

Braddon Mary Elizabeth

Mount Royal: A Novel.

Volume 1 of 3



Mary Braddon
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Braddon M. E. Mary Elizabeth Mount Royal: A Novel. Volume 1 of 3

CHAPTER I

THE DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE

"And he was a widower," said Christabel.

She was listening to an oft-told tale, kneeling in the firelight, at her aunt's knee, the ruddy glow tenderly touching her fair soft hair and fairer forehead, her big blue eyes lifted lovingly to Mrs. Tregonell's face.

"And he was a widower, Aunt Diana," she repeated, with an expression of distaste, as if something had set her teeth on edge. "I cannot help wondering that you could care for a widower – a man who had begun life by caring for somebody else."

"Do you suppose any one desperately in love ever thinks of the past?" asked another voice out of the twilight. "Those infatuated creatures called lovers are too happy and contented with the rapture of the present."

"One would think you had tremendous experience, Jessie, by

the way you lay down the law," said Christabel, laughing. "But I want to know what Auntie has to say about falling in love with a widower."

"If you had ever seen him and known him, I don't think you would wonder at my liking him," answered Mrs. Tregonell, lying back in her armchair, and talking of the story of her life in a placid way, as if it were the plot of a novel, so thoroughly does time smooth the rough edge of grief. "When he came to my father's house, his young wife had been dead just two years – she died three days after the birth of her first child – and Captain Hamleigh was very sad and grave, and seemed to take very little pleasure in life. It was in the shooting season, and the other men were out upon the hills all day."

"Murdering innocent birds," interjected Christabel. "How I hate them for it!"

"Captain Hamleigh hung about the house, not seeming to know very well what to do with himself, so your mother and I took pity upon him, and tried to amuse him, which effort resulted in his amusing us, for he was ever so much cleverer than we were. He was so kind and sympathetic. We had just founded a Dorcas Society, and we were muddling hopelessly in an endeavour to make good sensible rules, so that we should do nothing to lessen the independent feeling of our people – and he came to our rescue, and took the whole thing in hand, and seemed to understand it all as thoroughly as if he had been establishing Dorcas Societies all his life. My father said it was

because the Captain had been sixth wrangler, and that it was the higher mathematics which made him so clever at making rules. But Clara and I said it was his kind heart that made him so quick at understanding how to help the poor without humiliating them."

"It was very nice of him," said Christabel, who had heard the story a hundred times before, but who was never weary of it, and had a special reason for being interested this afternoon. "And so he stayed a long time at my grandfather's, and you fell in love with him?"

"I began by being sorry for him," replied Mrs. Tregonell. "He told us all about his young wife – how happy they had been – how their one year of wedded life seemed to him like a lovely dream. They had only been engaged three months; he had known her less than a year and a half altogether; had come home from India; had seen her at a friend's house, fallen in love with her, married her, and lost her within those eighteen months. 'Everything smiled upon us,' he said. 'I ought to have remembered Polycrates and his ring.'"

"He must have been rather a doleful person," said Christabel, who had all the exacting ideas of early youth in relation to love and lovers. "A widower of that kind ought to perform suttee, and make an end of the business, rather than go about the world prosing to nice girls. I wonder more and more that you could have cared for him." And then, seeing her aunt's eyes shining with unshed tears, the girl laid her sunny head upon the matronly shoulder, and murmured tenderly, "Forgive me for

teasing you, dear, I am only pretending. I love to hear about Captain Hamleigh; and I am not very much surprised that you ended by loving him – or that he soon forgot his brief dream of bliss with the other young lady, and fell desperately in love with you."

"It was not till after Christmas that we were engaged," continued Mrs. Tregonell, looking dreamily at the fire. "My father was delighted – so was my sister Clara – your dear mother. Everything went pleasantly; our lives seemed all sunshine. I ought to have remembered Polycrates, for I knew Schiller's ballad about him by heart. But I could think of nothing beyond that perfect all-sufficing happiness. We were not to be married till late in the autumn, when it would be three years since his wife's death. It was my father's wish that I should not be married till after my nineteenth birthday, which would not be till September. I was so happy in my engagement, so confident in my lover's fidelity, that I was more than content to wait. So all that spring he stayed at Penlee. Our mild climate had improved his health, which was not at all good when he came to us – indeed he had retired from the service before his marriage, chiefly on account of weak health. But he spoke so lightly and confidently about himself in this matter, that it had never entered into my head to feel any serious alarm about him, till early in May, when he and Clara and I were caught in a drenching rainstorm during a mountaineering expedition on Rough Tor, and then had to walk four or five miles in the rain before we came to the inn where the

carriage was to wait for us. Clara and I, who were always about in all weathers, were very little worse for the wet walk and the long drive home in damp clothes. But George was seriously ill for three weeks with cough and low fever; and it was at this time that our family doctor told my father that he would not give much for his future son-in-law's life. There was a marked tendency to lung complaint, he said; Captain Hamleigh had confessed that several members of his family had died of consumption. My father told me this – urged me to avoid a marriage which must end in misery to me, and was deeply grieved when I declared that no such consideration would induce me to break my engagement, and to grieve the man I loved. If it were needful that our marriage should be delayed, I was contented to submit to any delay; but nothing could loosen the tie between me and my dear love."

Aunt and niece were both crying now. However familiar the story might be, they always wept a little at this point.

"George never knew one word of this conversation between my father and me – he never suspected our fears – but from that hour my happiness was gone. My life was one perpetual dread – one ceaseless struggle to hide all anxieties and fears under a smile. George rallied, and seemed to grow strong again – was full of energy and high spirits, and I had to pretend to think him as thoroughly recovered as he fancied himself. But by this time I had grown sadly wise. I had questioned our doctor – had looked into medical books – and I knew every sad sign and token of decay. I knew what the flushed cheek and the brilliant

eye, the damp cold hand, and the short cough meant. I knew that the hand of death was on him whom I loved more than all the world besides. There was no need for the postponement of our marriage. In the long bright days of August he seemed wonderfully well – as well as he had been before the attack in May. I was almost happy; for, in spite of what the doctor had told me, I began to hope! but early in September, while the dressmakers were in the house making my wedding clothes, the end came suddenly, unexpectedly, with only a few hours' warning. Oh, Christabel! I cannot speak of that day!"

"No, darling, you shall not, you must not," cried Christabel, showering kisses on her aunt's pale cheek.

"And yet you always lead her on to talk about Captain Hamleigh," said the sensible voice out of the shadow. "Isn't that just a little inconsistent of our sweet Belle?"

"Don't call me your 'sweet Belle' – as if I were a baby," exclaimed the girl. "I know I am inconsistent – I was born foolish, and no one has ever taken the trouble to cure me of my folly. And now, Auntie dear, tell me about Captain Hamleigh's son – the boy who is coming here to-morrow."

"I have not seen him since he was at Eton. The Squire drove me down on a Fourth of June to see him."

"It was very good of Uncle Tregonell."

"The Squire was always good," replied Mrs. Tregonell, with a dignified air. Christabel's only remembrance of her uncle was of a large loud man, who blustered and scolded a good deal,

and frequently contrived, perhaps, without meaning it, to make everybody in the house uncomfortable; so she reflected inwardly upon that blessed dispensation which, however poorly wives may think of living husbands, provides that every widow should consider her departed spouse completely admirable.

"And was he a nice boy in those days?" asked Christabel, keenly interested.

"He was a handsome gentlemanlike lad – very intellectual looking; but I was grieved to see that he looked delicate, like his father; and his dame told me that he generally had a winter cough."

"Who took care of him in those days?"

"His maternal aunt – a baronet's wife, with a handsome house in Eaton Square. All his mother's people were well placed in life."

"Poor boy! hard to have neither father nor mother. It was twelve years ago when you spent that season in London with the Squire," said Christabel, calculating profoundly with the aid of her finger tips; "and Angus Hamleigh was then sixteen, which makes him now eight-and-twenty – dreadfully old. And since then he has been at Oxford – and he got the Newdigate – what is the Newdigate? – and he did not hunt, or drive tandem, or have rats in his rooms, or paint the doors vermilion – like – like the general run of young men," said Christabel, reddening, and hurrying on confusedly; "and he was altogether rather a superior person at the university."

"He had not your cousin Leonard's high spirits and powerful

physique," said Mrs. Tregonell, as if she were ever so slightly offended. "Young men's tastes are so different."

"Yes," sighed Christabel, "it's lucky they are, is it not? It wouldn't do for them *all* to keep rats in their rooms, would it? The poor old colleges would smell so dreadful. Well," with another sigh, "it is just three weeks since Angus Hamleigh accepted your invitation to come here to stay, and I have been expiring of curiosity ever since. If he keeps me expiring much longer I shall be dead before he comes. And I have a dreadful foreboding that, when he does appear, I shall detest him."

"No fear of that," said Miss Bridgeman, the owner of the voice that issued now and again from the covert of a deep armchair on the other side of the fireplace.

"Why not, Mistress Oracle?" asked Christabel.

"Because, as Mr. Hamleigh is accomplished and good-looking, and as you see very few young men of any kind, and none that are particularly attractive, the odds are fifty to one that you will fall in love with him."

"I am not that kind of person," protested Christabel, drawing up her long full throat, a perfect throat, and one of the girl's chief beauties.

"I hope not," said Mrs. Tregonell; "I trust that Belle has better sense than to fall in love with a young man, just because he happens to come to stay in the house."

Christabel was on the point of exclaiming, "Why, Auntie, you did it;" but caught herself up sharply, and cried out instead, with

an air of settling the question for ever.

"My dear Jessie, he is eight-and-twenty. Just ten years older than I am."

"Of course – he's ever so much too old for her. A *blasé* man of the world," said Mrs. Tregonell. "I should be deeply sorry to see my darling marry a man of that age – and with such antecedents. I should like her to marry a young man not above two or three years her senior."

"And fond of rats," said Jessie Bridgeman to herself, for she had a shrewd idea that she knew the young man whose image filled Mrs. Tregonell's mind as she spoke.

All these words were spoken in a goodly oak-panelled room in the Manor House known as Mount Royal, on the slope of a bosky hill about a mile and a half from the little town of Boscastle, on the north coast of Cornwall. It was an easy matter, according to the Heralds' Office, to show that Mount Royal had belonged to the Tregonells in the days of the Norman kings; for the Tregonells traced their descent, by a female branch, from the ancient baronial family of Botterell or Bottreaux, who once held a kind of Court in their castle on Mount Royal, had their dungeons and their prisoners, and, in the words of Carew, "exercised some large jurisdiction." Of the ancient castle hardly a stone remained; but the house in which Mrs. Tregonell lived was as old as the reign of James the First, and had all the rich and quaint beauty of that delightful period in architecture. Nor was there any prettier room at Mount Royal than this spacious oak-panelled parlour,

with curious nooks and cupboards, a recessed fireplace, or "cosy-corner," with a small window on each side of the chimney-breast, and one particular alcove placed at an angle of the house, overlooking one of the most glorious views in England. It might be hyperbole perhaps to call those Cornish hills mountains, yet assuredly it was a mountain landscape over which the eye roved as it looked from the windows of Mount Royal; for those wide sweeps of hill side, those deep clefts and gorges, and heathery slopes, on which the dark red cattle grazed in silent peacefulness, and the rocky bed of the narrow river that went rushing through the deep valley, had all the grandeur of the Scottish Highlands, all the pastoral beauty of Switzerland. And away to the right, beyond the wild and indented coast-line, that horned coast which is said to have given its name to Cornwall – Cornu-Wales – stretched the Atlantic.

The room had that quaint charm peculiar to rooms occupied by many generations, and upon which each age as it went by has left its mark. It was a room full of anachronisms. There was some of the good old Jacobean furniture left in it, while spindle-legged Chippendale tables and luxurious nineteenth-century chairs and sofas agreeably contrasted with those heavy oak cabinets and corner cupboards. Here an old Indian screen or a china monster suggested a fashionable auction room, filled with ladies who wore patches and played ombre, and squabbled for ideal ugliness in Oriental pottery; there a delicately carved cherry-wood *prie-dieu*, with claw feet, recalled the earlier beauties of the Stuart

Court. Time had faded the stamped velvet curtains to that neutral withered-leaf hue which painters love in a background, and against which bright yellow chrysanthemums and white asters in dark red and blue Japanese bowls, seen dimly in the fitful fire-glow, made patches of light and colour.

The girl kneeling by the matron's chair, looking dreamily into the fire, was even fairer than her surroundings. She was thoroughly English in her beauty, features not altogether perfect, but complexion of that dazzling fairness and wild-rose bloom which is in itself enough for loveliness; a complexion so delicate as to betray every feeling of the sensitive mind, and to vary with every shade of emotion. Her eyes were blue, clear as summer skies, and with an expression of childlike innocence – that look which tells of a soul whose purity has never been tarnished by the knowledge of evil. That frank clear outlook was natural in a girl brought up as Christabel Courtenay had been at a good woman's knee, shut in and sheltered from the rough world, reared in the love and fear of God, shaping every thought of her life by the teaching of the Gospel.

She had been an orphan at nine years old, and had parted for ever from mother and father before her fifth birthday, Mrs. Courtenay leaving her only child in her sister's care, and going out to India to join her husband, one of the Sudder Judges. Husband and wife died of cholera in the fourth year of Mrs. Courtenay's residence at Calcutta, leaving Christabel in her aunt's care.

Mr. Courtenay was a man of ample means, and his

wife, daughter and co-heiress with Mrs. Tregonell of Ralph Champernowne, had a handsome dowry, so Christabel might fairly rank as an heiress. On her grandfather's death she inherited half of the Champernowne estate, which was not entailed. But she had hardly ever given a thought to her financial position. She knew that she was a ward in Chancery, and that Mrs. Tregonell was her guardian and adopted mother, that she had always as much money as she wanted, and never experienced the pain of seeing poverty which she could not relieve in some measure from her well-supplied purse. The general opinion in the neighbourhood of Mount Royal was that the Indian Judge had accumulated an immense fortune during his twenty years' labour as a civil servant; but this notion was founded rather upon vague ideas about Warren Hastings and the Pagoda tree, and the supposed inability of any Indian official to refuse a bribe, than on plain facts or personal knowledge.

Mrs. Tregonell had been left a widow at thirty-five years of age, a widow with one son whom she idolized, but who was not a source of peace and happiness. He was open-handed, had no petty vices, and was supposed to possess a noble heart – a fact which Christabel was sometimes inclined to doubt when she saw his delight in the slaughter of birds and beasts, not having in her own nature that sportsman's instinct which can excuse such murder. He was not the kind of lad who would wilfully set his foot upon a worm, but he had no thrill of tenderness or remorseful pity as he looked at the glazing eye, or felt against his

hand the last feeble heart-beats of snipe or woodcock. He was a troublesome boy – fond of inferior company, and loving rather to be first fiddle in the saddle-room than to mind his manners in his mother's pink-and-white panelled saloon – among the best people in the neighbourhood. He was lavish to recklessness in the use of money, and therefore was always furnished with followers and flatterers. His University career had been altogether a failure and a disgrace. He had taken no degree – had made himself notorious for those rough pranks which have not even the merit of being original – the traditional college misdemeanours handed down from generation to generation of undergraduates, and which by their blatant folly incline the outside world to vote for the suppression of Universities and the extinction of the undergraduate race.

His mother had known and suffered all this, yet still loved her boy with a fond excusing love – ever ready to pardon – ever eager to believe that these faults and follies were but the crop of wild oats which must needs precede the ripe and rich harvest of manhood. Such wild youths, she told herself, fatuously, generally make the best men. Leonard would mend his ways before he was five-and-twenty, and would become interested in his estate, and develop into a model Squire, like his admirable father.

That he had no love for scholarship mattered little – a country gentleman, with half a dozen manors to look after, could be but little advantaged by a familiar acquaintance with the integral calculus, or a nice appreciation of the Greek tragedians. When

Leonard Tregonell and the college Dons were mutually disgusted with each other to a point that made any further residence at Oxford impossible, the young man graciously announced his intention of making a tour round the world, for the benefit of his health, somewhat impaired by University dissipations, and the widening of his experience in the agricultural line.

"Farming has been reduced to a science," he told his mother; "I want to see how it works in our colonies. I mean to make a good many reformatations in the management of my farms and the conduct of my tenants when I come home."

At first loth to part with him, very fearful of letting him so far out of her ken, Mrs. Tregonell ultimately allowed herself to be persuaded that sea voyages and knocking about in strange lands would be the making of her son; and there was no sacrifice, no loss of comfort and delight, which she would not have endured for his benefit. She spent many sad hours in prayer, or on her knees before her open Bible; and at last it seemed to her that her friends and neighbours must be right, and that it would be for Leonard's good to go. If he stayed in England she could not hope to keep him always in Cornwall. He could go to London, and, no doubt, London vices would be worse than Oxford vices. Yes, it was good for him to go; she thought of Esau, and how, after a foolish and ill-governed youth, the son who had bartered his father's blessing, yet became an estimable member of society. Why should not her boy flourish as Esau had flourished? but never without the parental blessing. That would be his to the

end. He could not sin beyond her large capacity for pardon: he could not exhaust an inexhaustible love. So Leonard, who had suddenly found that wild Cornish coast, and even the long rollers of the Atlantic contemptibly insignificant as compared with the imagined magnitude of Australian downs, and the grandeurs of Botany Bay, hurried on the preparations for his departure, provided himself with everything expensive in gunnery, fishing-tackle, porpoise-hide thigh-boots, and waterproof gear of every kind, and departed rejoicing in the most admirably appointed Australian steamer. The family doctor, who was one of the many friends in favour of this tour, had strongly recommended the rough-and-tumble life of a sailing-vessel; but Leonard preferred the luxury and swiftness of a steamer, and, suggesting to his mother that a sailing-vessel always took out emigrants, from whom it was more than likely he would catch scarlet-fever or small-pox, instantly brought Mrs. Tregonell to perceive that a steamer which carried no second-class passengers was the only fitting conveyance for her son.

He was gone – and, while the widow grieved in submissive silence, telling herself that it was God's will that she and her son should be parted, and that whatever was good for him should be well for her, Christabel and the rest of the household inwardly rejoiced at his absence. Nobody openly owned to being happier without him; but the knowledge that he was far away brought a sense of relief to every one; even to the old servants, who had been so fond of him in his childhood, when the kitchen and

servants' hall had ever been a happy hunting-ground for him in periods of banishment from the drawing-room.

"It is no good for me to punish him," Mrs. Tregonell had remonstrated, with assumed displeasure; "you all make so much of him."

"Oh, ma'am, he is such a fine, high-spirited boy," the cook would reply on these occasions; "'tesn't possible to be angry with him. He has such a spirit."

"Such a spirit" was only a euphemism for such a temper; and, as years went on, Mr. Tregonell's visits to the kitchen and servants' hall came to be less appreciated by his retainers. He no longer went there to be petted – to run riot in boyish liveliness, upsetting the housemaids' work-boxes, or making toffy under the cook's directions. As he became aware of his own importance, he speedily developed into a juvenile tyrant; he became haughty and overbearing, hectored and swore, befouled the snowy floors and flags with his muddy shooting-boots, made havoc and work wherever he went. The household treated him with unflinching respect, as their late master's son, and their own master, possibly, in the future; but their service was no longer the service of love. His loud strong voice, shouting in the passages and lobbies, scared the maids at their tea. Grooms and stable-boys liked him; for with them he was always familiar, and often friendly. He and they had tastes and occupations in common; but to the women servants and the grave middle-aged butler his presence was a source of discomfort.

Next to her son in Mrs. Tregonell's affection stood her niece Christabel. That her love for the girl who had never given her a moment's pain should be a lesser love than that which she bore to the boy who had seldom given her an hour's unalloyed pleasure was one of the anomalies common in the lives of good women. To love blindly and unreasonably is as natural to a woman as it is to love: and happy she whose passionate soul finds its idol in husband or child, instead of being lured astray by strange lights outside the safe harbour of home. Mrs. Tregonell loved her niece very dearly; but it was with that calm, comfortable affection which mothers are apt to feel for the child who has never given them any trouble. Christabel had been her pupil: all that the girl knew had been learned from Mrs. Tregonell; and, though her education fell far short of the requirements of Girton or Harley Street, there were few girls whose intellectual powers had been more fully awakened, without the taint of pedantry. Christabel loved books, but they were the books her aunt had chosen for her – old-fashioned books for the most part. She loved music, but was no brilliant pianist, for when Mrs. Tregonell, who had taught her carefully up to a certain point, suggested a course of lessons from a German professor at Plymouth, the girl recoiled from the idea of being taught by a stranger.

"If you are satisfied with my playing, Auntie, I am content never to play any better," she said; so the idea of six months' tuition and study at Plymouth, involving residence in that lively port, was abandoned. London was a far-away world, of which

neither aunt nor niece ever thought. That wild northern coast is still two days' journey from the metropolis. Only by herculean labour, in the way of posting across the moor in the grey dawn of morning, can the thing be done in one day; and then scarcely between sunrise and sunset. So Mrs. Tregonell, who loved a life of placid repose, had never been to London since her widowhood, and Christabel had never been there at all. There was an old house in Mayfair, which had belonged to the Tregonells for the last hundred years, and which had cost them a fortune in repairs, but it was either shut up and in the occupation of a caretaker, or let furnished for the season; and no Tregonell had crossed its threshold since the Squire's death. Mrs. Tregonell talked of spending a season in London before Christabel was much older, in order that her niece might be duly presented at Court, and qualified for that place in society which a young lady of good family and ample means might fairly be entitled to hold.

Christabel had no eager desire for the gaities of a London season. She had spent six weeks in Bath, and had enjoyed an occasional fortnight at Plymouth. She had been taken to theatres and concerts, had seen some of the best actors and actresses, heard a good deal of the finest music, and had been duly delighted with all she saw and heard. But she so fondly loved Mount Royal and its surroundings, she was so completely happy in her home life, that she had no desire to change that tranquil existence. She had a vague idea that London balls and parties must be something very dazzling and brilliant, but she

was content to abide her aunt's pleasure and convenience for the time in which she was to know more about metropolitan revelries than was to be gathered from laudatory paragraphs in fashionable newspapers. Youth, with its warm blood and active spirit, is rarely so contented as Christabel was: but then youth is not often placed amidst such harmonious circumstances, so protected from the approach of evil.

Christabel Courtenay may have thought and talked more about Mr. Hamleigh during the two or three days that preceded his arrival than was absolutely necessary, or strictly in accordance with that common-sense which characterized most of her acts and thoughts. She was interested in him upon two grounds – first, because he was the only son of the man her aunt had loved and mourned; secondly, because he was the first stranger who had ever come as a guest to Mount Royal.

Her aunt's visitors were mostly people whose faces she had known ever since she could remember: there were such wide potentialities in the idea of a perfect stranger, who was to be domiciled at the Mount for an indefinite period.

"Suppose we don't like him?" she said, speculatively, to Jessie Bridgeman, Mrs. Tregonell's housekeeper, companion, and factotum, who had lived at Mount Royal for the last six years, coming there a girl of twenty, to make herself generally useful in small girlish ways, and proving herself such a clever manager, so bright, competent, and far-seeing, that she had been gradually entrusted with every household care, from the largest to the most

minute. Miss Bridgeman was neither brilliant nor accomplished, but she had a genius for homely things, and she was admirable as a companion.

The two girls were out on the hills in the early autumn morning – hills that were golden where the sun touched them, purple in the shadow. The heather was fading, the patches of furze-blossom were daily growing rarer. Yet the hill-sides were alive with light and colour, only less lovely than the translucent blues and greens of yonder wide-stretching sea.

"Suppose we should all dislike him?" repeated Christabel, digging the point of her walking-stick into a ferny hillock on the topmost edge of a deep cleft in the hills, on which commanding spot she had just taken her stand, after bounding up the narrow path from the little wooden bridge at the bottom of the glen, almost as quickly and as lightly as if she had been one of the deeply ruddled sheep that spent their lives on those precipitous slopes; "wouldn't it be too dreadful, Jessie?"

"It would be inconvenient," answered Miss Bridgeman, coolly, resting both hands on the horny crook of her sturdy umbrella, and gazing placidly seaward; "but we could cut him."

"Not without offending Auntie. She is sure to like him, for the sake of Auld Lang Syne. Every look and tone of his will recall his father. But *we* may detest him. And if he should like Mount Royal very much, and go on staying there for ever! Auntie asked him for an indefinite period. She showed me her letter. I thought it was rather too widely hospitable, but I did not like to say so."

"I always say what I think," said Jessie Bridgeman, doggedly.

"Of course you do, and go very near being disagreeable in consequence."

Miss Bridgeman's assertion was perfectly correct. A sturdy truthfulness was one of her best qualifications. She did not volunteer unfavourable criticism; but if you asked her opinion upon any subject you got it, without sophistication. It was her rare merit to have lived with Mrs. Tregonell and Christabel Courtenay six years, dependent upon their liking or caprice for all the comforts of her life, without having degenerated into a flatterer.

"I haven't the slightest doubt as to your liking him," said Miss Bridgeman, decisively. "He has spent his life for the most part in cities – and in good society. That I gather from your aunt's account of him. He is sure to be much more interesting and agreeable than the young men who live near here, whose ideas are, for the most part, strictly local. But I very much doubt his liking Mount Royal, for more than one week."

"Jessie," cried Christabel, indignantly, "how can he help liking *this*?" She waved her stick across the autumn landscape, describing a circle which included the gold and bronze hills, the shadowy gorges, the bold headlands curving away to Hartland on one side, to Tintagel on the other – Lundy Island a dim line of dun colour on the horizon.

"No doubt he will think it beautiful – in the abstract. He will rave about it, compare it with the Scottish Highlands – with Wales – with Kerry, declare these Cornish hills the crowning

glory of Britain. But in three days he will begin to detest a place where there is only one post out and in, and where he has to wait till next day for his morning paper."

"What can he want with newspapers; if he is enjoying his life with us? I am sure there are books enough at Mount Royal. He need not expire for want of something to read."

"Do you suppose that books – the best and noblest that ever were written – can make up to a man for the loss of his daily paper? If you do, offer a man Shakespeare when he is looking for the *Daily Telegraph*, or Chaucer when he wants his *Times*, and see what he will say to you. Men don't want to read now-a-days, but to know – to be posted in the very latest movements of their fellow-men all over the universe. Reuter's column is all anybody really cares for in the paper. The leaders and the criticism are only so much padding to fill the sheet. People would be better pleased if there were nothing but telegrams."

"A man who only reads newspapers must be a most vapid companion," said Christabel.

"Hardly, for he must be brim full of facts."

"I abhor facts. Well, if Mr. Hamleigh is that kind of person, I hope he may be tired of the Mount in less than a week."

She was silent and thoughtful as they went home by the monastic churchyard in the hollow, the winding lane, and steep village street. Jessie had a message to carry to one of Mrs. Tregonell's pensioners, who lived in a cottage in the lane; but Christabel, who was generally pleased to show her fair young

face in such abodes, waited outside on this occasion, and stood in a profound reverie, digging the point of her stick into the loose earth of the mossy bank in front of her, and seriously damaging the landscape.

"I hate a man who does not care for books, who does not love our dear English poets," she said to herself. "But I must not say that before Auntie. It would be almost like saying that I hated my cousin Leonard. I hope Mr. Hamleigh will be – just a little different from Leonard. Of course he will, if his life has been spent in cities; but then he may be languid and supercilious, looking upon Jessie and me as inferior creatures; and that would be worse than Leonard's roughness. For we all know what a good heart Leonard has, and how warmly attached he is to us."

Somehow the idea of Leonard's excellent heart and affectionate disposition was not altogether a pleasant one. Christabel shuddered ever so faintly as she stood in the lane thinking of her cousin, who had last been heard of in the Fijis. She banished his image with an effort, and returned to her consideration of that unknown quantity, Angus Hamleigh.

"I am an idiot to be making fancy pictures of him, when at seven o'clock this evening I shall know all about him for good or evil," she said aloud, as Jessie came out of the cottage, which nestled low down in its little garden, with a slate for a doorstep, and a slate standing on end at each side of the door, for boundary line, or ornament.

"All that is to be known of the outside of him," said Jessie,

answering the girl's outspoken thought. "If he is really worth knowing, his mind will need a longer study."

"I think I shall know at the first glance if he is likeable," I replied Christabel; and then, with a tremendous effort, she contrived to talk about other things as they went down the High Street of Boscastle, which, to people accustomed to a level world, is rather trying. With Christabel the hills were only an excuse for flourishing a Swiss walking-stick. The stick was altogether needless for support to that light well-balanced figure. Jessie, who was very small and slim and sure-footed, always carried her stout little umbrella, winter or summer. It was her *vade-mecum*— good against rain, or sun, or mad bulls, or troublesome dogs. She would have scorned the affectation of cane or alpenstock: but the sturdy umbrella was very dear to her.

CHAPTER II

BUT THEN CAME ONE, THE LOVELACE OF HIS DAY

Although Angus Hamleigh came of a good old west country family, he had never been in Cornwall, and he approached that remote part of the country with a curious feeling that he was turning his back upon England and English civilization, and entering a strange wild land where all things would be different. He would meet with a half-barbarous people, perhaps, rough, unkempt, ignorant, brutal, speaking to him in a strange language – such men as inhabited Perthshire and Inverness before civilization travelled northward. He had accepted Mrs. Tregonell's invitation out of kindly feeling for the woman who had loved his father, and who, but for that father's untimely death, might have been to him as a second mother. There was a strong vein of sentiment in his character, which responded to the sentiment betrayed unconsciously in every line of Mrs. Tregonell's letter. His only knowledge of the father he had lost in infancy had come to him from the lips of others, and it pleased him to think that here was one whose memory must be fresher than that of any other friend, in whose mind his father's image must needs be as a living thing. He had all his life cherished a regretful fondness for that unknown father, whose

shadowy picture he had vainly tried to recall among the first faint recollections of babyhood – the dim dreamland of half-awakened consciousness.

He had frankly and promptly accepted Mrs. Tregonell's invitation; yet he felt that in going to immure himself in an old manor house for a fortnight – anything less than a fortnight would have been uncivil – he was dooming himself to ineffable boredom. Beyond that pious pleasure in parental reminiscences, there could be no possible gratification for a man of the world, who was not an ardent sportsman, in such a place as Mount Royal. Mr. Hamleigh's instincts were of the town, towny. His pleasures were all of an intellectual kind. He had never degraded himself by vulgar profligacy, but he liked a life of excitement and variety; he had always lived at high pressure, and among people posted up to the last moment of the world's history – people who drank the very latest pleasure cup which the Spirit of the Age – a Spirit of passing frivolity – had invented, were it only the newest brand of champagne; and who, in their eagerness to gather the roses of life, outstripped old Time himself, and grew old in advance of their age. He had been contemplating a fortnight in Paris, as the first stage in his journey to Monaco, when Mrs. Tregonell's letter altered his plans. This was not the first time she had asked him to Mount Royal, but on previous occasions his engagements had seemed to him too imperative to be foregone, and he had regretfully declined her invitations. But now the flavour of life had grown somewhat vapid for him,

and he was grateful to any one who would turn his thoughts and fancies into a new direction.

"I shall inevitably be bored there," he said to himself, when he had littered the railway carriage with newspapers accumulated on the way, "but I should be bored anywhere else. When a man begins to feel the pressure of the chain upon his leg, it cannot much matter where his walks lead him: the very act of walking is his punishment."

