gave a little nervous movement as if to try and dismiss the subject for the present, saying, "Are you going to drive?"

"No."

"What, going by boat! may I go with you?"

Mrs. Labouchere hesitated.

"On one condition," she said, "that we are to be friends."

"If I could say yes," and he caught both her hands, and held them with a grasp which only escaped being painful, "how willingly I would; but do what we can, we cannot school our hearts, or if so, do you think I would have set mine upon the moon, for you are quite as far out of my reach;" (his penitent humility made Katherine, in spite of her secret knowledge, feel very kindly towards him) "if you will forget what I have said and let me be your slave, your servant, anything that will not banish me from your presence, and your mind?"

"That is not quite in obedience to my conditions."

"Yes it is. I promise you all the obedience you ask, only let me go with you now."

"Very well, and let me go also;" for he seemed to forget that he was still clasping her hands. He paused an instant, then tried to raise them to his lips, but Katherine resolutely drew them away, saying, as if she had not noticed his movement—

"I think it is time I got ready to start."

She did not return to the room until her maid stood there waiting to accompany her on her journey. Leo could but see that his companion was too preoccupied to care for much conversation. She walked along so engaged with her busy thoughts, that each remark she made was an effort, and the people they passed on the way were quite unnoticed. What attention she could command she bestowed upon picking her steps along the steep street, down which they had to go, to the Hard below.

"Don't speak to me," she said in answer to some remark Leo made, "I dare not breathe. What an atmosphere to live in!" and as the thought swept over her that in future this was Stephen's sole inheritance, her heart sent out a fresh cry for the sorrow he would have to bear. She shrank from the rough, weather-beaten looking men, the dark-eyed, bold-faced women, who ran to the doors at the news of "the gentrys'" advent, proclaimed in several cases from one top window to the other. Arrived on the beach, her situation was but little mended. Here she had to undergo the stolid criticism of the numerous urchins, who emerged from various mounds of sea-weed, heaped together for manure. The idlers grouped about, nettled by her want of notice, continued to lounge unconcernedly by, and the only civility vouchsafed was by Mother Tapson, the keeper of a small inn known as "Jack Ashore," who, true to her motto, that "all was fish that comed to her net," came out to say—

"If you likes to bring the lady in 'ere, Maister Despard, the parler bar's to yer service, sir."

"Why could not the boat have been ready!" Katherine asked impatiently, taking no heed of this polite offer.

"I cannot think," said Leo.

"Aw can't'ee, sir?" snorted Mother Tapson. "I should ha' thought *you* might ha' know'd; why her bottom 'ed be stove in if her'd bin rin down afore you hove in sight. Wouldn't her, Jim?" she shouted as old Jim stopped to raise his cap to the gentlefolks. Jim being far too wise to offer any opposition to a lady so notably clever with her hands and her tongue as Mother Tapson, though ignorant of the case in point, nodded assent.

"Why where be you goin to, hey?" she added.

"To Winkle, to fetch Miss Hero back," said Jim, one eye still directed towards Mrs. Labouchere and Leo.

"Aw! her's comin home then. Bless her dear heart! She's a real lady, she is, and has often sot in my parler, and to serve her or the Cap'en I'd go down on my bended knees by night or by day, that I would."

"Come, come," laughed one of the men lounging near,

surveying her short, fat figure, "you're raither broad in the beam, missis, for that sort o' game."

"Niver you mind that. What I says I sticks to, and so will many more here who knows where to go mumpin' on a banyan day. There ain't nobody about here, gentle or simple, as is fit to tread in the same shoe leather as Miss Hero, and I don't care a brass farden who hears me say so, neither;" and she gave a defiant look towards Mrs. Labouchere, which made Leo say—

"Take no notice of her. These people are really not civilized. Come, Wallis," he called out, "lend Joe a hand with this boat; it's high time we were off now;" and he gave his arm to Mrs. Labouchere, trying to assist her over the rough, slippery stones with an assiduity which increased Mrs. Tapson's ire. "He's as false-faced as two is that young Despard," she said, "and before he and Miss Hero walks to church together, I hopes the say'll swaller 'un."

"Sir Stephen, he's the right mate for Miss Hero," said one of the bystanders.

"Ah, now you've got the stocking on the right leg," said Mother Tapson; "he is a likely gentleman. You should ha seed un yesterday a haulin' an hoistin' Mrs. Collins into the boat, as if her'd bin the port admiral's lady, and to me 'twas 'How de do, Mrs. Tapson, and good day to 'ee, Mrs. Tapson!' Don't 'ee tell me! there's more good done by gentlefolks with a kind word or haction, than if they was to stand jawing about 'ee all day, and I for one says, God bless Sir Stephen, and prosper the day he comed to Mallett."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT PAMPHILLON.

LEO accompanied Mrs. Labouchere to the station, and remained chatting with her until it was time for the train to start; then, after a somewhat confused and hurried good-by, he walked moodily away, while she, sinking back in the carriage, gave a sigh of thankfulness that she was again alone, and free to indulge the thoughts which filled and troubled her. Step by step she went over the marvellous revelations of the last few hours, and so at variance did these seem with all she had been brought up to believe and to put faith in, that she was tempted to question whether she could be the same Katherine, who, up to that time, could have staked her existence, that not an event had ever taken place in her aunt's life, with which she and Stephen were not thoroughly conversant; and here, suddenly, was brought to light a—a crime of which this timid, trustful woman was the secret perpetrator.

"It will cut Stephen to the heart," she thought, as she wiped away the blinding tears. "If I could but save him from knowing the worst! Nothing will be so hard for him to bear as the knowledge of what his mother has done." Then, after another reverie, she said to herself, "The feeling that Stephen loves her less, thinks less of her, will kill her. Oh! what can I do? how can I spare them? Poor aunt! poor Stephen! How strangely our lives run! Longings granted when they have lost their value; wishes answered all too late." Her memory went straying back to the old days, when she had been Stephen's world; to the time when a word from her could influence and guide him beyond all else. What a different promise her life had given then! Surrounded by love, she would have laughed

to scorn the supposition that a time would come when she would yearn after, and weary for, the faintest sign of that devotion which she then held so lightly. "Yes," she sighed, "out of my headstrong vanity sprang my misery: I took my fate into my own hands; I shaped my own destiny; and to punish me all my desires have been granted, and I am mocked by the very things I have thirsted after. I have cried out, 'If I were but rich, I should be happy;' I have said, 'So that I were Lady Prescott, I should have no care for aught else that might happen.' Rich I am, Lady Prescott I might be, but what now?" and she hid her face, because of the newly shaped desire which filled her heart, the desire to be Stephen Prescott's wife. "I may well feel humbled," she said after a time, "as daily I see, that little as I know of others, myself I know least of all." This taking her back to her recent mistake, made her sigh afresh for her aunt's sorrows. "I never knew until now how dear she is to me. I must try and in some way keep her secret from Stephen! he will never overlook or forget it." As she neared London, the task of breaking this unlooked-for trouble increased in magnitude, and every minute discovered some fresh difficulty, until, when the train reached Paddington, her anxiety had resolved itself into the words, "What shall I say to him?" and this she kept repeating during her drive to Albemarle Street, where she learnt that, after breakfast that morning, Sir Stephen had left, saying he was going down to his place, but that he should most likely return on Friday.

"To-morrow," she said to her maid, "I want you to do whatever business you have in town; I shall not require you to go to Pamphillon with me."

Pamphillon was a good three hours' journey from London; so, though the nine-o'clock train entailed rather early rising, Katherine decided to go by it, and the next morning nine o'clock found her commencing her journey. What an undertaking it now seemed! She began to be filled with all sorts of anxiety and fear, but she steadily determined to master herself, so that her energies might be turned upon the story she was going to tell. During the

night she had made up her mind, that if possible she would not repeat to Stephen what his mother had told her. "If I can but keep the principal fact from him," she thought, "it will not be half so hard for him to bear; if I tell him poor aunt burnt this certificate, what may he not do? perhaps as he did before in his trouble, rush off to some wild, out-of-the-way part of the world—India or America; refuse ever to see his mother again; or, if they did meet, treat her with a chilling indifference, which would kill her." Well did Katherine know how sorely such fears were distracting Mrs. Prescott; loss of home, income, position, all seemed swallowed up in the certainty that in her son's eyes she would now be lowered and degraded. Poor mother! how this thought racked her! how she shrank from meeting his altered gaze—a gaze in which love would be blotted out by reproach! At the time they were speaking of this together, it had not occurred to Katherine that she could do more than endeavor to soften down Stephen's bitterness, but now she saw there was a possibility that much more might be effected; if she failed, at least she could but try, and the certainty that, at the barest hint, Stephen would never rest until justice was done, gave much hope to her scheme. She carefully set herself to work to consider how much she could withhold, and how much, in order to impress upon him the importance of investigating the matter, must be told to him.

Absorbed in these reflections, the time passed very rapidly, and as the train stopped at a little station near, she could hardly believe she was close to Pamphillon. Almost unconsciously she began comparing the rural wealth among which it stood, with the wild, barren surroundings of Combe. In that golden time of russet leaves the noble old woods looked their best, half hiding, half discovering the principal wing of the house, on which a wealth of architectural taste had been lavished. Katherine closed her eyes, and resolutely turning them away from all beauty of sea and rock, she bade her memory picture the ugly, steep village leading up to bleak downs and barren heights—the house built with a thorough contempt of all style,

the one object being to afford the best protection against beating storms of wind and rain, from which the thick, stunted trees afforded little shelter. And was this to be Stephen's home? Would he banish himself far from society and civilization in such a desert? Never! Surely the time had come for all false pride to be laid aside between them, and this day, at all risks, their future should be decided.

At the little station, the one man who did the double duty of porter and ticket collector, could not believe his eyes when the train stopped, and Mrs. Labouchere got out; nor his ears when, instead of waiting for the wondrous vehicle from the Prescott Arms, she signified her intention of getting into old Johnson's one-horse fly, which stood at the wicket gate.

In after days Katherine always recalled Pamphillon, as that morning it stamped itself upon her mind. The drowsy, well-to-do village, where each person she saw stopped to give her a respectful salutation, the neatly kept cottages, the trim gardens. If Stephen had here chafed and worried over the evils he could not remedy, surely the horrors of Combe would distract him. As they turned from the lane into the road skirting the park, a network of rich pasture and yellow fields opened out, adding to the sweetness of the scene, which, viewed under Katherine's present feelings, seemed a very paradise of pastoral beauty. At the nearest of the several entrances she bade the man stop, saying she would walk through the park to the house. This she commenced doing at rather a rapid pace, having no wish to encounter Sir Stephen where there was any chance of their meeting being observed upon, and anywhere out of doors he was almost certain to be accompanied by his bailiff or his steward. All her minor difficulties began now to encompass her and take the place of those greater ones which had hitherto filled her mind. "It is a lovely old place," she said, suddenly pausing as the house came in view; then turning slowly round she gazed with wistful eyes in each direction, on the calm, refined beauty of the scene. The approach of footsteps set her

heart beating. Suppose—but no, it was only one of the gardeners, who stopped for her to pass him.

“Have you come from the house?” she asked.

“Yes, ma’am, I’m going to Mr. Sharp’s with this letter from Sir Stephen.”

“Sir Stephen is at the house, then?”

“Yes, ma’am; he came down unexpected yesterday.”

“Thank you,” and she went on to a side entrance always kept open, and close to the housekeeper’s apartment. Here she ascertained that Sir Stephen was in the library, where he had been seeing people all the morning, but that just now no one was with him.

“Then I will go to him,” Katherine said. “There is no need to announce me. I can find my way alone.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“FATE HAS DEALT HARD WITH US BOTH.”

“KATHERINE!” exclaimed Sir Stephen, in a voice of amazement and inquiry at Mrs. Labouchere’s unexpected appearance. “What on earth has brought you here? There is nothing the matter, I hope. My mother?”

“Is quite well.”

“And not with you?” for it suddenly occurred to him that in order to make a final struggle she had followed him with all speed.

