

STAND FAST, CRAIG-ROYSTON! (VOLUME
III)

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STAND FAST, CRAIG-ROYSTON!

A Novel

BY
WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF
"A DAUGHTER OF HETH," "MACLEOD OF DARE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

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STAND FAST, CRAIG-ROYSTON!

CHAPTER I.
IN VAIN—IN VAIN.

One evening Mr. Courtney Fox, the London correspondent of the *Edinburgh Chronicle*, was as usual in his own room in the office in Fleet-street, when a card was brought to him.

"Show the gentleman up," said he to the boy.

A couple of seconds thereafter Vincent Harris made his appearance.

"Mr. Fox?" said he, inquiringly.

The heavy-built journalist did not rise to receive his visitor; he merely said—

"Take a chair. What can I do for you?"

"No, thanks," said Vincent, "I don't wish to detain you more than a moment. I only wanted to see if you could give me any information about Mr. George Bethune."

"Well, that would be only fair," said the big, ungainly man, with the small, keen blue eyes glinting behind spectacles; "that would be only a fair exchange, considering I remember how Mr. Bethune came down here one night and asked for information about you."

Vincent looked astonished.

"And I was able," continued Mr. Fox, "to give him all the information he cared for—namely, that you were the son of a very rich man. I presume that was all he wanted to know."

There was something in the tone of this speech—a familiarity bordering on insolence—that Vincent angrily resented; but he was wise enough to show nothing: his sole anxiety was to have news of Maisrie and her grandfather; this man's manner did not concern him much.

"I do not ask for information about Mr. Bethune himself; I dare say I know

him as well as most do," said he with perfect calmness. "I only wish to know where he is."

"I don't know where he is," said the burly correspondent, examining the stranger with his small shrewd eyes, "but I guarantee that, wherever he is, he is living on the best. Shooting stags in Scotland most likely—"

"They don't shoot stags in December," said Vincent, briefly.

"Or careering down the Mediterranean in a yacht—gad, an auxiliary screw would come in handy for the old man," continued Mr. Fox, grinning at his own gay facetiousness; "anyhow, wherever he is, I'll bet he's enjoying himself and living on the fat of the land. Merry as a cricket—bawling away at his Scotch songs: I suppose that was how he amused himself when he was in Sing Sing—perhaps he learnt it there—"

"I thought you would probably know where he is," said Vincent, not paying much heed to these little jocosities, "if he happened to be sending in to you those articles on the Scotch ballads—"

"Articles on Scotch ballads!" said Mr. Fox, with a bit of a derisive laugh. "Yes, I know. A collation of the various versions: a cold collation, I should say, by the time he has got done with them. Why, my dear sir, have you never heard of Professor Childs, of Harvard College?"

"I have heard of Professor Child," said Vincent.

"Well, well, well, well, what is the difference?" said the ponderous correspondent, who rolled from side to side in his easy-chair as if he were in a bath, and peered with his minute, twinkling eyes. "And indeed it matters little to me what kind of rubbish is pitchforked into the *Weekly*. If my boss cares to do that kind of thing, for the sake of a 'brother Scot,' that's his own look-out. All I know is that not a scrap of the cold collation has come here, or has appeared in the *Weekly* as yet; so there is no clue that way to the whereabouts of old Father Christmas, old Santa Claus, the Wandering Scotch Jew—if that is what you want."

"I am sorry to have troubled you," said Vincent, with his hand on the door.

"Stop a bit," said Mr. Fox, in his blunt and rather impertinent fashion. "You and I might chance to be of use to each other some day. I like to know the young men in politics. If I can do you a good turn, you'll remember it; or rather you won't remember it, but I can recall it to you, when I want you to do me one. Take a seat. Let's make a compact. When you are in the House, you'll want the judicious little paragraph sent through the provinces now and again: I can manage all that for you. Then you can give me an occasional tip: you're in —'s confidence, people say—as much as any one can expect to be, that is. Won't you take a seat?—thanks, that will be better. I want to know you. I've already made one important acquaintanceship through your friend Mr. Bethune: it was quite an event when the great George Morris condescended to visit this humble

office—”

”George Morris!” said Vincent.

”Perhaps you know him personally?” Mr. Fox said, and he went on in the most easy and affable fashion: ”I may say without boasting that I am acquainted with most people—most people of any consequence: it is part of my business. But George Morris, somehow, I had never met. You may imagine, then, that when he came down here, to ask a few questions, I was precious glad to be of such service as I could; for I said to myself that here was just the man for me. Take a great scandal, for example—they do happen sometimes, don’t they?—even in this virtuous land of England: very well—I go to George Morris—a hint from him—and there I am first in the field: before the old mummies of the London press have had time to open their eyes and stare.”

Vincent had brought a chair from the side of the room, and was now seated: there was only the table, littered with telegrams and proofs, between those two.

”Did I understand you to say,” he asked, with his eyes fixed on this man, ”that George Morris had come to you to make inquiries about Mr. Bethune?”

”You understood aright.”