When a man comes to eight-and-twenty years of age – a man who has had very little to do in this life, except take his pleasure – a great weariness and sense of exhaustion is apt to close round him like a pall. The same man will be ever so much fresher in mind, will have ever so much more zest for life, when he comes to be forty – for then he will have entered upon those calmer enjoyments of middle age which may last him till he is eighty. But at eight-and-twenty there is a death-like calmness of feeling. Youth is gone. He has consumed all the first fruits of life – spring and summer, with their wealth of flowers, are over; only the quiet autumn remains for him, with her warm browns and dull greys, and cool, moist breath. The fires upon youth's altars have all died out – youth is dead, and the man who was young only yesterday fancies that he might as well be dead also. What is there left for him? Can there be any charm in this life when the looker-on has grey hair and wrinkles?

Having nothing in life to do except seek his own pleasure and spend his ample income, Angus Hamleigh had naturally taken

the time of life's march *prestissimo*.

He had never paused in his rose-gathering to wonder whether there might not be a few thorns among the flowers, and whether he might not find them – afterwards. And now the blossoms were all withered, and he was beginning to discover the lasting quality of the thorns. They were such thorns as interfered somewhat with the serenity of his days, and he was glad to turn his face westward, away from everybody he knew, or who knew anything about him.

"My character will present itself to Mrs. Tregonell as a blank page," he said to himself; "I wonder what she would think of me if one of my club gossips had enjoyed a quiet evening's talk with her beforehand. A dear friend's analysis of one's character and conduct is always so flattering to both; and I have a pleasant knack of offending my dearest friends!"

Mr. Hamleigh began to look about him a little when the train had left Plymouth. The landscape was wild and romantic, but had none of that stern ruggedness which he expected to behold on the Cornish Border. Deep glens, and wooded dells, with hill-sides steep and broken, but verdant to their topmost crest, and the most wonderful oak coppices that he ever remembered to have seen. Miles upon miles of oak, as it seemed to him, now sinking into the depth of a valley, now mounting to the distant sky line, while from that verdant undulating surface of young wood there stood forth the giants of the grove – wide-spreading oak and towering beech, the mighty growth of many centuries. Between Lidford and Launceston the scenery grew tamer. He

had fancied those deep ravines and wooded heights the prelude to a vast and awful symphony, but Mary Tavy and Lifton showed him only a pastoral landscape, with just so much wood and water as would have served for a Creswick or a Constable, and with none of those grand Salvatoresque effects which he had admired in the country round Tavistock. At Launceston he found Mrs. Tregonell's landau waiting for him, with a pair of powerful chestnuts, and a couple of servants, whose neat brown liveries had nothing of that unsophisticated semi-savagery which Mr. Hamleigh had expected in a place so remote.

"Do you drive that way?" he asked, pointing to the almost perpendicular street.

"Yes, sir," replied the coachman.

"Then I think I'll stroll to the top of the hill while you are putting in my portmanteaux," he said, and ascended the rustic street at a leisurely pace, looking about him as he went.

The thoroughfare which leads from Launceston Station to the ruined castle at the top of the hill is not an imposing promenade. Its architectural features might perhaps be best described like the snakes of Ireland as *nil*— but here and there an old-fashioned lattice with a row of flower-pots, an ancient gable, or a bit of cottage garden hints at the picturesque. Any late additions to the domestic architecture of Launceston favour the unpretending usefulness of Camden Town rather than the aspiring æstheticism of Chelsea or Bedford Park; but to Mr. Hamleigh's eye the rugged old castle keep on the top of the hill made amends.

He was not an ardent archæologist, and he did not turn out of his way to see Launceston Church, which might well have rewarded him for his trouble. He was content to have spared those good-looking chestnuts the labour of dragging him up the steep. Here they came springing up the hill. He took his place in the carriage, pulled the fur rug over his knees, and ensconced himself comfortably in the roomy back seat.

"This is a sybaritish luxury which I was not prepared for," he said to himself. "I'm afraid I shall be rather more bored than I expected. I thought Mrs. Tregonell and her surroundings would at least have the merit of originality. But here is a carriage that must have been built by Peters, and liveries that suggest the sartorial excellence of Conduit Street or Savile Row."

He watched the landscape with a critical eye, prepared for disappointment and disillusion. First a country road between tall ragged hedges and steep banks, a road where every now and then the branches of the trees hung low over the carriage and threatened to knock the coachman's hat off. Then they came out upon the wide waste of moorland, a thousand feet above the sea level, and Mr. Hamleigh, acclimatized to the atmosphere of club-houses, buttoned his overcoat, drew the black fur rug closer about him, and shivered a little as the keen breath of the Atlantic, sweeping over far-reaching tracts of hill and heather, blew round him. Far and wide as his gaze could reach, he saw no sign of human habitation. Was the land utterly forsaken? No; a little farther on they passed a hamlet so insignificant, so

isolated, that it seemed rather as if half a dozen cottages had dropped from the sky than that so lonely a settlement could be the result of deliberate human inclination. Never in Scotland or Ireland had Mr. Hamleigh seen a more barren landscape or a poorer soil; yet those wild wastes of heath, those distant tors were passing beautiful, and the air he breathed was more inspiring and exhilarating than the atmosphere of any vaunted health-resort which he had ever visited.

"I think I might live to middle age if I were to pitch my tent on this Cornish plateau," he thought; "but, then, there are so many things in this life that are worth more than mere length of days."

He asked the names of the hamlets they passed. This lonely church, dedicated to St. David – whence, oh! whence came the congregation – belonged to the parish of Davidstowe; and here there was a holy well; and here a Vicarage; and there – oh! crowning evidence of civilization – a post-office; and there a farmhouse; and that was the end of Davidstowe. A little later they came to cross roads, and the coachman touched his hat, and said, "This is Victoria," as if he were naming a town or settlement of some kind. Mr. Hamleigh looked about him, and beheld a low-roofed cottage, which he assumed to be some kind of public-house, possibly capable of supplying beer and tobacco; but other vestige of human habitation there was none. He leant back in the carriage, looking across the hills, and saying to himself, "Why, Victoria?" Was that unpretentious and somewhat dilapidated hostelry the Victoria Hotel? or the Victoria Arms? or

was Royalty's honoured name given, in an arbitrary manner, to the cross roads and the granite finger-post? He never knew. The coachman said shortly, "Victoria," and as "Victoria" he ever after heard that spot described. And now the journey was all downhill. They drove downward and downward, until Mr. Hamleigh began to feel as if they were travelling towards the centre of the earth – as if they had got altogether below the outer crust of this globe, and must be gradually nearing the unknown gulfs beneath. Yet, by some geographical mystery, when they turned out of the high road and went in at a lodge gate, and drove gently upward along an avenue of elms, in whose rugged tops the rooks were screaming, Mr. Hamleigh found that he was still high above the undulating edges of the cliffs that overtopped the Atlantic, while the great waste of waters lay far below, golden with the last rays of the setting sun.

They drove, by a gentle ascent, to the stone porch of Mount Royal, and here Mrs. Tregonell stood, facing the sunset, with an Indian shawl wrapped round her, waiting for her guest.

"I heard the carriage, Mr. Hamleigh," she said, as Angus alighted; "I hope you do not think me too impatient to see what change twelve years have made in you?"

"I'm afraid they have not been particularly advantageous to me," he answered, lightly, as they shook hands. "How good of you to receive me on the threshold! and what a delightful place you have here! Before I got to Launceston, I began to be afraid that Cornwall was commonplace – and now I am enchanted with

it. Your moors and hills are like fairy-land to me!"

"It is a world of our own, and we are very fond of it," said the widow; "I shall be sorry if ever a railway makes Boscastle open to everybody."

"And what a noble old house!" exclaimed Angus, as he followed his hostess across the oak-panelled hall, with its wide shallow staircase, curiously carved balustrades, and lantern roof. "Are you quite alone here?"

"Oh, no; I have my niece, and a young lady who is a companion to both of us."

Angus Hamleigh shuddered.

Three women! He was to exist for a fortnight in a house with three solitary females. A niece and a companion! The niece, rustic and gawky; the companion sour and frumpish. He began, hurriedly, to cast about in his mind for a convenient friend, to whom he could telegraph to send him a telegram, summoning him back to London on urgent business. He was still meditating this, when the butler opened the door of a spacious room, lined from floor to ceiling with books, and he followed Mrs. Tregonell in, and found himself in the bosom of the family. The simple picture of home-comfort, of restfulness and domestic peace, which met his curious gaze as he entered, pleased him better than anything he had seen of late. Club life – with its too studious indulgence of man's native selfishness and love of ease – fashionable life, with its insatiable craving for that latter-day form of display which calls itself Culture, Art, or Beauty – had

afforded him no vision so enchanting as the wide hearth and high chimney of this sober, book-lined room, with the fair and girlish form kneeling in front of the old dogstove, framed in the glaring light of the fire.

The tea-table had been wheeled near the hearth, and Miss Bridgeman sat before the bright red tea-tray, and old brass kettle, ready to administer to the wants of the traveller, who would be hardly human if he did not thirst for a cup of tea after driving across the moor. Christabel knelt in front of the fire, worshipping, and being worshipped by, a sleek black-and-white sheep-dog, native to the soil, and of a rare intelligence – a creature by no means approaching the Scotch colley in physical beauty, but of a fond and faithful nature, born to be the friend of man. As Christabel rose and turned to greet the stranger, Mr. Hamleigh was agreeably reminded of an old picture – a Lely or a Kneller, perhaps. This was not in any wise the rustic image which had flashed across his mind at the mention of Mrs. Tregonell's niece. He had expected to see a bouncing, countryfied maiden – rosy, buxom, the picture of commonplace health and vigour. The girl he saw was nearer akin to the lily than the rose – tall, slender, dazzlingly fair – not fragile or sickly in anywise – for the erect figure was finely moulded, the swan-like throat was round and full. He was prepared for the florid beauty of a milkmaid, and he found himself face to face with the elegance of an ideal duchess, the picturesque loveliness of an old Venetian portrait.

Christabel's dark brown velvet gown and square point lace

collar, the bright hair falling in shadowy curls over her forehead, and rolled into a loose knot at the back of her head, sinned in no wise against Mr. Hamleigh's notions of good taste. There was a picturesqueness about the style which indicated that Miss Courtenay belonged to that advanced section of womankind which takes its ideas less from modern fashion-plates than from old pictures. So long as her archaism went no further back than Vandyke or Moroni he would admire and approve; but he shuddered at the thought that to-morrow she might burst upon him in a mediæval morning-gown, with high-shouldered sleeves, a ruff, and a satchel. The picturesque idea was good, within limits; but one never knew how far it might go.

There was nothing picturesque about the lady sitting before the tea-tray, who looked up brightly, and gave him a gracious bend of her small neat head, in acknowledgment of Mrs. Tregonell's introduction – "Mr. Hamleigh, Miss Bridgeman!" This was the companion – and the companion was plain: not unpleasantly plain, not in any manner repulsive, but a lady about whose looks there could be hardly any compromise. Her complexion was of a sallow darkness, unrelieved by any glow of colour; her eyes were grey, acute, honest, friendly, but not beautiful; her nose was sharp and pointed – not at all a bad nose; but there was a hardness about nose and mouth and chin, as of features cut out of bone with a very sharp knife. Her teeth were good, and in a lovelier mouth might have been the object of much admiration. Her hair was of that nondescript monotonous brown

which has been unkindly called bottle-green, but it was arranged with admirable neatness, and offended less than many a tangled pate, upon whose locks of spurious gold the owner has wasted much time and money. There was nothing unpardonable in Miss Bridgeman's plainness, as Angus Hamleigh said of her later. Her small figure was neatly made, and her dark-grey gown fitted to perfection.

"I hope you like the little bit of Cornwall that you have seen this afternoon, Mr. Hamleigh," said Christabel, seating herself in a low chair in the shadow of the tall chimney-piece, fenced in by her aunt's larger chair.

"I am enraptured with it! I came here with the desire to be intensely Cornish. I am prepared to believe in witches – warlocks – "

"We have no warlocks," said Christabel. "They belong to the North."

"Well, then, wise women – wicked young men who play football on Sunday, and get themselves turned into granite – rocking stones – magic wells – Druids – and King Arthur. I believe the principal point is to be open to conviction about Arthur. Now, I am prepared to swallow everything – his castle – the river where his crown was found after the fight – was it his crown, by-the-by, or somebody else's? which *he* found – his hair-brushes – his boots – anything you please to show me."

"We will show you his quoit to-morrow, on the road to Tintagel," said Miss Bridgeman. "I don't think you would like to

swallow that actually. He hurled it from Tintagel to Trevalga in one of his sportive moods. We shall be able to give you plenty of amusement if you are a good walker, and are fond of hills."

"I adore them in the abstract, contemplated from one's windows, or in a picture; but there is an incompatibility between the human anatomy and a road set on end, like a ladder, which I have never yet overcome. Apart from the outside question of my legs – which are obvious failures when tested by an angle of forty-five degrees – I'm afraid my internal machinery is not quite so tough as it ought to be for a thorough enjoyment of mountaineering."

Mrs. Tregonell sighed, ever so faintly, in the twilight. She was thinking of her first lover, and how that fragility, which meant early death, had showed itself in his inability to enjoy the moorland walks which were the delight of her girlhood.

"The natural result of bad habits," said Miss Bridgeman, briskly. "How can you expect to be strong or active, when I dare say you have spent the better part of your life in hansom cabs and express trains! I don't mean to be impertinent, but I know that is the general way with gentlemen out of the shooting and hunting season."

"And as I am no sportsman, I am a somewhat exaggerated example of the vice of laziness fostered by congenial circumstances, acting on a lymphatic temperament. If you write books, as I believe most ladies do now-a-days, you should put me into one of them, as an awful warning."

"I don't write books, and, if I did, I would not flatter your vanity by making you my model sinner," retorted Jessie; "but I'll do something better for you, if Christabel will help me. I'll reform you."

"A million thanks for the mere thought! I hope the process will be pleasant."

"I hope so, too. We shall begin by walking you off your legs."

"They are so indifferent as a means of locomotion that I could very well afford to lose them, if you could hold out any hope of my getting a better pair."

"A week hence, if you submit to my treatment, you will be as active as the chamois hunter in 'Manfred.'"

"Enchanting – always provided that you and Miss Courtenay will follow the chase with me."

"Depend upon it, we shall not trust you to take your walks alone, unless you have a pedometer which will bear witness to the distance you have done, and which you will be content to submit to our inspection on your return," replied Jessie, sternly.

"I am afraid you are a terribly severe high priestess of this new form of culture," said Mr. Hamleigh, looking up from his teacup with a lazy smile, "almost as bad as the Dweller on the Threshold, in Bulwer's 'Zanoni.'"

"There is a dweller on the threshold of every science and every admirable mode of life, and his name is Idleness," answered Miss Bridgeman.

"The *vis inertiae*, the force of letting things alone," said Angus;

"yes, that is a tremendous power, nobly exemplified by vestries and boards of works – to say nothing of Cabinets, Bishops, and the High Court of Chancery! I delight in that verse of Scripture, 'Their strength is to sit still.'"

"There shall be very little sitting still for you if you submit yourself to Christabel and me," replied Miss Bridgeman.

"I have never tried the water-cure – the descriptions I have heard from adepts have been too repellent; but I have an idea that this system of yours must be rather worse than hydropathy," said Angus, musingly – evidently very much entertained at the way in which Miss Bridgeman had taken him in hand.

"I was not going to let him pose after Lamartine's *poète mourant*, just because his father died of lung disease," said Jessie, ten minutes afterwards, when the warning gong had sounded, and Mr. Hamleigh had gone to his room to dress for dinner, and the two young women were whispering together before the fire, while Mrs. Tregonell indulged in a placid doze.

"Do you think he is consumptive, like his father?" asked Christabel, with a compassionate look; "he has a very delicate appearance."

"Hollow-cheeked, and prematurely old, like a man who has lived on tobacco and brandy-and-soda, and has spent his nights in club-house card-rooms."

"We have no right to suppose that," said Christabel, "since we know really nothing about him."

"Major Bree told me he has lived a racketty life, and that if he

were not to pull up very soon he would be ruined both in health and fortune."

"What can the Major know about him?" exclaimed Christabel, contemptuously.

This Major Bree was a great friend of Christabel's; but there are times when one's nearest and dearest are too provoking for endurances.

"Major Bree has been buried alive in Cornwall for the last twenty years. He is at least a quarter of a century behind the age," she said, impatiently.

"He spent a fortnight in London the year before last," said Jessie; "it was then that he heard such a bad account of Mr. Hamleigh."

"Did he go about to clubs and places making inquiries, like a private detective?" said Christabel, still contemptuous; "I hate such fetching and carrying!"

"Here he comes to answer for himself," replied Jessie, as the door opened, and a servant announced Major Bree.

Mrs. Tregonell started from her slumbers at the opening of the door, and rose to greet her guest. He was a very frequent visitor, so frequent that he might be said to live at Mount Royal, although his nominal abode was a cottage on the outskirts of Boscastle – a stone cottage on the crest of a steep hill-side, with a delightful little garden, perched, as it were, on the edge of a verdant abyss. He was tall, stout, elderly, grey, and florid – altogether a comfortable-looking man, clean-shaved, save for a thin grey

moustache with the genuine cavalry droop, iron grey eyebrows, which looked like a repetition of the moustache on a somewhat smaller scale, keen grey eyes, a pleasant smile, and a well set-up figure. He dressed well, with a sobriety becoming his years, and was always the pink of neatness. A man welcome everywhere, on account of an inborn pleasantness, which prompted him always to say and do the right thing; but most of all welcome at Mount Royal, as a first cousin of the late Squire's, and Mrs. Tregonell's guide, philosopher, and friend in all matters relating to the outside world, of which, despite his twenty years' hybernation at Boscastle, the widow supposed him to be an acute observer and an infallible judge. Was he not one of the few inhabitants of that western village who took in the *Times* newspaper?

"Well!" exclaimed Major Bree, addressing himself generally to the three ladies, "he has come – what do you think of him?"

"He is painfully like his poor father," said Mrs. Tregonell.

"He has a most interesting face and winning manner, and I'm afraid we shall all get ridiculously fond of him," said Miss Bridgeman, decisively.

Christabel said nothing. She knelt on the hearthrug, playing with Randie, the black-and-white sheep-dog.

"And what have you to say about him, Christabel?" asked the Major.

"Nothing. I have not had time to form an opinion," replied the girl; and then lifting her clear blue eyes to the Major's friendly face, she said, gravely, "but I think, Uncle Oliver, it was very

unkind and unfair of you to prejudice Jessie against him before he came here."

"Unkind! – unfair! Here's a shower of abuse! I prejudice! Oh! I remember. Mrs. Tregonell asked me what people thought of him in London, and I was obliged to acknowledge that his reputation was – well – no better than that of the majority of young men who have more money than common sense. But that was two years ago —*Nous avons changé tout cela!*"

"If he was wicked then, he must be wicked now," said Christabel.

"Wicked is a monstrously strong word!" said the Major. "Besides, that does not follow. A man may have a few wild oats to sow, and yet become a very estimable person afterwards. Miss Bridgeman is tremendously sharp – she'll be able to find out all about Mr. Hamleigh from personal observation before he has been here a week. I defy him to hide his weak points from her."

"What is the use of being plain and insignificant if one has not some advantage over one's superior fellow-creatures?" asked Jessie.

"Miss Bridgeman has too much expression to be plain, and she is far too clever to be insignificant," said Major Bree, with a stately bow. He always put on a stately manner when he addressed himself to Jessie Bridgeman, and treated her in all things with as much respect as if she had been a queen. He explained to Christabel that this was the homage which he paid to the royalty of intellect; but Christabel had a shrewd suspicion that the Major

cherished a secret passion for Miss Bridgeman, as exalted and as hopeless as the love that Chastelard bore for Mary Stuart. He had only a small pittance besides his half-pay, and he had a very poor opinion of his own merits; so it was but natural that, at fifty-five, he should hesitate to offer himself to a young lady of six-and-twenty, of whose sharp tongue he had a wholesome awe.

Mr. Hamleigh came back before much more could be said about him, and a few minutes afterwards they all went in to dinner, and in the brighter lamplight of the dining-room Major Bree and the three ladies had a better opportunity of forming their opinion as to the external graces of their guest.

He was good-looking – that fact even malice could hardly dispute. Not so handsome as the absent Leonard, Mrs. Tregonell told herself complacently; but she was constrained at the same time to acknowledge that her son's broadly moulded features and florid complexion lacked the charm and interest which a woman's eye found in the delicate chiselling and subdued tones of Angus Hamleigh's countenance. His eyes were darkest grey, his complexion was fair and somewhat pallid, his hair brown, with a natural curl which neither fashion nor the barber could altogether suppress. His cheeks were more sunken than they should have been at eight-and-twenty, and the large dark eyes were unnaturally bright. All this the three ladies and Major Bree had ample time for observing, during the leisurely course of dinner. There was no flagging in the conversation, from the beginning to the end of the repast. Mr. Hamleigh was ready

to talk about anything and everything, and his interest in the most trifling local subjects, whether real or assumed, made him a delightful companion. In the drawing-room, after dinner, he proved even more admirable; for he discovered a taste for, and knowledge of, the best music, which delighted Jessie and Christabel, who were both enthusiasts. He had read every book they cared for – and a wide world of books besides – and was able to add to their stock of information upon all their favourite subjects, without the faintest touch of arrogance.

"I don't think you can help liking him, Jessie," said Christabel, as the two girls went upstairs to bed. The younger lingered a little in Miss Bridgeman's room for the discussion of their latest ideas. There was a cheerful fire burning in the large basket grate, for autumn nights were chill upon that wild coast. Christabel assumed her favourite attitude in front of the fire, with her faithful Randie winking and blinking at her and the fire alternately. He was a privileged dog – allowed to sleep on a sheepskin mat in the gallery outside his mistress's door, and to go into her room every morning, in company with the maid who carried her early cup of tea; when, after the exchange of a few remarks, in baby language on her part, and expressed on his by a series of curious grins and much wagging of his insignificant apology for a tail, he would dash out of the room, and out of the house, for his morning constitutional among the sheep upon some distant hill – coming home with an invigorated appetite, in time for the family breakfast at nine o'clock.

"I don't think you can help liking him – as – as a casual acquaintance!" repeated Christabel, finding that Jessie stood in a dreamy silence, twisting her one diamond ring – a birthday gift from Miss Courtenay – round and round upon her slender finger.

"I don't suppose any of us can help liking him," Jessie answered at last, with her eyes on the fire. "All I hope is, that some of us will not like him too much. He has brought a new element into our lives – a new interest – which may end by being a painful one. I feel distrustful of him."

"Why distrustful? Why, Jessie, you who are generally the very essence of flippancy – who make light of almost everything in life – except religion – thank God, you have not come to that yet! – you to be so serious about such a trifling matter as a visit from a man who will most likely be gone back to London in a fortnight – gone out of our lives altogether, perhaps: for I don't suppose he will care to repeat his experiences in a lonely country-house."

"He may be gone, perhaps – yes – and it is quite possible that he may never return – but shall we be quite the same after he has left us? Will nobody regret him – wish for his return – yearn for it – sigh for it – die for it – feeling life worthless – a burthen, without him?"

"Why, Jessie, you look like a Pythoness."

"Belle, Belle, my darling, my innocent one, you do not know what it is to care – for a bright particular star – and know how remote it is from your life – never to be brought any nearer! I felt

afraid to-night when I saw you and Mr. Hamleigh at the piano – you playing, he leaning over you as you played – both seeming so happy, so united by the sympathy of the moment! If he is not a good man – if – "

"But we have no reason to think ill of him. You remember what Uncle Oliver said – he had only been – a – a little racketty, like other young men," said Christabel, eagerly; and then, with a sudden embarrassment, reddening and laughing shyly, she added, "and indeed, Jessie, if it is any idea of danger to me that is troubling your wise head, there is no need for alarm. I am not made of such inflammable stuff – I am not the kind of girl to fall in love with the first comer."

"With the first comer no! But when the Prince comes in a fairy tale, it matters little whether he come first or last. Fate has settled the whole story beforehand."

"Fate has had nothing to say about me and Mr. Hamleigh. No, Jessie, believe me, there is no danger for *me*– and I don't suppose that you are going to fall in love with him?"

"Because I am so old?" said Miss Bridgeman, still looking at the fire; "no, it would be rather ridiculous in a person of my age, plain and *passée*, to fall in love with your Alcibiades."

"No, Jessie, but because you are too wise ever to be carried away by a sentimental fancy. But why do you speak of him so contemptuously? One would think you had taken a dislike to him. We ought at least to remember that he is my aunt's friend, and the son of some one she once dearly loved."

"Once," repeated Jessie, softly; "does not once in that case mean always?"

She was thinking of the Squire's commonplace good looks and portly figure, as represented in the big picture in the dining-room – the picture of a man in a red coat, leaning against the shoulder of a big bay horse, and with a pack of harriers fawning round him – and wondering whether the image of that dead man, whose son was in the house to-night, had not sometimes obtruded itself upon the calm plenitude of Mrs. Tregonell's domestic joys.

"Don't be afraid that I shall forget my duty to your aunt or your aunt's guest, dear," she said suddenly, as if awaking from a reverie. "You and I will do all in our power to make him happy, and to shake him out of lazy London ways, and then, when we have patched up his health, and the moorland air has blown a little colour into his hollow cheeks, we will send him back to his clubs and his theatres, and forget all about him. And now, good-night, my Christabel," she said, looking at her watch; "see! it is close upon midnight – dreadful dissipation for Mount Royal, where half-past ten is the usual hour."

Christabel kissed her and departed, Randie following to the door of her chamber – such a pretty room, with old panelled walls painted pink and grey, old furniture, old china, snowy draperies, and books – a girl's daintily bound books, selected and purchased by herself – in every available corner; a neat cottage piano in a recess, a low easy-chair by the fire, with a five-o'clock tea-table in front of it; desks, portfolios, work-baskets – all the frivolities

of a girl's life; but everything arranged with a womanly neatness which indicated industrious habits and a well-ordered mind. No scattered sheets of music – no fancy-work pitch-and-tossed about the room – no slovenliness claiming to be excused as artistic disorder.

Christabel said her prayers, and read her accustomed portion of Scripture, but not without some faint wrestlings with Satan, who on this occasion took the shape of Angus Hamleigh. Her mind was overcharged with wonder at this new phenomenon in daily life, a man so entirely different from any of the men she had ever met hitherto – so accomplished, so highly cultured; yet taking his accomplishments and culture as a thing of course, as if all men were so.

She thought of him as she lay awake for the first hour of the still night, watching the fire fade and die, and listening to the long roll of the waves, hardly audible at Mount Royal amidst all the commonplace noises of day, but heard in the solemn silence of night. She let her fancies shape a vision of her aunt's vanished youth – that one brief bright dream of happiness, so miserably broken! – and wondered and wondered how it was possible for any one to outlive such a grief. Still more incredible did it seem that any one who had so loved and so lost could ever listen to another lover; and yet the thing had been done, and Mrs. Tregonell's married life had been called happy. She always spoke of the Squire as the best of men – was never weary of praising him – loved to look up at his portrait on the wall

– preserved every unpicturesque memorial of his unpicturesque life – heavy gold and silver snuff-boxes, clumsy hunting crops, spurs, guns, fishing-rods. The relics of his murderous pursuits would have filled an arsenal. And how fondly she loved the son who resembled that departed father – save in lacking some of his best qualities! How she doated on Leonard, the most commonplace and unattractive of young men! The thought of her cousin set Christabel on a new train of speculation. If Leonard had been at home when Mr. Hamleigh came to Mount Royal, how would they two have suited each other? Like fire and water, like oil and vinegar, like the wolf and the lamb, like any two creatures most antagonistic by nature. It was a happy accident that Leonard was away. She was still thinking when she fell asleep, with that uneasy sense of pain and trouble in the future which was always suggested to her by Leonard's image – a dim unshapen difficulty waiting for her somewhere along the untrodden road of her life – a lion in the path.

CHAPTER III

"TINTAGEL, HALF IN SEA, AND HALF ON LAND."

There was no sense of fear or trouble of any kind in the mind of anybody next morning after breakfast, when Christabel, Miss Bridgeman, and Mr. Hamleigh started, in the young lady's own particular pony carriage, for an exploring day, attended by Randie, who was intensely excited, and furnished with a picnic basket which made them independent of the inn at Trevena, and afforded the opportunity of taking one's luncheon under difficulties upon a windy height, rather than with the commonplace comforts of an hotel parlour, guarded against wind and weather. They were going to do an immense deal upon this first day. Christabel, in her eagerness, wanted to exhibit all her lions at once.

"Of course, you must see Tintagel," she said; "everybody who comes to this part of the world is in a tremendous hurry to see King Arthur's castle. I have known people set out in the middle of the night."

"And have you ever known any one of them who was not just a little disappointed with that stupendous monument of traditional royalty?" asked Miss Bridgeman, with her most prosaic air. "They expect so much – halls, and towers, and keep, and chapel

– and find only ruined walls, and the faint indication of a graveyard. King Arthur is a name to conjure with, and Tintagel is like Mont Blanc or the Pyramids. It can never be so grand as the vision its very name has evoked."

"I blush to say that I have thought very little about Tintagel hitherto," said Mr. Hamleigh; "it has not been an integral part of my existence; so my expectations are more reasonable than those of the enthusiastic tourist. I promise to be delighted with your ruins."

"Oh, but you will pretend," said Christabel, "and that will be hateful! I would rather have to deal with one of those provoking people who look about them blankly, and exclaim, 'Is this all?' and who stand in the very centre of Arthur's Hall, and ask, 'And, pray, where is Tintagel? – when are we to see the castle?' No! give me the man who can take in the grandeur of that wild height at a glance, and whose fancy can build up those ruined walls, re-create those vanished towers, fill the halls with knights in shining armour, and lovely ladies – see Guinevere herself upon her throne – clothed in white samite – mystic, wonderful!"

"And with Lancelot in the background," said Mr. Hamleigh. "I think the less we say about Guinevere the better, and your snaky Vivien, and your senile Merlin, your prying Modred. What a disreputable set these Round Table people seem to have been altogether – they need have been dead thirteen hundred years for us to admire them!"

They were driving along the avenue by this time, the stout

chestnut cob going gaily in the fresh morning air – Mr. Hamleigh sitting face to face with Christabel as she drove. What a fair face it was in the clear light of day! How pure and delicate every tone, from the whiteness of the lily to the bloom of the wild rose! How innocent the expression of the large liquid eyes, which seemed to smile at him as he talked! He had known so many pretty women – his memory was like a gallery of beautiful faces; but he could recall no face so completely innocent, so divinely young. "It is the youthfulness of an unsullied mind," he said to himself; "I have known plenty of girls as young in years, but not one perfectly pure from the taint of worldliness and vanity. The trail of the serpent was over them all!"

They drove down hill into Boscastle, and then straightway began to ascend still steeper hills upon the other side of the harbour.

"You ought to throw a viaduct across the valley," said Mr. Hamleigh – "something like Brunel's bridge at Saltash; but perhaps you have hardly traffic enough to make it pay."