“No; I am alone. I left aunt at Combe yesterday morning. As soon as I reached town I drove to Albemarle Street, and there learnt that you had come on here.”

She paused.

Sir Stephen said “yes,” and then *he* paused; but finding Katherine remained silent, he thought, “Mother has sent her to try and move me now by fresh offers—arguments, opposition. Well, I had best meet them cheerfully, and treat them lightly;” so he said smiling, “I suppose my mother bothered you into coming, Katherine. It’s the old story about keeping the place, is it not?”

“Not quite, and I proposed to come to you myself. Are we safe not to be disturbed here? I want to talk to you very particularly.”

“Perhaps she intends offering to buy it,” Sir Stephen thought, as he got up and fastened an outer door.

“We shall not be interrupted, now,” he said; “that door shut is a signal that I am engaged.” He drew over a chair and seated himself near her, while she took off her gloves, unfastened her mantle and bonnet, not able to bear any pressure near the nervous lump which had begun to gather in her throat.

"What is it, Katey?" he said, gently, feeling that some more than ordinary circumstance was necessary to account for any betrayal of her usually well-controlled self.

"Aunt has told me about young Despard," Katherine blurted out, forgetting, as one usually does, how she had intended leading up to the subject.

"I feared you would blame us for not telling you before," Sir Stephen said, gravely; "but mother has such extraordinary crotchets in her head about this matter, that anything like common-sense arguments are entirely lost upon her."

"Tell me exactly all you have heard and been told about him," Katherine said, with such an anxious expression of face, that though Sir Stephen began his relation without any delay, he had had time to run over the possibility of Katherine having taken a fancy to Leo, the probability that her fortune and position would greatly influence him, and the fact that Hero would thus be set free. This made him most exact in repeating every detail he had learnt from his mother, and Aunt Lydia, of Leo's parentage, adoption, and bringing up by Mr. Despard.

"This, Katherine," he said in conclusion, "is the sum total of my knowledge, which I only delay telling to Mr. Despard himself until I am in a position to do what I feel, on my uncle's part, it is my duty to do. It cannot be much, but it will be some addition to his present income, which is not, as I need hardly tell you, a very sufficient one."

"Aunt seemed to think you were not quite satisfied with what she told you."

"Satisfied! Oh, I am satisfied enough; but you know, Katherine, what a difficult person my mother is in some things to deal with; there is no bringing her to the point. Now, in this case, had she straightforwardly told me all she knew about the young fellow, there would have been an end of the matter. But no, she must beat about the bush, defend herself on each question I asked, object to every single thing I proposed, until I lost temper, and told her I should apply to Holmes, and so I mean to."

"But you have not done so?"

"No, I have not been to him; I did not want to see him until I had spoken to two or three of the tenants, who, like myself, have not been Fortune's favorites, and are a little behindhand with their affairs. I want them to start fresh, as I hope to do, and there is no need for Holmes knowing all this."

"Aunt was so afraid you had gone straight to Mr. Holmes's."

"Poor old soul! how she does delight in worrying herself! I left that message purposely, thinking, if I had said I was coming here, she would have guessed what for, and given herself no peace. All I want to know from Holmes is whether Uncle Bernard ever mentioned the subject to him."

"Yes, he did."

"He did?" exclaimed Sir Stephen in a tone of amazement. "Why, how do you know?"

"Because aunt has been recalling things which had quite slipped her memory. She recollects now that Mr. Holmes asked her, if she had ever heard of this woman and a child. The woman, he said, was dead; but about the child he was not certain."

Sir Stephen's face changed.

"Why could not mother have told me this?"

"I do not know; perhaps I ask questions that lead her into remembering things. Then I bring to her mind circumstances she had forgotten, and so in some way, you know, she generally tells more to me than she does to any one else. Poor thing! she is in a sad way now, Stephen."

"About what?"

"About this young man. She so fears that perhaps she did not sift the matter as she ought to have done. You know how tender her conscience is, Stephen, and at the time of your uncle's death she was so engrossed with the ruinous state he had left the property in, that no one could wonder at her having no room in her thoughts for anything else. Every one must see, that she would only have been too glad to shift the burden upon other shoulders than her

own ; besides which, who could have dreamed of your uncle marrying any one—but aunt ? ”

“ What should make her suddenly believe that he did ? ”

“ Well, some letters, or a letter of his in which mention was made of a Matilda Williams, living at Hatfield, and, read by this new light, aunt is convinced that the folly to which he alluded must have meant marriage. At all events, Stephen, she will never rest until you have been to the parish church there, and have convinced yourself that such a marriage never took place.”

Sir Stephen sat with his eyes fixed blankly upon Katherine.

“ My God ! ” he said at length, as the great unbroken wave of his misery swept over him.

“ You may find nothing, Stephen,” Katherine said, thinking it best to try and soften this calamity by a doubt of its existence.

“ Where is this letter ? ”

“ Burnt ; aunt burnt it with the rest.”

“ Then as surely as we two sit here, it is true,” he answered. “ Katherine, you know it ; my mother has told you so, and this is why she concealed it from me all along.”

“ If she was remiss or careless, her fearful anxiety is paying dearly enough now,” Katherine murmured.

“ Yes. Now she would have me rush off, get together every scrap of information, and try to persuade every one, as she is persuading herself, that until I spoke of it the bare possibility never dawned upon her. Who will believe me ? Not only shall we be reduced to beggary, but we shall be looked upon as impostors.”

He hid his face in his hands, so that Katherine might not see its pained working ; but her own was scarcely less troubled. Rising to go over to his side, she trembled so violently that she was forced to kneel down and lean against the table.

“ Stephen,” she said in all but a whisper, “ I once did you a great wrong. I was presumptuous and self-confident then, and I thought it a grand thing to force a royal road through our difficulties. Very soon I learnt the fatal error

I had made, and that in your eyes I could never regain my self-respect; then the money which had cost me my happiness turned to a burden; so it has remained until this moment. Now a gleam of hope comes that you will let it give me some pleasure. This young man cannot keep Pamphillon; he must sell it. Buy it of him. If he chooses to assume the title, let him; but do not let the sacrifices aunt made be in vain. She has been a mother to us both, Stephen; repay her by doing this. I cannot tell you how it wrings my heart, to know that both of you may be called upon to suffer anything which I could save you from. For her sake, Stephen—for your mother's sake—do what I ask, and—and take it from me as freely as I, in need, took from her and from you.

Stephen felt his own eyes fill as he looked upon the earnest face before him.

"My dear," he said softly, "think what the world might reasonably accuse me of, if I bought the estate from a man too needy to keep an inheritance of which, for years, I have been unjustly depriving him. No, my embarrassment will be my greatest justification."

Katherine was silent; she saw the reasonableness of this argument.

"But I could buy it?" she said presently. "Every one knows I can afford to do so."

"Certainly you could buy it; but I should not advise your doing so; it is a very troublesome estate to manage."

"I should not want it for myself," she said in a low tone, and her eyes were raised to his with a look of such pleading entreaty, that in a moment all his mother had said and hinted at rushed across him, and he knew that it was Katherine's turn to love him.

"Katherine," he said very gravely, "I know the largeness of your heart, and that you are still bent upon benefiting me; but, my dear, this is a gift which a brother could not take from a sister, were that sister young as you are, and likely to form other and nearer ties.

She shook her head, and two heavy drops fell upon the table towards which she had turned away.

“Do not look upon this as impossible, Katherine dear. I will tell you something which will show you how very little we know of our own hearts. For years after you married I was aimless and purposeless, from the belief that I could never again take any interest in life. Even after I came to England, and met you, this feeling still existed, and I looked upon you as its sole cause, and this prevented my having the brotherly regard which I saw you wished to exist between us. Well, I went down to Mallett, and suddenly the whole course of my life changed; new hopes and prospects seemed to brighten it, and when I asked myself the cause for this, I found it was because my heart had opened again, and the place you had so long left vacant was filled by—Hero Carthew.”

A little shiver seemed to run through Katherine, but she did not speak nor move, until, feeling she must know the worst, she said,—

“Are you going to marry her, Stephen?”

“No.”

“Because of this?”

“No, before I knew of this. I knew that she cared for some one else.”

“Can you tell me who?”

“Yes; to this very Mr. Despard;” and with a pang of intense bitterness, he added, speaking rather to himself than to her, “so probably she will be Lady Prescott, in spite of herself.”

“He asked me to marry him yesterday,” Katherine said, turning her tear-stained face towards him.

Sir Stephen grew scarlet.

“He asked *you* to marry him?”

“Yes; why or what made him do so I cannot imagine—decidedly nothing in my manner towards him. I did not tell him so,” she added hastily; “I thought it best to keep on good terms with him.”

“He knows no more about himself than when I left?”

“Nothing more.”

“Then I wish you had told him, Katherine, that he was greatly presuming on your courtesy and kindness.”

"I do not think he meant it in that way," she said, inclined to look upon Leo's offence with less severity than her cousin did. "He was surprised into it, I think, by my sudden departure. He is young, and very likely he knows but little of the world. Of course I told him that he must never mention such a thing to me again, because I was quite determined"—and here her voice trembled—"as I am—never to marry. So your scruples are very needless, Stephen. I shall remain a widow as long as I live."

She rose up, and stood gazing into a future which seemed to her blank and desolate. Unknown to herself, her un-studied attitude told her tale of crushed hope and lost love. Looking at her, and remembering how their lives had been linked together, Stephen was touched to the quick; the words he had meant to say died away, and in their place he whispered huskily,—

"God bless you, Katherine, for coming to me in my trouble. Fate has dealt very hardly with us both."

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIR LEOPOLD PRESCOTT.

LEO DESPARD had seldom felt so thoroughly miserable, as he did during the week which succeeded Mrs. Labouchere's departure. The hopes, which had been raised by her manner on that morning, were all but extinguished by the total ignorance he was left in, as to when she intended returning to Mallett, or whether she intended returning at all. The certainty of learning all about her movements from Mrs. Prescott had occasioned the reticence, for which Katherine had felt so grateful; but to his dismay, on calling at Combe, he was told that Mrs. Prescott was ill and confined to her room, and though each day he had repeated his visit, the bulletin he received was no better. Putting together the circumstances of Sir Stephen's unannounced departure, Mrs. Labouchere's sudden flight, and this illness (which he believed feigned), he began to be very uneasy, that it all boded anything but good to him. The only thing he had to cling to, was the way in which Mrs. Labouchere had received his avowal; and the more he pondered over this, the more satisfied was he that with a little more opportunity, she would have been secured. Had she felt this? Had Mrs. Prescott or Sir Stephen noticed it, and so got up some plan for carrying her off, and keeping her away? If so, the game was over, and he had jeopardized his happiness for nothing. Hitherto, his claim upon Hero had secured to him her constant companionship, and whenever he felt dull or lonely, he had but to go to Sharrows. Never before had he felt how thoroughly he had excluded himself from the little community, among whom his boyhood had been spent; but now the truth was forced upon him, and all his vanity

could not blind him to the fact, that though he might be received kindly, because of Aunt Lydia, or for Uncle Tony's sake, nobody cared for him personally, and all plainly showed him that they knew his visits were only due to the Combe people being absent, and he, in consequence, not knowing what else to do with himself. Poor Aunt Lydia had a sad time of it, for, thrown upon his own resources, nothing seemed to please or satisfy her nephew, and twenty times in the day she shook her head dismally over Hero's obstinacy in staying all this time at Winkle. She constantly endeavored to get Leo to talk of Captain Carthew and Sharrows, but before she reached the point she was aiming at, he invariably turned the conversation, and the poor old lady's scheme of reconciliation seemed further off than ever. "I really think I will try and speak to him openly," she thought, as she sat one morning waiting for him to come down to breakfast; but at the first sight of Leo's face her courage failed her, and she thought it would be better to wait for a more propitious opportunity. He pushed away his breakfast; almost untasted, causing Aunt Lydia to say with a doleful shake of her head, "Oh dear! oh dear! what am I to get for you, Leo? you really do not eat enough to feed a sparrow. My dear boy, what is the matter?"