”Who sent him?” demanded Vincent, abruptly—for there were strange fancies and still darker suspicions flying through his head.

But Courtney Fox smiled.

”George Morris, you may have heard, was not born yesterday. His business is to get out of you what he can, and to take care you get nothing out of him. It was not likely he would tell me why he came making these inquiries—even if I had cared to ask, which I did not.”

”You told him all you knew, of course, about Mr. Bethune?” Vincent went on, with a certain cold austerity.

”I did.”

”And how much more?”

”Ah, very good—very neat,” the spacious-waisted journalist exclaimed with a noisy laugh. ”Very good indeed. But look here, Mr. Harris, if the great solicitor was not born yesterday, you were—in a way; and so I venture to ask you why you should take such an interest in Mr. Bethune’s affairs?”

Vincent answered him without flinching.

”Because, amongst other things, certain lies have been put in circulation about Mr. Bethune, and I wished to know where they arose. Now I am beginning to guess.”

For an instant Mr. Courtney Fox seemed somewhat disconcerted; but he betrayed no anger.

”Come, come,” said he, with an affectation of good humour, ”that is a strong word. Morris heard no lies from me, I can assure you. Why, don’t we all of

us know who and what old George Bethune is! He may flourish and vapour successfully enough elsewhere; but he doesn't impose on Fleet-street; we know him too well. And don't imagine I have any dislike towards your venerable friend; not the slightest; in fact, I rather admire the jovial old mountebank. You see, he doesn't treat me to too much of his Scotch *blague*; I'm not to the manner born; and he knows it. Oh, he's skilful enough in adapting himself to his surroundings—like a trout, that takes the colour of the pool he finds himself in; and when he gets hold of a Scotchman, I am told his acting of the rugged and manly independence of the Scot—of the Drury Lane Scot, I mean—is splendid. I wonder he doesn't go and live in Edinburgh. They take things seriously there. They might elevate him into a great position—make a great writer of him—they're in sore need of one or two; and then every now and again he could step out of his cloud of metaphysics, and fall on something. That's the way the Scotchmen get hold of a subject; they don't take it up as an ordinary Christian would; they fall on it. We once had an English poet called Milton; but Masson fell on him, and crushed him, and didn't even leave us an index by which to identify the remains. Old Bethune should go back to Scotland, and become the Grand Lama of Edinburgh letters: it would be a more dignified position than cadging about for a precarious living among us poor southrons."

Vincent paid but small heed to all this farrago: he was busily thinking how certain undoubted features and circumstances of old George Bethune's life might appear when viewed through the belittling and sardonic scepticism of this man's mind; and then again, having had that hue and shape conferred upon them, how would they look when presented to the professional judgment of such a person as Mr. George Morris?

"The Scotch are the very oddest people in all the world," Mr. Fox continued, for he seemed to enjoy his own merry tirade. "They'll clasp a stranger to their bosom, and share their last bawbee with him, if only he can prove to them that he, too, was born within sight of MacGillicuddy's Reeks—"

"MacGillicuddy's Reeks are in Ireland," said Vincent.

"Well, MacGillicuddy's Breeks—no, that won't do; they don't wear such things in the north. Any unpronounceable place—any kind of puddle or barren rock: to be born within sight of that means that you own everything of honesty, and manliness, and worth that's going—yes, worth—worth is a sweet word—manly worth—it is the prerogative of persons who have secured the greatest blessing on earth, that of being born north of the Tweed. Now, why doesn't old George Bethune go away back there; and wave his tartan plaid, and stamp, and howl balderdash, and have monuments put up to him as the White-haired Bard of Glen-Toddy? That surely would be better than hawking bogus books about London and getting subscriptions for things that never appear; though he

manages to do pretty well. Oh, yes, he does pretty well, one way and another. The cunning old cockroach—to take that girl around with him, and get her to make eyes at tradesmen, so as to swindle them out of pounds of tea!”

But at this a sudden flame seemed to go through the young man’s brain—and unhappily he had his stick quite close by. In an instant he was on his feet, his right hand grasping the cane, his left fixed in the coat-collar of the luckless journalist, whose inert bulk he was attempting to drag from the chair.

“You vile hound!” Vincent said with set teeth—and his nostrils were dilated and his eyes afire, “I have allowed you to insult an old man—but now—now you have gone too far. Come out of that—and I will break every bone in your body—!”

Down came the stick; but by a fortunate accident it caught on the back of the chair, and the force of the blow sent it flying in two.

“For God’s sake—stop!” the other cried—but in a terrified whisper—and his face was as white as death. “What are you doing!—are you mad!—I beg your pardon—can I do more? I beg your pardon—for God’s sake, have a little common sense!”

Vincent looked at the man: more abject cowardice he had never beheld than was displayed in every trembling limb of his huge carcase, in every feature of the blanched face. He flung him from him—in disdain.

“Yes,” said Mr. Fox, with a desperate effort at composure, and he even tried to put his coat collar to rights, though his fingers were all shaking, and himself panting and breathless. “You—you may thank me—for—for having saved you. If—I had touched that bell—if I had called out—you would have been ruined—ruined for life—a pretty story for — to hear—about his favourite protégé—increase your chances of getting into Parliament, wouldn’t it? Can’t you take a bit of a joke?—you’re not a Scotchman!”