They went winding up the new road to Trevena, avoiding the village street, and leaving the Church of the Silent Tower on its windy height on their right hand. The wide Atlantic lay far below them on the other side of those green fields which bordered the road; the air they breathed was keen with the soft breath of the sea. But autumn had hardly plucked a leaf from the low storm-beaten trees, or a flower from the tall hedgerows, where the red blossom of the Ragged Robin mixed with the pale gold of the

hawk-weed, and the fainter yellow of the wild cistus. The ferns had hardly begun to wither, and Angus Hamleigh, whose last experiences had been among the stone walls of Aberdeenshire, wondered at the luxuriance of this western world, where the banks were built up and fortified with boulders of marble-veined spar.

They drove through the village of Trevalga, in which there is never an inn or public-house of any kind – not even a cottage licensed for the sale of beer. There was the wheelwright, carpenter, builder, Jack-of-all-trades, with his shed and his yard – the blacksmith, with his forge going merrily – village school – steam threshing-machine at work – church – chapel; but never a drop of beer – and yet the people at Trevalga are healthy, and industrious, and decently clad, and altogether comfortable looking.

"Some day we will take you to call at the Rectory," said Christabel, pointing skywards with her whip.

"Do you mean that the Rector has gone to Heaven?" asked Angus, looking up into the distant blue; "or is there any earthly habitation higher than the road on which we are driving."

"Didn't you see the end of the lane, just now?" asked Christabel, laughing; "it is rather steep – an uphill walk all the way; but the views are lovely."

"We will walk to the Rectory to-morrow," said Miss Bridgeman; "this lazy mode of transit must not be tolerated after to-day."

Even the drive to Trevena was not all idleness; for after they had passed the entrance to the path leading to the beautiful waterfall of St. Nectan's Kieve, hard by St. Piran's chapel and well – the former degraded to a barn, and the latter, once of holy repute, now chiefly useful as a cool repository for butter from the neighbouring dairy of Trethevy Farm – they came to a hill, which had to be walked down; to the lowest depth of the Rocky Valley, where a stone bridge spans the rapid brawling stream that leaps as a waterfall into the gorge at St. Nectan's Kieve, about a mile higher up the valley. And then they came to a corresponding hill, which had to be walked up – because in either case it was bad for the cob to have a weight behind him. Indeed, the cob was so accustomed to consideration in this matter, that he made a point of stopping politely for his people to alight at either end of anything exceptional in the way of a hill.

"I'm afraid you spoil your pony," said Mr. Hamleigh, throwing the reins over his arm, and resigning himself to a duty which made him feel very much like a sea-side flyman, earning his day's wages toilsomely, and saving his horse with a view to future fares.

"Better that than to spoil you," answered Miss Bridgeman, as she and Christabel walked briskly beside him. "But if you fasten the reins to the dashboard, you may trust Felix."

"Won't he run away?"

"Not he," answered Christabel. "He knows that he would never be so happy with anybody else as he is with us."

"But mightn't he take a fancy for a short run; just far enough to

allow of his reducing that dainty little carriage to match-wood? A well-fed underworked pony so thoroughly enjoys that kind of thing."

"Felix has no such diabolical suggestions. He is a conscientious person, and knows his duty. Besides, he is not underworked. There is hardly a day that he does not carry us somewhere."

Mr. Hamleigh surrendered the reins, and Felix showed himself worthy of his mistress's confidence, following at her heels like a dog, with his honest brown eyes fixed on the slim tall figure, as if it had been his guiding star.

"I want you to admire the landscape," said Christabel, when they were on the crest of the last hill; "is not that a lovely valley?"

Mr. Hamleigh willingly admitted the fact. The beauty of a pastoral landscape, with just enough of rugged wildness for the picturesque, could go no further.

"Creswick has immortalized yonder valley by his famous picture of the mill," said Miss Bridgeman, "but the romantic old mill of the picture has lately been replaced by that large ungainly building, quite out of keeping with its surroundings."

"Have you ever been in Switzerland?" asked Angus of Christabel, when they had stood for some moments in silent contemplation of the landscape.

"Never."

"Nor in Italy?"

"No. I have never been out of England. Since I was five years

old I have hardly spent a year of my life out of Cornwall."

"Happy Cornwall, which can show so fair a product of its soil! Well, Miss Courtenay, I know Italy and Switzerland by heart, and I like this Cornish landscape better than either. It is not so beautiful – it would not do as well for a painter or a poet; but it comes nearer an Englishman's heart. What can one have better than the hills and the sea? Switzerland can show you bigger hills, ghostly snow-shrouded pinnacles that mock the eye, following each other like a line of phantoms, losing themselves in the infinite; but Switzerland cannot show you that."

He pointed to the Atlantic: the long undulating line of the coast, rocky, rugged, yet verdant, with many a curve and promontory, many a dip and rise.

"It is the most everlasting kind of beauty, is it not?" asked Christabel, delighted at this little gush of warm feeling in one whose usual manner was so equable. "One could never tire of the sea. And I am always proud to remember that our sea is so big – stretching away and away to the New World. I should have liked it still better before the days of Columbus, when it led to the unknown!"

"Ah!" sighed Angus, "youth always yearns for the undiscovered. Middle age knows that there is nothing worth discovering!"

On the top of the hill they paused for a minute or so to contemplate the ancient Borough of Bossiney, which, until disfranchised in 1832, returned two members to Parliament, with

a constituency of little more than a dozen, and which once had Sir Francis Drake for its representative. Here Mr. Hamleigh beheld that modest mound called the Castle Hill, on the top of which it was customary to read the writs before the elections.

An hour later they were eating their luncheon on that windy height where once stood the castle of the great king. To Christabel the whole story of Arthur and his knights was as real as if it had been a part of her own life. She had Tennyson's Arthur and Tennyson's Lancelot in her heart of hearts, and knew just enough of Sir Thomas Mallory's prose to give substance to the Laureate's poetic shadows. Angus amused himself a little at her expense, as they ate their chicken and salad on the grassy mounds which were supposed to be the graves of heroes who died before Athelstane drove the Cornish across the Tamar, and made his victorious progress through the country, even to the Scilly Isles, after defeating Howel, the last King of Cornwall.

"Do you really think that gentlemanly creature in the Laureate's epic – that most polished and perfect and most intensely modern English gentleman, self-contained, considerate of others, always the right man in the right place – is one whit like that half-naked sixth century savage – the real Arthur – whose Court costume was a coat of blue paint, and whose war-shriek was the yell of a Red Indian? What can be more futile than our setting up any one Arthur, and bowing the knee before him, in the face of the fact that Great Britain teems with monuments of Arthurs – Arthur's Seat in Scotland, Arthur's Castle in Wales,

Arthur's Round Table here, there, and everywhere? Be sure that Arthur – Ardheer – the highest chief – was a generic name for the princes of those days, and that there were more Arthurs than ever there were Cæsars."

"I don't believe one word you say," exclaimed Christabel, indignantly, "there was only one Arthur, the son of Uther and Ygerne, who was born in the castle that stood on this very cliff, on the first night of the year, and carried away in secret by Merlin, and reared in secret by Sir Anton's wife – the brave good Arthur – the Christian king – who was killed at the battle of Camlan, near Slaughter Bridge, and was buried at Glastonbury."

"And embalmed by Tennyson. The Laureate invented Arthur – he took out a patent for the Round Table, and his invention is only a little less popular than that other product of the age, the sewing-machine. How many among modern tourists would care about Tintagel if Tennyson had not revived the old legend?"

The butler had put up a bottle of champagne for Mr. Hamleigh – the two ladies drinking nothing but sparkling water – and in this beverage he drank hail to the spirit of the legendary prince.

"I am ready to believe anything now you have me up here," he said, "for I have a shrewd idea that without your help I should never be able to get down again. I should live and die on the top of this rocky promontory – sweltering in the summer sun – buffeted by the winter winds – an unwilling Simeon Stylites."

"Do you know that the very finest sheep in Cornwall are said to be grown on that island," said Miss Bridgeman gravely, pointing

to the grassy top of the isolated crag in the foreground, whereon once stood the donjon keep. "I don't know why it should be so, but it is a tradition."

"Among butchers?" said Angus. "I suppose even butchers have their traditions. And the poor sheep who are condemned to exile on that lonely rock – the St. Helena of their woolly race – do they know that they are achieving a posthumous perfection – that they are straining towards the ideal in butcher's meat? There is room for much thought in the question."

"The tide is out," said Christabel, looking seaward; "I think we ought to do Trebarwith sands to-day."

"Is Trebarwith another of your lions?" asked Angus, placidly. "Yes."

"Then, please save him for to-morrow. Let me drink the cup of pleasure to the dregs where we are. This champagne has a magical taste, like the philter which Tristan and Iseult were so foolish as to drink while they sailed across from Ireland to this Cornish shore. Don't be alarmed, Miss Bridgeman, I am not going to empty the bottle. I am not an educated tourist – have read neither Black nor Murray, and I am very slow about taking in ideas. Even after all you have told me, I am not clear in my mind as to which is the castle and which the chapel, and which the burial-ground. Let us finish the afternoon dawdling about Tintagel. Let us see the sun set from this spot, where Arthur must so often have watched it, if the men of thirteen hundred years ago ever cared to watch the sun setting, which I doubt. They belong

to the night-time of the world, when civilization was dead in Southern Europe, and was yet unborn in the West. Let us dawdle about till it is time to drive back to Mount Royal, and then I shall carry away an impression. I am very slow at taking impressions."

"I think you want us to believe that you are stupid," said Christabel, laughing at the earnestness with which he pleaded.

"Believe me, no. I should like you to think me ever so much better than I am. Please, let us dawdle."

They dawdled accordingly. Strolling about upon the short sea-beaten grass, so treacherous and slippery a surface in summer time, when fierce Sol has been baking it. They stumbled against the foundations of long-vanished walls, they speculated upon fragments of cyclopean masonry, and talked a great deal about the traditions of the spot.

Christabel, who had all the old authorities – Leland, Carew, and Norden – at her fingers' ends, was delighted to expound the departed glories of this British fortress. She showed where the ancient dungeon keep had reared its stony walls upon that "high terrible crag, environed with the sea; and how there had once been a drawbridge uniting yonder cliff with the buildings on the mainland" – now divorced, as Carew says, "by the downfallen steep cliffs, on the farther side, which, though it shut out the sea from his wonted recourse, hath yet more strengthened the island; for in passing thither you must first descend with a dangerous declining, and then make a worse ascent by a path, through his stickleness occasioning, and through his steepness threatening,

the ruin of your life, with the falling of your foot." She told Mr. Hamleigh how, after the Conquest, the castle was the occasional residence of some of our Princes, and how Richard, King of the Romans, Earl of Cornwall, son of King John, entertained here his nephew David, Prince of Wales, how, in Richard the Second's time, this stronghold was made a State prison, and how a certain Lord Mayor of London was, for his unruly mayoralty, condemned thither as a perpetual penitentiary; which seems very hard upon the chief magistrate of the city, who thus did vicarious penance for the riot of his brief reign.

And then they talked of Tristan and Iseult, and the tender old love-story, which lends the glamour of old-world fancies to those bare ruins of a traditional past. Christabel knew the old chronicle through Matthew Arnold's poetical version, which gives only the purer and better side of the character of the Knight and Chatelaine, at the expense of some of the strongest features of the story. Who, that knew that romantic legend, could linger on that spot without thinking of King Marc's faithless queen! Assuredly not Mr. Hamleigh, who was a staunch believer in the inventor of "sweetness and light," and who knew Arnold's verses by heart.

"What have they done with the flowers and the terrace walks?" he said, – "the garden where Tristan and his Queen basked in the sunshine of their days; and where they parted for ever? —

"All the spring time of their love

Is already gone and past,
And instead thereof is seen
Its winter, which endureth still Tyntagel,
on its surge-beat hill,
The pleasaunce walks, the weeping queen,
The flying leaves, the straining blast,
And that long wild kiss – their last.'

And where – oh, where – are those graves in the King's chapel in which the tyrant Marc, touched with pity, ordered the fated lovers to be buried? And, behold! out of the grave of Tristan there sprung a plant which went along the walls, and descended into the grave of the Queen, and though King Marc three several times ordered this magical creeper to be cut off root and branch, it was always found growing again next morning, as if it were the very spirit of the dead knight struggling to get free from the grave, and to be with his lady-love again! Show me those tombs, Miss Courtenay."

"You can take your choice," said Jessie Bridgeman, pointing to a green mound or two, overgrown with long rank grass, in that part of the hill which was said to be the kingly burial-place. "But as for your magical tree, there is not so much as a bramble to do duty for poor Tristan."

"If I were Duke of Cornwall and Lord of Tintagel Castle, I would put up a granite cross in memory of the lovers; though I fear there was very little Christianity in either of them," said Angus.

"And I would come once a year and hang a garland on it," said Christabel, smiling at him with

"Eyes of deep, soft, lucent hue —
Eyes too expressive to be blue,
Too lovely to be grey."

He had recalled those lines more than once when he looked into Christabel's eyes.

Mr. Hamleigh had read so much as to make him an interesting talker upon any subject; but Christabel and Jessie noticed that of his own life, his ways and amusements, his friends, his surroundings, he spoke hardly at all. This fact Christabel noticed with wonder, Jessie with suspicion. If a man led a good wholesome life, he would surely be more frank and open — he would surely have more to say about himself and his associates.

They dawdled, and dawdled, till past four o'clock, and to none of the three did the hours so spent seem long; but they found that it would make them too late in their return to Mount Royal were they to wait for sundown before they turned their faces homewards; so while the day was still bright, Mr. Hamleigh consented to be guided by steep and perilous paths to the base of the rocky citadel, and then they strolled back to the Wharncliffe Arms, where Felix had been enjoying himself in the stable, and was now desperately anxious to get home, rattling up and down hill at an alarming rate, and not hinting at anybody's alighting to walk.

This was only one of many days spent in the same fashion. They walked next day to Trebarwith sands, up and down hills, which Mr. Hamleigh declared were steeper than anything he had ever seen in Switzerland; but he survived the walk, and his spirits seemed to rise with the exertion. This time Major Bree went with them – a capital companion for a country ramble, being just enough of a botanist, archæologist, and geologist, to leaven the lump of other people's ignorance, without being obnoxiously scientific. Mr. Hamleigh was delighted with that noble stretch of level sand, with the long rollers of the Atlantic tumbling in across the low rocks, and the bold headlands behind – spot beloved of marine painters – spot where the gulls and the shags hold their revels, and where man feels himself but a poor creature face to face with the lonely grandeur of sea, and cliff, and sky.

So rarely is that long stretch of yellow sand vulgarized by the feet of earth's multitudes, that one half expects to see a procession of frolicsome sea-nymphs come dancing out of yonder cave, and wind in circling measures towards the crested wavelets, gliding in so softly under the calm clear day.

These were halcyon days – an Indian summer – balmy western zephyrs – sunny noontides – splendid sunsets – altogether the most beautiful autumn season that Angus Hamleigh had known, or at least, so it seemed to him – nay, even more than this, surely the most beautiful season of his life.

As the days went on, and day after day was spent in Christabel's company – almost as it were alone with her, for Miss

Bridgeman and Major Bree were but as figures in the background – Angus felt as if he were at the beginning of a new life – a life filled with fresh interests, thoughts, hopes, desires, unknown and undreamed of in the former stages of his being. Never before had he lived a life so uneventful – never before had he been so happy. It surprised him to discover how simple are the elements of real content – how deep the charm of a placid existence among thoroughly loveable people! Christabel Courtenay was not the loveliest woman he had ever known, nor the most elegant, nor the most accomplished, nor the most fascinating; but she was entirely different from all other women with whom his lot had been cast. Her innocence, her unsophisticated enjoyment of all earth's purest joys, her transparent purity, her perfect trustfulness – these were to him as a revelation of a new order of beings. If he had been told of such a woman he would have shrugged his shoulders misbelievingly, or would have declared that she must be an idiot. But Christabel was quite as clever as those brilliant creatures whose easy manners had enchanted him in days gone by. She was better educated than many a woman he knew who passed for a wit of the first order. She had read more, thought more, was more sympathetic, more companionable, and she was delightfully free from self-consciousness or vanity.

He found himself talking to Christabel as he had never talked to any one else since those early days at the University, the bright dawn of manhood, when he confided freely in that second self, the chosen friend of the hour, and believed that all men lived

and moved according to his own boyish standard of honour. He talked to her, not of the actualities of his life, but of his thoughts and feelings – his dreamy speculations upon the gravest problems which hedge round the secret of man's final destiny. He talked freely of his doubts and difficulties, and the half-belief which came so near unbelief – the wide love of all creation – the vague yet passionate yearning for immortality which fell so far short of the Gospel's sublime certainty. He revealed to her all the complexities of a many-sided mind, and she never failed him in sympathy and understanding. This was in their graver moods, when by some accidental turn of the conversation they fell into the discussion of those solemn questions which are always at the bottom of every man and woman's thoughts, like the unknown depths of a dark water-pool. For the most part their talk was bright and light as those sunny autumn days, varied as the glorious and ever-changing hues of sky and sea at sunset. Jessie was a delightful companion. She was so thoroughly easy herself that it was impossible to feel ill at ease with her. She played her part of confidante so pleasantly, seeming to think it the most natural thing in the world that those two should be absorbed in each other, and should occasionally lapse into complete forgetfulness of her existence. Major Bree when he joined in their rambles was obviously devoted to Jessie Bridgeman. It was her neatly gloved little hand which he was eager to clasp at the crossing of a stile, and where the steepness of the hill-side path gave him an excuse for assisting her. It was her stout little boot

which he guided so tenderly, where the ways were ruggedest. Never had a plain woman a more respectful admirer – never was beauty in her peerless zenith more devoutly worshipped!

And so the autumn days sped by, pleasantly for all: with deepest joy – joy ever waxing, never waning – for those two who had found the secret of perfect sympathy in thought and feeling. It was not for Angus Hamleigh the first passion of a spotless manhood; and yet the glamour and the delight were as new as if he had never loved before. He had never so purely, so reverently loved. The passion was of a new quality. It seemed to him as if he had ascended into a higher sphere in the universe, and had given his heart to a creature of a loftier race.

"Perhaps it is the good old lineage which makes the difference," he said to himself once, while his feelings were still sufficiently novel and so far under his control as to be subject to analysis. "The women I have cared for in days gone by have hardly got over their early affinity with the gutter; or when I have admired a woman of good family she has been steeped to the lips in worldliness and vanity."

Mr. Hamleigh, who had told himself that he was going to be intensely bored at Mount Royal, had been Mrs. Tregonell's guest for three weeks, and it seemed to him as if the time were brief and beautiful as one of those rare dreams of impossible bliss which haunt our waking memories, and make actual life dull and joyless by contrast with the glory of shadowland. No word had yet been spoken – nay, at the very thought of those

words which most lovers in his position would have been eager to speak, his soul sickened and his cheek paled; for there would be no joyfulness in the revelation of his love – indeed, he doubted whether he had the right to reveal it – whether duty and honour did not alike constrain him to keep his converse within the strict limits of friendship, to bid Christabel good-bye, and turn his back upon Mount Royal, without having said one word more than a friend might speak. Happy as Christabel had been with him – tenderly as she loved him – she was far too innocent to have considered herself ill-treated in such a case. She would have blamed herself alone for the weakness of mind which had been unable to resist the fascination of his society – she would have blushed and wept in secret for her folly in having loved unwooed.

"Has the eventful question been asked?" Jessie inquired one night, as Christabel lingered, after her wont, by the fire in Miss Bridgeman's bedroom. "You two were so intensely earnest to-day as you walked ahead of the Major and me, that I said to myself, 'now is the time – the crisis has arrived!'"

"There was no crisis," answered Christabel, crimsoning; "he has never said one word to me that can imply that I am any more to him than the most indifferent acquaintance."

"What need of words when every look and tone cries 'I love you?' Why he idolizes you, and he lets all the world see it. I hope it may be well for you – both!"

Christabel was on her knees by the fire. She laid her cheek against Jessie's waistband, and drew Jessie's arm round her neck,

holding her hand lovingly.

"Do you really think he – cares for me?" she faltered, with her face hidden.

"Do I really think that I have two eyes, and something which is at least an apology for a nose!" ejaculated Jessie, contemptuously. "Why, it has been patent to everybody for the last fortnight that you two are over head and ears in love with each other. There never was a more obvious case of mutual infatuation."

"Oh, Jessie! surely I have not betrayed myself. I know that I have been very weak – but I have tried so hard to hide – "

"And have been about as successful as the ostrich. While those drooping lashes have been lowered to hide the love-light in your eyes, your whole countenance has been an illuminated calendar of your folly. Poor Belle! to think that she has not betrayed herself, while all Boscastle is on tiptoe to know when the wedding is to take place. Why the parson could not see you two sitting in the same pew without knowing that he would be reading your banns before he was many Sundays older."

"And you – really – like him?" faltered Christabel, more shyly than before.

"Yes," answered Jessie, with a provoking lack of enthusiasm. "I really like him. I can't help feeling sorry for Mrs. Tregonell, for I know she wanted you to marry Leonard."

Christabel gave a little sigh, and a faint shiver.

"Poor dear Leonard! I wonder what traveller's hardships he is enduring while we are so snug and happy at Mount Royal?" she

said, kindly. "He has an excellent heart – "

"Troublesome people always have, I believe," interjected Jessie. "It is their redeeming feature, the existence of which no one can absolutely disprove."

"And I am very much attached to him – as a cousin – or as an adopted brother; but as to our ever being married – that is quite out of the question. There never were two people less suited to each other."

"Those are the people who usually come together," said Jessie; "the Divorce Court could hardly be kept going if it were not so."

"Jessie, if you are going to be cynical I shall say good-night. I hope there is no foundation for what you said just now. I hope that Auntie has no foolish idea about Leonard and me."

"She has – or had – one prevailing idea, and I fear it will go hard with her when she has to relinquish it," answered Jessie, seriously. "I know that it has been her dearest hope to see you and Leonard married, and I should be a wretch if I were not sorry for her disappointment, when she has been so good to me. But she never ought to have invited Mr. Hamleigh to Mount Royal. That is one of those mistakes the consequences of which last for a lifetime."

"I hope he likes me – just a little," pursued Christabel, with dreamy eyes fixed on the low wood fire; "but sometimes I fancy there must be some mistake – that he does not really care a straw for me. More than once, when he has begun to say something that sounded – "

"Business-like," suggested Jessie, as the girl hesitated.

"He has drawn back – seeming almost anxious to recall his words. Once he told me – quite seriously – that he had made up his mind never to marry. Now, that doesn't sound as if he meant to marry *me*."

"That is not an uncommon way of breaking ground," answered Jessie, with her matter-of-fact air. "A man tells a girl that he is going to die a bachelor – which makes it seem quite a favour on his part when he proposes. All women sigh for the unattainable; and a man who distinctly states that he is not in the market, is likely to make a better bargain when he surrenders."

"I should be sorry to think Mr. Hamleigh capable of such petty ideas," said Christabel. "He told me once that he was like Achilles. Why should he be like Achilles? He is not a soldier."

"Perhaps, it is because he has a Grecian nose," suggested Miss Bridgeman.

"How can you imagine him so vain and foolish," cried Christabel, deeply offended. "I begin to think you detest him?"

"No, Belle, I think him charming, only too charming, and I had rather the man you loved were made of sterner metal – not such a man as Leonard, whose loftiest desires are centred in stable and gun-room; but a man of an altogether different type from Mr. Hamleigh. He has too much of the artistic temperament, without being an artist – he is too versatile, too soft-hearted and impressionable. I am afraid for you, Christabel, I am afraid; and if it were not too late – if your heart were not

wholly given to him – "

"It is," answered Christabel, tearfully, with her face hidden; "I hate myself for being so foolish, but I have let myself love him. I know that I may never be his wife – I do not even think that he has any idea of marrying me – but I shall never marry any other man. Oh, Jessie! for pity's sake don't betray me; never let my aunt, or any one else in this world, learn what I have told you. I can't help trusting you – you wind yourself into my heart somehow, and find out all that is hidden there!"

"Because I love you truly and honestly, my dear," answered Jessie, tenderly; "and now, good-night; I feel sure that Mr. Hamleigh will ask you to be his wife, and I only wish he were a better man."

CHAPTER IV

"LOVE! THOU ART LEADING ME FROM WINTRY COLD."

After this came two or three dull and showery days, which afforded no opportunity for long excursions or ramblings of any kind. It was only during such rambles that Mr. Hamleigh and Miss Courtenay ever found themselves alone. Mrs. Tregonell's ideas of propriety were of the old-fashioned school, and when her niece was not under her own wing, she expected Miss Bridgeman to perform all the duties of a duenna – in no wise suspecting how very loosely her instructions upon this point were being carried out. At Mount Royal there was no possibility of confidential talk between Angus and Christabel. If they were in the drawing-room or library, Mrs. Tregonell was with them; if they played billiards, Miss Bridgeman was told off to mark for them; if they went for a constitutional walk between the showers, or wasted half-an-hour in the stables looking at horses and dogs, Miss Bridgeman was bidden to accompany them; and though they had arrived at the point of minding her very little, and being sentimental and sympathetic under her very nose, still there are limits to the love-making that can be carried on before a third person, and a man would hardly care to propose in the presence of a witness. So for three days Christabel still remained in doubt as to Mr.

Hamleigh's real feelings. That manner of making tender little speeches, and then, as it were, recalling them, was noticeable many times during those three days of domesticity. There was a hesitancy – an uncertainty in his attentions to Christabel which Jessie interpreted ill.

"There is some entanglement, I daresay," she told herself; "it is the evil of his past life which holds him in the toils. How do we know that he has not a wife hidden away somewhere? He ought to declare himself, or he ought to go away! If this kind of shillyshallying goes on much longer he will break Christabel's heart."

Miss Bridgeman was determined that, if it were in her power to hasten the crisis, the crisis should be hastened. The proprieties, as observed by Mrs. Tregonell, might keep matters in abeyance till Christmas. Mr. Hamleigh gave no hint of his departure. He might stay at Mount Royal for months sentimentalizing with Christabel, and ride off at the last uncompromised.

The fourth day was the Feast of St. Luke. The weather had brightened considerably, but there was a high wind – a south-west wind, with occasional showers.

"Of course, you are going to church this morning," said Jessie to Christabel, as they rose from the breakfast-table.

"Church this morning?" repeated Christabel, vaguely.

For the first time since she had been old enough to understand the services of her Church, she had forgotten a Saint's day.

"It is St. Luke's Day."

"Yes, I remember. And the service is at Minster. We can walk across the hills."

"May I go with you?" asked Mr. Hamleigh.

"Do you like week-day services?" inquired Jessie, with rather a mischievous sparkle in her keen grey eyes.

"I adore them," answered Angus, who had not been inside a church on a week-day since he was best man at a friend's wedding.

"Then we will all go together," said Jessie. "May Brook bring the pony-carriage to fetch us home, Mrs. Tregonell? I have an idea that Mr. Hamleigh won't be equal to the walk home."

"More than equal to twenty such walks!" answered Angus, gaily. "You under-estimate the severity of the training to which I have submitted myself during the last three weeks."

"The pony-carriage may as well meet you in any case," said Mrs. Tregonell. And the order was straightway given.

They started at ten o'clock, giving themselves ample leisure for a walk of something over two miles – a walk by hill and valley, and rushing stream, and picturesque wooden bridge – through a deep gorge where the dark-red cattle were grouped against a background of gorse and heather – a walk of which one could never grow weary – so lonely, so beautiful, so perfect a blending of all that is wildest and all that is most gracious in Nature – an Alpine ramble on a small scale.

Minster Church lies in a hollow of the hill, so shut in by the wooded ridge which shelters its grey walls, that the stranger

comes upon it as an architectural surprise.

"How is it you have never managed to finish your tower?" asked Mr. Hamleigh, surveying the rustic fane with a critical air, as he descended to the churchyard by some rugged stone steps on the side of the grassy hill. "You cannot be a particularly devout people, or you would hardly have allowed your parish church to remain in this stunted and stunted condition."

"There was a tower once," said Christabel, naïvely; "the stones are still in the churchyard; but the monks used to burn a light in the tower window – a light that shone through a cleft in the hills, and was seen far out at sea."

"I believe that is geographically – or geometrically impossible," said Angus laughing; "but pray go on."

"The light was often mistaken for a beacon, and the ships came ashore and were wrecked on the rocks."

"Naturally – and no doubt the monks improved the occasion. Why should a Cornish monk be better than his countrymen? 'One and all' is your motto."

"They were not Cornish monks," answered Christabel, "but a brotherhood of French monks from the monastery of St. Sergius, at Angers. They were established in a Priory here by William de Bottreaux, in the reign of Richard, Cœur de Lion; and, according to tradition, the townspeople resented their having built the church so far from the town. I feel sure the monks could have had no evil intention in burning a light; but one night a crew of wild sailors attacked the tower, and pulled the greater part of it down."

"And nobody in Boscastle has had public spirit enough to get it set up again. Where is your respect for those early Christian martyrs, St. Sergius and St. Bacchus, to whose memory your temple is dedicated?"

"I don't suppose it was so much want of respect for the martyrs as want of money," suggested Miss Bridgeman. "We have too many chapel people in Boscastle for our churches to be enriched or beautified. But Minster is not a bad little church after all."

"It is the dearest, sweetest, most innocent little church I ever knelt in," answered Angus; "and if I could but assist at one particular service there –"

He checked himself with a sigh; but this unfinished speech amounted in Miss Bridgeman's mind to a declaration. She stole a look at Christabel, whose fair face crimsoned for a moment or so, only to grow more purely pale afterwards.

They went into the church, and joined devoutly in the brief Saint's Day service. The congregation was not numerous. Two or three village goodies – the school children – a tourist, who had come to see the church, and found himself, as it were, entangled in saintly meshes – the lady who played the harmonium, and the incumbent who read prayers. These were all, besides the party from Mount Royal. There are plenty of people in country parishes who will be as pious as you please on Sunday, deeming three services not too much for their devotion, but who can hardly be persuaded to turn out of the beaten track of week-day life to offer homage to the memory of Evangelist or Apostle.

The pony-carriage was waiting in the lane when Mr. Hamleigh and the two ladies came out of the porch. Christabel and the gentleman looked at the equipage doubtfully.

"You slandered me, Miss Bridgeman, by your suggestion that I should be done up after a mile or so across the hills," said Mr. Hamleigh; "I never felt fresher in my life. Have you a hankering for the ribbons?" to Christabel; "or will you send your pony back to his stable and walk home?"

"I would ever so much rather walk."

"And so would I."

"In that case, if you don't mind, I think I'll go home with Felix," said Jessie Bridgeman, most unexpectedly. "I am not feeling quite myself to-day, and the walk has tired me. You won't mind going home alone with Mr. Hamleigh, will you, Christabel? You might show him the seals in Pentargon Bay."

What could Christabel do? If there had been anything in the way of an earthquake handy, she would have felt deeply grateful for a sudden rift in the surface of the soil, which would have allowed her to slip into the bosom of the hills, among the gnomes and the pixies. That Cornish coast was undermined with caverns, yet there was not one for her to drop into. Again, Jessie Bridgeman spoke in such an easy off-hand manner, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for Christabel and Mr. Hamleigh to be allowed a lonely ramble. To have refused, or even hesitated, would have seemed affectation, mock-modesty, self-consciousness. Yet Christabel almost involuntarily made a step

towards the carriage.

"I think I had better drive," she said; "Aunt Diana will be wanting me."

"No, she won't," replied Jessie, resolutely. "And you shall not make a martyr of yourself for my sake. I know you love that walk over the hill, and Mr. Hamleigh is dying to see Pentargon Bay –"

"Positively expiring by inches; only it is one of those easy deaths that does not hurt one very much," said Angus, helping Miss Bridgeman into her seat, giving her the reins, and arranging the rug over her knees with absolute tenderness.