"Now, for Heaven's sake, Aunt Lydia, don't begin to bother. I cannot sit down at this hour of the morning, and make a meal like a ploughboy, and nothing short of that satisfies you."

"I am afraid there is nothing to tempt you. I am sure, if I only knew what to get, I'd get it. Do you think now, if Mrs. Carne had got a nice hog's pudding, that you could fancy a bit of that?"

Leo jumped up from his chair with an impatient gesture, but, after a moment, he repented, and turned saying, "Don't worry me like a good old soul, I don't feel at all the thing; I'm out of sorts and spirits."

"It must be so dull for you, my dear," Aunt Lydia said, sympathetically. "When is Sir Stephen coming back?"

"Oh, Sir Stephen be hanged, and all the others with

him. I begin to wish I'd never set eyes on one of them. Here's that fellow now with the letters," he continued, "as if I hadn't enough without people writing to torment my life out," for the bulky blue envelopes which bore no official stamp, were almost certain to contain long bills, made up of small items which poor Leo had entirely forgotten. He took the letters, said a few words to the man before dismissing him, and then sat down to the unpleasant duty of becoming acquainted with their contents. Aunt Lydia hurried out of the room, oppressed with the remembrance that the dinner had yet to be ordered. What to get she could not tell, "Hero used to give me such help," she sighed, "but now I never see her, and from Antony having been pleased with anything, I have grown so stupid." Suddenly she gave a start—listened a moment—and then, convinced that Leo was calling, she hurried back to find him standing in the middle of the room with an open letter in his hand and a look upon his face, which made her exclaim, "What, my dear? What is it?"

Leo could not answer; the words he wanted to say would not come. His throat and mouth seemed parched and dry; "Sir Stephen," he got out at length.

"What about him?" then taking notice of the letter, she burst out, "Oh, Leo, has he told you?"

"Did you know of it then?" Leo said faintly, as his strength suddenly failing him, he dropped down into the nearest chair.

"I knew it, my dear, of course, from your dear uncle, but it was his desire that it should never be mentioned to you, and until Sir Stephen came to me and made his generous offer, I did not think that I should ever set aside his wishes."

"Sir Stephen came to you?" Leo exclaimed, reading the letter again, "what do you mean? When did Sir Stephen come to you? what offer did he make?"

Aunt Lydia began to feel uneasy; she feared that Leo's pride was hurt by this discovery of his birth—"Dear, dear! what should she do? everything seemed to be going wrong."

"Besides myself, Mrs. Prescott was the only other person

who knew of it, Leo. After she came down here, she thought it right to acquaint her son, and very hurt he seemed to be about it, but you know, my dear, no harm is done; Sir Stephen, I am sure, is the last person to mention it, if you have the slightest objection;” but Leo had returned again to the letter, which he seemed to be reading over carefully. Aunt Lydia therefore waited until she saw he had come to the end, then she began, “Your uncle felt perfectly convinced.”

“Never mind about my uncle being convinced,” Leo exclaimed, impatiently, his face looking hot and excited; “what I want from you is, who I am. Tell me every scrap you know about me.”

“Well, my dear, of course it’s very painful for me, and I know it must be painful for you too.”

“For Heaven’s sake, never mind the pain, but try and answer my question.”

“So I will, but, Leo, you forget, after years of silence, it is very hard at my time of life.”

Leo took a turn up and down the little room, then stopping in front of her, he said with a movement of his finger, as if fixing her reply,—

“Now tell me, whose son am I?”

“Your—your father was Sir Bernard Prescott.”

“And why was this kept from me?”

“Because your dear uncle wished that you and all around us should believe that you belonged to our family.”

“Then my uncle was an old fool.”

Aunt Lydia gave a little cry.

“Leo!” she said in a voice of horror. “You do not know what you are saying; consider what your uncle did for you.”

“Did for me?” he cried, in an excited voice. “I’ll tell you what he did for me—he helped to keep me out of my lawful estate and position, so that instead of having my rights, I and every one else believed I was a beggarly nobody. Why did he keep a secret such as this to himself? And you? why didn’t you tell me, especially when you found that these cheats and impostors were coming down here?”

Oh yes! you may stare," he added, seeing her terror-stricken face. "But cheats they are, and impostors too. Why every stick they possess belongs to me! Yes, to me—the rightful heir. *I'm* no base-born son. I am Sir Leopold Prescott—Sir Leopold Prescott," he repeated, "by Jove!" and he threw himself down, laughing hysterically, in his uncontrollable joy, while the tears which she could no longer restrain rolled down Aunt Lydia's withered cheeks.

"Why, what are you crying for, you old stupid?" Leo called out, jumping up and giving her a shake. "Do you think *I'm* gone mad? Well, my head does seem all but turned, and no wonder: read that," and he thrust the letter he held into her hand, "read it and tell me what you think of it then?"

Aunt Lydia drew forth her spectacles, and endeavoring to steady her hand sufficiently to see the words before her, she with much difficulty got through the letter which Mr. Holmes had sent to Leo. Sir Stephen's instructions had been the most explicit with him: "Tell him everything he ought to know, get it over as quickly as you can." This letter, therefore, was but a preliminary announcement to the explanations, which were to follow as soon as Mr. Holmes was assured that this first epistle had safely come to hand. Its writing had caused the old gentleman more pain, than during his business life he had ever yet experienced; and in his frequent ejaculations of "fine fellow!" "noble character!" he almost forgave Sir Stephen, for what he called poking and prying and meddling with things, which were intended by Providence to remain as they were. The letter which he despatched merely informed Leo, that it having lately come to Sir Stephen's knowledge, that his uncle, the late Sir Bernard Prescott, had left a son, he had instituted an inquiry into the facts, which had resulted in his being convinced that Leo was that son, the late baronet's legitimate son, and therefore heir to his title and estate of Pamphillon. Mr. Holmes added, that Sir Stephen had placed the necessary evidence and documents with him for Leo's use and disposal, and he ended by begging that with

his acknowledgment of this letter, instructions might be sent, as to how and where all particulars relating to himself and his estate should be communicated to him.

"*Now*, what do you say?" Leo asked, taking the letter, which Aunt Lydia had let drop into her lap out of her hands.

"Oh! if your uncle had only lived to see this day! Oh! Leo, Leo!" and overcome by contending emotions, the poor old lady burst into tears.

"Well, it seems to me, he might have easily seen it if he had acted to me as he ought to have done; and really, Aunt Lydia, I don't know what right he could have fancied he had to take me away from everybody, and keep from me whose son I was."

"Nothing! but his love for you kept him silent, Leo," Miss Despard said, gathering up a spirit of defence for her brother which she never would have found for herself. "When Antony adopted you, you seemed to have no claim upon any one. Your mother was dead, your father had died without acknowledging that he had married her, and Mrs. Prescott herself wrote, saying that this offer to adopt you was the greatest act of charity, for she did not know what otherwise would have been done with you."

"It was a charity to take me out of the way, I suppose," Leo said, with a bitter sneering laugh. "The old hypocrite, I'll teach her what charity means; she shall have a taste of it now at my hands. I only fancy the Malletters, when they hear this bit of news about their wonderful Sir Stephen, it'll rather alter their tune, I fancy."

"Poor young man! What a reverse for him, after all these years too! Oh! Leo; you must try and spare him all you can, for he was so generously minded towards you. I'm sure the words hadn't left my lips about your not being able to marry, before he said that you should have the money, as soon as ever he was able to sell the estate."

"Sell the estate! He dare not lay his finger on a stick or stone of it. I tell you what it is, Aunt Lydia, he may think himself a precious fortunate fellow, that I choose to take his word for things. Many a man has found himself inside Carsleat gaol for less than he has done."

"Oh, my dear! don't say so; why, but for him, this might never have come to light."

"I'm not quite so certain of that."

"Oh Leo! I am quite certain that Sir Stephen never knew a word of this when he came to see me, nor did Mrs. Prescott either."

"Oh, are you? Well, perhaps it's a pity that I am not quite so credulous. However, there is no need for us to argue about that now; I have quite business enough to take up my time in seeing after leave."

"I wonder whatever Hero will say," Aunt Lydia murmured, more to herself, than to Leo.

Leo's face changed; in his excitement he had forgotten Hero, but the mention of her name brought additional joy to him. There was nothing he need deny himself now, and laughing, as he pictured Hero's surprised delight, he said, "If she should by any chance come here before I see her, mind, not a word, Aunt Lydia. I must tell her all about it myself. What do you think she'll say to Sir Leopold and Lady Prescott? It doesn't sound so bad, does it, old lady?"

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Aunt Lydia, "I can't realize it, you know. Sir Leopold—Lady Prescott—not that Hero has treated you quite nicely of late, my dear."

"Oh, never mind that now; I was more to blame than she was; it was nothing but a little jealousy, I know that well enough."

"But who had she to be jealous of?"

"Who? why Mrs. Labouchere, and with very good cause," he added with a laugh; "why I might have her and her money to-morrow if I liked. I dare say by this time she's ready to take odds in anything you like to name that she will be Lady Prescott. Ah, well, now I *can* have the girl I love."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A WORD OF ADVICE.

It did not take long to spread news in Mallett, and before very long the universal theme of conversation in every house and cottage was, the "wonderful stroke o' luck which had overtook the young Despard." For once in her life Betsey allowed her curiosity to so far master her that, being in the village, she accepted Hepzibah Bunce's invitation to "step in and make a pitch," knowing that within the little shop the affair would have been pretty freely handled and discussed. No sooner was she seated in a chair brought out, and, in her honor, wiped with Hepzibah's "filthy" apron, which Betsey felt sure "hadn't sin soap and water the time was when," than Hepzibah began, "Why Betsey, what for goodness gracious sake is all this hoot and cry about the folks to Combe and the young Despard? The talk is, that Sir Stephen baint a Sir at all, and that the young Despard's reale name is Priscott? What have you heerd about it all?"

Betsey shook her head. "I've 'a heerd no more than you can tell me," she said.

"Well, I never! I should ha' thought that you'd know more than anybody else. Ned Wallis says, that in rum-magin' about, Sir Stephen has come across the marriage lines to prove, that the young Despard's mother was his uncle's wedded wife, and so he's foas'd to give un up everything. The men's all in a reg'lar quandary. They hold by Sir Stephen makin' un prove it to law, for Job Trethewy, whose cousin Jack's in lawyer Truscott's office, says that unless Sir Stephen chooses to walk out, Despard can't put un to doors, for that position is nine points of the law; but there, as the sayin' is, somebody's children's a got their

father's luck, and if there's one more than another that I can't abide the sight on 'tis that young Despard, though p'raps now I should do better to hold my tongue before you, Betsey. I'm forgettin' about Miss Hero, though you ain't one to fetch and carry, for I'd rather swaller my words any day than hurt Miss Hero's feelin's."

"Aw! you needn't be afeard there," said Betsey, with a tone and look of severe contempt; "her's nothin' to he, and he's nothin' to she."

"What, is it all off then?" exclaimed Hepzibah. "Well, I ain't surprised; for so soon as iver I see un philanderin' about after that new madam to Combe, I says to our Tamson, 'Miss Hero won't put up with that,' I says, 'you see if her do, for I'm thrapped if I would, without the man a measuring his length, if he was so big as Goliath o' Gath.'"

"Aw! well then as likes orts is welcome to Mr. Despard so far as Miss Hero goes," said Betsey.

"But p'rhaps her'll change her mind now," Hepzibah put in, reflectively, "if 'tis true that he'll be Sir Leopoll."

"He may be what poll pleases un," exclaimed Betsey with a snort; "but—and I've dared Joe to do otherwise—I'll be put in irons and kep there afore I'll call un Sir anything. I says it," continued Betsey, forgetting in her excitement her caution, "and I'll stick to it, that all this has bin brought about by foul play somewheres, for they as knaws can testify to it that Despard's mother was a reg'lar fly-be-night, and if he'd ever got a father it don't follow that he was Sir Stephen's uncle, the nointy ole rascal to have the credit of a son that the father o' lies might own for false-ness."