"Take care of Felix," pleaded Christabel; "and if you trot down the hills trot fast."

"I shall walk him every inch of the way. The responsibility would be too terrible otherwise."

But Felix had his own mind in the matter, and had no intention of walking when the way he went carried him towards his stable. So he trotted briskly up the lane, between tall, tangled blackberry hedges, leaving Christabel and Angus standing at the churchyard gate. The rest of the little congregation had dispersed; the church door had been locked; there was a gravedigger at work in the garden-like churchyard, amidst long grasses and fallen leaves, and the unchanged ferns and mosses of the bygone summer.

Mr. Hamleigh had scarcely concealed his delight at Miss Bridgeman's departure, yet, now that she was gone, he looked passing sad. Never a word did he speak, as they two stood idly at the gate, listening to the dull thud of the earth which the

gravedigger threw out of his shovel on to the grass, and the shrill sweet song of a robin, piping to himself on a ragged thornbush near at hand, as if in an ecstasy of gladness about things in general. One sound so fraught with melancholy, the other so full of joy! The contrast struck sharply on Christabel's nerves, to-day at their utmost tension, and brought sudden tears in her eyes.

They stood for perhaps five minutes in this dreamy silence, the robin piping all the while; and then Mr. Hamleigh roused himself, seemingly with an effort.

"Are you going to show me the seals at Pentargon?" he asked, smilingly.

"I don't know about seals – there is a local idea that seals are to be seen playing about in the bay; but one is not often so lucky as to find them there. People have been very cruel in killing them, and I'm afraid there are very few seals left on our coast now."

"At any rate, you can show me Pentargon, if you are not tired."

"Tired!" cried Christabel, laughing at such a ridiculous idea, being a damsel to whom ten miles were less than three to a town-bred young lady. Embarrassed though she felt by being left alone with Mr. Hamleigh, she could not even pretend that the proposed walk was too much for her.

"I shall be very glad to take you to Pentargon," she said, "it is hardly a mile out of our way; but I fear you'll be disappointed; there is really nothing particular to see."

"I shall not be disappointed – I shall be deeply grateful."

They walked along the narrow hill-side paths, where it was

almost impossible for two to walk abreast; yet Angus contrived somehow to be at Christabel's side, guiding and guarding her by ways which were so much more familiar to her than to him, that there was a touch of humour in this pretence of protection. But Christabel did not see things in their humorous aspect to-day. Her little hand trembled as it touched Angus Hamleigh's, when he led her across a craggy bit of path, or over a tiny water-pool. At the stiles in the valley on the other side of the bridge, which are civilized stiles, and by no means difficult, Christabel was too quick and light of foot to give any opportunity for that assistance which her companion was so eager to afford. And now they were in the depths of the valley, and had to mount another hill, on the road to Bude, till they came to a field-gate, above which appeared a sign-board, and the mystic words, "To Pentargon."

"What is Pentargon, that they put up its name in such big letters?" asked Mr. Hamleigh, staring at the board. "Is it a borough town – or a cattle market – or a cathedral city – or what? They seem tremendously proud of it."

"It is nothing – or only a shallow bay, with a waterfall and a wonderful cave, which I am always longing to explore. I believe it is nearly as beautiful as the cavern in Shelley's 'Alastor.' But you will see what Pentargon is like in less than five minutes."

They crossed a ploughed field, and then, by a big five-barred gate, entered the magic region which was said to be the paradise of seals. A narrow walk cut in a steep and rocky bank, where the gorse and heather grew luxuriantly above slate and spar,

described a shallow semicircle round one of the loveliest bays in the world – a spot so exquisitely tranquil in this calm autumn weather, so guarded and fenced in by the massive headlands that jutted out towards the main – a peaceful haven, seemingly so remote from that outer world to which belonged yonder white-winged ship on the verge of the blue – that Angus Hamleigh exclaimed involuntarily, —

"Here is peace! Surely this must be a bay in that Lotus land which Tennyson has painted for us!"

Hitherto their conversation had been desultory – mere fragmentary talk about the landscape and the loveliness of the autumn day, with its clear bright sky and soft west wind. They had been always in motion, and there had been a certain adventurousness in the way that seemed to give occupation to their thoughts. But now Mr. Hamleigh came to a dead stop, and stood looking at the rugged amphitheatre, and the low weedy rocks washed smooth by the sea.

"Would you mind sitting down for a few minutes?" he asked; "this Pentargon of yours is a lovely spot, and I don't want to leave it instantly. I have a very slow appreciation of Nature. It takes me a long time to grasp her beauties."

Christabel seated herself on the bank which he had selected for her accommodation, and Mr. Hamleigh placed himself a little lower, almost at her feet, her face turned seaward, his half towards her, as if that lily face, with its wild rose bloom, were even lovelier than the sunlit ocean in all its variety of colour.

"It is a delicious spot," said Angus, "I wonder whether Tristan and Iseult ever came here! I can fancy the queen stealing away from the Court and Court foolery, and walking across the sunlit hills with her lover. It would be rather a long walk, and there might be a difficulty about getting back in time for supper; but one can picture them wandering by flowery fields, or by the cliffs above that everlasting sea, and coming here to rest and talk of their sorrow and their love. Can you not fancy her as Matthew Arnold paints her? —

"Let her have her youth again —
Let her be as she was then!
Let her have her proud dark eyes,
And her petulant, quick replies:
Let her sweep her dazzling hand,
With its gesture of command,
And shake back her raven hair
With the old imperious air.

I have an idea that the Hibernian Iseult must have been a tartar, though Matthew Arnold glosses over her peccadilloes so pleasantly. I wonder whether she had a strong brogue, and a sneaking fondness for usquebaugh."

"Please, don't make a joke of her," pleaded Christabel; "she is very real to me. I see her as a lovely lady – tall and royal-looking, dressed in long robes of flowered silk, fringed with gold. And Tristan – "

"What of Tristan? Is his image as clear in your mind? How do you depict the doomed knight, born to suffer and to sin, destined to sorrow from the time of his forest-birth – motherless, beset with enemies, consumed by hopeless passion. I hope you feel sorry for Tristan?"

"Who could help being sorry for him?"

"Albeit he was a sinner? I assure you, in the old romance which you have not read – which you would hardly care to read – neither Tristan nor Iseult are spotless."

"I have never thought of their wrong-doing. Their fate was so sad, and they loved each other so truly."

"And, again, you can believe, perhaps – you who are so innocent and confiding – that a man who has sinned may forsake the old evil ways and lead a good life, until every stain of that bygone sin is purified. You can believe, as the Greeks believed, in atonement and purification."

"I believe, as I hope all Christians do, that repentance can wash away sin."

"Even the accusing memory of wrong-doing, and make a man's soul white and fair again? That is a beautiful creed."

"I think the Gospel gives us warrant for believing as much – not as some of the Dissenters teach, that one effort of faith, an hour of prayer and ejaculation, can transform a murderer into a saint; but that earnest, sustained regret for wrong-doing, and a steady determination to live a better life – "

"Yes – that is real repentance," exclaimed Angus, interrupting

her. "Common sense, even without Gospel light, tells one that it must be good. Christabel – may I call you Christabel? – just for this one isolated half-hour of life – here in Pentargon Bay? You shall be Miss Courtenay directly we leave this spot."

"Call me what you please. I don't think it matters very much," faltered Christabel, blushing deeply.

"But it makes all the difference to me. Christabel, I can't tell you how sweet it is to me just to pronounce your name. If – if – I could call you by that name always, or by a name still nearer and dearer. But you must judge. Give me half-an-hour – half-an-hour of heartfelt earnest truth on my side, and pitying patience on yours. Christabel, my past life has not been what a stainless Christian would call a good life. I have not been so bad as Tristan. I have violated no sacred charge – betrayed no kinsman. I suppose I have been hardly worse than the common run of young men, who have the means of leading an utterly useless life. I have lived selfishly, unthinkingly – caring for my own pleasure – with little thought of anything that was to come afterwards, either on earth or in heaven. But all that is past and done with. My wild oats are sown; I have had enough of youth and folly. When I came to Cornwall the other day I thought that I was on the threshold of middle age, and that middle age could give me nothing but a few years of pain and weariness. But – behold a miracle! – you have given me back my youth – youth and hope, and a desire for length of days, and a passionate yearning to lead a new, bright, stainless life. You have done all

this, Christabel. I love you as I never thought it possible to love! I believe in you as I never before believed in woman – and yet – and yet – "

He paused, with a long heartbroken sigh, clasped the girl's hand, which had been straying idly among the faded heather, and pressed it to his lips.

"And yet I dare not ask you to be my wife. Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes, tell me," she faltered, her cheeks deadly pale, her lowered eyelids heavy with tears.

"I told you I was like Achilles, doomed to an early death. You remember with what pathetic tenderness Thetis speaks of her son,

'Few years are thine, and not a lengthened term;
At once to early death and sorrows doomed
Beyond the lot of man!'

The Fates have spoken about me quite as plainly as ever the sea-nymph foretold the doom of her son. He was given the choice of length of days or glory, and he deemed fame better than long life. But my life has been as inglorious as it must be brief. Three months ago, one of the wisest of physicians pronounced my doom. The hereditary malady which for the last fifty years has been the curse of my family shows itself by the clearest indications in my case. I could have told the doctor this just as well as he told me; but it is best to have official information. I

may die before I am a year older; I may crawl on for the next ten years – a fragile hot-house plant, sent to winter under southern skies."

"And you may recover, and be strong and well again!" cried Christabel, in a voice choked with sobs. She made no pretence of hiding her pity or her love. "Who can tell? God is so good. What prayer will He not grant us if we only believe in Him? Faith will remove mountains."

"I have never seen it done," said Angus. "I'm afraid that no effort of faith in this degenerate age will give a man a new lung. No, Christabel, there is no chance of long life for me. If hope – if love could give length of days, my new hopes, born of you – my new love felt for you, might work that miracle. But I am the child of my century: I only believe in the possible. And knowing that my years are so few, and that during that poor remnant of life I may be a chronic invalid, how can I – how dare I be so selfish as to ask any girl – young, fresh, and bright, with all the joys of life untasted – to be the companion of my decline? The better she loved me, the sadder would be her life – the keener would be the anguish of watching my decay!"

"But it would be a life spent with you, her days would be devoted to you; if she really loved you, she would not hesitate," pursued Christabel, her hands clasped passionately, tears streaming down her pale cheeks, for this moment to her was the supreme crisis of fate. "She would be unhappy, but there would be sweetness even in her sorrow if she could believe that

she was a comfort to you!"

"Christabel, don't tempt me! Ah, my darling! you don't know how selfish a man's love is, how sweet it would be to me to snatch such bliss, even on the brink of the dark gulf – on the threshold of the eternal night, the eternal silence! Consider what you would take upon yourself – you who perhaps have never known what sickness means – have never seen the horrors of mortal disease."

"Yes, I have sat with some of our poor people when they were dying. I have seen how painful disease is, how cruel Nature seems, and how hard it is for a poor creature racked with pain to believe in God's beneficence; but even then there has been comfort in being able to help them and cheer them a little. I have thought more of that than of the actual misery of the scene."

"But to give all your young life – all your days and thoughts and hopes to a doomed man! Think of that, Christabel! When you are happy with him to see Death grinning behind his shoulder – to watch that spectacle which is of all Nature's miseries the most awful – the slow decay of human life – a man dying by inches – not death, but dissolution! If my malady were heart-disease, and you knew that at some moment – undreamt of – unlooked for – death would come, swift as an arrow from Hecate's bow, brief, with no loathsome or revolting detail – then I might say, 'Let us spend my remnant of life together.' But consumption, you cannot tell what a painful ending that is! Poets and novelists have described it as a kind of euthanasia; but the poetical mind is rarely strong in scientific knowledge. I want you to understand

all the horror of a life spent with a chronic sufferer, about whom the cleverest physician in London has made up his mind."

"Answer me one question," said Christabel, drying her tears, and trying to steady her voice. "Would your life be any happier if we were together – till the end?"

"Happier? It would be a life spent in Paradise. Pain and sickness could hardly touch me with their sting."

"Then let me be your wife."

"Christabel, are you in earnest? have you considered?"

"I consider nothing, except that it may be in my power to make your life a little happier than it would be without me. I want only to be sure of that. If the doom were more dreadful than it is – if there were but a few short months of life left for you, I would ask you to let me share them; I would ask to nurse you and watch you in sickness. There would be no other fate on earth so full of sweetness for me. Yes, even with death and everlasting mourning waiting for me at the end."

"My Christabel, my beloved! my angel, my comforter! I begin to believe in miracles. I almost feel as if you could give me length of years, as well as bliss beyond all thought or hope of mine. Christabel, Christabel, God forgive me if I am asking you to wed sorrow; but you have made this hour of my life an unspeakable ecstasy. Yet I will not take you quite at your word, love. You shall have time to consider what you are going to do – time to talk to your aunt."

"I want no time for consideration. I will be guided by no one."

I think God meant me to love you – and cure you."

"I will believe anything you say; yes, even if you promise me a new lung. God bless you, my beloved! You belong to those whom He does everlastingly bless, who are so angelic upon this earth that they teach us to believe in heaven. My Christabel, my own! I promised to call you Miss Courtenay when we left Pentargon, but I suppose now you are to be Christabel for the rest of my life!"

"Yes, always."

"And all this time we have not seen a single seal," exclaimed Angus, gaily.

His delicate features were radiant with happiness. Who could at such a moment remember death and doom? All painful words which need be said had been spoken.

CHAPTER V

"THE SILVER ANSWER RANG, – 'NOT DEATH, BUT LOVE'"

Mrs. Tregonell and her niece were alone together in the library half-an-hour before afternoon tea, when the autumn light was just beginning to fade, and the autumn mist to rise ghostlike from the narrow little harbour of Boscastle. Miss Bridgeman had contrived that it should be so, just as she had contrived the visit to the seals that morning.

So Christabel, kneeling by her aunt's chair in the fire-glow, just as she had knelt upon the night before Mr. Hamleigh's coming, with faltering lips confessed her secret.

"My dearest, I have known it for ever so long," answered Mrs. Tregonell, gravely, laying her slender hand, sparkling with hereditary rings – never so gorgeous as the gems bought yesterday – on the girl's sunny hair. "I cannot say that I am glad. No, Christabel, I am selfish enough to be sorry, for Leonard's sake, that this should have happened. It was the dream of my life that you two should marry."

"Dear aunt, we could never have cared for each other – as lovers. We had been too much like brother and sister."

"Not too much for Leonard to love you, as I know he does. He was too confident – too secure of his power to win you. And

I, his mother, have brought a rival here – a rival who has stolen your love from my son."

"Don't speak of him bitterly, dearest. Remember he is the son of the man you loved."

"But not my son! Leonard must always be first in my mind. I like Angus Hamleigh. He is all that his father was – yes – it is almost a painful likeness – painful to me, who loved and mourned his father. But I cannot help being sorry for Leonard."

"Leonard shall be my dear brother, always," said Christabel; yet even while she spoke it occurred to her that Leonard was not quite the kind of person to accept the fraternal position pleasantly, or, indeed, any secondary character whatever in the drama of life.

"And when are you to be married?" asked Mrs. Tregonell, looking at the fire.

"Oh, Auntie, do you suppose I have begun to think of that yet awhile?"

"Be sure that he has, if you have not! I hope he is not going to be in a hurry. You were only nineteen last birthday."

"I feel tremendously old," said Christabel. "We – we were talking a little about the future, this afternoon, in the billiard-room, and Angus talked about the wedding being at the beginning of the new year. But I told him I was sure you would not like that."

"No, indeed! I must have time to get reconciled to my loss," answered the dowager, with her arm drawn caressingly round

Christabel's head, as the girl leaned against her aunt's chair. "What will this house seem to me without my daughter? Leonard far away, putting his life in peril for some foolish sport, and you living – Heaven knows where; for you would have to study your husband's taste, not mine, in the matter."

"Why shouldn't we live near you? Mr. Hamleigh might buy a place. There is generally something to be had if one watches one's opportunity."

"Do you think he would care to sink his fortune, or any part of it, in a Cornish estate, or to live amidst these wild hills?"

"He says he adores this place."

"He is in love, and would swear as much of a worse place. No, Belle, I am not foolish enough to suppose that you and Mr. Hamleigh are to settle for life at the end of the world. This house shall be your home whenever you choose to occupy it; and I hope you will come and stay with me sometimes, for I shall be very lonely without you."

"Dear Auntie, you know how I love you; you know how completely happy I have been with you – how impossible it is that anything can ever lessen my love."

"I believe that, dear girl; but it is rarely now-a-days that Ruth follows Naomi. Our modern Ruths go where their lovers go, and worship the same gods. But I don't want to be selfish or unjust, dear. I will try to rejoice in your happiness. And if Angus Hamleigh will only be a little patient; if he will give me time to grow used to the loss of you, he shall have you with your adopted

mother's blessing."

"He shall not have me without it," said Christabel, looking up at her aunt with steadfast eyes.

She had said no word of that early doom of which Angus had told her. For worlds she could not have revealed that fatal truth. She had tried to put away every thought of it while she talked with her aunt. Angus had urged her beforehand to be perfectly frank, to tell Mrs. Tregonell what a mere wreck of a life it was which her lover offered her: but she had refused.

"Let that be our secret," she said, in her low sweet voice. "We want no one's pity. We will bear our sorrow together. And, oh, Angus! my faith is so strong. God, who has made me so happy by the gift of your love, will not take you from me. If – if your life is to be brief, mine will not be long."

"My dearest! if the gods will it so, we will know no parting, but be translated into some new kind of life together – a modern Baucis and Philemon. I think it would be wiser – better, to tell your aunt everything. But if you think otherwise –"

"I will tell her nothing, except that you love me, and that, with her consent, I am going to be your wife;" and with this determination Christabel had made her confession to her aunt.

The ice once broken, everybody reconciled herself or himself to the new aspect of affairs at Mount Royal. In less than a week it seemed the most natural thing in life that Angus and Christabel should be engaged. There was no marked change in their mode of life. They rambled upon the hills, and went boating on fine

mornings, exploring that wonderful coast where the sea-birds congregate, on rocky isles and fortresses rising sheer out of the sea – in mighty caves, the very tradition whereof sounds terrible – caves that seem to have no ending, but to burrow into unknown, unexplored regions, towards the earth's centre.

With Major Bree for their skipper, and a brace of sturdy boatmen, Angus, Christabel, and Jessie Bridgeman spent several mild October mornings on the sea – now towards Cambeak, anon towards Trebarwith. Tintagel from the beach was infinitely grander than Tintagel in its landward aspect. "Here," as Norden says, was "that rocky and winding way up the steep sea-cliff, under which the sea-waves wallow, and so assail the foundation of the isle, as may astonish an unstable brain to consider the peril, for the least slip of the foot leads the whole body into the devouring sea."

To climb these perilous paths, to spring from rock to rock upon the slippery beach, landing on some long green slimy slab over which the sea washes, was Christabel's delight – and Mr. Hamleigh showed no lack of agility or daring. His health had improved marvellously in that invigorating air. Christabel, noteful of every change of hue in the beloved face, saw how much more healthy a tinge cheek and brow had taken since Mr. Hamleigh came to Mount Royal. He had no longer the exhausted look or the languid air of a man who had untimely squandered his stock of life and health. His eye had brightened – with no hectic light, but with the clear sunshine of a mind at ease. He was

altered in every way for the better.

And now the autumn evenings were putting on a wintry air – the lights were twinkling early in the Alpine street of Boscastle. The little harbour was dark at five o'clock. Mr. Hamleigh had been nearly two months at Mount Royal, and he told himself that it was time for leave-taking. Fain would he have stayed on – stayed until that blissful morning when Christabel and he might kneel, side by side, before the altar in Minster Church, and be made one for ever – one in life and death – in a union as perfect as that which was symbolized by the plant that grew out of Tristan's tomb and went down into the grave of his mistress.

Unhappily, Mrs. Tregonell had made up her mind that her niece should not be married until she was twenty years of age – and Christabel's twentieth birthday would not arrive till the following Midsummer. To a lover's impatience so long an interval seemed an eternity; but Mrs. Tregonell had been very gracious in her consent to his betrothal, so he could not disobey her.

"Christabel has seen so little of the world," said the dowager. "I should like to give her one season in London before she marries – just to rub off a little of the rusticity."

"She is perfect – I would not have her changed for worlds," protested Angus.

"Nor I. But she ought to know a little more of society before she has to enter it as your wife. I don't think a London season will spoil her – and it will please me to chaperon her – though I

have no doubt I shall seem rather an old-fashioned chaperon."

"That is just possible," said Angus, smiling, as he thought how closely his divinity was guarded. "The chaperons of the present day are very easy-going people – or, perhaps I ought to say, that the young ladies of the present day have a certain Yankee go-a-headishness which very much lightens the chaperon's responsibility. In point of fact, the London chaperon has dwindled into a formula, and no doubt she will soon be improved off the face of society."

"So much the worse for society," answered the lady of the old school. And then she continued, with a friendly air, —

"I dare say you know that I have a house in Bolton Row. I have not lived in it since my husband's death – but it is mine, and I can have it made comfortable between this and the early spring. I have been thinking that it would be better for you and Christabel to be married in London. The law business would be easier settled – and you may have relations and friends who would like to be at your wedding, yet who would hardly care to come to Boscastle."

"It *is* a long way," admitted Angus. "And people are so inconsistent. They think nothing of going to the Engadine, yet grumble consumedly at a journey of a dozen hours in their native land – as if England were not worth the exertion."

"Then I think we are agreed that London is the best place for the wedding," said Mrs. Tregonell.

"I am perfectly content. But if you suggested Timbuctoo I

should be just as happy."

This being settled, Mrs. Tregonell wrote at once to her agent, with instructions to set the old house in Bolton Row in order for the season immediately after Easter, and Christabel and her lover had to reconcile their minds to the idea of a long dreary winter of severance.

Miss Courtenay had grown curiously grave and thoughtful since her engagement – a change which Jessie, who watched her closely, observed with some surprise. It seemed as if she had passed from girlhood into womanhood in the hour in which she pledged herself to Angus Hamleigh. She had for ever done with the thoughtless gaiety of youth that knows not care. She had taken upon herself the burden of an anxious, self-sacrificing love. To no one had she spoken of her lover's precarious hold upon life; but the thought of by how frail a tenure she held her happiness was ever present with her. "How can I be good enough to him? – how can I do enough to make his life happy?" she thought, "when it may be for so short a time."

With this ever-present consciousness of a fatal future, went the desire to make her lover forget his doom, and the ardent hope that the sentence might be revoked – that the doom pronounced by human judgment might yet be reversed. Indeed, Angus had himself begun to make light of his malady. Who could tell that the famous physician was not a false prophet, after all? The same dire announcement of untimely death had been made to Leigh Hunt, who contrived somehow – not always in the smoothest

waters – to steer his frail bark into the haven of old age. Angus spoke of this, hopefully, to Christabel, as they loitered within the roofless crumbling walls of the ancient oratory above St. Nectan's Kieve, one sunny November morning, Miss Bridgeman rambling on the crest of the hill, with the black sheep-dog, Randie, under the polite fiction of blackberry hunting, among hedges which had long been shorn of their last berry, though the freshness of the lichens and ferns still lingered in this sheltered nook.

"Yes, I know that cruel doctor was mistaken!" said Christabel, her lips quivering a little, her eyes wide and grave, but tearless, as they gazed at her lover. "I know it, I know it!"

"I know that I am twice as strong and well as I was when he saw me," answered Angus; "you have worked as great a miracle for me as ever was wrought at the grave of St. Mertheriana in Minster Churchyard. You have made me happy, and what can cure a man better than perfect bliss. But, oh, my darling! what is to become of me when I leave you, when I return to the beaten ways of London life, and, looking back at these delicious days, ask myself if this sweet life with you is not some dream which I have dreamed, and which can never come again?"

"You will not think anything of the kind," said Christabel, with a pretty little air of authority which charmed him – as all her looks and ways charmed him. "You know that I am sober reality, and that our lives are to be spent together. And you are not going back to London – at least not to stop there. You are

going to the South of France."

"Indeed? this is the first I have heard of any such intention."

"Did not that doctor say you were to winter in the South?"

"He did. But I thought we had agreed to despise that doctor?"

"We will despise him, yet be warned by him. Why should any one, who has liberty and plenty of money, spend his winter in a smoky city, where the fog blinds and stifles him, and the frost pinches him, and the damp makes him miserable, when he can have blue skies, and sunshine and flowers, and ever so much brighter stars, a few hundred miles away? We are bound to obey each other, are we not, Angus? Is not that among our marriage vows?"

"I believe there is something about obedience – on the lady's side – but I waive that technicality. I am prepared to become an awful example of a henpecked husband. If you say I am to go southward, with the swallows, I will go – yea, verily, to Algeria or Tunis, if you insist: though I would rather be on the Riviera, whence a telegram, with the single word 'Come' would bring me to your side in forty-eight hours."

"Yes, you will go to that lovely land on the shores of the Mediterranean, and there you will be very careful of your health, so that when we meet in London, after Easter, your every look will gainsay that pitiless doctor. Will you do this, for my sake, Angus?" she pleaded, lovingly, nestling at his side, as they stood together on a narrow path that wound down to the entrance of the Kieve. They could hear the rush of the waterfall in the deep

green hollow below them, and the faint flutter of loosely hanging leaves, stirred lightly by the light wind, and far away the joyous bark of a sheep-dog. No human voices, save their own, disturbed the autumnal stillness.

"This, and much more, would I do to please you, love. Indeed, if I am not to be here, I might just as well be in the South; nay, much better than in London, or Paris, both of which cities I know by heart. But don't you think we could make a compromise, and that I might spend the winter at Torquay, running over to Mount Royal for a few days occasionally?"

"No; Torquay will not do, delightful as it would be to have you so near. I have been reading about the climate in the South of France, and I am sure, if you are careful, a winter there will do you worlds of good. Next year – "

"Next year we can go there together, and you will take care of me. Was that what you were going to say, Belle?"

"Something like that."

"Yes" he said, slowly, after a thoughtful pause, "I shall be glad to be away from London, and all old associations. My past life is a worthless husk that I have done with for ever."

CHAPTER VI IN SOCIETY

The Easter recess was over. Society had returned from its brief holiday – its glimpse of budding hedges and primrose-dotted banks, blue skies and blue violets, the snowy bloom of orchards, the tender green of young cornfields. Society had come back again, and was hard at the London treadmill – yawning at old operas, and damning new plays – sniggering at crowded soirées – laying down the law, each man his particular branch thereof, at carefully planned dinner parties – quarrelling and making friends again – eating and drinking – spending and wasting, and pretending to care very little about anything; for society is as salt that has lost its savour if it is not cynical and affected.

But there was one *débutante* at least that season for whom town pleasures had lost none of their freshness, for whom the old operas were all melody, and the new plays all wit – who admired everything with frankest wonder and enthusiasm, and without a thought of Horace, or Pope, or Creech, or anybody, except the lover who was always at her side, and who shed the rose-coloured light of happiness upon the commonest things. To sit in the Green Park on a mild April morning, to see the guard turn out by St. James's Palace after breakfast, to loiter away an hour or two at a picture gallery – was to be infinitely happy. Neither opera nor

play, dinner nor dance, race-course nor flower-show, was needed to complete the sum of Christabel's bliss when Angus Hamleigh was with her.

He had returned from Hyères, quietest among the southern towns, wonderfully improved in health and strength. Even Mrs. Tregonell and Miss Bridgeman perceived the change in him.

"I think you must have been very ill when you came to Mount Royal, Mr. Hamleigh," said Jessie, one day. "You look so much better now."

"My life was empty then – it is full now," he answered. "It is hope that keeps a man alive, and I had very little to hope for when I went westward. How strange the road of life is, and how little a man knows what is waiting for him round the corner."

The house in Bolton Row was charming; just large enough to be convenient, just small enough to be snug. At the back, the windows looked into Lord Somebody's garden – not quite a tropical paradise – nay, even somewhat flavoured with bricks and mortar – but still a garden, where, by sedulous art, the gardeners kept alive ferns and flowers, and where trees, warranted to resist smoke, put forth young leaves in the springtime, and only languished and sickened in untimely decay when the London season was over, and their function as fashionable trees had been fulfilled.

The house was furnished in a Georgian style, pleasant to modern taste. The drawing-room was of the spindle-legged order – satin-wood card tables; groups of miniatures in oval

frames; Japanese folding screen, behind which Belinda might have played Bo-peep; china jars, at whose fall Narcissa might have inly suffered, while outwardly serene. The dining-room was sombre and substantial. The bedrooms had been improved by modern upholstery; for the sleeping apartments of our ancestors leave a good deal to be desired. All the windows were full of flowers – inside and out there was the perfume and colour of many blossoms. The three drawing-rooms, growing smaller to a diminishing point, like a practical lesson in perspective, were altogether charming.

Major Bree had escorted the ladies to London, and was their constant guest, camping out in a bachelor lodging in Jermyn Street, and coming across Piccadilly every day to eat his luncheon in Bolton Row, and to discuss the evening's engagements.

Long as he had been away from London, he acclimatized himself very quickly – found out everything about everybody – what singers were best worth hearing – what plays best worth seeing – what actors should be praised – which pictures should be looked at and talked about – what horses were likely to win the notable races. He was a walking guide, a living hand-book to fashionable London.

All Mrs. Tregonell's old friends – all the Cornish people who came to London – called in Bolton Row; and at every house where the lady and her niece visited there were new introductions, whereby the widow's visiting list widened like a circle in the water – and cards for dances and evening parties,

afternoons and dinners were super-abundant. Christabel wanted to see everything. She had quite a country girl's taste, and cared much more for the theatre and the opera than to be dressed in a new gown, and to be crushed in a crowd of other young women in new gowns – or to sit still and be admired at a stately dinner. Nor was she particularly interested in the leaders of fashion, their ways and manners – the newest professed or professional beauty – the last social scandal. She wanted to see the great city of which she had read in history – the Tower, the Savoy, Westminster Hall, the Abbey, St. Paul's, the Temple – the London of Elizabeth, the still older London of the Edwards and Henries, the house in which Milton was born, the organ on which he played, the place where Shakespeare's Theatre once stood, the old Inn whence Chaucer's Pilgrims started on their journey. Even Dickens's London – the London of Pickwick and Winkle – the Saracen's Head at which Mr. Squeers put up – had charms for her.

"Is everything gone?" she asked, piteously, after being told how improvement had effaced the brick and mortar background of English History.

Yet there still remained enough to fill her mind with solemn thoughts of the past. She spent long hours in the Abbey, with Angus and Jessie, looking at the monuments, and recalling the lives and deeds of long vanished heroes and statesmen. The Tower, and the old Inns of Court, were full of interest. Her curiosity about old houses and streets was insatiable.

"No one less than Macaulay could satisfy you," said Angus, one day, when his memory was at fault. "A man of infinite reading, and infallible memory."

"But you have read so much, and you remember a great deal."

They had been prowling about the Whitehall end of the town in the bright early morning, before Fashion had begun to stir herself faintly among her down pillows. Christabel loved the parks and streets while the freshness of sunrise was still upon them – and these early walks were an institution.

"Where is the Decoy?" she asked Angus, one day, in St. James's Park; and on being interrogated, it appeared that she meant a certain piece of water, described in "Peveril of the Peak." All this part of London was peopled with Scott's heroes and heroines, or with suggestions of Goldsmith. Here Fenella danced before good-natured, loose-living Rowley. Here Nigel stood aside, amidst the crowd, to see Charles, Prince of Wales, and his ill-fated favourite, Buckingham, go by. Here the Citizen of the World met Beau Tibbs and the gentleman in black. For Christabel, the Park was like a scene in a stage play.

Then, after breakfast, there were long drives into fair suburban haunts, where they escaped in some degree from London smoke and London restraints of all kinds, where they could charter a boat, and row up the river to a still fairer scene, and picnic in some rushy creek, out of ken of society, and be almost as recklessly gay as if they had been at Tintagel.

These were the days Angus loved best. The days upon which

he and his betrothed turned their backs upon London society, and seemed as far away from the outside world as ever they had been upon the wild western coast. Like most men educated at Eton and Oxford, and brought up in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, Angus loved the Thames with a love that was almost a passion.

"It is my native country," he said; "I have no other. All the pleasantest associations of my boyhood and youth are interwoven with the river. When I die, my spirit ought to haunt these shores, like that ghost of the 'Scholar Gipsy,' which you have read about in Arnold's poem."

He knew every bend and reach of the river – every tributary, creek, and eyot – almost every row of pollard willows, standing stunted and grim along the bank, like a line of rugged old men. He knew where the lilies grew, and where there were chances of trout. The haunts of monster pike were familiar to him – indeed, he declared that he knew many of these gentlemen personally – that they were as old as the Fontainebleau carp, and bore a charmed life.

"When I was at Eton I knew them all by sight," he said. "There was one which I set my heart upon landing, but he was ever so much stronger and cleverer than I. If I had caught him I should have worn his skin ever after, in the pride of my heart – like Hercules with his lion. But he still inhabits the same creek, still sulks among the same rushes, and devours the gentler members of the finny race by shoals. We christened him Dr. Parr, for we

knew he was preternaturally old, and we thought he must, from mere force of association, be a profound scholar."

Mr. Hamleigh was always finding reasons for these country excursions, which he declared were the one sovereign antidote for the poisoned atmosphere of crowded rooms, and the evil effects of late hours.

"You wouldn't like to see Christabel fade and languish like the flowers in your drawing-room," he urged, when Mrs. Tregonell wanted her niece to make a round of London visits, instead of going down to Maidenhead on the coach, to lunch somewhere up the river. Not at Skindle's – or at any other hotel – but in the lazy sultry quiet of some sequestered nook below the hanging woods of Cliveden. "I'm sure you can spare her just for to-day – such a perfect spring day. It would be a crime to waste such sunlight and such balmy air in town drawing-rooms. Could not you strain a point, dear Mrs. Tregonell, and come with us?"

Aunt Diana shook her head. No, the fatigue would be too much – she had lived such a quiet life at Mount Royal, that a very little exertion tired her. Besides she had some calls to make; and then there was a dinner at Lady Bulteel's, to which she must take Christabel, and an evening party afterwards.

Christabel shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"I am beginning to hate parties," she said. "They are amusing enough when one is in them – but they are all alike – and it would be so much nicer for us to live our own lives, and go wherever Angus likes. Don't you think you might defer the calls, and come

with us to-day, Auntie dear?"

Auntie dear shook her head.

"Even if I were equal to the fatigue, Belle, I couldn't defer my visits. Thursday is Lady Onslow's day – and Mrs. Trevannion's day – and Mrs. Vansittart's day – and when people have been so wonderfully kind to us, it would be uncivil not to call."

"And you will sit in stifling drawing-rooms, with the curtains lowered to shut out the sunlight – and you will drink ever so much more tea than is good for you – and hear a lot of people prosing about the same things over and over again – Epsom and the Opera – and Mrs. This and Miss That – and Mrs. Somebody's new book, which everybody reads and talks about, just as if there were not another book in the world, or as if the old book counted for nothing," concluded Christabel, contemptuously, having by this time discovered the conventional quality of kettle-drum conversations, wherein people discourse authoritatively about books they have not read, plays they have not seen, and people they do not know.

Mr. Hamleigh had his own way, and carried off Christabel and Miss Bridgeman to the White Horse Cellar, with the faithful Major in attendance.

"You will bring Belle home in time to dress for Lady Bulteel's dinner," said Mrs. Tregonell, impressively, as they were departing. "Mind, Major, I hold you responsible for her return. You are the only sober person in the party. I believe Jessie Bridgeman is as wild as a hawk, when she gets out of my sight."

Jessie's shrewd grey eyes twinkled at the reproof.

"I am not very sorry to get away from Bolton Row, and the fine ladies who come to see you – and who always look at me as much as to say, 'Who is she? – what is she? – how did she come here?' – and who are obviously surprised if I say anything intelligent – first, at my audacity in speaking before company, and next that such a thing as I should have any brains."

"Nonsense, Jessie, how thin-skinned you are; everybody praises you," said Mrs. Tregonell, while they all waited on the threshold for Christabel to fasten her eight-button gloves – a delicate operation, in which she was assisted by Mr. Hamleigh.

"How clever you are at buttoning gloves," exclaimed Christabel; "one would think you had served an apprenticeship."

"That's not the first pair he has buttoned, I'll wager," cried the Major, in his loud, hearty voice; and then, seeing Angus redden ever so slightly, and remembering certain rumours which he had heard at his club, the kindly bachelor regretted his speech.

Happily, Christabel was engaged at this moment in kissing her aunt, and did not observe Mr. Hamleigh's heightened colour. Ten minutes later they were all seated outside the coach, bowling down Piccadilly Hill on their way westward.

"In the good old days this is how you would have started for Cornwall," said Angus.

"I wish we were going to Cornwall now."

"So do I, if your aunt would let us be married at that dear little church in the glen. Christabel, when I die, if you have the

ordering of my funeral, be sure that I am buried in Minster Churchyard."

"Angus, don't," murmured Christabel, piteously.

"Dearest, 'we must all die – 'tis an inevitable chance – the first Statute in Magna Charta – it is an everlasting Act of Parliament – that's what he says of death, dear, who jested at all things, and laid his cap and bells down one day in a lodging in Bond Street – the end of which we passed just now – sad and lonely, and perhaps longing for the kindred whom he had forsaken."

"You mean Sterne," said Christabel. "Jessie and I hunted for that house, yesterday. I think we all feel sorrier for him than for many a better man."

In the early afternoon they had reached their destination – a lovely creek shaded by chestnut and alder – a spot known to few, and rarely visited. Here, under green leaves, they moored their boat, and lunched on the contents of a basket which had been got ready for them at Skindle's – dawdling over the meal – taking their ease – full of talk and laughter. Never had Angus looked better, or talked more gaily. Jessie, too, was at her brightest, and had a great deal to say.

"It is wonderful how well you two get on," said Christabel, smiling at her friend's prompt capping of some bitter little speech from Angus. "You always seem to understand each other so quickly – indeed, Jessie seems to know what Angus is going to say before the words are spoken. I can see it in her face."

"Perhaps, that is because we are both cynics," said Mr.

Hamleigh.

"Yes, that is no doubt the reason," said Jessie, reddening a little; "the bond of sympathy between us is founded on our very poor opinion of our fellow-creatures."

But after this Miss Bridgeman became more silent, and gave way much less than usual to those sudden impulses of sharp speech which Christabel had noticed.

They landed presently, and went wandering away into the inland – a strange world to Christabel, albeit very familiar to her lover.

"Not far from here there is a dell which is the most wonderful place in the world for bluebells," said Angus, looking at his watch. "I wonder whether we should have time to walk there."

"Let us try, if it is not very, very far," urged Christabel. "I adore bluebells, and skylarks, and the cuckoo, and all the dear country flowers and birds. I have been surfeited with hot-house flowers and caged canaries since I came to London."

A skylark was singing in the deep blue, far aloft, over the little wood in which they were wandering. It was the loneliest, loveliest spot; and Christabel felt as if it would be agony to leave it. She and her lover seemed ever so much nearer, dearer, more entirely united here than in London drawing-rooms, where she hardly dared to be civil to him lest society should be amused or contemptuous. Here she could cling to his arm – it seemed a strong and helpful arm now – and look up at his face with love irradiating her own countenance, and feel no more ashamed than

Eve in the Garden. Here they could talk without fear of being heard; for Jessie and the Major followed at a most respectful distance – just keeping the lovers in view, and no more.

Christabel ran back presently to say they were going to look for bluebells.

"You'll come, won't you?" she pleaded; "Angus says the dell is not far off."

"I don't believe a bit in his topography," said the Major; "do you happen to know that it is three o'clock, and that you are due at a State dinner?"

"At eight," cried Christabel, "ages away. Angus says the train goes at six. We are to have some tea at Skindle's, at five. We have two hours in which to do what we like."

"There is the row back to Skindle's."

"Say half an hour for that, which gives us ninety minutes for the bluebells."

"Do you count life by minutes, child?" asked the Major.

"Yes, Uncle Oliver, when I am utterly happy; for then every minute is precious."

And then she and her lover went rambling on, talking, laughing, poetising under the flickering shadows and glancing lights; while the other two followed at a leisurely pace, like the dull foot of reality following the winged heel of romance. Jessie Bridgeman was only twenty-seven, yet in her own mind it seemed as if she were the Major's contemporary – nay, indeed, his senior; for he had never known that grinding poverty which

ages the eldest daughter in a large shabby genteel family. Jessie Bridgeman had been old in care before she left off pinafores. Her childish pleasure in the shabbiest of dolls had been poisoned by a precocious familiarity with poor-rates, and water-rates – a sickening dread of the shabby man in pepper-and-salt tweed, with the end of an oblong account-book protruding from his breast-pocket, who came to collect money that was never ready for him, and departed, leaving a printed notice, like the trail of the serpent, behind him. The first twenty years of Jessie Bridgeman's life had been steeped in poverty, every day, every hour flavoured with the bitter taste of deprivation and the world's contempt, the want of common comforts, the natural longing for fairer surroundings, the ever-present dread of a still lower deep in which pinching should become starvation, and even the shabby home should be no longer tenable. With a father whose mission upon this earth was to docket and file a certain class of accounts in Somerset House, for a salary of a hundred-and-eighty pounds a year, and a bi-annual rise of five, a harmless man, whose only crime was to have married young and made himself responsible for an unanticipated family – "How could a young fellow of two-and-twenty know that God was going to afflict him with ten children?" Mr. Bridgeman used to observe plaintively – with a mother whose life was one long domestic drudgery, who spent more of her days in a back kitchen than is consistent with the maintenance of personal dignity, and whose only chance of an airing was that stern necessity which impelled her to go

and interview the tax-gatherer, in the hope of obtaining "time" – Jessie's opportunities of tasting the pleasures of youth had been of the rarest. Once in six months or so, perhaps, a shabby-genteel friend gave her father an order for some theatre, which was in that palpable stage of ruin when orders are freely given to the tavern loafer and the stage-door hanger-on – and then, oh, what rapture to trudge from Shepherd's Bush to the West End, and to spend a long hot evening in the gassy paradise of the Upper Boxes! Once in a year or so Mr. Bridgeman gave his wife and eldest girl a dinner at an Italian Restaurant near Leicester Square – a cheap little pinchy dinner, in which the meagre modicum of meat and poultry was eked out by much sauce, redolent of garlic, by delicious foreign bread, and too-odorous foreign cheese. It was a tradition in the family that Mr. Bridgeman had been a great dinner-giver in his bachelor days, and knew every restaurant in London.

"They don't forget me here, you see," he said, when the sleek Italian waiter brought him extra knives and forks for the dual portion which was to serve for three.

Such had been the utmost limit of Jessie's pleasures before she answered an advertisement in the *Times*, which stated that a lady, living in a retired part of Cornwall, required the services of a young lady who could write a good hand, keep accounts, and had some knowledge of housekeeping – who was willing, active, cheerful, and good-tempered. Salary, thirty pounds per annum.

It was not the first advertisement by many that Jessie had

answered. Indeed, she seemed, to her own mind, to have been doing nothing but answering advertisements, and hoping against hope for a favourable reply, since her eighteenth birthday, when it had been borne in upon her, as the Evangelicals say, that she ought to go out into the world, and do something for her living, making one mouth less to be filled from the family bread-pan.

"There's no use talking, mother," she said, when Mrs. Bridgeman tried to prove that the bright useful eldest daughter cost nothing; "I eat, and food costs money. I have a dreadfully healthy appetite, and if I could get a decent situation I should cost you nothing, and should be able to send you half my salary. And now that Milly is getting a big girl –"

"She hasn't an idea of making herself useful," sighed the mother; "only yesterday she let the milkman ring three times and then march away without leaving us a drop of milk, because she was too proud or too lazy to open the door, while Sarah and I were up to our eyes in the wash."

"Perhaps she didn't hear him," suggested Jessie, charitably.

"She must have heard his pails if she didn't hear *him*," said Mrs. Bridgeman; "besides he 'yooped,' for I heard him, and relied upon that idle child for taking in the milk. But put not your trust in princes," concluded the overworked matron, rather vaguely.

"Salary, thirty pounds per annum," repeated Jessie, reading the Cornish lady's advertisement over and over again, as if it had been a charm; "why that would be a perfect fortune; think what you could do with an extra fifteen pounds a year!"

"My dear, it would make my life heaven. But you would want all the money for your dress: you would have to be always nice. There would be dinner parties, no doubt, and you would be asked to come into the drawing-room of an evening," said Mrs. Bridgeman, whose ideas of the governess's social status were derived solely from "Jane Eyre."

Jessie's reply to the advertisement was straight-forward and succinct, and she wrote a fine bold hand. These two facts favourably impressed Mrs. Tregonell, and of the three or four dozen answers which her advertisement brought forth, Jessie's pleased her the most. The young lady's references to her father's landlord and the incumbent of the nearest church, were satisfactory. So one bleak wintry morning Miss Bridgeman left Paddington in one of the Great Western's almost luxurious third-class carriages, and travelled straight to Launceston, whence a carriage – the very first private carriage she had ever sat in, and every detail of which was a wonder and a delight to her – conveyed her to Mount Royal.

That fine old Tudor manor-house, after the shabby ten-roomed villa at Shepherd's Bush – badly built, badly drained, badly situated, badly furnished, always smelling of yesterday's dinner, always damp and oozy with yesterday's rain – was almost too beautiful to be real. For days after her arrival Jessie felt as if she must be walking about in a dream. The elegancies and luxuries of life were all new to her. The perfect quiet and order of this country home; the beauty in every detail – from the old silver

urn and Worcester china which greeted her eyes on the breakfast-table, to the quaint little Queen Anne candlestick which she carried up to her bedroom at night – seemed like a revelation of a hitherto unknown world. The face of Nature – the hills and the moors – the sea and the cliffs – was as new to her as all that indoor luxury. An occasional week at Ramsgate or South-end had been all her previous experience of this world's loveliness. Happily, she was not a shy or awkward young person. She accommodated herself with wonderful ease to her altered surroundings – was not tempted to drink out of a finger-glass, and did not waver for a moment as to the proper use of her fish-knife and fork – took no wine – and ate moderately of that luxurious and plentiful fare which was as new and wonderful to her as if she had been transported from the barren larder of Shepherd's Bush to that fabulous land where the roasted piglings ran about with knives and forks in their backs, squeaking, in pig language, "Come, eat me; come, eat me."

Often in this paradise of pasties and clotted cream, mountain mutton and barn-door fowls, she thought with a bitter pang of the hungry circle at home, with whom dinner was the exception rather than the rule, and who made believe to think tea and bloaters an ever so much cosier meal than a formal repast of roast and boiled.

On the very day she drew her first quarter's salary – not for worlds would she have anticipated it by an hour – Jessie ran off to a farm she knew of, and ordered a monster hamper to be sent

to Rosslyn Villa, Shepherd's Bush – a hamper full of chickens, and goose, and cream, and butter, with a big saffron-flavoured cake for its crowning glory – such a cake as would delight the younger members of the household!

Nor did she forget her promise to send the over-tasked house-mother half her earnings. "You needn't mind taking the money, dearest," she wrote in the letter which enclosed the Post-Office order. "Mrs. Tregonell has given me a lovely grey silk gown; and I have bought a brown merino at Launceston, and a new hat and jacket. You would stare to see how splendidly your homely little Jessie is dressed! Christabel found out the date of my birthday, and gave me a dozen of the loveliest gloves, my favourite grey, with four buttons. A whole dozen! Did you ever see a dozen of gloves all at once, mother? You have no idea how lovely they look. I quite shrink from breaking into the packet; but I must wear a pair at church next Sunday, in compliment to the dear little giver. If it were not for thoughts of you and the brood, dearest, I should be intensely happy here! The house is an ideal house – the people are ideal people; and they treat me ever so much better than I deserve. I think I have the knack of being useful to them, which is a great comfort; and I am able to get on with the servants – old servants who had a great deal too much of their own way before I came – which is also a comfort. It is not easy to introduce reform without making oneself detested. Christabel, who has been steeping herself in French history lately, calls me Turgot in petticoats – by which

you will see she has a high opinion of my ministerial talents – if you can remember Turgot, poor dear! amidst all your worries," added Jessie, bethinking herself that her mother's book-learning had gone to seed in an atmosphere of petty domestic cares – mending – washing – pinching – contriving.

This and much more had Jessie Bridgeman written seven years ago, while Mount Royal was still new to her. The place and the people – at least those two whom she first knew there – had grown dearer as time went on. When Leonard came home from the University, he and his mother's factotum did not get on quite so well as Mrs. Tregonell had hoped. Jessie was ready to be kind and obliging to the heir of the house; but Leonard did not like her – in the language of the servant's hall, he "put his back up at her." He looked upon her as an interloper and a spy, especially suspecting her in the latter capacity, perhaps from a lurking consciousness that some of his actions would not bear the fierce light of unfriendly observation. In vain did his mother plead for her favourite.

"You have no idea how good she is!" said Mrs. Tregonell.

"You're perfectly right there, mother; I have not," retorted Leonard.

"And so useful to me! I should be lost without her!"

"Of course; that's exactly what she wants: creeping and crawling – and pinching and saving – docking your tradesmen's accounts – grinding your servants – fingering your income – till, by-and-by, she will contrive to finger a good deal of it into her

own pocket! That's the way they all begin – that's the way the man in the play, Sir Giles Overreach's man, began, you may be sure – till by-and-by he got Sir Giles under his thumb. And that's the way Miss Bridgeman will serve you. I wonder you are so shortsighted!"

Weak as Mrs. Tregonell was in her love for her son, she was too staunch to be set against a person she liked by any such assertions as these. She was quite able to form her own opinion about Miss Bridgeman's character, and she found the girl straight as an arrow – candid almost to insolence, yet pleasant withal; industrious, clever – sharp as a needle in all domestic details – able to manage pounds as carefully as she had managed pence and sixpences.

"Mother used to give me the housekeeping purse," she said, "and I did what I liked. I was always Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was a very small exchequer; but I learnt the habit of spending and managing, and keeping accounts."

While active and busy about domestic affairs, verifying accounts, settling supplies and expenditures with the cook-housekeeper, making herself a veritable clerk of the kitchen, and overlooking the housemaids in the finer details of their work, Miss Bridgeman still found ample leisure for the improvement of her mind. In a quiet country-house, where family prayers are read at eight o'clock every morning, the days are long enough for all things. Jessie had no active share in Christabel's education, which was Mrs. Tregonell's delight and care; but she contrived

to learn what Christabel learnt – to study with her and read with her, and often to outrun her in the pursuit of a favourite subject. They learnt German together, they read good French books together, and were companions in the best sense of the word. It was a happy life – monotonous, uneventful, but a placid, busy, all-satisfying life, which Jessie Bridgeman led during those six years and a half which went before the advent of Angus Hamleigh at Mount Royal. The companion's salary had long ago been doubled, and Jessie, who had no caprices, and whose wants were modest, was able to send forty pounds a year to Shepherd's Bush, and found a rich reward in the increased cheerfulness of the letters from home.

Just so much for Jessie Bridgeman's history as she walks by Major Bree's side in the sunlight, with a sharply cut face, impressed with a gravity beyond her years, and marked with precocious lines that were drawn there by the iron hand of poverty before she had emerged from girlhood. Of late, even amidst the elegant luxuries of May Fair, in a life given over to amusement, among flowers and bright scenery, and music and pictures, those lines had been growing deeper – lines that hinted at a secret care.

"Isn't it delightful to see them together!" said the Major, looking after those happy lovers with a benevolent smile.

"Yes; I suppose it is very beautiful to see such perfect happiness, like Juan and Haidée before Lambro swooped down upon them," returned Miss Bridgeman, who was too outspoken

to be ashamed of having read Byron's epic.

Major Bree had old-fashioned notions about the books women should and should not read, and Byron, except for elegant extracts, was in his *Index expurgatorius*. If a woman was allowed to read the "Giaour," she would inevitably read "Don Juan," he argued; there would be no restraining her, after she had tasted blood – no use in offering her another poet, and saying, Now you can read "Thalaba," or "Peter Bell."

"They were so happy!" said Jessie dreamily, "so young, and one so innocent; and then came fear, severance, despair, and death for the innocent sinner. It is a terrible story!"

"Fortunately, there is no tyrannical father in this case," replied the cheerful Major. "Everybody is pleased with the engagement – everything smiles upon the lovers."

"No, it is all sunshine," said Jessie; "there is no shadow, if – if Mr. Hamleigh is as worthy of his betrothed as we have all agreed to think him. Yet there was a time when you spoke rather disparagingly of him."

"My gossiping old tongue should be cut out for repeating club scandals! Hamleigh is a generous-hearted, noble-natured fellow, and I am not afraid to trust him with the fate of a girl whom I love almost as well as if she were my own daughter. I don't know whether all men love their daughters, by-the-by. There are daughters and daughters – I have seen some that it would be tough work to love. But for Christabel my affection is really parental. I have seen her bud and blossom, a beautiful living flower, a rose

in the garden of life."

"And you think Mr. Hamleigh is worthy of her?" said Miss Bridgeman, looking at him searchingly with her shrewd grey eyes, "in spite of what you heard at the clubs?"

"A *fico* for what I heard at the clubs!" exclaimed the Major, blowing the slander away from the tips of his fingers as if it had been thistledown. "Every man has a past, and every man outlives it. The present and the future are what we have to consider. It is not a man's history, but the man himself, that concerns us; and I say that Angus Hamleigh is a good man, a right-meaning man, a brave and generous man. If a man is to be judged by his history, where would David be, I should like to know? and yet David was the chosen of the Lord!" added the Major, conclusively.

"I hope," said Jessie, earnestly, with vague visions of intrigue and murder conjured up in her mind, "that Mr. Hamleigh was never as bad as David."

"No, no," murmured the Major, "the circumstances of modern times are so different, don't you see? – an advanced civilization – a greater respect for human life. Napoleon the First did a good many queer things; but you would not get a monarch and a commander-in-chief to act as David and Joab acted now-a-days. Public opinion would be too strong for them. They would be afraid of the newspapers."

"Was it anything very dreadful that you heard at the clubs three years ago?" asked Jessie, still hovering about a forbidden theme, with a morbid curiosity strange in one whose acts and

thoughts were for the most part ruled by common sense.

The Major, who would not allow a woman to read "Don Juan," had his own ideas of what ought and ought not to be told to a woman.

"My dear Miss Bridgeman," he said, "I would not for worlds pollute your ears with the ribald trash men talk in a club smoking-room. Let it suffice for you to know that I believe in Angus Hamleigh, although I have taken the trouble to make myself acquainted with the follies of his youth."

They walked on in silence for a little while after this, and then the Major said, in a voice full of kindness:

"I think you went to see your own people yesterday, did you not?"

"Yes; Mrs. Tregonell was kind enough to give me a morning, and I spent it with my mother and sisters."

The Major had questioned her more than once about her home, in a way which indicated so kindly an interest that it could not possibly be mistaken for idle curiosity. And she had told him, with perfect frankness, what manner of people her family were – in no wise hesitating to admit their narrow means, and the necessity that she should earn her own living.

"I hope you found them well and happy."

"I thought my mother looked thin and weary. The girls were wonderfully well – great hearty, overgrown creatures! I felt myself a wretched little shrimp among them. As for happiness – well, they are as happy as people can expect to be who are very

poor!"

"Do you really think poverty is incompatible with happiness?" asked the Major, with a philosophical air; "I have had a particularly happy life, and I have never been rich."

"Ah, that makes all the difference!" exclaimed Jessie. "You have never been rich, but they have always been poor. You can't conceive what a gulf lies between those two positions. You have been obliged to deny yourself a great many of the mere idle luxuries of life, I dare say – hunters, the latest improvements in guns, valuable dogs, continental travelling; but you have had enough for all the needful things – for neatness, cleanliness, an orderly household; a well-kept flower-garden, everything spotless and bright about you; no slipshod maid-of-all-work printing her greasy thumb upon your dishes – nothing out at elbows. Your house is small, but of its kind it is perfection; and your garden – well, if I had such a garden in such a situation I would not envy Eve the Eden she lost."

"Is that really your opinion?" cried the enraptured soldier; "or are you saying this just to please me – to reconcile me to my jog-trot life, my modest surroundings?"

"I mean every word I say."

"Then it is in your power to make me richer in happiness than Rothschild or Baring. Dearest Miss Bridgeman, dearest Jessie, I think you must know how devotedly I love you! Till to-day I have not dared to speak, for my limited means would not have allowed me to maintain a wife as the woman I love ought to be

maintained; but this morning's post brought me the news of the death of an old Admiral of the Blue, who was my father's first cousin. He was a bachelor like myself – left the Navy soon after the signing of Sir Henry Pottinger's treaty at Nankin in '42 – never considered himself well enough off to marry, but lived in a lodging at Devonport, and hoarded and hoarded and hoarded for the mere abstract pleasure of accumulating his surplus income; and the result of his hoarding – combined with a little dodging of his investments in stocks and shares – is, that he leaves me a solid four hundred a year in Great Westerns. It is not much from some people's point of view, but, added to my existing income, it makes me very comfortable. I could afford to indulge all your simple wishes, my dearest! I could afford to help your family!"

He took her hand. She did not draw it away, but pressed his gently, with the grasp of friendship.

"Don't say one word more – you are too good – you are the best and kindest man I have ever known!" she said, "and I shall love and honour you all my life; but I shall never marry! I made up my mind about that, oh! ever so long ago. Indeed, I never expected to be asked, if the truth must be told."

"I understand," said the Major, terribly dashed. "I am too old. Don't suppose that I have not thought about that. I have. But I fancied the difficulty might be got over. You are so different from the common run of girls – so staid, so sensible, of such a contented disposition. But I was a fool to suppose that any girl of – "

"Seven-and-twenty," interrupted Jessie; "it is a long way up the hill of girlhood. I shall soon be going down on the other side."

"At any rate, you are more than twenty years my junior. I was a fool to forget that."

"Dear Major Bree," said Jessie, very earnestly, "believe me, it is not for that reason, I say No. If you were as young – as young as Mr. Hamleigh – the answer would be just the same. I shall never marry. There is no one, prince or peasant, whom I care to marry. You are much too good a man to be married for the sake of a happy home, for status in the world, kindly companionship – all of which you could give me. If I loved you as you ought to be loved I would answer proudly, Yes; but I honour you too much to give you half love."

"Perhaps you do not know with how little I could be satisfied," urged the Major, opposing what he imagined to be a romantic scruple with the shrewd common-sense of his fifty years' experience. "I want a friend, a companion, a helpmate, and I am sure you could be all those to me. If I could only make you happy!"

"You could not!" interrupted Jessie, with cruel decisiveness. "Pray, never speak of this again, dear Major Bree. Your friendship has been very pleasant to me; it has been one of the many charms of my life at Mount Royal. I would not lose it for the world. And we can always be friends, if you will only remember that I have made up my mind – irrevocably – never to marry."

"I must needs obey you," said the Major, deeply disappointed,

but too unselfish to be angry. "I will not be importunate. Yet one word I must say. Your future – if you do not marry – what is that to be? Of course, so long as Mrs. Tregonell lives, your home will be at Mount Royal – but I fear that does not settle the question for long. My dear friend does not appear to me a long-lived woman. I have seen traces of premature decay. When Christabel is married, and Mrs. Tregonell is dead, where is your home to be?"

"Providence will find me one," answered Jessie, cheerfully. "Providence is wonderfully kind to plain little spinsters with a knack of making themselves useful. I have been doing my best to educate myself ever since I have been at Mount Royal. It is so easy to improve one's mind when there are no daily worries about the tax-gatherer and the milkman – and when I am called upon to seek a new home, I can go out as a governess – and drink the cup of life as it is mixed for governesses – as Charlotte Brontë says. Perhaps I shall write a novel, as she did, although I have not her genius."

"I would not be sure of that," said the Major. "I believe there is some kind of internal fire burning you up, although you are outwardly so quiet. I think it would have been your salvation to accept the jog-trot life and peaceful home I have offered you."

"Very likely," replied Jessie, with a shrug and a sigh. "But how many people reject salvation. They would rather be miserable in their own way than happy in anybody else's way."

The Major answered never a word. For him all the glory of the

day had faded. He walked slowly on by Jessie's side, meditating upon her words – wondering why she had so resolutely refused him. There had been not the least wavering – she had not even seemed to be taken by surprise – her mind had been made up long ago – not him, nor any other man, would she wed.

"Some early disappointment, perhaps," mused the Major – "a curate at Shepherd's Bush – those young men have a great deal to answer for."

They came to the hyacinth dell – an earthly paradise to the two happy lovers, who were sitting on a mossy bank, in a sheet of azure bloom, which, seen from the distance, athwart young trees, looked like blue, bright water.

To the Major the hazel copse and the bluebells – the young oak plantation – and all the lovely details of mosses and flowering grasses, and starry anemones – were odious. He felt in a hurry to get back to his club, and steep himself in London pleasures. All the benevolence seemed to have been crushed out of him.

Christabel saw that her old friend was out of spirits, and contrived to be by his side on their way back to the boat, trying to cheer him with sweetest words and loveliest smiles.

"Have we tired you?" she asked. "The afternoon is very warm."

"Tired me! You forget how I ramble over the hills at home. No; I am just a trifle put out – but it is nothing. I had news of a death this morning – a death that makes me richer by four hundred a year. If it were not for respect for my dead cousin who

so kindly made me his heir, I think I should go to-night to the most rowdy theatre in London, just to put myself in spirits."

"Which are the rowdy theatres, Uncle Oliver?"

"Well, perhaps I ought not to use such a word. The theatres are all good in their way – but there are theatres and theatres. I should choose one of those to which the young men go night after night to see the same piece – a burlesque, or an opera bouffe – plenty of smart jokes and pretty girls."

"Why have you not taken me to those theatres?"

"We have not come to them yet. You have seen Shakespeare and modern comedy – which is rather a weak material as compared with Sheridan – or even with Colman and Morton, whose plays were our staple entertainment when I was a boy. You have heard all the opera singers?"

"Yes, you have been very good. But I want to see 'Cupid and Psyche' – two of my partners last night talked to me of 'Cupid and Psyche,' and were astounded that I had not seen it. I felt quite ashamed of my ignorance. I asked one of my partners, who was particularly enthusiastic, to tell me all about the play – and he did – to the best of his ability, which was not great – and he said that a Miss Mayne – Stella Mayne – who plays Psyche, is simply adorable. She is the loveliest woman in London, he says – and was greatly surprised that she had not been pointed out to me in the Park. Now really, Uncle Oliver, this is very remiss in you – you who are so clever in showing me famous people when we are driving in the Park."