"Iss, I hear that he goes about tellin' up, that he's bin kep' out o' his money all these years by Sir Stephen o' purpose. Why, 'tis shameful. You might so well call anybody a thief and liard to their face, and more partic'lar after the Cap'en a makin' a speech about it on the Hard. They says you might a heerd a pin drop, till he comed to where nobody durstn't lay a finger upon Combe, and then they sot up cheerin' and hurroarin' as if the French was a comin'."

"Ah! 'tis that what riles un so," said Betsey laughing. "He was for takin' everybody to be so big a lick-spittle as hisself, carneying to whoever was uppermost. Why, he's had the brass to say that he'll make the Malletters pay for it, and if Sir Stephen's left with a coat to his back 'twill only be through his charity."

"And that after Sir Stephen has found all this out for un," exclaimed Hepzibah, "aw! fie upon un."

"If he'd took it and not said a word," continued Betsey, "why nobody would ha' said a word again he; but 'tis to go round makin' out that he's a bin chated, and that the poor old rector and Miss Despard all but winked at it, that's what's a turned the whole place agin un, and I says for one that the sooner he shows Mallett his back the better we shall all like un."

"He's only waitin' till his leave comes down, I hear."

"That's all. He's sure to be off to-morrow or the next day, cos he's a got to meet Sir Stephen in London. I heerd the Cap'en tellin' Mr. Jamieson about it."

"Why, now, you baint goin'," Hepzibah exclaimed, as Betsey rose to take her departure. "'Tis so seldom you do come, and we all but sister-laws. But there," she added, "I s'pose this'll put it off agin?"

Betsey drew herself up severely. "Joe's one of they who thinks, if he baits his line he's sure o' his fish," she said; "but that ain't my way. There's a voice inside me callin' louder than ever Joe Bunce could holler, and if he and a few more, who shall be nameless, was to listen to that voice instead o' followin' the perverse workin's o' their own fleshly 'arts, there wouldn't be so many empty sittin's in Mr. Pethewick's chapel;" and with that backhander, as Betsey afterwards remarked, she took her "congee."

Well might it be said that the village, to quote the Captain, was turned wrong side uppermost; for this unlooked-for discovery had completely unhinged the minds of a simple folk given to put implicit faith in things as they were, and as they found them. They could not grasp this new fact presented to them, nor realize that Leo Despard, whom they had known for all these years as old Mr.

Despard's nephew, should suddenly turn out to be Sir Bernard Prescott's son, and that Sir Stephen shouldn't be Sir Stephen at all, and only Leo Despard's cousin. "Why," as old Jim said, "it didn't appear nat'ral like." At length the Captain, being informed of the general consternation, took it upon himself to give them, as plainly as he could, an account of the whole affair, and inasmuch as they knew the Captain would never stand by and see anything but fair play, they were quite satisfied, and it was understood among them that their line of action was "to stand by the Cap'en, to stick to Sir Stephen like limpets, and if any man gainsayed 'em in it, why off jacket and make un prove his words," and this out of no such particular ill-will to Leo, only that they knew he had always stood so apart from them, that in his rise or fall he would never consider Mallett. But in his elation Leo forgot the past, and was sorely nettled to find that those, whose joys and sorrows he had treated with open indifference, should now presume to be indifferent to him and to his interests. This vexation caused him to forget his usual tact, and he lost more ground by the way he tried to assert himself. He cast upon his newly found relations imputations, and gave covert hints that unless he was rather more conciliated it might be the worse for Mallett; and some of these incautious speeches being repeated to the Captain, he made up his mind to go to Aunt Lydia, and give Leo a word of advice.

This resolution he put in practice, and the next morning walked to the cottage, where he found the old lady sitting alone, expecting Leo to come in on his way to Dockmouth.

"You saw him last evening?" she said, "did you not?"

"Only for a few minutes; I wasn't at home when he called, I'd gone to Winkle. It was young Tom Joslyn's birthday, and as it's the last he'll spend in England for the next three years, they'd got up a little treat among themselves."

"But surely you have seen Leo since he—"

"Oh, yes; I found time to say that, sorry as I feel for my friend Prescott, I am glad that good has fallen to Leo's share."

The old lady sat for a moment silent, then, in a quavering whisper, she said, pointing to her head, "It's been a little too much for him. You mustn't mind anything he says just now. Poor boy! he'll know better after a time."

"Ah!" said the Captain, drawing a long breath, "to tell you the truth I thought I'd just step up, and, as an old friend of his uncle's, give him a word of advice about letting his tongue run a little too fast."

"I'm very glad you have; I dare say he'll pay attention to what you say; he never thinks I know anything. Here he comes; and, Captain Carthew, I do so want you to say something on the subject of my going to see Mrs. Prescott; I feel it is my place to do so. He says no, let her call here; but that is not kind, not Christianlike."

The Captain had not time to answer before Leo entered.

"Ah!" he said, shaking hands cordially, "have you got anything for me?"

"No; did you expect something?"

"I left a note for Hero last evening, and I thought she might have sent me a line in reply."

"No; she did not come back from Winkle."

Leo looked his annoyance.

"I may be off to London at any moment," he said, "and I want to see her particularly before I leave."

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to go to Winkle, for they're all hard at work stitching away at Master Tom's rig-out; he's off on Tuesday to join the *Calliope*."

Leo tried to relieve his feelings by an impatient sigh; he longed to give vent to his opinion of the Joslyns—a vulgar, ill-bred set. He had always set his face against Hero being so intimate with them, and now, just when he wanted her, she must be working for one of those cubs of boys. Ah! well, Lady Prescott would have to forget many of Hero Carthew's ways.

"Have you been to Combe, yet?" Captain Carthew said. "I fancy Mrs. Prescott would like to see you; she almost said as much to me."

"If she wants me, she knows where I am; I don't quite see that it is my place to run after the Prescotts," Leo

answered, more ungraciously than he intended, through being out of temper.

"I tell you what it is, Leo," said the Captain, "I don't think you are taking quite the right line in this matter. You seem to forget that if it had not been for Sir Stephen, you might have remained Leo Despard all your life. I don't know what your idea of acting honorably and straightforwardly is; but, by Jove, if you ask me, I say 'tis the way in which Stephen Prescott has treated you. You may say it's confounded hard lines to have been kept in the dark all these years. Perhaps it is; but there, again, you fell upon your feet in being brought up by those who took such care of you, and your property being in the hands of people who took such care of it. Come, come, my lad, don't give utterance to anything that your conscience must condemn. I feel convinced that, when you think it over, you will feel that what you said last evening in the boat would have been far better unsaid."

"I don't see that," replied Leo, doggedly. "Why should every one be on Mr. Prescott's side, and no one on mine? You talk about good feeling. I have had very little shown to me; not a single person in Mallett has said out heartily, 'I am glad to hear it.' Why they should care so much for his loss, and so little for my gain, I cannot tell, seeing they have known me as many years as they have known him weeks. It isn't calculated to improve a man's temper to find every one's back up against him because he happens to get his own."

"My dear," said Aunt Lydia, "you shouldn't say that."

"I don't know why I should not, I'm sure. You never sit five minutes without 'poor Mrs. Prescott this,' and 'poor Sir Stephen the other.' Why, even Hero, who has known me all her life, can't take the trouble to send me a line of congratulation."

And a little tremble in these words touching the Captain's soft heart, he got up, and laid his hand on Leo's shoulder, saying—

"I see we've all been out in our soundings, my lad. Come now, for the future don't let us have any more of

this backing and filling, but a thorough understanding that being sorry for one does not mean that we're not glad for the other; and as for Hero—go to Winkle and see her, tell her what you're come for, and you'll see she won't be the one to forget your old friendship, and while you're gone there Aunt Lydia will call at Combe, and have a chat with Mrs. Prescott; and then to-morrow you can go. By that time I dare say your friend Mrs. Labouchere will be back."

For an instant Leo did not reply; then he said—

"I should be certain to find Hero at Winkle?"

"Certain—that is, if you go soon. I left word with Jim to fetch her back this afternoon some time."

"I might go with him."

"You might."

"Well, then, I'll give up going to Dockmouth until to-morrow. I really did not want to go there. And you can go to Combe, Aunt Lydia."

"Yes, my dear. That's my own dear boy," she whispered, giving him a squeeze of the hand.

And when, after some further conversation, the Captain took his departure, she continued to say, unheard by Leo—

"His heart is still in the right place, my dear friend."

"Oh, yes, yes," said the captain, "he'll pull through all right, never fear."

"And he says that this little tiff between our dear Hero and him was all his fault."

"Ah!" said the Captain with considerable less heartiness.

"Fancy, Lady Prescott!"

But the Captain only shook his head as he walked away; for, viewed in the light of a son-in-law, he found he had less liking for Leo than ever.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A PARTING.

WHEN Leo reached Sharrows beach, he found that Jim had been gone for some time.

"He'd a got a bit o' a job to Winkle," one of the men said, "or else he wouldn't ha' started so early."

Leo hesitated, wondering whether he had best follow, or wait Hero's return.

"The tide won't serve for coming back later than five, sir," said the man; "that made 'un so nimble in settin' off."

In that case, it would be useless trying to reach Winkle before Hero had started; so Leo determined to walk up to the Forts, and be back in time for her return. He was not sorry to escape the visit to Winkle; he wanted Hero, and Hero alone, and was impatient for the time of their meeting to arrive.

There was one point from which he could catch sight of the boat as soon as she rounded Combe headland, and, having completed his survey of how the work, so soon to pass into other hands, was progressing, he took up his station to watch for her approach.

Naturally his thoughts ran on the events of the last few days—the unexpected turn his life had taken, as if Aladdin's lamp, or Fortunatus's wishing cap had been given to him. Well, at all events, now he ought to be contented. Still, he had fancied that he should have somehow felt different to what he did. This led him on to picture the surprise of his brother officers, and from thinking of them, he began to debate into which of the crack regiments he should exchange; and these reflections occupied him, until a sudden puff of wind roused him, and in another minute the boat he was watching for came in sight.

It was clear enough for him to see the outline of its two occupants, Jim sitting crossways, so that he might give the attention which the sail, on account of the chopping wind, demanded, Hero bending forward, in order that the conversation in which they were indulging might be intelligible.

"Once away from here, and she will be quite different," Leo thought, offering an excuse for the vexed feeling it always gave him to see Hero so familiar with the village people. "What the deuce she can find to talk about to an old canting psalm-singer like that I cannot imagine."

Hoping to attract her attention, he took out his handkerchief, and waved it, but to no purpose. Hero was too engrossed to see the signal, and Leo, annoyed at her preoccupation, began to descend to the landing-place below.

From the moment of starting Jim had been trying hard to engage Hero in conversation; but she was too much wrapt up in her own thoughts to give her old favorite his usual share of attention.

It seemed to her, as if she should never recover from the bewildered state of surprise into which this wonderful news had thrown her. It was so improbable, so unlooked-for, that it was impossible to realize it as a fact. So long as people spoke of Leo she did not mind; but to hear them pitying Sir Stephen was unbearable. To know that he was in sorrow, and she not able to go to him, seemed the sharpest arrow that outrageous Fortune had yet aimed at her.

While giving them the story, the Captain had entered minutely into the various incidental details connected with the past week; and Hero's wounded love recovered, and grew doubly strong at hearing of Sir Stephen's frequent visits to Sharrows, his inquiries, and his anxiety to learn that she was getting stronger.

"Oh, papa!" she exclaimed reproachfully, "why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Tell you what?" laughed the old man. "I should have enough to do if I repeated all the philandering nonsense a parcel of young fellows talk. Lord bless my soul! not a day has passed without Tom Grant coming in two or three times, and as for Jack Pringle and Giles, 'tis

'All round my hat
I wears a green willow.'

"Tom Grant and Giles, papa ! but Sir Stephen is very different to boys, like they are."

"All tarred with the same brush, my dear : and your old father the greatest fool of all. However, I'll make it all square when I write."

Upon Tom Joslyn's appointment Hero had consented to prolong her stay at Winkle for a few days longer ; but she was most anxious now to be home again ; all her thoughts ran upon Sir Stephen's future movements, and the possibility of her being afforded an early opportunity of letting him know the real state of her heart. Suppose he did not return to Mallett, could she write to him, and, if so, what could she say ? These perplexities completely absorbed her, and for some time rendered her blind to Jim's more than usual desire for conversation."

"Miss Hero," he said, as they passed under Combe Point, "I reckon they'm glad enuf now that they've a got Combe. Iss," continued Jim, "'better small fish than empty dish,' as the sayin' is. Do 'ee fancy Sir Stephen takes it much to heart ?"

Hero nodded.

"Ah," said Jim, with a sympathetic sigh, "but you must cheer un up, Miss Hero. Tell 'un 'bitter pills has blessed effects,' and he knows whose hand it is that smites un :—

'Only fools that rod despises,
That loves the harder it chastises.'

Hero smiled. "Have you seen Mr. Despard since ?" she asked.

"Why, no, I habn't, not to say seed un since the day I comed to Winkle for you, and cos o' Master Tom's appointment, you didn't come back. I seed un then. He was 'pon the Hard with the lady to Combe." Then, after a pause, "You haven't a minded his busnackin' about after she, have 'ee, Miss Hero ?"

"Not in the least," Hero answered, laughing at Jim's insinuating look and manner.

"No, I know'd that. Some thought whether you would

or no. Mother Tapson said her'd scum un like a cat, if so. But, says I to myself, all 'll be made plain sailin' now. Miss Hero, I says, ain't the one to desert a sinkin' ship."

Then, noticing that Hero's eyes had suddenly filled with tears, Jim discreetly concentrated his gaze upon the sail, and promising that it meant to gibe, he gave vent to a whistle. Puff came the wind, round the last point went the little boat, within sight of the beach, on which Leo stood waiting to help Hero out.

At sight of him Hero's face changed, and Jim, seeing the cause of its altered expression, asked,—

"Shall I tack out again, Miss Hero?"

"Oh no; we'll land there, Jim."

Jim got the oar out in readiness; then he said, in a perplexed tone,—

"I s'pose we ain't to begin calling un to once, sir anythink? 'Tull sound for all the world like gummucksin' of un."

But Hero did not answer; she waited until they were close to the shore, and then, as the boat grated on the beach, she called out,—

"How do you do? I have just returned from Winkle."

Leo stepped into the boat and took her hand, to steady her in jumping out. Hero noticed that he had not spoken, but she was too nervous herself to say anything more. Under pretence of speaking to Jim, she got a moment to steady herself, and then, with Leo at her side, she turned to walk towards the Sharrows Cliff.

"You got my note?" Leo asked.

"Your note! No."

"What, did not Betsey send it to you? I gave it to her yesterday. I thought your father would have been sure to take it."

"Papa came straight on from Cargill, and I suppose Betsey forgot to give it to him; at all events, I have not had it."

"Can you guess what it was about, Hero?" and the tone sent the color flying into her cheeks.

"Not in the least," she answered, in a low, firm voice.

"You have heard of the good fortune which has fallen to my share?"

"Yes."

"Then you might have known to whom, in my joy, I should first turn. Hero, I know that we have had a misunderstanding; I know that you blamed me for having, through the world's rough teaching, a larger share of worldly wisdom than you can comprehend, and I fear you thought my refusal to let you share in the poverty, which was all I could then offer you, a want of love. It was anything but that—if possible, you have been ten thousand times dearer to me since I thought—I tried to give you up. I can never tell you how wretched I felt—how tame, dull, uncongenial everything and every one seemed, while I was breaking my heart for your sake. Ask Aunt Lydia—she will tell you a little of what I have gone through. After that night I met you at the Thomsons', I couldn't sleep, I could not eat—I could do nothing. I know it would have been impossible to go on enduring it. I must have rushed off to you, and told you that I could not give you up."

"Indeed! I wish that you had done so," Hero said.

"You do?"

"It would have spared us this."

"Yes. But that very morning, as I was sitting thinking about it, the news came. Hero, only fancy, what we have longed for, and talked about, and sighed after, has come to pass—only it is a great deal more," he laughed; "for our imaginations never took us further than an old gentleman leaving a large fortune, and here is a fortune, an estate, and a title—no, I won't let you speak until you have told me that all you said on that horrid evening, when we stood almost in this very spot, meant nothing. I am sure that you love me, Hero. Love me well enough to forgive me the pain I have made you suffer; and when you have said so in words, then I will tell you everything about this wonderful discovery. Ah, how little we thought, when we used to argue and quarrel about Sir Stephen Prescott, that all he had, and all for which he was so thought of, belonged

to me. I only spoke against him because I was jealous of him. I fancied that he might want to marry you, and then you would forget me."

Those words seemed to sting Hero, and to give her the key to all Leo's selfishness. Looking at him, she said bitterly—

"That is just what did take place, and what did not take place. He wished to marry me, and I did not forget you."

"He wished to marry you? Why? did he ask you?"

"He did, not knowing anything about you. He asked me while you were in Scotland."

"And you refused him for my sake. Oh, Hero, what a noble girl you are! Why did you not tell me of this before? However, you have your reward, have you not, darling? It would only have been a sham before; but now, as soon as it is possible, you shall be the real Lady Prescott; and I know whose wife you would rather be. You have proved that to me. What a sneak the fellow is!" he added, as certain passages between them occurred with unpleasant vividness to his mind.

"Leo," Hero said, "it is necessary that I should speak plainly to you. I thank you for the honor you have meant to offer to me, but I must decline it."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say—I must decline to accept the honor of being Lady Prescott."

"Hero!" his voice was hard and stern; "this is no time for standing on your dignity. I have acknowledged my fault as completely as any woman could desire. I expect to leave this place to-morrow, and except for you I shall never put foot in it again. You tell me that on my account you refused a man whom you, like every one else then, supposed to be a baronet. I now offer you the same advantages, you must feel, from no other reason than because I love you. Why, then, do you say you must decline to be my wife?"

"Simply because I do not love you."

"Do not love me? and yet, for my sake, a couple of months since you could say no to what must have seemed

like a kingdom to you. Your words and actions are paradoxical."

"Perhaps so. I do not ask or expect you to understand what I did; but I do wish you to feel that, if we are to remain friends, there must be no word of love mentioned again between us;" and she turned as if she would walk on. But Leo caught her by the hand—

"No!" he exclaimed, "you shall not move from this spot until you tell me what you mean. I am not one to be taken up and thrown aside at pleasure; befooled one moment by being told of your great love, and flung off the next with your high and mighty graces. What am I to believe?"

"That which in your own heart you know to be true," Hero said, her face flushed with excitement. "I gave you my girl love and trust; I believed in you; and I was ready to sacrifice anything for your sake; while you—failed me in my hour of need, and were ready to give me up to secure what in your eyes was of more value. I know," she added, "that you are much more clever in argument than I am, Leo, so we need not waste words in proving or disproving that which I am certain you feel is the truth. It is best," she said, holding out her hand, "that we should part. Our paths will be widely divided, and we may never meet again. Let us try, therefore, to forget all which makes us feel bitter towards one another, and when you remember Mallett—and I know you will sometimes go back to old days—think kindly of me, Leo, as I shall of you—Good-by."

"Good-by!" he echoed, looking at her; "good-by to *you*, Hero! Oh, you don't, you cannot mean to be so cruel. What is all this to me if you do not share it with me?" and in truth at that moment his new possessions seemed utterly valueless to him.

"You did not want me to share your poverty, Leo," Hero could not help saying.

"Because I hate poverty," he burst out. "Its shifts and straits are abominable to me. They so try my temper and disposition, that it made me doubt whether even my love

for you would stand it; seeing to what I was born, what wonder if it jarred against me? But now I have all I want, I cannot do without you. Hero, you are necessary to me. Every minute seems to make you grow dearer, and surely it is seldom that a man is reproached for the love he tried to curb in his adversity, but gloried in, and fed upon, the moment fortune looked kindly on him."

"I am very sorry, Leo," Hero said, with a saddened expression on her face. "You will find many who will love you dearly and truly, but I could never love you again."

"No, no," he groaned, "don't say that. I will try so hard that I must win it back. I will wait, oh! so patiently for it. Hero, say you will try. If we were married, it would come then."

"Never," she sobbed; "it will never come back. I know it will not, because I like you better than I ever did; but I do not love you in the least."

"Because you will not try," he said, passionately. "Hero, think of what we were to each other. You never seemed to care for anything but me. Why, see, you gave up a rich man like Stephen Prescott for me, comparatively a beggar."

"I did," she said, slowly, "and now that you are rich and he is the beggar, for his sake I refuse you."

Leo felt as if a sudden blow had been dealt him.

"You are going to marry him?" he gasped out.

"No. I told him that I loved you, and knowing no more, he will think that I love you still."

Leo turned away, hiding his face in the grassy slope behind them. Had Stephen Prescott thought of him, as he now thought of himself? for in the great anguish of feeling that Hero was gone from him forever, he judged himself very harshly. "Had I but been true, but been true." In days which were to come he found many an excuse for his worldly wisdom, but not then. In proportion to the tumult of excited joy which had filled him was his despair and self-reproach.

Hero's voice recalled him to the present moment.

"I am afraid that papa or Betsey may have seen the

boat," she said, "and if so, they might come down wondering what had become of me."

Leo made no further attempt at remonstrance. He took both her hands in his, and stood looking at her with eyes full of a sorrow that seemed then to rob his future of all light.

"Good-by, Leo. We have both something to forgive. Forgive me, Leo;" and here the tears which had stood in her eyes burst forth unchecked, "as I forgive you; and God bless you and make you very happy."

But Leo made no answer. All at once he seemed choking; then a great sob came, which forced him to let go Hero's hands and cover his face from her view, and when, his passion spent, some minutes later he raised his head, he found himself alone.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“NO LEO DESPARD.”

WHEN, some time later, Leo returned to the cottage, Aunt Lydia asked him whom he had seen at Winkle.

“I did not go to Winkle.”

“Not go, my dear!” exclaimed the old lady.

“No. I don’t feel at all the thing; my head aches, and it is quite an effort to speak.”

“Oh dear, oh dear! it’s just what I thought,” said Aunt Lydia plaintively. “All this excitement has been too much for you, Leo. I told Mrs. Prescott that you seemed very harassed and worried, and she said she did not wonder at it. Poor thing! she is so altered, Leo—quite an old woman—and the way she clings to her niece is positively painful.”

“Her niece?”

“Yes; Mrs. Labouchere is back again; she came back this morning. She has been in London with Sir— There, I always forget he is *Mr.* Prescott—and oh, my dear boy, it cuts me to the heart to feel there is no Leo Despard,” and the poor old soul stopped to brush away her tears.

“Who told you she had been with Mr. Prescott?”

“Mrs. Prescott did; she said her niece had been her greatest comfort, for directly she heard what had taken place she went straight off to London, to see of what use she could be to her cousin; so, depend on it, she had a heavy heart when you saw her off by the train.”

Simple, unsuspecting Aunt Lydia was but a poor observer, or she must have noticed the change in Leo’s face. He had deceived himself, then, and Mrs. Labouchere had refused him, knowing who and what he was. This accounted for her agitation—this was the meaning of that indescribable something in her manner, which he had set down to a

struggle between love and pride. Oh! how he cursed his folly as he pictured the whole scene being rehearsed for Sir Stephen's benefit!

"Both Mrs. Prescott and Mrs. Labouchere spoke very nicely of you," Aunt Lydia continued.

"Did they?"

"Yes; and I hope you won't be angry, Leo; but after what you said, as an opening was given me, I thought it was best to mention Hero, and how very attached you both were to each other, and Mrs. Prescott seemed quite pleased, and said it only confirmed her good opinion of you, to find you constant to your early love."