"My dear, we have not happened to see her – that is all," replied the Major, without any responsive smile at the bright young face smiling up at him.

"You have seen her, I suppose?"

"Yes, I saw her when I was last in London."

"Not this time?"

"Not this time."

"You most unenthusiastic person. But, I understand your motive. You have been waiting an opportunity to take Jessie and me to see this divine Psyche. Is she absolutely lovely?"

"Loveliness is a matter of opinion. She is generally accepted as a particularly pretty woman."

"When will you take me to see her?"

"I have no idea. You have so many engagements – your aunt is always making new ones. I can do nothing without her permission. Surely you like dancing better than sitting in a theatre?"

"No, I do not. Dancing is delightful enough – but to be in a theatre is to be in fairy-land. It is like going into a new world. I leave myself, and my own life, at the doors – and go to live and love and suffer and be glad with the people in the play. To see a powerful play – really well acted – such acting as we have seen – is to live a new life from end to end in a few hours. It is like getting the essence of a lifetime without any of the actual pain – for when the situation is too terrible, one can pinch oneself and say – it is only a dream – an acted dream."

"If you like powerful plays – plays that make you tremble and cry – you would not care twopence for 'Cupid and Psyche,'" said Major Bree. "It is something between a burlesque and a fairy comedy – a most frivolous kind of entertainment, I believe."

"I don't care how frivolous it is. I have set my heart upon seeing it. I don't want to be out of the fashion. If you won't get me a box at the – where is it?"

"The Kaleidoscope Theatre."

"At the Kaleidoscope! I shall ask Angus."

"Please don't. I – I shall be seriously offended if you do. Let me arrange the business with your aunt. If you really want to see the piece, I suppose you must see it – but not unless your aunt likes."

"Dear, dearest, kindest uncle Oliver!" cried Christabel, squeezing his arm. "From my childhood upwards you have always fostered my self-will by the blindest indulgence. I was afraid that, all at once, you were going to be unkind and thwart me."

Major Bree was thoughtful and silent for the rest of the afternoon, and although Jessie tried to be as sharp-spoken and vivacious as usual, the effort would have been obvious to any two people properly qualified to observe the actions and expressions of others. But Angus and Christabel, being completely absorbed in each other, saw nothing amiss in their companions.

The river and the landscape were divine – a river for gods – a wood for nymphs – altogether too lovely for mortals. Tea, served

on a little round table in the hotel garden, was perfect.

"How much nicer than the dinner to-night," exclaimed Christabel. "I wish we were not going. And yet, it will be very pleasant, I daresay – a table decorated with the loveliest flowers – well-dressed women, clever men, all talking as if there was not a care in life – and perhaps we shall be next each other," added the happy girl, looking at Angus.

"What a comfort for me that I am out of it," said Jessie. "How nice to be an insignificant young woman whom nobody ever dreams of asking to dinner. A powdered old dowager did actually hint at my going to her musical evening the other day when she called in Bolton Row. 'Be sure you come early,' she said, gushingly, to Mrs. Tregonell and Christabel; and then, in quite another key, glancing at me, she added, and 'if Miss – er – er would like to hear my singers I should be – er – delighted,' no doubt mentally adding, 'I hope she won't have the impertinence to take me at my word.'"

"Jessie, you are the most evil-thinking person I ever knew," cried Christabel. "I'm sure Lady Millamont meant to be civil."

"Yes, but she did not mean me to go to her party," retorted Jessie.

The happy days – the society evenings – slipped by – dining – music – dancing. And now came the brief bright season of rustic entertainments – more dancing – more music – lawn-tennis – archery – water parties – every device by which the summer hours may chime in tune with pleasure. It was July –

Christabel's birthday had come and gone, bringing a necklace of single diamonds and a basket of June roses from Angus, and the most perfect thing in Park hacks from Mrs. Tregonell – but Christabel's wedding-day – more fateful than any birthday except the first – had not yet been fixed – albeit Mr. Hamleigh pressed for a decision upon this vital point.

"It was to have been at Midsummer," he said, one day, when he had been discussing the question tête-à-tête with Mrs. Tregonell.

"Indeed, Angus, I never said that. I told you that Christabel would be twenty at Midsummer, and that I would not consent to the marriage until after then."

"Precisely, but surely that meant soon after? I thought we should be married early in July – in time to start for the Tyrol in golden weather."

"I never had any fixed date in my mind," answered Mrs. Tregonell, with a pained look. Struggle with herself as she might, this engagement of Christabel's was a disappointment and a grief to her. "I thought my son would have returned before now. I should not like the wedding to take place in his absence."

"And I should like him to be at the wedding," said Angus; "but I think it will be rather hard if we have to wait for the caprice of a traveller who, from what Belle tells me of his letters – "

"Has Belle shown you any of his letters?" asked Mrs. Tregonell, with a vexed look.

"No, I don't think he has written to her, has he?"

"No, of course not; his letters are always addressed to me. He is a wretched correspondent."

"I was going to say, that, from what Belle tells me, your son's movements appear most uncertain, and it really does not seem worth while to wait."

"When the wedding-day is fixed, I will send him a message by the Atlantic cable. We must have him at the wedding."

Mr. Hamleigh did not see the necessity; but he was too kind to say so. He pressed for a settlement as to the day – or week – or at least the month in which his marriage was to take place – and at last Mrs. Tregonell consented to the beginning of September. They were all agreed now that the fittest marriage temple for this particular bride and bridegroom was the little old church in the heart of the hills – the church in which Christabel had worshipped every Sunday, morning or afternoon, ever since she could remember. It was Christabel's own desire to kneel before that familiar altar on her wedding-day – in the solemn peacefulness of that loved hill-side, with friendly honest country faces round her – rather than in the midst of a fashionable crowd, attended by bridesmaids after Gainsborough, and page-boys after Vandyke, in an atmosphere heavy with the scent of Ess Bouquet.

Mr. Hamleigh had no near relations – and albeit a whole bevy of cousins and a herd of men from the clubs would have gladly attended to witness his excision from the ranks of gilded youth, and to bid him God-speed on his voyage to the domestic haven – their presence at the sacrifice would have given him no pleasure –

while, on the other hand, there was one person resident in London whose presence would have caused him acute pain. Thus, each of the lovers pleading for the same favour, Mrs. Tregonell had foregone her idea of a London wedding, and had come to see that it would be very hard upon all the kindly inhabitants of Forrabury and Minster – Boscastle – Trevalga – Bossiney and Trevena – to deprive them of the pleasurable excitement to be derived from Christabel's wedding.

Early in September, in the golden light of that lovely time, they were to be quietly married in the dear old church, and then away to Tyrolean woods and hills – scenes which, for Christabel, seemed to be the chosen background of poetry, legend, and romance, rather than an actual country, provided with hotels, and accessible by tourists. Once having consented to the naming of an exact time, Mrs. Tregonell felt there could be no withdrawal of her word. She telegraphed to Leonard, who was somewhere in the Rocky Mountains, with a chosen friend, a couple of English servants and three or four Canadians, – and who, were he so minded, could be home in a month – and having despatched this message she felt the last wrench had been endured. Nothing that could ever come afterwards – save death itself – could give her sharper pain.

"Poor Leonard," she replied; "it will break his heart."

In the years that were gone she had so identified herself with her son's hopes and schemes, had so projected her thoughts into his future – seeing him in her waking dreams as he would be in

the days to come, a model squire, possessed of all his father's old-fashioned virtues, with a great deal of modern cleverness superadded, a proud and happy husband, the father of a noble race – she had kept this vision of the future in her mind so long, had dwelt upon it so fondly, had coloured it so brightly, that to forego it now, to say to herself "This thing was but a dream which I dreamed, and it can never be realized," was like relinquishing a part of her own life. She was a deeply religious woman, and if called upon to bear physical pain – to suffer the agonies of a slow, incurable illness – she would have suffered with the patience of a Christian martyr, saying to herself, as brave Dr. Arnold said in the agony of his sudden fatal malady, "Whom He loveth He chasteneth," – but she could not surrender the day-dream of her life without bitterest repining. In all her love of Christabel, in all her careful education and moral training of the niece to whom she had been as a mother, there had been this leaven of selfishness. She had been rearing a wife for her son – such a wife as would be a man's better angel – a guiding, restraining, elevating principle, so interwoven with his life that he should never know himself in leading-strings – an influence so gently exercised that he should never suspect that he was influenced.

"Leonard has a noble heart and a fine manly character," the mother had often told herself; "but he wants the association of a milder nature than his own. He is just the kind of man to be guided and governed by a good wife – a wife who would obey his lightest wish, and yet rule him always for good."

She had seen how, when Leonard had been disposed to act unkindly or illiberally by a tenant, Christabel had been able to persuade him to kindness or generosity – how, when he had set his face against going to church, being minded to devote Sunday morning to the agreeable duty of cleaning a favourite gun, or physicking a favourite spaniel, or greasing a cherished pair of fishing-boots, Christabel had taken him there – how she had softened and toned down his small social discourtesies, checked his tendency to strong language – and, as it were, expurgated, edited, and amended him.

And having seen and rejoiced in this state of things, it was very hard to be told that another had won the wife she had moulded, after her own fashion, to be the gladness and glory of her son's life; all the harder because it was her own shortsighted folly which had brought Angus Hamleigh to Mount Royal.

All through that gay London season – for Christabel a time of unclouded sadness – carking care had been at Mrs. Tregonell's heart. She tried to be just to the niece whom she dearly loved, and who had so tenderly and fully repaid her affection. Yet she could not help feeling as if Christabel's choice was a personal injury – nay, almost treachery and ingratitude. "She must have known that I meant her to be my son's wife," she said to herself; "yet she takes advantage of my poor boy's absence, and gives herself to the first comer."

"Surely September is soon enough," she said, pettishly, when Angus pleaded for an earlier date. "You will not have known

Christabel for a year, even then. Some men love a girl for half a lifetime before they win her."

"But it was not my privilege to know Christabel at the beginning of my life," replied Angus. "I made the most of my opportunities by loving her the moment I saw her."

"It is impossible to be angry with you," sighed Mrs. Tregonell. "You are so like your father."

That was one of the worst hardships of the case. Mrs. Tregonell could not help liking the man who had thwarted the dearest desire of her heart. She could not help admiring him, and making comparisons between him and Leonard – not to the advantage of her son. Had not her first love been given to his father – the girl's romantic love, ever so much more fervid and intense than any later passion – the love that sees ideal perfection in a lover?

CHAPTER VII

CUPID AND PSYCHE

In all the bright June weather, Christabel had been too busy and too happy to remember her caprice about Cupid and Psyche. But just after the Henley week – which to some thousands, and to these two lovers, had been as a dream of bliss – a magical mixture of sunlight and balmy airs and flowery meads, fine gowns and fine luncheons, nigger singers, stone-breaking athletes, gipsy sorceresses, eager to read high fortunes on any hand for half-a-crown, rowing men, racing men, artists, actors, poets, critics, swells – just after the wild excitement of that watery saturnalia, Mr. Hamleigh had occasion to go to the north of Scotland to see an ancient kinswoman of his father – an eccentric maiden aunt – who had stood for him, by proxy, at the baptismal font, and at the same time announced her intention of leaving him her comfortable fortune, together with all those snuff-mulls, quaighs, knives and forks, spoons, and other curiosities of Caledonia, which had been in the family for centuries – provided always that he grew up with a high opinion of Mary Stuart, and religiously believed the casket letters to be the vile forgeries of George Buchanan. The old lady, who was a kindly soul, with a broad Scotch tongue, had an inconvenient habit of sending for her nephew at odd times and seasons, when she imagined herself

on the point of death – and he was too kind to turn a deaf ear to this oft-repeated cry of "wolf" – lest, after making light of her summons, he should hear that the real wolf had come and devoured the harmless, affectionate old lady.

So now, just when London life was at its gayest and brightest, when the moonlit city after midnight looked like fairy-land, and the Thames Embankment, with its long chain of glittering lamps, gleaming golden above the sapphire river, was a scene to dream about, Mr. Hamleigh had to order his portmanteau and a hansom, and drive from the Albany to one of the great railway stations in the Euston Road, and to curl himself up in his corner of the limited mail, scarcely to budge till he was landed at Inverness. It was hard to leave Christabel, though it were only for a week. He swore to her that his absence should not outlast a week, unless the grisly wolf called Death did indeed claim his victim.

"I know I shall find the dear old soul up and hearty," he said, lightly, "devouring Scotch collops, or haggis, or cock-a-leeky, or something equally loathsome, and offering me some of that extraordinary soup which she always talks of in the plural. 'Do have a few more broth, Angus; they're very good the day.' But she is a sweet old woman, despite her barbarities, and one of the happiest days of my life will be that on which I take you to see her."

"And if – if she is not very ill, you will come back soon, won't you, Angus," pleaded Christabel.

"As soon as ever I can tear myself away from the collops and

the few broth. If I find the dear old impostor in rude health, as I quite expect, I will hob and nob with her over one glass of toddy, sleep one night under her roof, and then across the Border as fast as the express will carry me."

So they parted; and Angus had scarcely left Bolton Row an hour, when Major Bree came in, and, by some random flight of fancy, Christabel remembered "Cupid and Psyche."

The three ladies had just come upstairs after dinner. Mrs. Tregonell was enjoying forty winks in a low capacious chair, near an open window, in the first drawing-room, softly lit by shaded Carcel lamps, scented with tea-roses and stephanotis. Christabel and Jessie were in the tiny third room, where there was only the faint light of a pair of wax candles on the mantelpiece. Here the Major found them, when he came creeping in from the front room, where he had refrained from disturbing Mrs. Tregonell.

"Auntie is asleep," said Christabel. "We must talk in subdued murmurs. She looked sadly tired after Mrs. Dulcimer's garden party."

"I ought not to have come so early," apologized the Major.

"Yes you ought; we are very glad to have you. It is dreadfully dull without Angus."

"What! you begin to miss him already?"

"Already!" echoed Christabel. "I missed him before the sound of his cab wheels was out of the street. I have been missing him ever since."

"Poor little Belle!"

"And he is not half-way to Scotland yet," she sighed. "How long and slow the hours will be. You must do all you can to amuse me. I shall want distractions – dissipation even. If we were at home I should go and wander up by Willapark, and talk to the gulls. Here there is nothing to do. Another stupid garden party at Twickenham to-morrow, exactly opposite the one to-day at Richmond – the only variety being that we shall be on the north bank of the river instead of the south bank – a prosy dinner in Regent's Park the day after. Let me see," said Christabel, suddenly animated. "We are quite free for to-morrow evening. We can go and see 'Cupid and Psyche,' and I can tell Angus all about it when he comes back. Please get us a nice see-able box, like a dear obliging Uncle Oliver, as you are."

"Of course I am obliging," groaned the Major, "but the most obliging person that ever was can't perform impossibilities. If you want a box at the Kaleidoscope you must engage one for to-morrow month – or to-morrow six weeks. It is a mere bandbox of a theatre, and everybody in London wants to see this farrago of nonsense illustrated by pretty women."

"You have seen it, I suppose."

"Yes, I dropped in one night with an old naval friend, who had taken a stall for his wife, which she was not able to occupy."

"Major Bree, you are a very selfish person," said Christabel, straightening her slim waist, and drawing herself up with mock dignity. "You have seen this play yourself, and you are artful enough to tell us it is not worth seeing, just to save yourself the

trouble of hunting for a box. Uncle Oliver, that is not chivalry. I used to think you were a chivalrous person."

"Is there anything improper in the play?" asked Jessie, striking in with her usual bluntness – never afraid to put her thoughts into speech. "Is that your reason for not wishing Christabel to see it?"

"No, the piece is perfectly correct," stammered the Major, "there is not a word –"

"Then I think Belle's whim ought to be indulged," said Jessie, "especially as Mr. Hamleigh's absence makes her feel out of spirits."

The Major murmured something vague about the difficulty of getting places with less than six weeks' notice, whereupon Christabel told him, with a dignified air, that he need not trouble himself any further.

But a young lady who has plenty of money, and who has been accustomed, while dutiful and obedient to her elders, to have her own way in all essentials, is not so easily satisfied as the guileless Major supposed. As soon as the West-end shops were open next morning, before the jewellers had set out their dazzling wares – those diamond parures and rivières, which are always inviting the casual loungeur to step in and buy them – those goodly chased claret jugs, and Queen Anne tea-kettles, and mighty venison dishes, which seem to say, this is an age of luxury, and we are indispensable to a gentleman's table – before those still more attractive shops which deal in hundred-guinea dressing-cases, jasper inkstands, ormolu paper-weights,

lapis lazuli blotting-books, and coral powder-boxes – had laid themselves out for the tempter's work – Miss Courtenay and Miss Bridgeman, in their neat morning attire, were tripping from library to library, in quest of a box at the Kaleidoscope for that very evening.

They found what they wanted in Bond Street. Lady Somebody had sent back her box by a footman, just ten minutes ago, on account of Lord Somebody's attack of gout. The librarian could have sold it were it fifty boxes, and at a fabulous price, but he virtuously accepted four guineas, which gave him a premium of only one guinea for his trouble – and Christabel went home rejoicing.

"It will be such fun to show the Major that we are cleverer than he," she said to Jessie.

Miss Bridgeman was thoughtful, and made no reply to this remark. She was pondering the Major's conduct in this small matter, and it seemed to her that he must have some hidden reason for wishing Christabel not to see "Cupid and Psyche." That he, who had so faithfully waited upon all their fancies, taking infinite trouble to give them pleasure, could in this matter be disobliging or indifferent seemed hardly possible. There must be a reason; and yet what reason could there be to taboo a piece which the Major distinctly declared to be correct, and which all the fashionable world went to see? "Perhaps there is something wrong with the drainage of the theatre," Jessie thought, speculating vaguely – a suspicion of typhoid fever,

which the Major had shrunk from mentioning, out of respect for feminine nerves.

"Did you ever tell Mr. Hamleigh you wanted to see 'Cupid and Psyche'?" asked Miss Bridgeman at last, sorely exercised in spirit – fearful lest Christabel was incurring some kind of peril by her persistence.

"Yes, I told him; but it was at a time when we had a good many engagements, and I think he forgot all about it. Hardly like Angus, was it, to forget one's wishes, when he is generally so eager to anticipate them?"

"A strange coincidence!" thought Jessie. Mr. Hamleigh and the Major had been unanimous in their neglect of this particular fancy of Christabel's.

At luncheon Miss Courtenay told her aunt the whole story – how Major Bree had been most disobliging, and how she had circumvented him.

"And my revenge will be to make him sit out 'Cupid and Psyche' for the second time," she said, lightly, "for he must be our escort. You will go, of course, dearest, to please me?"

"My pet, you know how the heat of a theatre always exhausts me!" pleaded Mrs. Tregonell, whose health, long delicate, had been considerably damaged by her duties as chaperon. "When you are going anywhere with Angus, I like to be seen with you; but to-night, with the Major and Jessie, I shall not be wanted. I can enjoy an evening's rest."

"But do you enjoy that long, blank evening, Auntie?" asked

Christabel, looking anxiously at her aunt's somewhat careworn face. People who have one solitary care make so much of it, nurse and fondle it, as if it were an only child. "Once or twice when we have let you have your own way and stay at home, you have looked so pale and melancholy when we came back, as if you had been brooding upon sad thoughts all the evening."

"Sad thoughts will come, Belle."

"They ought not to come to you, Auntie. What cause have you for sadness?"

"I have a dear son far away, Belle – don't you think that is cause enough?"

"A son who enjoys the wild sports of the West ever so much better than he enjoys his home; but who will settle down by-and-by into a model country Squire."

"I doubt that, Christabel. I don't think he will ever settle down – now."

There was an emphasis – an almost angry emphasis – upon the last word which told Christabel only too plainly what her aunt meant. She could guess what disappointment it was that her aunt sighed over in the long, lonely evenings; and, albeit the latent resentfulness in Mrs. Tregonell's mind was an injustice, her niece could not help being sorry for her.

"Yes, dearest, he will – he will," she said, resolutely. "He will have his fill of shooting bisons, and all manner of big and small game, out yonder; and he will come home, and marry some good sweet girl, who will love you only just a little less than I do, and

he will be the last grand example of the old-fashioned country Squire – a race fast dying out; and he will be as much respected as if the power of the Norman Botterells still ruled in the land, and he had the right of dealing out high-handed justice, and immuring his fellow-creatures in a dungeon under his drawing-room."

"I would rather you would not talk about him," answered the widow, gloomily; "you turn everything into a joke. You forget that in my uncertainty about his fate, every thought of him is fraught with pain."

Belle hung her head, and the meal ended in silence. After luncheon came dressing, and then the drive to Twickenham, with Major Bree in attendance. Christabel told him of her success as they drove through the Park to Kensington.

"I have the pleasure to invite you to a seat in my box at the Kaleidoscope this evening," she said.

"What box?"

"A box which Jessie and I secured this morning, before you had finished your breakfast."

"A box for this evening?"

"For this evening."

"I wonder you care to go to a theatre without Hamleigh."

"It is very cruel of you to say that!" exclaimed Christabel, her eyes brightening with girlish tears, which her pride checked before they could fall. "You ought to know that I am wretched without him – and that I want to lose the sense of my misery in

dreamland. The theatre for me is what opium was for Coleridge and De Quincey."

"I understand," said Major Bree; "'you are not merry, but you do beguile the thing you are by seeming otherwise.'"

"You will go with us?"

"Of course, if Mrs. Tregonell does not object."

"I shall be very grateful to you for taking care of them," answered the dowager languidly, as she leant back in her carriage – a fine example of handsome middle-age: gracious, elegant, bearing every mark of good birth, yet with a worn look, as of one for whom fading beauty and decline of strength would come too swiftly. "I know I shall be tired to death when we get back to town."

"I don't think London society suits you so well as the monotony of Mount Royal," said Major Bree.

"No; but I am glad Christabel has had her first season. People have been extremely kind. I never thought we should have so many invitations."

"You did not know that beauty is the ace of trumps in the game of society."

The garden party was as other parties of the same genus: strawberry ices and iced coffee in a tent under a spreading Spanish chestnut – music and recitations in a drawing-room, with many windows looking upon the bright swift river – and the picturesque roofs of Old Richmond – just that one little picturesque group of bridge and old tiled-gables which

still remains – fine gowns, fine talk; a dash of the æsthetic element; strange colours, strange forms and fashions; pretty girls in grandmother bonnets; elderly women in limp Ophelia gowns, with tumbled frills and lank hair. Christabel and the Major walked about the pretty garden, and criticized all the eccentricities, she glad to keep aloof from her many admirers – safe under the wing of a familiar friend.

"Five o'clock," she said; "that makes twenty-four hours. Do you think he will be back to-morrow?"

"He? Might I ask whom you mean by that pronoun?"

"Angus. His telegram this morning said that his aunt was really ill – not in any danger – but still quite an invalid, and that he would be obliged to stay a little longer than he had hoped might be needful, in order to cheer her. Do you think he will be able to come back to-morrow?"

"Hardly, I fear. Twenty-four hours would be a very short time for the cheering process. I think you ought to allow him a week. Did you answer his telegram?"

"Why, of course! I told him how miserable I was without him; but that he must do whatever was right and kind for his aunt. I wrote him a long letter before luncheon to the same effect. But, oh, I hope the dear old lady will get well very quickly!"

"If usquebaugh can mend her, no doubt the recovery will be rapid," answered the Major, laughing. "I dare say that is why you are so anxious for Hamleigh's return. You think if he stays in the North he may become a confirmed toddy-drinker. By-the-

by, when his return is so uncertain, do you think it is quite safe for you to go to the theatre to-night? He might come to Bolton Row during your absence."

"That is hardly possible," said Christabel. "But even if such a happy thing should occur, he would come and join us at the Kaleidoscope."

This was the Major's last feeble and futile effort to prevent a wilful woman having her own way. They rejoined Mrs. Tregonell, and went back to their carriage almost immediately – were in Bolton Row in time for a seven o'clock dinner, and were seated in the box at the Kaleidoscope a few minutes after eight. The Kaleidoscope was one of the new theatres which have been added to the attractions of London during the last twenty years. It was a small house, and of exceeding elegance; the inspiration of the architect thereof seemingly derived rather from the *bonbonnières* of Siraudin and Boissier than from the severer exemplars of high art. Somebody said it was a theatre which looked as if it ought to be filled with glacé chestnuts, or crystallized violets, rather than with substantial flesh and blood. The draperies thereof were of palest dove-coloured poplin and cream-white satin; the fauteuils were upholstered in velvet of the same dove colour, with a monogram in dead gold; the pilasters and mouldings were of the slenderest and most delicate order – no heavy masses of gold or colour – all airy, light, graceful; the sweeping curve of the auditorium was in itself a thing of beauty: every fold of the voluminous dove-coloured curtain, lined with crimson satin –

which flashed among the dove tints here and there, like a gleam of vivid colour in the breast of a tropical bird – was a study. The front of the house was lighted with old-fashioned wax candles, a recurrence to obsolete fashion which reminded the few survivors of the D'Orsay period of Her Majesty's in the splendid days of Pasta and Malibran, and which delighted the Court and Livery of the Tallow Chandlers' Company.

"What a lovely theatre!" cried Christabel, looking round the house, which was crowded with a brilliant audience; "and how cruel of you not to bring us here! It is the prettiest theatre we have seen yet."

"Yes; it's a nice little place," said the Major, feebly; "but, you see, they've been playing the same piece all the season – no variety."

"What did that matter, when we had not seen the piece? Besides, a young man I danced with told me he had been to see it fifteen times."

"That young man was an ass!" grumbled the Major.

"Well, I can't help thinking so too," assented Christabel. And then the overture began – a dreamy, classical compound, made up of reminiscences of Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber – a melodious patchwork, dignified by scientific orchestration. Christabel listened dreamily to the dreamy music, thinking of Angus all the while – wondering what he was doing in the far-away Scottish land, which she knew only from Sir Walter's novels.

The dove-coloured curtains were drawn apart to a strain of plaintive sweetness, and the play – half poem, half satire – began. The scene was a palace garden, in some "unsuspected isle in far-off seas." The personages were Psyche, her sisters, and the jealous goddess, whose rest had been disturbed by rumours of an earthly beauty which surpassed her own divine charms, and who approached the palace disguised as a crone, dealing in philters and simples, ribbons and perfumes, a kind of female Autolycus.

First came a dialogue between Venus and the elder sisters – handsome women both, but of a coarse type of beauty, looking too large for the frame in which they appeared. Christabel and Jessie enjoyed the smartness of the dialogue, which sparkled with Aristophanian hits at the follies of the hour, and yet had a poetical grace which seemed the very flavour of the old Greek world.

At last, after the interest of the fable had fairly begun, there rose the faint melodious breathings of a strange music within the palace – the quaint and primitive harmonies of a three-stringed lyre – and Psyche came slowly down the marble steps, a slender, gracious figure in classic drapery – Canova's statue incarnate.

"Very pretty face," muttered the Major, looking at her through his opera-glass; "but no figure."

The slim, willowy form, delicately and lightly moulded as a young fawn's, was assuredly of a type widely different from the two young women of the fleshly school who represented Psyche's jealous sisters. In their case there seemed just enough mind to keep those sleek, well-favoured bodies in motion. In

Stella Mayne the soul, or, at any rate, an ethereal essence, a vivid beauty of expression, an electric brightness, which passes for the soul, so predominated over the sensual, that it would have scarcely surprised one if this fragile butterfly-creature had verily spread a pair of filmy wings and floated away into space. The dark liquid eyes, the small chiselled features, exquisitely Greek, were in most perfect harmony with the character. Amongst the substantial sensuous forms of her companions this Psyche moved like a being from the spirit world.

"Oh!" cried Christabel, almost with a gasp, "how perfectly lovely!"

"Yes; she's very pretty, isn't she?" muttered the Major, tugging at his grey moustache, and glaring at the unconscious Psyche from his lurking place at the back of the box.

"Pretty is not the word. She is the realization of a poem."

Jessie Bridgeman said nothing. She had looked straight from Psyche to the Major, as he grunted out his acquiescence, and the troubled expression of his face troubled her. It was plain to her all in a moment that his objection to the Kaleidoscope Theatre was really an objection to Psyche. Yet what harm could that lovely being on the stage, even were she the worst and vilest of her sex, do to any one so remote from her orbit as Christabel Courtenay?

The play went on. Psyche spoke her graceful lines with a perfect intonation. Nature had in this case not been guilty of cruel inconsistency. The actress's voice was as sweet as her face; every movement was harmonious; every look lovely. She was not

a startling actress; nor was there any need of great acting in the part that had been written for her. She was Psyche – the loved, the loving, pursued by jealousy, persecuted by women's unwomanly hatred, afflicted, despairing – yet loving always; beautiful in every phase of her gentle life.

"Do you like the play?" asked the Major, grimly, when the curtain had fallen on the first act.

"I never enjoyed anything so much! It is so different from all other plays we have seen," said Christabel; "and Psyche – Miss Stella Mayne, is she not – is the loveliest creature I ever saw in my life."

"You must allow a wide margin for stage make-up, paint and powder, and darkened lashes," grumbled the Major.

"But I have been studying her face through my glass. It is hardly at all made up. Just compare it with the faces of the two sisters, which are like china plates, badly fired. Jessie, what are you dreaming about? You haven't a particle of enthusiasm! Why don't you say something?"

"I don't want to be an echo," said Miss Bridgeman, curtly. "I could only repeat what you are saying. I can't be original enough to say that Miss Mayne is ugly."

"She is simply the loveliest creature we have seen on the stage or off it," exclaimed Christabel, who was too rustic to want to know who Miss Mayne was, and where the manager had discovered such a pearl, as a London playgoer might have done.

"Hark!" said Jessie; "there's a knock at the door."

Christabel's heart began to beat violently. Could it be Angus? No, it was more likely to be some officious person, offering ices.

It was neither; but a young man of the languid-elegant type – one of Christabel's devoted admirers, the very youth who had told her of his having seen "Cupid and Psyche," fifteen times.

"Why this makes the sixteenth time," she said, smiling at him as they shook hands.

"I think it is nearer the twentieth," he replied; "it is quite the jolliest piece in London! Don't you agree with me?"

"I think it is – remarkably – jolly!" answered Christabel, laughing. "What odd words you have in London for the expression of your ideas – and so few of them!"

"A kind of short-hand," said the Major, "arbitrary characters. Jolly means anything you like – awful means anything you like. That kind of language gives the widest scope for the exercise of the imagination."

"How is Mrs. Tregonell?" asked the youth, not being given to the discussion of abstract questions, frivolous or solemn. He had a mind which could only grasp life in the concrete – an intellect that required to deal with actualities – people, coats, hats, boots, dinner, park-hack – just as little children require actual counters to calculate with.

He subsided into a chair behind Miss Courtenay, and, the box being a large one, remained there for the rest of the play – to the despair of a companion youth in the stalls, who looked up ever and anon, vacuous and wondering, and who resembled his friend

as closely as a well-matched carriage-horse resembles his fellow – grooming and action precisely similar.

"What brilliant diamonds!" said Christabel, noticing a collet necklace which Psyche wore in the second act, and which was a good deal out of harmony with her Greek drapery – not by any means resembling those simple golden ornaments which patient Dr. Schliemann and his wife dug out of the hill at Hissarlik. "But, of course, they are only stage jewels," continued Christabel; "yet they sparkle as brilliantly as diamonds of the first water."