"And what did Mrs. Labouchere say?" asked Leo, too cast down to say one word of reproach.

"Well, she never made the slightest remark; but I could see by her face that she was quite taken aback. I dare say she has been so used to flattery and homage, that she can't understand having a rival, more especially a little home-bird like our Hero."

Leo did not answer, neither did he hear the little rhapsodies Aunt Lydia was indulging in. He sat looking into the fire, letting his bitter recollection run riot.

"Is there anything I can get you, my dear?" Aunt Lydia asked, bending forward and laying her hand on his knee.

"No, nothing;" and he gently stroked the thin little hand with his own. "You are a dear old soul, Aunt Lydia," he said, trying to smile at her. "I don't think I've ever been half grateful enough for what you and Uncle Tony did for me."

"My dear boy, you must be ill, or you would never say that to me. Why, you were the pride and pleasure of our lives. What have I left to me but you, Leo? and has not my one happiness been to have you with me, and look forward to your coming? Why, Hero and I used to sit talking about you by the hour together. She didn't mind opening her heart to me, dear child, and that's why I so dreaded this misunderstanding between you; for, my dear, you might search the world over, without finding another so loving, so tender, and so true; and that is one thing which

made me think very highly of Sir Stephen, for when he paid me that first visit (just after he heard of your relationship) I spoke openly to him about you and Hero, and his answer was, 'If the want of money is the thing which keeps them apart, they shall not be separated; as soon as ever I have sold my estate I shall be prepared to advance the sum required.' How wonderful are the ways of Providence! for you see, my dear, the time had come—it was to be known—and while going through the necessary papers for the sale of the place, he came on these very ones, which proved that you were the rightful heir. Mrs. Labouchere said, from her cousin being constantly abroad, he had always left matters entirely to his lawyer; so perhaps that was the reason that these things were not discovered before. She's evidently very fond of Sir Stephen, and I should not be at all surprised if, after a time, they two made a match."

"I think I must say good-night," Leo said, getting up suddenly, "or, if my leave does come to-morrow, I shall not be up to starting."

He felt as if he could bear no more; this last communication seemed to pierce every vulnerable part of his character, and to complete his humiliation. At length his tact and diplomacy had completely led him astray. Until now he had never known how sorely his vanity could be wounded. Accustomed to be admired, petted, and made much of, he had believed that if money were added to his list of attractions, no one could withstand him. Judging Mrs. Labouchere and Stephen Prescott by himself, he felt certain they would never keep this story to themselves, and his ready wit provided a dozen malicious settings for it, which the world would enjoy at his expense, and then, most bitter pang of all, came the certainty that in time it would come round to Hero's ears, and she would think he had deceived her, that he had never loved her. The whole night long he tossed about, and only when it was time to get up did he drop off into a troubled sleep, from which he was aroused by Aunt Lydia knocking at his door, to tell him that some letters had come for him. One he found to be from Mr. Holmes, arranging a meeting between him and

Stephen Prescott; the other was his expected leave; so that if he intended to catch the mid-day train, he had but little time to spare.

Aunt Lydia, feeling confident that on Hero's account Leo would soon return, treated this departure as only a temporary leave-taking, and suppressed the tearful anxiety and nervous forebodings, which at such times she usually gave vent to.

"Tell Mrs. Prescott," said Leo, standing ready to start, "that I much regret being prevented calling upon her; but say I will write."

"Yes, my dear, and you can go when you come back."

Come back! When would that be? But Leo dared not risk a scene by undeceiving the poor old lady. He wanted to speak of Hero, but he could not; so he made no answer, but listened patiently to all her little loving fidgets about himself and his luggage; then he stooped down and kissed her with far greater affection than usual, and with an unbidden sigh, which came he scarce knew why, Leo turned his back upon his early home and his most faithful friend.

On his way to the water-side he found his steps loiter wherever there was a chance of his meeting Hero; but in vain. The beach was reached, and he had to step into the boat, venting his disappointment in sharp speeches to the man for not bringing his luggage quicker. He had taken care to secure himself against fellow-passengers, so that he could sit silently taking an unacknowledged farewell of the old place and its surroundings.

Each point and creek was familiar to him, and associated with a thousand memories, which, after laying dormant for years, would spring up when recent and more important events had lost interest, or were forgotten. Here as a boy he had gone fishing with Uncle Tony, there he had rambled with Hero, that was the spot where he and Jack Pringle were all but drowned, and farther on was the Nozzle Rock they had all climbed down to try and rescue the crew of the *Priscilla* schooner. Looking at them then, Leo little dreamed the time would come, when he would grow garrulous about these simple recollections, treasuring their mem-

ories because they recalled the dear old place where he had spent the happiest days of his life. But these days were far distant; and now, in proportion as the rugged coast, save in its bold outline, grew dim, his spirits revived, so that by the time he had landed at the cove, and had been amused by the buzz of whispered surprise that he "didn't look no different"—had been gratified by several marks of attention from people he met in Dockmouth streets—had had his ears titillated by his tailor (given of late to indulge in that familiarity which was a portion of his premium upon long-standing bills, but now obsequiously hoping that he might be honored by a further continuance of Sir Leopold's favors), Leo began to brisk up wonderfully, to take a happier view of life, and to determine to try and forget all that had given him pain and annoyance. As he was whirled along, he grew busy and interested in his future; and it was only when his eyes fell upon some quiet scene of rural sweetness that the thought arose, "I wonder what Hero is doing?" Ofttimes it is hard that such heart yearnings cannot be answered; oft-times the scope given to imagination is more soothing, than the actual knowledge would prove. So at least it was with Leo, who might have been somewhat disconcerted to hear, that about this time Hero was surprised by a visitor, who was no other than Mrs. Labouchere. After listening to Aunt Lydia's story of the great attachment between Leo and Hero, Katherine had heard from the old lady the further fact, that, directly the announcement had come, Leo had spoken of Hero as the one to share his fortune, and that she believed he had then gone to Winkle to settle matters, and make up a little misunderstanding which had existed for the last few weeks, and which he now acknowledged to be all his fault. Could this be true? was it really with but the hope of securing her money that this man had presumed to address her? Woman like, she could make excuses for most mistakes and follies prompted by a love inspired by herself; but if she had been the object of a mercenary scheme, then the perpetrator was worthy of a contempt, which, when opportunity offered, she would not be slow to make him feel.

Such a rankled hold did this take of her that she could think of little else. It betrayed itself in a restlessness so unusual that Mrs. Prescott, noticing it, said—

“Katey, dear, don’t you think a little air might be good for you?”

“Yes, aunt, perhaps it might. I was just thinking I would walk across the park to Sharrows.”

“To Sharrows, my dear! Captain Carthew is certain to call some time to-day.”

“I rather want to see Miss Carthew. I should like to know a little more of her.”

“Yes?” said Mrs. Prescott, in a half-inquiring voice; but Katherine, without giving any other reason for this sudden determination, said she would get ready at once, and before long she was on her road to Sharrows. When she reached the gate she waited for some little time before opening it, wondering how she should begin, and what she should say to Hero. Circumstances must decide. So, resolutely, on she went, down the path, and along past the windows, up to the door, which was opened by Betsey.

“Is Miss Carthew at home?”

“Please to walk in, ma’am,” said Betsey, considerably softened towards Mrs. Labouchere, since she had heard of her going to London on purpose to assist Sir Stephen.

“I hope you find yourself pretty middlin’, ma’am, and, if ’t isn’t a liberty, that you left Sir Stephen so well as we all wishes un.”

“Thank you, yes, my cousin is very well.”

By this time Betsey had opened the door of the room.

“Miss Hero,” she said, “here’s the lady to Combe come to see you.”

Not knowing of Mrs. Labouchere’s return, Hero thought only of Mrs. Prescott.

“Mrs. Labouchere,” she exclaimed in surprise, “how kind of you!” and then she stopped, not quite knowing in her confusion what else to say.

“I am very glad to find you at home, Miss Carthew; I have been in London with Stephen,” she added, “trying to give him some little help.”

Back rushed the color to Hero's cheeks.

"Has Sir Stephen come back too?" she asked timidly.

"Not yet. He is waiting in town to see the new heir. He will return directly matters are settled. But you must not say 'Sir Stephen' now."

Hero smiled. "I believe," she said, "that he will never be anything but 'Sir Stephen' in Mallett."

"It was so very kind of Captain Carthew to write to my cousin about the way the village people behaved. It seemed to do Stephen more good than anything else; and indeed it has made me feel quite drawn towards them."

"I am very glad of that."

"It rather surprised me too," Katherine continued, "seeing that they had known Sir Leopold Prescott since he was a boy. One would have expected them to have rejoiced with him."

"Leo never cared for Mallett," Hero said, "and they know it. He always seemed to have a sort of contempt for everything that belonged to the place. Poor Leo!"

"Why poor Leo?"

Hero got a little confused.

"Oh, I don't know that I have any reason to pity him, only he has cared for riches so much, and sighed so constantly to be rich, that I wonder now if he will be as happy as he anticipates."

"He will not be a rich man," said Mrs. Labouchere.

"Will he not? But he will be what seems rich to him, and then he will so value being Sir Leopold! He has always longed to be different to the people by whom we are surrounded—perhaps because he really is different. From the time he was a boy he always wished that he could do this and that, and, of course, when he got into the army he was more discontented than before."

"You were engaged to him, were you not?" said Mrs. Labouchere. Then, feeling she had been somewhat abrupt, she added, "You must pardon me if I seem rude; but some one has been speaking of it to me."

Some one! who could it be but Sir Stephen? Did he want to know whether she was now going to marry Leo,

and had he asked his cousin to find out? Hero's heart beat so violently, that she was afraid that Mrs. Labouchere would see, or hear it, before she could manage to answer her.

"There was an unacknowledged engagement between us," she said, "but it was all broken off before anything of this was known."

"Will you tell me why? Don't think I am asking you from curiosity," Katherine said, earnestly.

Hero raised her truthful eyes as she said, "I wanted the engagement, for such I considered it, made known, but Leo did not. He said a great deal about its being dishonorable to tie me down by an engagement, which might not be terminated for years. At the time I believed he had other motives for wishing to be free, but perhaps I wronged him. I cannot tell. You see, to me it seemed impossible that wanting, or having, more money could make any difference, if people really cared for each other. But that was not Leo's idea. He said that poverty killed love, and that if his wife was obliged to wear a shabby bonnet, and live in lodgings, or in a small house, he should be miserable and make her the same."

Katherine smiled.

"Well," she said, "I think I am of his opinion."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Labouchere, because you are different. But suppose you had loved some one who loved you, and that you had the prospect of an income as good as most of your friends, you would not worry and fret because you could not outstrip them all; surely, you would not finally risk the happiness of both, rather than marry, and trust to getting on."

Katherine was silent, and Hero continued—

"When Leo, as it were, gave me up, it might have broken my heart; but in reality, after the first shock was over, it was a relief, for these ceaseless regrets and ambitions no longer made me laugh, as they had done years before. As I grew older they vexed me; they divided us; they made me feel that we were utterly unsuited to each other; so that I found my love for Leo had died, while I thought it had only grown faint and cold."

"Then you are sure that now you do not care for him?"

"Quite sure."

"But does he know this?"

"Yes."

Katherine paused for a moment, then she said—

"For how long has he known this?"

Hero hesitated. Was it betraying a trust to tell her? Surely not. She felt certain that Mrs. Labouchere's object was to satisfy Sir Stephen, and try and secure their happiness.

"I told him yesterday," she said, in a low voice.

"Yesterday!" and as Katherine turned her face to look at her, a shadow seemed to sweep over it, and her lips trembled, as she said—

"Then you have twice refused to be Lady Prescott?"

But no answer came; for Hero, now convinced that Stephen had told Katherine, and that she had come to set all right between them, suddenly slid down beside her, and sobbed—

"Oh, it was nothing to say no this time."

The words seemed to reveal the whole story, and as the tears welled up into Katherine's eyes she said, in her heart—

"After all, this girl is worthy to be Stephen's wife."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“POOR YOUNG MAN!”