"Very odd, but so they do," muttered young FitzPelham, behind her shoulder; and then, *sotto voce* to the Major, he said – "that's the worst of giving these women jewels, they *will* wear them."

"And that emerald butterfly on her shoulder," pursued Christabel; "one would suppose it were real."

"A real butterfly?"

"No, real emeralds."

"It belonged to the Empress of the French, and was sold for three hundred and eighty guineas at Christie's," said FitzPelham; whereupon Major Bree's substantial boot came down heavily on the youth's Queen Anne shoe. "At least, the Empress had one like it," stammered FitzPelham, saying to himself, in his own vernacular, that he had "hoofed it."

"How do you like Stella Mayne?" he asked by-and-by, when the act was over.

"I am charmed with her. She is the sweetest actress I ever saw;

not the greatest – there are two or three who far surpass her in genius; but there is a sweetness – a fascination. I don't wonder she is the rage. I only wonder Major Bree could have deprived me of the pleasure of seeing her all this time."

"You could stand the piece a second time, couldn't you?"

"Certainly – or a third time. It is so poetical – it carries one into a new world!"

"Pretty foot and ankle, hasn't she?" murmured FitzPelham – to which frivolous comment Miss Courtenay made no reply.

Her soul was rapt in the scene before her – the mystic wood whither Psyche had now wandered with her divine lover. The darkness of a summer night in the Greek Archipelago – fire-flies flitting athwart ilex and olive bushes – a glimpse of the distant starlit sea.

Here – goaded by her jealous sisters to a fatal curiosity – Psyche stole with her lamp to the couch of her sleeping lover, gazing spell-bound upon that godlike countenance – represented in actual flesh by a chubby round face and round brown eyes – and in her glad surprise letting fall a drop of oil from her lamp on Cupid's winged shoulder – whereon the god leaves her, wounded by her want of faith. Had he not told her they must meet only in the darkness, and that she must never seek to know his name? So ends the second act of the fairy drama. In the third, poor Psyche is in ignoble bondage – a slave to Venus, in the goddess's Palace at Cythera – a fashionable, fine-lady Venus, who leads her gentle handmaiden a sorry life, till the god of love comes to

her rescue. And here, in the tiring chamber of the goddess, the playwright makes sport of all the arts by which modern beauty is manufactured. Here poor Psyche – tearful, despairing – has to toil at the creation of the Queen of Beauty, whose charms of face and figure are discovered to be all falsehood, from the topmost curl of her toupet to the arched instep under her jewelled buskin. Throughout this scene Psyche alternates between smiles and tears; and then at the last Cupid appears – claims his mistress, defies his mother, and the happy lovers, linked in each other's arms, float skyward on a shaft of lime-light. And so the graceful mythic drama ends – fanciful from the first line to the last, gay and lightly touched as burlesque, yet with an element of poetry which burlesque for the most part lacks.

Christabel's interest had been maintained throughout the performance.

"How extraordinarily silent you have been all the evening, Jessie!" she said, as they were putting on their cloaks; "surely, you like the play!"

"I like it pretty well. It is rather thin, I think; but then, perhaps, that is because I have 'Twelfth Night' still in my memory, as we heard Mr. Brandram recite it last week at Willis's Rooms."

"Nobody expects modern comedy to be as good as Shakespeare," retorted Christabel; "you might as well find fault with the electric light for not being quite equal to the moon. Don't you admire that exquisite creature?"

"Which of them?" asked Jessie, stolidly, buttoning her cloak.

"Which of them! Oh, Jessie, you have generally such good taste. Why, Miss Mayne, of course. It is almost painful to look at the others. They are such common earthy creatures, compared with her!"

"I have no doubt she is very wonderful – and she is the fashion, which goes for a great deal," answered Miss Bridgeman; but never a word in praise of Stella Mayne could Christabel extort from her. She – who, educated by Shepherd's Bush and poverty, was much more advanced in knowledge of evil than the maiden from beyond Tamar – suspected that some sinister influence was to be feared in Stella Mayne. Why else had the Major so doggedly opposed their visit to this particular theatre? Why else did he look so glum when Stella Mayne was spoken about?

CHAPTER VIII

LE SECRET DE POLICHINELLE

The next day but one was Thursday – an afternoon upon which Mrs. Tregonell was in the habit of staying at home to receive callers, and a day on which her small drawing-rooms were generally filled with more or less pleasant people – chiefly of the fairer sex – from four to six. The three rooms – small by degrees and beautifully less – the old-fashioned furniture and profusion of choicest flowers – lent themselves admirably to gossip and afternoon tea, and were even conducive to mild flirtation, for there was generally a sprinkling of young men of the FitzPelham type – having nothing particular to say, but always faultless in their dress, and well-meaning as to their manners.

On this afternoon – which to Christabel seemed a day of duller hue and colder atmosphere than all previous Thursdays, on account of Angus Hamleigh's absence – there were rather more callers than usual. The season was ripening towards its close. Some few came to pay their last visit, and to inform Mrs. Tregonell and her niece about their holiday movements – generally towards the Engadine or some German Spa – the one spot of earth to which their constitution could accommodate itself at this time of year.

"I am obliged to go to Pontresina before the end of July,"

said a ponderous middle-aged matron to Miss Courtenay. "I can't breathe any where else in August and September."

"I think you would find plenty of air at Boscastle," said Christabel, smiling at her earnestness; "but I dare say the Engadine is very nice!"

"Five thousand feet above the level of the sea," said the matron proudly.

"I like to be a little nearer the sea – to see it – and smell it – and feel its spray upon my face," answered Christabel. "Do you take your children with you?"

"Oh, no, they all go to Ramsgate with the governess and a maid."

"Poor little things! And how sad for you to know that there are all those mountain passes – a three days' journey – between you and your children."

"Yes, it is very trying!" sighed the mother; "but they are so fond of Ramsgate; and the Engadine is the only place that suits me."

"You have never been to Chagford?"

"Chagford! No; what is Chagford?"

"A village upon the edge of Dartmoor – all among the Devonshire hills. People go there for the fine bracing air. I can't help thinking it must do them almost as much good as the Engadine."

"Indeed! I have heard that Devonshire is quite too lovely," said the matron, who would have despised herself had she been

familiar with her native land. "But what have you done with Mr. Hamleigh? I am quite disappointed at not seeing him this afternoon."

"He is in Scotland," said Christabel, and then went on to tell as much as was necessary about her lover's journey to the North.

"How dreadfully dull you must be without him!" said the lady, sympathetically, and several other ladies – notably a baronet's widow, who had been a friend of Mrs. Tregonell's girlhood – a woman who never said a kind word of anybody, yet was invited everywhere, and who had the reputation of giving a better dinner, on a small scale, than any other lonely woman in London. The rest were young women, mostly of the gushing type, who were prepared to worship Christabel because she was pretty, an heiress, and engaged to a man of some distinction in their particular world. They had all clustered round Mrs. Tregonell and her niece, in the airy front drawing-room, while Miss Bridgeman poured out tea at a Japanese table in the middle room, waited upon sedulously by Major Bree, Mr. FitzPelham, and another youth, a Somerset House young man, who wrote for the Society papers – or believed that he did, on the strength of having had an essay on "Tame Cats" accepted in the big gooseberry season – and gave himself to the world as a person familiar with the undercurrents of literary and dramatic life. The ladies made a circle round Mrs. Tregonell, and these three gentlemen, circulating with tea-cups, sugar-basins, and cream-pots, joined spasmodically in the conversation.

Christabel owned to finding a certain emptiness in life without her lover. She did not parade her devotion to him, but was much too unaffected to pretend indifference.

"We went to the theatre on Tuesday night," she said.

"Oh, how could you!" cried the oldest and most gushing of the three young ladies. "Without Mr. Hamleigh?"

"That was our chief reason for going. We knew we should be dull without him. We went to the Kaleidoscope, and were delighted with Psyche."

All three young ladies gushed in chorus. Stella Mayne was quite too lovely – a poem, a revelation, and so on, and so on. Lady Cumberbridge, the baronet's widow, pursed her lips and elevated her eyebrows, which, on a somewhat modified form, resembled Lord Thurlow's, but said nothing. The Somerset House young man stole a glance at FitzPelham, and smiled meaningly; but the amiable FitzPelham was only vacuous.

"Of course you have seen this play," said Mrs. Tregonell, turning to Lady Cumberbridge. "You see everything, I know?"

"Yes; I make it my business to see everything – good, bad, and indifferent," answered the strong-minded dowager, in a voice which would hardly have shamed the Lord Chancellor's wig, which those Thurlow-like eyebrows so curiously suggested. "It is the sole condition upon which London life is worth living. If one only saw the good things, one would spend most of one's evening at home, and we don't leave our country places for *that*. I see a good deal that bores me, an immense deal that disgusts me, and

a little – a very little – that I can honestly admire."

"Then I am sure you must admire 'Cupid and Psyche,'" said Christabel.

"My dear, that piece, which I am told has brought a fortune to the management, is just one of the things that I don't care to talk about before young people. I look upon it as the triumph of vice: and I wonder – yes, *very* much wonder – that *you* were allowed to see it."

There was an awfulness about the dowager's tone as she uttered these final sentences, which out-Thurlowed Thurlow. Christabel shivered, hardly knowing why, but heartily wishing there had been no such person as Lady Cumberbridge among her aunt's London acquaintance.

"But, surely there is nothing improper in the play, dear Lady Cumberbridge," exclaimed the eldest gusher, too long in society to shrink from sifting any question of that kind.

"There is a great deal that is improper," replied the dowager, sternly.

"Surely not in the language: that is too lovely?" urged the gusher. "I must be very dense, I'm afraid, for I really did not see anything objectionable."

"You must be very blind, as well as dense, if you didn't see Stella Mayne's diamonds," retorted the dowager.

"Oh, of course I saw the diamonds. One could not help seeing them."

"And do you think there is nothing improper in those

diamonds, or their history?" demanded Lady Cumberbridge, glaring at the damsel from under those terrific eyebrows. "If so, you must be less experienced in the ways of the world than I gave you credit for being. But I think I said before that this is a question which I do *not* care to discuss before young people – even advanced as young people are in their ways and opinions now-a-days."

The maiden blushed at this reproof; and the conversation, steered judiciously by Mrs. Tregonell, glided on to safer topics. Yet calmly as that lady bore herself, and carefully as she managed to keep the talk among pleasant ways for the next half-hour, her mind was troubled not a little by the things that had been said about Stella Mayne. There had been a curious significance in the dowager's tone when she expressed surprise at Christabel having been allowed to see this play. That significant tone, in conjunction with Major Bree's marked opposition to Belle's wish upon this one matter, argued that there was some special reason why Belle should not see this actress. Mrs. Tregonell, like all quiet people, very observant, had seen the Somerset House young man's meaning smile as the play was mentioned. What was this peculiar something which all these people had in their minds? and of which she, Christabel's aunt, to whom the girl's welfare and happiness were vital, knew nothing.

She determined to take the most immediate and direct way of knowing all that was to be known, by questioning that peripatetic chronicle of fashionable scandal, Lady Cumberbridge. This

popular personage knew a great deal more than the Society papers, and was not constrained like those prints to disguise her knowledge in Delphic hints and dark sayings. Lady Cumberbridge, like John Knox, never feared the face of man, and could be as plain-spoken and as coarse as she pleased.

"I should so like to have a few words with you by-and-by, if you don't mind waiting till these girls are gone," murmured Mrs. Tregonell.

"Very well, my dear; get rid of them as soon as you can, for I've some people coming to dinner, and I want an hour's sleep before I put on my gown."

The little assembly dispersed within the next quarter of an hour, and Christabel joined Jessie in the smaller drawing-room.

"You can shut the folding-doors, Belle," said Mrs. Tregonell, carelessly. "You and Jessie are sure to be chattering; and I want a quiet talk with Lady Cumberbridge."

Christabel obeyed, wondering a little what the quiet talk would be about, and whether by any chance it would touch upon the play last night. She, too, had been struck by the significance of the dowager's tone; and then it was so rarely that she found herself excluded from any conversation in which her aunt had part.

"Now," said Mrs. Tregonell, directly the doors were shut, "I want to know why Christabel should not have been allowed to see that play the other night?"

"What!" cried Lady Cumberbridge, "don't you know why?"

"Indeed no. I did not go with them, so I had no opportunity

of judging as to the play."

"My dear soul," exclaimed the deep voice of the dowager, "it is not the play – the play is well enough – it is the woman! And do you really mean to tell me that you don't know?"

"That I don't know what?"

"Stella Mayne's history?"

"What should I know of her more than of any other actress? They are all the same to me, like pictures, which I admire or not, from the outside. I am told that some are women of fashion who go everywhere, and that it is a privilege to know them; and that some one ought hardly to speak about, though one may go to see them; while there are others – "

"Who hover like stars between two worlds," said Lady Cumberbridge. "Yes, that's all true. And nobody has told you anything about Stella Mayne?"

"No one!"

"Then I'm very sorry I mentioned her name to you. I dare say you will hate me if I tell you the truth: people always do; because, in point of fact, truth is generally hateful. We can't afford to live up to it."

"I shall be grateful to you if you will tell me all that there is to be told about this actress, who seems in some way to be concerned – "

"In your niece's happiness? Well, no, my dear, we will hope not. It is all a thing of the past. Your friends have been remarkably discreet. It is really extraordinary that you should

have heard nothing about it; but, on reflection, I think it is really better you should know the fact. Stella Mayne is the young woman for whom Mr. Hamleigh nearly ruined himself three years ago."

Mrs. Tregonell turned white as death.

Her mind had not been educated to the acceptance of sin and folly as a natural element in a young man's life. In her view of mankind the good men were all Bayards – fearless, stainless; the bad were a race apart, to be shunned by all good women. To be told that her niece's future husband – the man for whose sake her whole scheme of life had been set aside, the man whom Christabel and she had so implicitly trusted – was a fashionable libertine – the lover of an actress – the talk of the town – was a revelation that changed the whole colour of life.

"Are you sure that this is true?" she asked, falteringly.

"My dear creature, do I ever say anything that isn't true? There is no need to invent things. God knows the things people do are bad enough, and wild enough, to supply conversation for everybody. But this about Hamleigh and Stella Mayne is as well known as the Albert Memorial. He was positively infatuated about her; took her off the stage: she was in the back row of the ballet at Drury Lane, salary seventeen and sixpence a week. He lived with her in Italy for a year; then they came back to England, and he gave her a house in St. John's Wood; squandered his money upon her; had her educated; worshipped her, in fact; and, I am told, would have married her, if she had only behaved

herself. Fortunately, these women never do behave themselves: they show the cloven-foot too soon; *our* people only go wrong after marriage. But I hope, my dear, you will not allow yourself to be worried by this business. It is all a thing of the past, and Hamleigh will make just as good a husband as if it had never happened; better, perhaps, for he will be all the more able to appreciate a pure-minded girl like your niece."

Mrs. Tregonell listened with a stony visage. She was thinking of Leonard – Leonard who had never done wrong, in this way, within his mother's knowledge – who had been cheated out of his future wife by a flashy trickster – a man who talked like a poet, and who yet had given his first passionate love, and the best and brightest years of his life to a stage-dancer.

"How long is it since Mr. Hamleigh has ceased to be devoted to Miss Mayne?" she asked, in a cold, dull voice.

"I cannot say exactly: one hears so many different stories; there were paragraphs in the Society papers last season: 'A certain young sprig of fashion, a general favourite, whose infatuation for a well-known actress has been a matter of regret among the *haute volée*, is said to have broken his bonds. The lady keeps her diamonds, and threatens to publish his letters,' and so on, and so forth. You know the kind of thing?"

"I do not," said Mrs. Tregonell. "I have never taken any interest in such paragraphs."

"Ah! that is the consequence of vegetating at the fag-end of England: all the pungency is taken out of life for you."

Mrs. Tregonell asked no further questions. She had made up her mind that any more detailed information, which she might require, must be obtained from another channel. She did not want this battered woman of the world to know how hard she was hit. Yes – albeit there was a far-off gleam of light amidst this darkness – she was profoundly hurt by the knowledge of Angus Hamleigh's wrong-doing. He had made himself very dear to her – dear from the tender association of the past – dear for his own sake. She had believed him a man of scrupulous honour, of pure and spotless life. Perhaps she had taken all this for granted, in her rustic simplicity, seeing that all his ideas and instincts were those of a gentleman. She had made no allowance for the fact that the will-o'-the-wisp, passionate love, may lure even a gentleman into swampy ground; and that his sole superiority over profligates of coarser clay will be to behave himself like a gentleman in those morasses whither an errant fancy has beguiled him.

"I hope you will not let this influence your feelings towards Mr. Hamleigh," said Lady Cumberbridge; "if you did so, I should really feel sorry for having told you. But you must inevitably have heard the story from somebody else before long."

"No doubt. I suppose everybody knows it."

"Why yes, it was tolerably notorious. They used to be seen everywhere together. Mr. Hamleigh seemed proud of his infatuation, and there were plenty of men in his own set to encourage him. Modern society has adopted Danton's motto, don't you know? —*de l'audace, encore de l'audace et toujours de*

l'audace! And now I must go and get my siesta, or I shall be as stupid as an owl all the evening. Good-bye."

Mrs. Tregonell sat like a statue, absorbed in thought, for a considerable time after Lady Cumberbridge's departure. What was she to do? This horrid story was true, no doubt. Major Bree would be able to confirm it presently, when he came back to dinner, as he had promised to come. What was she to do? Allow the engagement to go on? – allow an innocent and pure-minded girl to marry a man whose infatuation for an actress had been town talk; who had come to Mount Royal fresh from that evil association – wounded to the core, perhaps, by the base creature's infidelity – and seeking consolation wherever it might offer; bringing his second-hand feelings, with all the bloom worn off them, to the shrine of innocent young beauty! – dedicating the mere ashes of burned-out fires to the woman who was to be his wife; perhaps even making scornful comparisons between her simple rustic charms and the educated fascinations of the actress; bringing her the leavings of a life – the mere dregs of youth's wine-cup! Was Christabel to be permitted to continue under this shameful delusion – to believe that she was receiving all when she was getting nothing? No! – ten thousand times, no! It was womanhood's stern duty to come to the rescue of guileless, too-trusting girlhood. Bitter as the ordeal must needs be for both, Christabel must be told the whole cruel truth. Then it would be for her own heart to decide. She would still be a free agent. But surely her own purity of feeling would teach her to

decide rightly – to renounce the lover who had so fooled and cheated her – and, perhaps, later to reward the devotion of that other adorer who had loved her from boyhood upwards with a steady unwavering affection – chiefly demonstrated by the calm self-assured manner in which he had written of Christabel – in his letters to his mother – as his future wife, the possibility of her rejection of that honour never having occurred to his rustic intelligence.

Christabel peeped in through the half-opened door.

"Well, Aunt Di, is your conference over? Has her ladyship gone?"

"Yes, dear; I am trying to coax myself to sleep," answered Mrs. Tregonell from the depths of her armchair.

"Then I'll go and dress for dinner. Ah, how I only wish there were a chance of Angus coming back to-night!" sighed Christabel, softly closing the door.

Major Bree came in ten minutes afterwards.

"Come here, and sit by my side," said Mrs. Tregonell. "I want to talk to you seriously."

The Major complied, feeling far from easy in his mind.

"How pale you look!" he said; "is there anything wrong?"

"Yes – everything is wrong! You have treated me very badly. You have been false to me and to Christabel!"

"That is rather a wide accusation," said the Major, calmly. He knew perfectly what was coming, and that he should require all his patience – all that sweetness of temper which had been his

distinction through life – in order to leaven the widow's wrath against the absent. "Perhaps, you won't think it too much trouble to explain the exact nature of my offence?"

Mrs. Tregonell told him Lady Cumberbridge's story.

"Did you, or did you not, know this last October?" she asked.

"I had heard something about it when I was in London two years before."

"And you did not consider it your duty to tell me?"

"Certainly not. I told you at the time, when I came back from town, that your young protégé's life had been a trifle wild. Miss Bridgeman remembered the fact, and spoke of it the night Hamleigh came to Mount Royal. When I saw how matters were going with Belle and Hamleigh, I made it my business to question him, considering myself Belle's next friend; and he assured me, as between man and man, that the affair with Stella Mayne was over – that he had broken with her formally and finally. From first to last I believe he acted wonderfully well in the business."

"Acted well! – acted well, to be the avowed lover of such a woman! – to advertise his devotion to her – associate his name with hers irrevocably – for you know that the world never forgets these alliances – and then to come to Mount Royal, and practise upon our provincial ignorance, and offer his battered life to my niece! Was that well?"

"You could hardly wish him to have told your niece the whole story. Besides, it is a thing of the past. No man can go through life with the burden of his youthful follies hanging round his neck,

and strangling him."

"The past is as much a part of a man's life as the present. I want my niece's husband to be a man of an unstained past."

"Then you will have to wait a long time for him. My dear Mrs. Tregonell, pray be reasonable, just commonly reasonable. There is not a family in England into which Angus Hamleigh would not be received with open arms, if he offered himself as a suitor. Why should you draw a hard-and-fast line, sacrifice Belle's happiness to a chimerical idea of manly virtue? You can't have King Arthur for your niece's husband, and if you could, perhaps you wouldn't care about him. Why not be content with Lancelot, who has sinned, and is sorry for his sin; and of whom may be spoken praise almost as noble as those famous words Sir Bohort spoke over his friend's dead body."

"I shall not sacrifice Belle's happiness. If she were my daughter I should take upon myself to judge for her, and while I lived she should never see Angus Hamleigh's face again. But she is my sister's child, and I shall give her the liberty of judgment."

"You don't mean that you will tell her this story?"

"Most decidedly."

"For God's sake, don't! – you will spoil her happiness for ever. To you and me, who must have some knowledge of the world, it ought to be a small thing that a man has made a fool of himself about an actress. We ought to know for how little that kind of folly counts in a lifetime. But for a girl brought up like Christabel it will mean disenchantment – doubt – perhaps a lifetime of

jealousy and self-torment. For mercy's sake, be reasonable in this matter! I am talking to you as if I were Christabel's father, remember. I suppose that old harridan, Lady Cumberbridge, told you this precious story. Such women ought to be put down by Act of Parliament. Yes, there should be a law restricting every unattached female over five-and-forty to a twenty-mile radius of her country-house. After that age their tongues are dangerous."

"My friend Lady Cumberbridge told me facts which seem to be within everybody's knowledge; and she told them at my particular request. Your rudeness about her does not make the case any better for Mr. Hamleigh, or for you."

"I think I had better go and dine at my club," said the Major, perfectly placid.

"No, stay, please. You have proved yourself a broken reed to lean upon; but still you are a reed."

"If I stay it will be to persuade you to spare Belle the knowledge of this wretched story."

"I suppose he has almost ruined himself for the creature," said Mrs. Tregonell, glancing at the subject for the first time from a practical point of view.

"He spent a good many thousands, but as he had no other vices – did not race or gamble – his fortune survived the shock. His long majority allowed for considerable accumulations, you see. He began life with a handsome capital in hand. I dare say Miss Mayne sweated that down for him!"

"I don't want to go into details – I only want to know how far

he deceived us?"

"There was no deception as to his means – which are ample – nor as to the fact that he is entirely free from the entanglement we have been talking about. Every one in London knows that the affair was over and done with more than a year ago."

The two girls came down to the drawing-room, and dinner was announced. It was a very dismal dinner – the dreariest that had ever been eaten in that house, Christabel thought. Mrs. Tregonell was absorbed in her own thoughts, absent, automatic in all she said and did. The Major maintained a forced hilarity, which was more painful than silence. Jessie looked anxious.

"I'll tell you what, girls," said Major Bree, as the mournful meal languished towards its melancholy close, "we seem all very doleful without Hamleigh. I'll run round to Bond Street directly after dinner, and see if I can get three stalls for 'Lohengrin.' They are often to be had at the last moment."

"Please, don't," said Christabel, earnestly; "I would not go to a theatre again without Angus. I am sorry I went the other night. It was obstinate and foolish of me to insist upon seeing that play, and I was punished for it by that horrid old woman this afternoon."

"But you liked the play?"

"Yes – while I was seeing it; but now I have taken a dislike to Miss Mayne. I feel as if I had seen a snake – all grace and lovely colour – and had caught hold of it, only to find that it was a snake."

The Major stared and looked alarmed. Was this an example of instinct superior to reason?

"Let me try for the opera," he said. "I'm sure it would do you good to go. You will sit in the front drawing-room listening for hansoms all the evening, fancying that every pair of wheels you hear is bringing Angus back to you."

"I would rather be doing that than be sitting at the opera, thinking of him. But I'm afraid there's no chance of his coming to-night. His letter to-day told me that his aunt insists upon his staying two or three days longer, and that she is ill enough to make him anxious to oblige her."

The evening passed in placid dreariness. Mrs. Tregonell sat brooding in her armchair – pondering whether she should or should not tell Christabel everything – knowing but too well how the girl's happiness was dependent upon her undisturbed belief in her lover, yet repeating to herself again and again that it was right and fair that Christabel should know the truth – nay, ever so much better that she should be told it now, when she was still free to shape her own future, than that she should make the discovery later, when she was Angus Hamleigh's wife. This last consideration – the thought, that a secret which was everybody's secret must inevitably, sooner or later, become known to Christabel – weighed heavily with Mrs. Tregonell; and through all her meditations there was interwoven the thought of her absent son, and how his future welfare might depend upon the course to be taken now.

Christabel played and sang, while the Major and Jessie Bridgeman sat at bezique. The friendship of these two had been in no wise disturbed by the Major's offer, and the lady's rejection. It was the habit of both to take life pleasantly. Jessie took pains to show the Major how sincerely she valued his esteem – how completely she appreciated the fine points of his character; and he was too much a gentleman to remind her by one word or tone of his disappointment that day in the wood above Maidenhead.

The evening came to its quiet end at last. Christabel had scarcely left her piano in the dim little third room – she had sat there in the faint light, playing slow sleepy nocturnes and lieder, and musing, musing sadly, with a faint sick dread of coming sorrow. She had seen it in her aunt's face. When the old buhl clock chimed the half-hour after ten the Major got up and took his leave, bending over Mrs. Tregonell as he pressed her hand at parting to murmur: "Remember," with an accent as solemn as Charles the Martyr's when he spoke to Juxon.

Mrs. Tregonell answered never a word. She had been pondering and wavering all the evening, but had come to no fixed conclusion.

She bade the two girls good-night directly the Major was gone. She told herself that she had the long tranquil night before her for the resolution of her doubts. She would sleep upon this vexed question. But before she had been ten minutes in her room there came a gentle knock at the door, and Christabel stole softly to her side.

"Auntie, dear, I want to talk to you before you go to bed, if you are not very tired. May Dormer go for a little while?"

Dormer, gravest and most discreet of handmaids, whose name seemed to have been made on purpose for her, looked at her mistress, and receiving a little nod, took up her work and crept away. Dormer was never seen without her needlework. She complained that there was so little to do for Mrs. Tregonell that unless she had plenty of plain sewing she must expire for want of occupation, having long outlived such frivolity as sweethearts and afternoons out.

When Dormer was gone, Christabel came to her aunt's chair, and knelt down beside it just as she had done at Mount Royal, when she told her of Angus Hamleigh's offer.

"Aunt Diana, what has happened, what is wrong?" she asked, coming at the heart of the question at once. There was no shadow of doubt in her mind that something was sorely amiss.

"How do you know that there is anything wrong?"

"I have known it ever since that horrible old woman – Medusa in a bonnet all over flowers – pansies instead of snakes – talked about Cupid and Psyche. And you knew it, and made her stop to tell you all about it. There is some cruel mystery – something that involves my fate with that of the actress I saw the other night."

Mrs. Tregonell sat with her hands tightly clasped, her brows bent. She felt herself taken by storm, as it were, surprised into decision before she had time to make up her mind.

"Since you know so much, perhaps you had better know all,"

she said, gloomily; and then she told the story, shaping it as delicately as she could for a girl's ear.

Christabel covered her face with her clasped hands, and listened without a sigh or a tear. The pain she felt was too dull and vague as yet for the relief of tears. The horrible surprise, the sudden darkening of the dream of her young life, the clouding over of every hope, these were shapeless horrors which she could hardly realize at first. Little by little this serpent would unfold its coils; drop by drop this poison would steal through her veins, until its venom filled her heart. He, whom she had supposed all her own, with whose every thought she had fancied herself familiar, he, of whose heart she had believed herself the sole and sovereign mistress, had been one little year ago the slave of another – loving with so passionate a love that he had not shrunk from letting all the world know his idolatry. Yes, all those people who had smiled at her, and said sweet things to her, and congratulated her on her engagement, had known all the while that this lover, of whom she was so proud, was only the cast-off idolater of an actress; had come to her only when life's master-passion was worn threadbare, and had become a stale and common thing for him. At the first, womanly pride felt the blow as keenly as womanly love. To be made a mock of by the man she had so loved!

Kneeling there in dumb misery at her aunt's feet, answering never a word to that wretched record of her lover's folly, Christabel's thoughts flew back to that still grey autumn noontide

at Pentargon Bay, and the words then spoken. Words, which then had only vaguest meaning, now rose out of the dimness of the past, and stood up in her mind as if they had been living creatures. He had compared himself to Tristan – to one who had sinned and repented – he had spoken of himself as a man whose life had been more than half lived already. He had offered himself to her with no fervid passion – with no assured belief in her power to make him happy. Nay, he had rather forced from her the confession of her love by his piteous representation of himself as a man doomed to early death. He had wrung from her the offer of a life's devotion. She had given herself to him almost unwooed. Never before had her betrothal appeared to her in this humiliating aspect; but now, enlightened by the knowledge of that former love, a love so reckless and self-sacrificing, it seemed to her that the homage offered her had been of the coldest – that her affection had been placidly accepted, rather than passionately demanded of her.

"Fool, fool, fool," she said within herself, bowed to the dust by this deep humiliation.

"My darling, why don't you speak to me?" said Mrs. Tregonell, tenderly, with her arm round the girl's neck, her face leaning down to touch that drooping head.

"What can I say? I feel as if my life had suddenly come to an end, and there were nothing left for me to do, except just to sit still and remember what has been."

"You mean to break with him?"

"Break with him! Why he has never been mine. There is nothing to be broken. It was all a delusion and a dream. I thought he loved me – loved me exactly as I loved him – with the one great and perfect love of a lifetime – and now I know that he never loved me – how could he after having only just left off loving this other woman? – if he had left off loving her. And how could he when she is so perfectly lovely? Why should he have ever ceased to care for her? She had been like his wife, you say – his wife in all but the name – and all the world knew it. What must people have thought of me for stealing away another woman's husband?"

"My dear, the world does not see it in that light. She never was really his wife."

"She ought to have been," answered Christabel, resolutely, yet with quivering lips. "If he cared for her so much as to make himself the world's wonder for her sake he should have married her: a man should not play fast and loose with love."

"It is difficult for us to judge," said Mrs. Tregonell, believing herself moved by the very spirit of justice, "we are not women of the world – we cannot see this matter as the world sees it."

"God forbid that I should judge as the world judges," exclaimed Christabel, lifting her head for the first time since that story had been told her. "That would be a sorry end of your teaching. What ought I to do?"

"Your own heart must be the arbiter, Christabel. I made up my mind this afternoon that I would not seek to influence you

one way or the other. Your own heart must decide."

"My own heart? No; my heart is too entirely his – too weakly, fondly, foolishly, devoted to him. No, I must think of something beyond my foolish love for him. His honour and mine are at stake. We must be true to ourselves, he and I. But I want to know what you think, Auntie. I want to know what you would have done in such a case. If, when you were engaged to his father, you had discovered that he had been within only a little while" – these last words were spoken with inexpressible pathos, as if here the heart-wound were deepest – "the lover of another woman – bound to her by ties which a man of honour should hold sacred – what would you have done? Would you have shut your eyes resolutely upon that past history? Would you have made up your mind to forget everything, and to try to be happy with him?"

"I don't know, Belle," Mrs. Tregonell answered, helplessly, very anxious to be true and conscientious, and, if she must needs be guide, to guide the girl aright through this perilous passage in her life. "It is so difficult at my age to know what one would have done in one's girlhood. The fires are all burnt out; the springs that moved one then are all broken. Judging now, with the dull deliberation of middle age, I should say it would be a dangerous thing for any girl to marry a man who had been notoriously devoted to another woman – that woman still living, still having power to charm him. How can you ever be secure of his love? how be sure that he would not be lured back to the old madness? These women are so full of craft – it is their profession to tempt

men to destruction. You remember what the Bible says of such? "They are more bitter than death: their feet go down to death: their steps take hold on hell."

"Don't, Auntie," faltered Christabel. "Yes, I understand. Yes, he would tire of me and go back to her very likely. I am not half so lovely, nor half so fascinating. Or, if he were true to honour and duty, he would regret her all his life. He would be always repenting that he had not broken down all barriers and married her. He would see her sometimes on the stage, or in the Park, and just the sight of her face flashing past him would spoil his happiness. Happiness," she repeated, bitterly, "what happiness? what peace could there be for either of us? knowing of that fatal love. I have decided, Auntie, I shall love Angus all the days of my life, but I will never marry him."

Mrs. Tregonell clasped the girl in her arms, and they wept together, one with the slow silent tears of life that was well-nigh worn out, the other with youth's passionate sobs – sobs that shook the slender frame.

"My beloved, you have chosen wisely and well," said the widow, her heart throbbing with new hopes – it was not of Angus Hamleigh's certain loss she thought, but of her son Leonard's probable gain – "you have chosen wisely. I do not believe that you could ever have been really happy with him. Your heart would have been consumed with jealous fears – suspicion would have haunted your life – that evil woman's influence would have darkened all your days."

"Don't say another word," pleaded Christabel, in low hoarse tones; "I have quite made up my mind. Nothing can change it."

She did not want to be encouraged or praised; she did not want comfort or consolation. Even her aunt's sympathy jarred upon her fretted nerves. She felt that she must stand alone in her misery, aloof from all human succour.

"Good-night," she said, bending down to touch her aunt's forehead, with tremulous lips.

"Won't you stay, dear? Sleep with me to-night."

"Sleep?" echoed the girl. "No, Auntie dear; I would rather be in my own room!"

She went away without another word, and went slowly back to her own room, the pretty little London bedchamber, bright with new satin-wood furniture and pale blue cretonne hangings, clouded with creamy Indian muslin, a bower-like room, with flowers and books, and a miniature piano in a convenient recess by the fireplace. Here she sat gravely down before her davenport and unlocked one particular drawer, a so-called secret drawer, but as obvious as a secret panel in a melodrama – and took out Angus Hamleigh's letters. The long animated letters written on thin paper, letters which were a journal of his thoughts and feelings, almost as fully recorded as in those voluminous epistles which Werther despatched to his friend – letters which had bridged over the distance between Cornwall and Southern France, and had been the chief delight of Christabel's life through the long slow winter, making her lover her daily companion.

Slowly, slowly, with tears dropping unnoticed every now and then, she turned over the letters, one by one – now pausing to read a few lines – now a whole letter. There is no loving folly of which she had not been guilty with regard to these cherished letters: she had slept with them under her pillow, she had read them over and over again, had garnered them in a perfumed desk, and gone back to them after the lapse of time, had compared them in her own mind with all the cleverest letters that ever were given to the world – with Walpole, with Beckford, with Byron, with Deffand, and Espinasse, Sevigné, Carter – and found in them a grace and a charm that surpassed all these. She had read elegant extracts to her aunt, who confessed that Mr. Hamleigh wrote cleverly, wittily, picturesquely, poetically, but did not perceive that immeasurable superiority to all previous letter-writers. Then came briefer letters, dated from the Albany – notes dashed off hastily in those happy days when their lives were spent for the most part together. Notes containing suggestions for some new pleasure – appointments – sweet nothings, hardly worth setting down except as an excuse for writing – with here and there a longer letter, written after midnight; a letter in which the writer poured out his soul to his beloved, enlarging on their conversation of the day – that happy talk about themselves and love.

"Who would think, reading these, that he never really cared for me, that I was only an after-thought in his life," she said to herself, bitterly.

"Did he write just such letters to Stella Mayne, I wonder? No;

there was no need for writing – they were always together."

The candles on her desk had burnt low by the time her task was done. Faint gleams of morning stole through the striped blinds, as she sealed the packet in which she had folded that lengthy history of Angus Hamleigh's courtship – a large square packet, tied with stout red tape, and sealed in several places. Her hand hardly faltered as she set her seal upon the wax: her purpose was so strong.

"Yes," she said to herself, "I will do what is best and safest for his honour and for mine." And then she knelt by her bed and prayed long and fervently; and remained upon her knees reading the Gospel as the night melted away and the morning sun flooded her room with light.

She did not even attempt to sleep, trusting to her cold bath for strength against the day's ordeal. She thought all the time she was dressing of the task that lay before her – the calm deliberate cancelment of her engagement, with the least possible pain for the man she loved, and for his ultimate gain in this world and the next. Was it not for the welfare of a man's soul that he should do his duty and repair the wrong that he had done; rather than that he should conform to the world's idea of the fitness of things and make an eminently respectable marriage?

Christabel contemplated herself critically in the glass as she brushed her hair. Her eyelids were swollen with weeping – her cheeks pallid, her eyes lustreless, and at this disadvantage she compared herself with that vivid and sylph-like beauty she had

seen at the Kaleidoscope.

"How could he ever forget her for my sake?" she thought, looking at that sad colourless face, and falling into the common error that only the most beautiful women are loved with perfect love, that perfection of feeling answers to perfection of form – forgetting how the history of life shows that upon the unlovely also there have been poured treasures of deepest, purest love – that, while beauty charms and wins all, there is often one, best worth the winning, who is to be vanquished by some subtler charm, held by some less obvious chain than Aphrodite's rosy garlands. Perhaps, if Miss Courtenay had been a plain woman, skilled in the art of making the most of small advantages, she would have had more faith in her own power; but being a lovely woman who had been so trained and taught as to think very little of her own beauty, she was all the more ready to acknowledge the superior loveliness of a rival.

"Having worshipped that other fairer face, how could he care for me?" she asked herself; and then, brooding upon every detail of their betrothal, she came to the bitter conclusion that Angus had offered himself to her out of pity – touched by her too obvious affection for him – love which she had hardly tried to hide from him, when once he had told her of his early doom. That storm of pity and regret which had swept over her heart had annihilated her womanly pride: she forgot all that was due to her own dignity, and was only too eager to offer herself as the companion and consoler of his brief days. She looked back and

remembered her folly – thinking of herself as a creature caught in a trap.

No, assuredly, there was but one remedy.

One doubt – one frail straw of hope to which she might cling – yet remained. That tried, all was decided. Was this story true – completely and positively a fact? She had heard so much in society about baseless scandals – she had been told so many versions of the same story – as unlike as black to white or false to true – and she was not going to take this one bitter fact for granted upon the strength of any fashionable Medusa who might try to turn her warm beating heart to stone. Before she accepted Medusa's sentence she would discover for herself how far this story was true.

"I will give no one any trouble," she thought: "I will act for myself, and judge for myself. It will be the making or marring of three lives."

In her wide charity, in that power to think and feel for others, which was the highest gift of her rich sweet soul, Stella Mayne seemed to Christabel as important a factor in this life-problem as herself or Angus. She thought of her tenderly, picturing her as a modern Gretchen, tempted by an early and intense love, much more than by the devil's lure of splendour and jewels – a poor little Gretchen at seventeen and sixpence a week, living in a London garret, with no mother to watch and warn, and with wicked old Marthas in plenty to whisper bad advice.

Christabel went down to breakfast as usual. Her quiet face

and manner astonished Mrs. Tregonell, who had slept very little better than her niece; but when the servant came in to ask if she would ride she refused.

"Do, dear," pleaded her aunt; "a nice long country ride by Finchley and Hendon would do you good."

"No, Aunt Di – I would rather be at home this morning," answered Christabel; so the man departed, with an order for the carriage at the usual hour in the afternoon.

There was a letter from Angus – Christabel only glanced at the opening lines, which told her that he was to stay at Hillside a few days longer, and then put the letter in her pocket. Jessie Bridgeman looked at her curiously – knowing very well that there was something sorely amiss – but waiting to be told what this sudden cloud of sorrow meant.

Christabel went back to her own room directly after breakfast. Her aunt forbore any attempt at consolation, knowing it was best to let the girl bear her grief in her own way.

"You will go with me for a drive after luncheon, dear?" she asked.

"Yes, Auntie – but I would rather we went a little way in the country, if you don't mind, instead of to the Park."

"With all my heart: I have had quite enough of the Park."

"The 'booming, and booming, and booming,'" said Jessie, "and the straining one's every nerve to see the Princess drive by – only to discover the humiliating fact that she is one of the very few respectable-looking women in the Park – perhaps the only one

who can look absolutely respectable without being a dowdy."

"Shall I go to her room and try if I can be of any comfort to her?" mused Jessie, as she went up to her own snug little den on the third floor. "Better not, perhaps. I like to hug my sorrows. I should hate any one who thought their prattle could lessen my pain. She will bear hers best alone, I dare say. But what can it be? Not any quarrel with him. They could hardly quarrel by telegraph or post – they who are all honey when they are together. It is some scandal – something that old demon with the eyebrows said yesterday. I am sure of it – a talk between two elderly women with closed doors always means Satan's own mischief."

All three ladies went out in the carriage after luncheon – a dreary, dusty drive, towards Edgware – past everlasting bricks and mortar, as it seemed to Christabel's tired eyes, which gazed at the houses as if they had been phantoms, so little human meaning had they for her – so little did she realize that in each of those brick and plaster packing-cases human beings lived, and, in their turn, suffered some such heart-agony as this which she was enduring to-day.

"That is St. John's Wood up yonder, isn't it?" she asked, as they passed Carlton Hill, speaking for almost the first time since they left Mayfair.

"Yes."

"Isn't it somewhere about there Miss Stella Mayne lives, the actress we saw the other night?" asked Christabel, carelessly.

Her aunt looked at her with intense surprise, – how could she

pronounce *that* name, and to ask a frivolous question?

"Yes; she has a lovely house called the Rosary. Mr. FitzPelham told me about it," answered Jessie.

Christabel said never a word more as the carriage rolled on by Cricklewood and the two Welsh Harps, and turned into the quiet lanes about Hendon, and so home by the Finchley Road. She had found out what she wanted to know.

When afternoon tea was served in the little third drawing-room, where Mrs. Tregonell sat resting herself after the dust and weariness of the drive, Christabel was missing. Dormer brought a little note for her mistress.

"Miss Courtenay gave me this just before she went out, ma'am."

"Out! Has Miss Courtenay gone out?"

"Yes, ma'am; Daniel got her a cab five minutes ago."

"To her dressmaker, I suppose," said Mrs. Tregonell, trying to look indifferent.

"Don't be uneasy about me, Auntie," wrote Christabel: "I am going on an errand about which I made up my mind last night. I may be a little late for dinner – but as I shall go and return in the same cab, you may feel sure that I shall be quite safe. Don't wait dinner for me."

CHAPTER IX

"LOVE IS LOVE FOR EVERMORE."

The Rosary, St. John's Wood: that was the address which Christabel had given the cabman. Had any less distinguished person than Stella Mayne lived at the Rosary it might have taken the cabman all the evening to find that particular house, with no more detailed address as to road and number. But a brother whip on a rank near Hamilton Terrace was able to tell Christabel's cabman the way to the Rosary. It was a house at which hansoms were often wanted at unholy hours between midnight and sunrise – a house whose chief hospitality took the form of chablis and oysters after the play – a house which seldom questioned poor cabby's claim or went closely into mileage – a house which deserved and commanded respectful mention on the rank.

"The Rosary – yes, that's where Miss Mayne lives. Beech Tree Road – a low 'ouse with veranders all round – yer can't miss it."

The cabman rattled away to Grove End Road, and thence to the superior quietude and seclusion of Beech Tree Road, where he drew up at a house with a glazed entrance. He rang the bell, and Christabel alighted before the summons was answered.

"Is Miss Mayne at home?" she asked a servant in plain clothes – a servant of unquestionable respectability.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, and preceded her along a corridor, glass-roofed, richly carpeted, and with a bank of hot-house flowers on either side.

Only at this ultimate moment did Christabel's courage begin to falter. She felt as if she were perhaps entering a den of vice. Innocent, guileless as she was, she had her own vague ideas about vice – exaggerated as all ignorant ideas are apt to be. She began to shiver as she walked over the dark subdued velvet pile of that shadowy corridor. If she had found Miss Mayne engaged in giving a masked ball – or last night's supper party only just finishing – or a party of young men playing blind hookey, she would hardly have been surprised – not that she knew anything about masked balls – or late suppers – or gambling – but that all these would have come within her vague notions of an evil life.

"*He* loved her," she said to herself, arguing against this new terror, "and he could not love a thoroughly wicked woman."

No, the Gretchen idea – purity fallen, simplicity led astray – was more natural – but one could hardly imagine Gretchen in a house of this kind – this subdued splendour – this all-pervading air of wealth and luxury.

Miss Courtenay was shown into a small morning-room – a room which on one side was all window – opening on to a garden, where some fine old trees gave an idea of space – and where the foreground showed a mass of flowers – roses – roses – roses everywhere – trailing over arches – clustering round tall iron rods – bush roses – standard roses – dwarf roses – all shining in the

golden light of a westering sun.

The room was elegantly simple – an escritoire in the Sherraton style – two or three book-tables crowded with small volumes in exquisite binding, vellum, creamy calf, brown Russia, red edges, gold edges, painted edges, all the prettinesses of bookbinding – half a dozen low chairs – downy nests covered with soft tawny Indian silk, with here and there a brighter patch of colour in the shape of a plush pillow or an old brocade anti-macassar – voluminous curtains of the same soft tawny silk, embroidered with poppies and corn-flowers – a few choice flowers in old Venetian vases – a large peacock-feather fan thrown beside an open book, upon a low pillow-shaped ottoman.

Christabel gazed round the room in blank surprise – nothing gaudy – nothing vulgar – nothing that indicated sudden promotion from the garret to the drawing-room – an air of elegant luxury, of supreme fashion in all things – but no glare of gilding, no discords in form or colour.

"Your name, if you please, madam?" said the servant, a model of decorum in well-brushed black.

"Perhaps, you had better take my card. I am not personally known to Miss Mayne," answered Christabel, opening her card-case. "Oh!" she exclaimed suddenly, as with a cry of pain.

"I beg your pardon," said the servant, alarmed.

"It's nothing. A picture startled me – that was all. Be good enough to tell Miss Mayne that I shall be very much obliged to her if she will see me."

"Certainly, madam!" said the man, as he retired with the card, wondering how a young lady of such distinguished appearance happened to call upon his mistress, whose feminine visitors were usually of a more marked type.

"I dare say she's collectin' funds for one of their everlastin' churches," thought the butler, "'igh, low, or Jack, as I call 'em – 'igh church, low church, or John Wesley – ever so many predominations, and all of 'em equally keen after money. But why did she almost s'riek when she clapt her eyes on Mr. 'Amleigh's portrait, I wonder, just as if she had seen a scorpiont."

Christabel stood motionless where the man left her, looking at a photograph on a brass easel upon an old ebony table in the middle of the room. A cluster of stephanotis in a low Venetian vase stood in front of that portrait, like flowers before a shrine. It was an exquisitely painted photograph of Angus Hamleigh – Angus at his best and brightest, before the flush and glory of youth had faded from eyes and brow – Angus with a vivacity of expression which she had never seen in his face – she who had known him only since the fatal hereditary disease had set its mark upon him.

"Ah!" she sighed, "he was happier when he loved her than he ever was with me."

She stood gazing at that pictured face, her hands clasped, her heart beating heavily. Everything confirmed her in her despair – in her iron resolve. At last, with a long-drawn sigh, she withdrew her eyes from the picture, and began to explore the room. No,

there was no trace of vulgarity – no ugly indication of a vicious mind. Christabel glanced at the open book on the ottoman, half expecting to find the trail of the serpent there – in some shameful French novel, the very name of which she had not been allowed to hear. But the book was only the last *Contemporary Review*, open at an article of Gladstone's. Then, with faintly tremulous hand, she took one of the vellum-bound duodecimos from a shelf of the revolving book-table – "Selections from Shelley" – and on the title-page, "Angus to Stella, Rome," and a date, just three years old, in the hand she knew so well. She looked in other books – all choicest flowers of literature – and in each there was the same familiar penmanship, sometimes with a brief sentence that made the book a *souvenir*– sometimes with a passionate line from Shakespeare or Dante, Heine or De Musset. Christabel remembered, with a sharp pang of jealousy, that her lover had never so written in any book he had given her. She ignored the change which a year or two may make in a man's character, when he has reached one of the turning points of life; and how a graver deeper phase of feeling, less eager to express itself in other people's flowery language, succeeds youth's fervid sentiment. Had Werther lived and loved a second Charlotte, assuredly he would have loved her after a wiser and graver fashion. But Christabel had believed herself her lover's first and only love, and finding that she was but the second volume in his life, abandoned herself at once to despair.

She sank into one of the low luxurious chairs, just as the door

opened, and Miss Mayne came into the room.

If she had looked lovely as Psyche, in her classic drapery, with the emerald butterfly on her shoulder, she looked no less beautiful in the costly-simplicity of her home toilet. She wore a sacque-shaped tea-gown of soft French-grey silk, lined with palest pink satin, over a petticoat that seemed a mass of cream-coloured lace. Her only ornaments were three half-hoop rings – rubies, diamonds, and sapphires – too large for the slender third finger of her left hand, and half concealing a thin wedding-ring – and a star-shaped brooch – one large cat's-eye with diamond rays, which fastened the lace handkerchief at her throat.

Christabel, quick to observe the woman whose existence had ruined her life, noted everything, from the small perfectly-shaped head – shaped for beauty rather than mental power – to the little arched foot in its pearl-coloured silk stocking, and grey satin slipper. For the first time in her life she beheld a woman whose chief business in this world was to look her loveliest, at all times and seasons, for friend or foe – for whom the perfection of costume was the study and delight of life – who lived and reigned by the divine right of beauty.

"Pray sit down!" said Miss Mayne, with a careless wave of her hand – so small – so delicate and fragile-looking under the lace ruffle; "I am quite at a loss to guess to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit."

She looked at her visitor scrutinizingly with those dark, too lustrous eyes. A hectic flush burned in her hollow cheeks. She

had heard a good deal about this Miss Courtenay, of Mount Royal and Mayfair, and she came prepared to do battle.

For some moments Christabel was dumb. It was one thing to have come into this young lioness's den, and another thing to know what to say to the lioness. But the straightness and purity of the girl's purpose upheld her – and her courage hardly faltered.

"I have come to you, Miss Mayne, because I will not consent to be governed by common report. I want to know the truth – the whole truth – however bitter it may be for me – in order that I may know how to act."

Miss Mayne had expected a much sharper mode of attack. She had been prepared to hear herself called scorpion – or viper – the pest of society – a form of address to which she would have been able to reply with a startling sharpness. But to be spoken to thus – gravely, gently, pleadingly, and with that sweet girlish face looking at her in unspeakable sorrow – was something for which she had not prepared herself.

"You speak to me like a lady – like a good woman," she said, falteringly. "What is it you want to know?"

"I have been told that Mr. Hamleigh – Angus Hamleigh – was once your lover. Is that true?"

"True as the stars in heaven – the stars by which we swore to love each other to the end of our lives – looking up at them, with our hands clasped, as we stood on the deck of the steamer between Dover and Calais. That was our marriage. I used to think that God saw it, and accepted it – just as if we had been in church:

only it did not hold water, you see," she added, with a cynical laugh, which ended in a hard little cough.

"He loved you dearly. I can see that by the lines that he wrote in your books. I ventured to look at them while I waited for you. Why did he not marry you?"

Stella Mayne shrugged her shoulders, and played with the soft lace of her *fichu*.

"It is not the fashion to marry a girl who dances in short petticoats, and lives in an attic," she answered. "Perhaps such a girl might make a good wife, if a man had the courage to try the experiment. Such things have been done, I believe; but most men prefer the safer course. If I had been clever, I daresay Mr. Hamleigh would have married me; but I was an ignorant little fool – and when he came across my path he seemed to me like an angel of light. I simply worshipped him. You've no idea how innocent I was in those days. Not a carefully educated, lady-like innocence, like yours, don't you know, but absolute ignorance. I didn't know any wrong; but then I didn't know any right. You see I am quite candid with you."

"I thank you with all my heart for your truthfulness. Everything – for you, for me, for Angus – depends upon our perfect truthfulness. I want to do what is best – what is wisest – what is right – not for myself only, but for Angus, for you."

Those lovely liquid eyes looked at her incredulously.

"What," cried Stella Mayne, with her mocking little laugh – a musical little laugh trained for comedy, and unconsciously

artificial – "do you mean to tell me that you care a straw what becomes of me – that it matters to you whether I die in the gutter where I was born, or pitch myself into the Regent's Canal some night when I have a fit of the blue devils?"

"I care very much what becomes of you. I should not be here if I did not wish to do what is best for you."

"Then you come as my friend, and not as my enemy?" said Stella.

"Yes, I am here as your friend," answered Christabel, with an effort.

The actress – a creature all impulse and emotion – fell on her knees at Miss Courtenay's feet, and pressed her lips upon the lady's gloved hand.

"How good you are," she exclaimed – "how good – how good. I have read of such women – they swarm in the novels I get from Mudie – they and fiends. There's no middle distance. But I never believed in them. When the man brought me your card I thought you had come to blackguard me."

Christabel shuddered at the coarse word, so out of harmony with that vellum-bound Shelley, and all the graciousness of Miss Mayne's surroundings.

"Forgive me," said Stella, seeing her disgust. "I am horribly vulgar. I never was like that while – while Angus cared for me."

"Why did he leave off caring for you?" asked Christabel, looking gravely down at the lovely up-turned face – so exquisite in its fragile sensitive beauty.

Now Stella Mayne was one of those complex creatures, quite out of the range of a truthful woman's understanding – a creature who could be candour itself – could gush and prattle with the innocent expansiveness of a child, so long as there was nothing she particularly desired to conceal – yet who could lie with the same sweet air of childlike simplicity, when it served her purpose – lie with the calm stolidity, the invincible assurance, of an untruthful child. She did not answer Christabel's question immediately, but looked at her thoughtfully for a few seconds, wondering how much of her history this young lady knew, and to what extent lying might serve. She had slipped from her knees to a sitting position on the Persian hearthrug, her thin, semi-transparent hands clasped upon her knee, the triple circlet of gems flashing in the low sunlight.

"Why did we part?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders. "I hardly know. Temper, I suppose. He has not too good a temper, and I – well, I am a demon when I am ill – and I am often ill."

"You keep his portrait on your table," said Christabel.

"Keep it? Yes – and round my neck," answered Stella, jerking a gold locket out of her loose gown, and opening it to show the miniature inside. "I have worn his picture against my heart ever since he gave it me – during our first Italian tour. I shall wear it so when I am dead. Yes – when he is married, and happy with you, and I am lying in my grave in Hendon Churchyard. Do you know I have bought and paid for my grave?"

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I wanted to make sure of not being buried in a cemetery – a city of the dead – streets and squares and alleys of gravestones. I have chosen a spot under a great spreading cedar, in a churchyard that might be a hundred miles from London – and yet it is quite near here, and handy for those who will have to take me. I shall not give any one too much trouble. Perhaps, if you will let him, Angus may come to my funeral, and drop a bunch of violets on my coffin."

"Why do you talk like that?"

"Because the end cannot be very far off. Do you think I look as if I should live to be a grandmother?"

The hectic bloom, the unnatural light in those lovely eyes, the transparent hands, and purple-tinted nails, did not, indeed, point to such a conclusion.

"If you are really ill why do you go on acting?" asked Christabel, gently. "Surely the fatigue and excitement must be very bad for you."

"I hardly know. The fatigue may be killing me, but the excitement is the only thing that keeps me alive. Besides, I must live – thirty pounds a week is a consideration."

"But – you are not in want of money?" exclaimed Christabel. "Mr. Hamleigh would never –"

"Leave me to starve," interrupted Stella, hurriedly; "no, I have plenty of money. While – while we were happy Mr. Hamleigh lavished his money upon me – he was always absurdly generous – and if I wanted money now I should have but to hold out my

hand. I have never known the want of money since I left my attic – four and sixpence a week, with the use of the kitchen fire, to boil a kettle, or cook a chop – when my resources rose to a chop – it was oftener a bloater. Do you know, the other day, when I was dreadfully ill and they had been worrying me with invalid turtle, jellies, oysters, caviare, all kinds of loathsome dainties – and the doctor said I should die if I didn't eat – I thought perhaps I might get back the old appetite for bloater and bread and butter – I used to enjoy a bloater tea so in those old days – but it was no use – the very smell of the thing almost killed me – the whole house was poisoned with it."

She prattled on, looking up at Christabel with a confiding smile. The visit had taken quite a pleasant turn. She had no idea that anything serious was to come of it. Her quondam lover's affianced wife had taken it into her head to come and see what kind of stuff Mr. Hamleigh's former idol was made of – that was all – and the lady's amiability was making the interview altogether agreeable.

Yet, in another moment, the pain and sorrow in Christabel's face showed her and there was something stronger than frivolous curiosity in the lady's mind.

"Pray be serious with me," said Christabel. "Remember that the welfare of three people depends upon my resolution in this matter. It would be easy for me to say – I will shut my eyes to the past: he has told me that he loves me – and I will believe him. But I will not do that. I will not live a life of suspicion and unrest,

just for the sweet privilege of bearing him company, and being called by his name – dear as that thought is to me. No, it shall be all or nothing. If I cannot have his whole heart I will have none of it. You confess that you wear his picture next your heart. Do you still love him?"

"Yes – always – always – always," answered the actress, fervently. This at least was no bold-faced lie – there was truth's divine accent here. "There is no man like him on this earth." And then in low impassioned tones she quoted those passionate lines of Mrs. Browning's: —

There is no one beside thee, and no one above thee;
Thou standest alone as the nightingale sings;
And my words, that would praise thee, are impotent things.

"And do you believe that he has quite left off loving you?"

"No," answered the actress, looking up at her with flashing eyes, "I don't believe it. I don't believe he could after all we have been to each other. It isn't in human nature to forget such love as ours."

"And you believe – if he were free – if he had not engaged himself to me – perhaps hardly intending it – he would come back to you?"

"Yes, if he knew how ill I am – if he knew what the doctor says about me – I believe he would come back."

"And marry you?" asked Christabel, deadly pale.

"That's as may be," retorted the other, with her Parisian shrug.

Christabel stood up, and laid her clenched hand on the low draperied mantelpiece, almost as if she were laying it on an altar to give emphasis to an oath. "Then he shall come back – then he shall marry you," she said in a grave earnest voice. "I will rob no woman of her husband. I will doom no fellow-creature to lifelong shame!"

"What," cried Stella Mayne, with almost a shriek, "you will give him up – for me!"

"Yes. He has never belonged to me as he has belonged to you – it is no shame for me to renounce him – grief and pain – yes, grief and pain unspeakable – but no disgrace. He has sinned, and he must atone for his sin. I will not be the impediment to your marriage."

"But if you were to give him up he might not marry me: men are so difficult to manage," faltered the actress, aghast at the idea of such a sacrifice, seeing the whole business in the light of circumstances unknown to Miss Courtenay.

"Not men with conscience and honour," answered Christabel, with unshaken firmness. "I feel very sure that if Mr. Hamleigh were free he would do what is right. It is only his engagement to me that hinders his making atonement to you. He has lived among worldly people who have never reminded him of his duty – who have blunted his finer feelings with their hideous wordliness – oh, I know how worldly women talk – as if there were neither hell nor heaven, only Belgravia and Mayfair – and no doubt worldly men are still worse. But he – he whom I have so

loved and honoured – cannot be without honour and conscience. He shall do what is just and right."

She looked almost inspired as she stood there with pale cheeks and kindling eyes, thinking far more of that broad principle of justice than of the fragile emotional creature trembling before her. This comes of feeding a girl's mind with Shakespeare and Bacon, Carlyle and Plato, to say nothing of that still broader and safer guide, the Gospel.

Just then there was the sound of footsteps approaching the door – a measured masculine footfall. The emotional creature flew to the door, opened it, murmured a few words to some person without, and closed it, but not before a whiff of Latakia had been wafted into the flower-scented room. The footsteps moved away in another direction, and Christabel was much too absorbed to notice that faint breath of tobacco.

"There's not the least use in your giving him up," said Stella, resolutely: "he would never marry me. You don't know him as well as I do."

"Do I not? I have lived only to study his character for the best part of a year. I know he will do what is just."

Stella Mayne suddenly clasped her hands before her face and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, if I were only good and innocent like you!" she cried, piteously; "how I detest myself as I stand here before you! – how loathsome – how hateful I am!"

"No, no," murmured Christabel, soothingly, "you are not

hateful: it is only impenitent sin that is hateful. You were led into wrong-doing because you were ignorant of right – there was no one to teach you – no one to uphold you. And he who tempted you is in duty bound to make amends. Trust me – trust me – it is better for my peace as well as for yours that he should do his duty. And now good-by – I have stayed too long already."

Again Stella Mayne fell on her knees and clasped this divine visitant's hand. It seemed to this weak yet fervid soul almost as if some angel guest had crossed her threshold. Christabel stooped and would have kissed the actress's forehead.

"No," she cried, hysterically, "don't kiss me – don't – you don't know. I should feel like Judas."

"Good-by, then. Trust me." And so they parted.

A tall man, with an iron-grey moustache and a soldier-like bearing, came out of a little study, cigarette in hand, as the outer door closed on Christabel. "Who the deuce is that thoroughbred-looking girl?" asked this gentleman. "Have you got some of the neighbouring swells to call upon you, at last? Why, what's the row, Fishky, you've been crying?"

Fishky was the stage-carpenters', dressers' and supernumeraries' pronunciation of the character which Miss Mayne acted nightly, and had been sportively adopted by her intimates as a pet name for herself.

"That lady is Miss Courtenay."

"The lady Hamleigh is going to marry? What the devil is she doing in this *galère*? I hope she hasn't been making herself

unpleasant?"

"She is an angel."

"With all my heart. Hamleigh is very welcome to her, so long as he leaves me my dear little demon," answered the soldier, smiling down from his altitude of six feet two at the sylph-like form in the Watteau gown.

"Oh, how I wish I had never seen your face," said Stella: "I should be almost a good woman, if there were no such person as you in the world."

END OF VOL. I