VERY slowly did Katherine Labouchère retrace her steps back to Combe, going over, as she went, the days of her life. Past sorrows had taught her endurance, so that neither in face nor manner did she betray the sharp conflict which she had so recently gone through.

She found that Mrs. Prescott was resting, and not wishing to disturb her, she went at once to her own room, and sat down before her desk, having promised her aunt that she would that day write to Stephen. To do so now was a task; but her task had to be fulfilled, because Stephen was anxious to know whether his mother had seen Miss Despard. So, after a little consideration, she began:—

“DEAR STEPHEN,—I know you will like to hear that Miss Despard called yesterday, and by her unaffected sympathy with aunt, and her simply expressed feeling for you, she really did us both a great deal of good.

“This morning she sent a note, saying that her nephew, as she still calls him, much regretted being obliged to leave without calling, but that immediately he returned to Mallett, his first visit would be here. My own opinion is that all this is the old lady’s invention, and that he has no thought of coming back again. I hear that he is dreadfully vexed at the behavior of the people in the village, with whom, it seems, he has never been a favorite. By the way, I have got quite into their good graces, and the amount of attention I received when I landed would have certainly made you jealous. Indeed, they were all so glad to see me, and so eager in their inquiries after Sir Stephen, as they still call you, that I forgave them half their roughness,

and tried to look as if I thoroughly enjoyed the smell of their fish, likewise the tar, which just now they seem to be spreading over every available space.

"The packet I enclose is the one you asked aunt for. A note inside, from her, gives the necessary explanations. I need not say, be prepared to find her looking ill, as these recent events have, as you may suppose, greatly tried her. She says if you will lend her to me, and I know you will do so, that, when I leave here, she will return with me, and we will do a little quiet visiting together.

"Captain Carthew takes all trouble for this place off our hands. He and your new man Joe seem at work from morning until night. When I remonstrate, he says he is only getting matters a little ship-shape, hoping, I think, to agreeably surprise you. You seem to have completely won everybody here into really caring for you, and from the moment your loss was known, aunt says the house was besieged with inquiries, and notes and messages. Well, no matter where one may be, it is pleasant to be cared for and looked up to, and I intend next spring to stay in Cumberland for some time. I begin to think that I ought to identify myself more with the interests of those with whom I am connected, and there is very much to be done there. I wonder if I could persuade Captain Carthew to come and help me. I think I might, for you have no idea what wonderful friends we are.

"Now, I have told you all I have to tell. After you have had your meeting with Sir Leopold, I suppose we may expect you any day. Poor young man! I fear there is a great disappointment in store for him. He evidently anticipates being rich, and is a greater worshipper of Mammon than I took him for. However, I can forgive him.

"Aunt has most probably sent her messages in her note. She is trying to get a little rest, so I will not now disturb her, but only say good-by from

Your loving cousin,
KATHERINE."

She laid down her pen, and sat apparently lost in thought

—the shadows from which seemed gradually to fall across her face, leaving behind them no pleasant index to her memories.

Rising at length, with a feeling and gesture of intolerable impatience, she went to the window, and leaning against it, stood looking out.

Stephen had chosen the room because of its grand prospect, which he thought she would appreciate. Its windows looked out upon a great span of water, with Combe Point on one side, and on the other the rugged coast of Winkle, ending in the Nozzle Rock, towering up black and barren.

For some minutes Katherine saw nothing of this. Her eyes were closed upon all save the bitter darkness and anger which raged within her. Suddenly her attention was arrested by the sun slowly sinking down into the sea, bidding farewell to the toilsome, busy world. How strangely beautiful everything looked around! The sky, with its wondrous red lights spread over sea, and rock, and hill, so still, and quiet, and peaceful! The scene touched her as it had never done before—over her hot spirit it came sweeping like the evening breeze of a summer's day. Lower and lower dipped the sun—another few minutes and it would be gone—gone like the hopes of her life—a life which she had striven to shape, and now had to blot out, and turn her back upon. A weary sigh rose to her lips, a great longing for rest came into her heart, a mist gathered before her eyes, tears blinded her, and sinking down, she hid her face, while she listened to that better part of her nature already cropping up through chastisements and disappointments.

When she rose, she hesitated no longer. Returning to her letter, she added this postscript:—

“Stephen, I have been to see Hero Carthew. Yesterday Sir Leopold Prescott asked her to marry him, but she refused to do so.”

CHAPTER XL.

NOT A BIT HAPPIER !

BEFORE Mrs. Labouchere's letter reached Stephen Prescott the dreaded interview with his cousin was over, and had gone off with much less awkwardness than either of them had anticipated. Without doubt, this was in great measure due to Mr. Holmes, who always expressed immense satisfaction that the first handling of the young fellow had fallen to his share, and, therefore, the pleasure of disabusing his mind of certain errors into which his elation had perhaps not unnaturally led him. "A little inclined to ride the high horse," the old gentleman would say, nodding his head; "but, by putting him in possession of a few facts, I soon got him on his feet again, and then the whole matter was reversed, and he saw plainly enough that if any one was a debtor it was himself, not Stephen Prescott, who will, in all probability, be straightened for years to come."

Happily, during this interview Leo's ready tact and pleasant manner served him very well, so that, though both Stephen and he knew they should never be intimate friends, they parted with a sufficient show of cordiality to free their future transactions from any unnecessary unpleasantness.

Leo was doomed to have a large proportion of bitterness mixed with the gifts which Fortune had flung at him; for, after reckoning himself the possessor of an income, which he swelled in proportion to the wants his imagination created, it was no small come-down to find the estate was his, only inasmuch as he, instead of Sir Stephen, was now the person compelled to sell it, and that when it was sold, and all due from it paid, his income would be as inadequate for the necessaries of Sir Leopold Prescott, as his pay had been for the wants of Leo Despard.

Mr. Holmes little thought that he left an arrow rankling in his client's heart, by telling him that he should not be at all surprised if Mrs. Prescott's niece, Mrs. Labouchere, became the purchaser of Pamphillon.

"She is very fond of the place," he said, "and money would not be any object to her, as she cannot spend the half of her income."

Leo did not answer; for Katherine's name brought a greater degree of vexed shame to him than anything else. In the first hours of his elation, while following the natural bent of his own desires, he cared nothing for any one's opinion, whether good or bad. Let Mrs. Labouchere or Mrs. Prescott think what they liked—if it pleased him to marry Hero Carthew, Hero Carthew he should marry. Now all this was altered. Now he dwelt in unpleasant minuteness on what these same people might say, and do, before the society in which they would most probably mix together. With his sinking fortunes common-sense began to reassert itself in his mind, telling him there was much to his advantage which these new relations could say, and much which they could leave unsaid.

With the exception of a week's visit to a friend some years before, since Leo was a child he had never been in London, and the feeling of loneliness and isolation, which most feel in a strange city, was entirely new to him. Hitherto, wherever he had gone, he had carried his companions with him. Here, without a person to speak to whom he knew, or who knew him, he felt oppressed and dull, so that it was a positive boon when he accidentally stumbled on a homely young fellow, upon whom, when quartered in the same town, he had been prone to turn a somewhat cold shoulder.

"By Jove!" exclaimed his acquaintance, after he had heard Leo's story, "you are a fortunate fellow. Here, I say, don't you feel awfully jolly?"

"Not particularly," and Leo gave a weary yawn. "Oh," he added, "a man has always something to bother him; besides which, position and money don't make one a bit happier. I could have told you that long ago."

"Ah, but you didn't!" laughed his friend. "You used to be always wishing somebody would die, and leave you a lot of tin."

"Well, I wish that still; for I can assure you that I have not got a quarter of the income I shall need."

Whereupon, when the two parted, one told those he met that Despard wasn't half what he used to be. Nothing now seemed to please or amuse him, and as for airs, why, he pooh-poohed his title and his money as if he was a regular swell, who had been brought up to it.

While Leo returned to his hotel, and, for sheer lack of knowing what to do with his time, wrote a letter to Aunt Lydia, asking her to send him back a long account of herself, Mallett, and everybody belonging to it.

As long as she lived, Aunt Lydia held by this letter, as a proof that, however Leo might have changed afterwards, his heart when he left Mallett was in the right place. As soon as she could, she set off to show the precious document to Hero, who, after a time, gradually told her what had happened, and that she and Leo had said good-by to each other forever.

"It is all for the best, Aunt Lydia," Hero said soothingly, "and Leo will very soon see that himself. We are so utterly unsuited to each other. You have no idea how differently we look upon things already."

But Aunt Lydia was deaf to all arguments or consolations. She only sat wiping her eyes, shaking her head over her shattered hopes, and murmuring,—

"Oh, Hero; how could you? how could you? I looked upon you being the making of Leo. Now he won't care ever to set foot in Mallett again."

"If Leo does not come to Mallett for you, Aunt Lydia, he would not have listened to any inducement from me; but we have no right to judge him so unfairly, as to suppose he will cease to remember you, who have been a mother to him—and Uncle Tony, and all he did for him. Come, come, Aunt Lydia! why you'd be very angry if any one else hinted at such a thing."

But Aunt Lydia could not be cheered, and, after a time,

she took leave of Hero, and went back to her little home with a heart full of regrets and disappointment.

Hero walked with her as far as the lane, where they met Betsey, and in her company she returned again to the house.

"Poor dear old soul!" Hero said, by way of explanation, "she is so full of trouble at parting with—her nephew."

"Well, 'tis one doin' the work o' all," replied Betsey, sarcastically; "for he's a got nobody else to mourn his loss, that's one thing."

"Oh! I don't know that," said Hero. "Many people like him exceedingly. Why, I am sure, at one time he used to be a great favorite with you, Betsey."

"No, never, Miss Hero. I used to put up with un; for what else was there to do, when you'd a set your mind on un; but, as for a favorite!—well, he might ha' bin lyin' in a gutter, decked in diamonds, afore I'd ha' picked un out; but one's loathin' has a got nothin' to do with another's likin'. A toad's a diamond in a duck's eye."

"Ah, well!" said Hero, "we need not quarrel about him now, Betsey; he has gone his way, and I have gone mine. That seems the fate of me and my lovers!" she added, with a sigh.

"Now, don't 'ee say that, Miss Hero," replied Betsey, softened by the slightest shadow on her darling's face; "there's one who'll never go by no other road but that you fixes upon, mark my words if he do. And there's no cause for me to ax why everything I takes in my hand falls abroad, and every blessed night I'm a dreamin' o' funerals and coffins till I'm so moody-hearted, that I could bust out cryin' if anybody was but to hold up their little finger."

"You stupid old thing to pay heed to such nonsense," Hero said, though her heart made her listen to every promise that things would soon be set right again; and a few minutes after, as she stood in the kitchen, listening to some more of Betsey's country superstitions, she suddenly put her arms round her, and, looking into her honest old face, she said—

"Betsey, you don't think it's likely that he has forgotten me, do you?"

"Forgotten 'ee, Miss Hero! I'd defy un to do that, not if he was to live to be up a hunderd. You've got they babbyfied ways as twines you round anybody's heart afore they knows it, and once in, gettin' of 'ee out's like pickin' rinkles with a pin. You think you've got 'em, when they'm only broked in two, and the best half's left behind to torment 'ee with longin's after it."

Hero gave her a squeeze as she said with a happy little laugh, "If I were to get married, Betsey, you'd have to marry Joe."

"Ah, now the stockin's on the other leg. Not, mind, but there's wus than Joe Bunce in the world, there now! though I should be sorry for un to think I said so. But there's maister," she added, "what forever's to become o' he if all hands deserts? I can't abide laws myself, but if you was married would 'ee mind a mother-law here, Miss Hero?"

"A mother-in-law!"

"Well, I was a thinkin' of Sir Stephen's cousin, Mrs. — you know who. Her first, by all accounts, was old enough to be her father, so why not your pa. 'Twould be a nail in Miss Jane Stevens's coffin, though, let the day come when it might."

"Oh, Betsey, what a funny old thing you are!" laughed Hero. "The bare idea of Mrs. Labouchere giving papa a thought. I must tell Sir Stephen; how it will amuse him."

"Ah, well, he may laugh, but he'll tell 'ee so well as I, that her wouldn't be the first by scores, who'd rather scheme to please an old man than louser for a young one's pleasure."

"Papa said to-day that he should not be at all surprised if Sir Stephen came to-morrow."

"If so, then 'twas he was the stranger in my tay this morning, I shouldn't wonder neither. Joe says he's reg'lar mobbed, when he goes to Quay, by one and another wantin' to find out when Sir Stephen's looked for up to house. They won't credit that he's comin' back unbeknownst and without a word; they'm still all for givin' un a welcome."

"Yes, but papa thinks it would be better not to do so."

"Well, I don't see that," said Betsey, sharing in the disappointment of the village people, that they were not to

give an outward demonstration of their feelings in the shape of flags and garlands.

It was the fear of this reception, which prevented Stephen Prescott announcing, as he would otherwise have done, the day of his return. "If I tell them at home," he thought, "my mother is sure to order some preparations to be made, and in some way or other it may ooze out," so he determined to start without a word of notice, and it therefore happened, that at the time Hero and Betsey were discussing the probabilities of his return, he was already at Dockmouth, only waiting to transact some business with Mr. Truscott, before he got into a boat and went on to Mallett. Several of the persons who recognized him were surprised to see him look so cheerful and pleased at getting back. They little knew what a relief this reaching home seemed to him ; for, having faced his troubles (and few ever knew or guessed what it had cost him to do so), his one desire now was to turn his back upon the past, and begin the new life which lay before him ; and with this desire came a thought which set his heart beating, his blood tingling, and filled him with a desperate longing to tell the man to land him at Sharrows. But no, it might give pain to his mother if he went anywhere before going to her, so he curbed his impatience ; and, when Sharrows came in sight, he only sat straining his eyes to see if he could discern any speck, which he might reasonably suppose to be Hero.

Four o'clock was one of the hours, when the Hard at Mallett was comparatively free from its usual company, so that not more than half a dozen men drew near to see who the *Fanny of Dockmouth* was bringing, and great was the excitement manifested when her fare was found to be no other than Sir Stephen. A sudden beaming satisfaction in their weather-beaten faces was so expressive, and so far beyond anything words could convey, that Stephen anticipated them by calling out cheerily,—

"Well, my men, I'm glad to see you and old Mallett again."

"Thank'ee, sir, we'm main glad to have 'ee back, I can tell 'ee," answered one, while several voices chimed, "Iss,

and if we'd only know'd yer honor was comin', you would ha' had all Mallett out to tell 'ee so too, sir."

"I'm quite sure of that, but say from me, that I was in such a hurry to get back that I could not stop to send word," and with a pleasant nod, and saying something about seeing them to-morrow, he made a little scrambling detour so as to avoid the village street.

Delighted to be the bearers of such welcome news, the little knot strolled into Mother Tapson's for the double pleasure of telling those, who might be there assembled, and drinking health and prosperity to Sir Stephen.

"Which I'll stand treat, call for what you may," exclaimed that enthusiastic lady in the exuberance of her joy. "All I axes is, tell me what his looks is like, and every blessed word he give mouth speech to."

"He spoke up as cheerful as ever," said one of the men, "didn't he, Tom?" To which Tom assented, while Ned Briggs, who, from having brought him in the *Fanny*, felt he was in a position to speak authoritatively, added—

"And from what I seed I don't believe not a half o' what I've a heard."

"How do 'ee mean, mate?" asked the others.

"Why, this, the talk to Dockmouth's bin that 'tain't only the givin' up, but he's got to do the payin' back o' all that he's a spent."

"Tine a by!" exclaimed Mother Tapson contemptuously, "Why, how can they take from un what he arn't a got; whether 'tis hisn or theirs, folks must ate and drink, and ha' garments to their backs."

"Iss, that's true," replied Ned, slowly draining the measure which was being handed round. Then setting it down with an unctuous smack of his lips, he ran his mouth slowly along his jacket sleeve, adding with a sly look round, "There may be punchin o' heads, mates, but there's no rippin o'—" and the conclusion of his sentence was conveyed by the pantomimic movement in which he indulged.

CHAPTER XLI.

HOW ABOUT THIS MARRIAGE?

“MOTHER!”

“Stephen!”

And in another moment the mother's sorrow-stricken head was bowed upon her son's breast, while her pale, trembling lips tried to shape words of sorrow and self-reproach—words to which her son refused to listen. Bidding her hush them, he told her it was she who had taught him how to bear reverses and to endure disappointments. Then stretching out his hand towards Katherine, who at a little distance stood watching them, he drew her to them, saying that he had yet much to love and live for.

“Ah, Stephen! I can never, never, tell you all Katherine has been to me,” exclaimed Mrs. Prescott, her tears gushing forth afresh. “If it had not been for her, what should I have done, what would have become of me?”

“My dear mother, what would have become of either of us?” Stephen answered, filled with fears at his mother's anguish. “Come,” he added cheerfully, “let us try at least for the present to put away this unfortunate subject. You will make the effort for my sake, I know. I have been terribly tried during the few past weeks, and coming home is the first gleam of anything approaching to sunshine.”

This appeal was the surest inducement to self-control, and it was not long before Mrs. Prescott was calm enough, to listen with apparent interest to the details of her son's movements during his absence—whom he had seen, the various people who had called upon him, and the several proofs of kindness he had received.

"And one instance more particularly," he said, "for the offer came from a man who was a comparative stranger to me, Lord Fareham," and he turned to Katherine, "who has just been appointed to Vienna, came and asked if I thought there was anything which he could obtain for me. It was not only the thing itself, but the way in which it was done. I had no idea that he was such a nice fellow."

"I have always liked Lord Fareham," Katherine said, quietly, while if a little sigh which rose to Mrs. Prescott's lips had spoken, it would have said, "Farewell to hopes and fears, alike past and gone."

"And now about Mallett. Which are the victors, Katey, you or the villagers?"

Katherine laughed. "Well," she said, "perhaps there is a little on both sides."

"I shall never forget their devotion," said Mrs. Prescott, "and a delicacy of feeling that I could not have credited such a rough set of people with possessing. I entrusted Captain Carthew to convey to them my thanks and gratitude."

"That was right," said Stephen, heartily pleased. "You could not have found a more fitting ambassador, mother. He has been very busy, has he not?"

"Here he is to answer for himself," said Mrs. Labouchere, as the door opened, and Captain Carthew was announced. Very great was the old gentleman's astonishment to find that Stephen Prescott had arrived a full hour before, and that he had not known of it.

"Well," he said, "you have sloped in quietly this time. Why, where had all the quay fellows got?"

"I don't know, but I always notice that about four o'clock the Hard seems to be pretty clear, so I managed to land about that time."

The Captain gave a triumphant chuckle.

"It's quite true, my dear madam," he said, turning enthusiastically to Mrs. Prescott. "If he'd been born and bred here, he couldn't know the place better than he does, and that's what the fellows like, for they're uncommonly

cute, are sailor men. They'll see whether you've anything of the little big coat about you in the handling of a knife."

"We were just speaking of you as you came in," said Mrs. Labouchere.

"Yes," said Stephen, "my cousin tells me that you have been working wonders about the place."

The Captain shook his head in denial of this flattery.

"No, no, nothing of the sort, only as my poor old father used to say after he'd been beating to quarters for a day or two, 'What's the use of having a temper if you don't show it?' so there's no use in being left first lieutenant unless you let 'em know it; and as soon as your back was turned, I sent for Joe and old Matthey Simmons, and we regularly overhauled the place. The consequence is now"—and the old man went through a mock salute—"we're ready for a general inspection."

"Come along, then," said Stephen, "and we'll make it. I want to have a little chat with you, and we can manage the two things together."

After leaving the house, some little time was taken up in seeing a fence which had been repaired, and then Stephen asked,—

"Are you going to Sharrows? Then I will walk there with you. Shall I find your daughter at home?"

"Lord bless ye, there's been no getting her under weigh lately," and he gave a perplexed sigh, after which the two walked on in silence. Suddenly, in front of a gate the Captain made a stand.

"There now," he said, flourishing his stick towards a newly made path. "What do you think of that? Wherever there's a gate, leave a gangway; so I set Mr. Joe to work there, and a very nice job he's made of it. Capital fellow, that Joe; wets the other eye a little too often, but a first-rate workman. Puts his back into a thing. That's what I like to see."

"How about his marriage? Has Betsey consented to fix the day yet?"

"Not she, nor never will whilst she's got that youngster

of mine to busnack after. She'd die in a week if she couldn't get at Hero ; God bless her for it."

"But you cannot keep Hero forever."

"Well, no," said the old man, "I suppose not. I began to feel rather shaky, I can tell you, when I found out the course Master Leo was shaping ; but it's all right, though it would cost you your commission to say so to Aunt Lydia, poor old soul.—What do you think of a flagstaff here? It would be uncommonly handy for the Winkle men."

Stephen did not answer, and the Captain turning to see the cause, found his hand suddenly seized by his companion, who said with nervous haste,—

"Captain Carthew, will you give Hero, your daughter, to me?"

"Will I do what?" roared the captain emphatically, the visible astonishment in his face and manner so irresistibly comic, that Stephen could not help smiling as he again proffered his demand.

"I want your consent to my asking Hero to be my wife. She knows that I love her."

"The deuce she does! Why the young monkey," he exclaimed, a sudden light breaking in upon him.

"I asked her to marry me some months ago," interrupted Stephen. "Then she fancied herself bound in a way to somebody else. But now that she is free, I think—that is, I hope—I have a chance."

The Captain's face assumed a comical expression as he said, "Well, I suppose it's time I was laid on the shelf, for you've both stolen a march on me, it seems ;" and then gripping Stephen's hand, he added with a rather quavery attempt at cheerfulness, "However, as I am to be superseded, thank the Lord it's by one after my own heart ; so luck with you, my boy. I believe you're worthy of her, and—I can't say more than that ;" an opinion in which Stephen Prescott evidently shared, for, putting his arm through that of his elected father-in-law, he began telling him the various details which related to his income, prospects, and so forth. This conversation engrossed them

until they reached Sharrows gate, which Stephen held open for the old man to enter.

"Well, no," he said with a laugh, "I think I'll go and see if I can't run foul of one of my old chums."

"Good-by, then, for the present," Stephen said, holding out his hand.

"Good-by, and I hope there'll be no hitch in the block, and that you'll come off with flying colors. As a mess-mate of mine used to say (poor Tommy Holmes, and no bad judge either, though he made a mess of it at last, and married a woman old enough to be his grandmother), 'You may circumnavigate the world and circumvent the devil, before you'll calculate the exact course a woman's steering in.'"

Stephen looked as if he felt tolerably certain of the woman he was going to, and too impatient to listen to further advice, he hurried down the narrow path on to the flat, and catching sight of a figure as he passed the windows, without knocking he entered the house, and pushing open the door of the room, found himself in the presence of Hero. Suddenly he seemed to realize the joy which lay so close to him, and this gave the quiver to his voice as he almost whispered, "Hero!"

A startled look, a low cry, as she sprang up, a tremor running through her lithe form, these gave her answer; then as she turned her face to his, she caught the soft contagion of his eyes. "Stephen," she tried to say; but before the sound had left her lips she was folded in his arms, while her heart spoke to his in a language known but to those who love and are beloved again.

* * * * *

"I would now that I had all, and much more than I have lost to offer you," he said, framing her dear, upturned face, as some days after, all settled and the marriage day fixed, the two lingered together, looking at the Sharrows Sands, on the very place where once they had endured such misery. "I could sometimes sigh after it, Hero, only you do not seem to care."

“I do not,” she said, with her old, bright smile, and merry laugh. “There is but one thing in the world I care for.”

“And that?”

“Is to be your wife.”

THE END.

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