Vincent was still standing there, with lowering brow.

“When you are busy with your jokes,” said he, “I would advise you to keep any friends of mine out of them—especially a girl who has no one to defend her. But I am glad I came here to-night. I begin to understand in whose foul mind arose those distortions, and misrepresentations, and lies. So it was to you George Morris came when he wanted to know about Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter? An excellent authority! And it was straight from you, I suppose, that George Morris went to my father with his wonderful tale——”

“One moment,” said Courtney Fox—and he appeared to speak with a little difficulty: perhaps he still felt the pressure of knuckles at his neck. “Sit down. I wish to explain. Mind you, I could make this a bad night’s work for you, if I chose. But I don’t, for reasons that you would understand if you were a little older and had to earn your own living, as I have. It is my interest to make friends——”

"And an elegant way you have of making them," said Vincent, scornfully.

"—and I want to assure you that I never said anything to George Morris about Mr. Bethune that was not quite well-known. Nor had I the least idea that Morris was going to your father; or that you had the least interest or concern in the matter. As for a bit of chaff about Scotland: who would mind that? Many a time I've had it out with Mr. Bethune himself in this very room; and do you suppose he cared?—his grandiloquent patriotism soared far away above my little Cockney jests. So I wish you to perceive that there was no enmity in the affair, no intention to do harm, and no misrepresentation; and when you see that, you will see also that you have put yourself in the wrong, and I hope you will have the grace to apologise."

It was a most creditable effort to escape from a humiliating position with some semblance of dignity.

"Apologise for what?" said Vincent, staring.

"Why, for your monstrous and outrageous conduct of this evening!"

"—I am to apologise?" said Vincent, with his brows growing dark again. "You introduce into your scurrilous talk the name of a young lady who is known to me—you speak of her in the most insulting and gratuitous fashion—and—and I am to apologise! Yes, I do apologise: I apologise for having brought such a fool of a stick with me: I hope it will be a heavier one if I hear you make use of such language again."

"Come, come, threats will not serve," said Mr. Fox—but he was clearly nervous and apprehensive. "Wouldn't it be better for you, now, to be a little civil—and—and I could promise to send you Mr. Bethune's address if I hear of it? Wouldn't that be better—and more reasonable? Yes, I will—I promise to send you his address if it comes in any way to this office—isn't that more reasonable?"

"I thank you," said Vincent, with formal politeness; and with an equally formal 'Good night' the young man took his leave. Mr. Courtney Fox instantly hid the broken portions of the cane (until he should have a chance of burning them), and, ringing the bell, called in a loud and manly voice for the latest telegrams.

So Vincent was once more thrown back on himself and his own resources. During these past few days he had sought everywhere for the two lost ones; and sought in vain. First of all he had made sure they had left Brighton; then he had come to London; and morning, noon, and night had visited their accustomed haunts, without finding the least trace of them. He went from this restaurant to that; in the morning he walked about the Parks; he called at the libraries where they were known; no sign of them could be found anywhere. And now, when he thought of Maisrie, his heart was no longer angry and reproachful: nay, he grew to think it was in some wild mood of self-sacrifice that she had resolved to go away, and had persuaded her grandfather to take her. She had got some notion

into her head that she was a degraded person; that his friends suspected her; that no future as between him and her was possible; that it was better they should see each other no more. He remembered how she had drawn up her head in maidenly pride—in indignation, almost: his relatives might be at peace: they had nothing to fear from her. And here was the little brooch—with its tiny white dove, that was to rest on her bosom, as if bringing a message of love and safety—all ready for her; but her place was empty; she had gone from him, and perhaps for ever. The very waiters in the restaurants, when he went there all alone, ventured to express a little discreet surprise, and make enquiries: he could say nothing. He had the sandal-wood necklace, to be sure; and sometimes he wore it over his heart; and on the way home, through the dark thoroughfares, at times a faint touch of the perfume reached his nostrils—but there was no Maisrie by his side. And then again, a sudden, marvellous vision would come before him: of Maisrie, her hair blown by the winds, her eyes piteous and full of tears, her eyebrows and lashes wet with the flying spray; and she would say 'Kiss me, Vincent, kiss me!' as if she had already resolved to go, and knew that this was to be a last, despairing farewell.

The days passed; and ever he continued his diligent search, for he knew that these two had but little money, and guessed that they had not departed on any far travel, especially at this time of the year. He went down to Scotland, and made enquiries among the Edinburgh newspaper offices—without avail. He advertised in several of the London daily journals: there was no reply. He told the headwaiter at the Restaurant Mentavisti, that if Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter—who were well-known to all in the place—should make their appearance any evening, and if he, the headwaiter, could manage to send some one to follow them home and ascertain their address, that would mean a couple of sovereigns in his pocket; but the opportunity never presented itself. And meanwhile this young man, taking no care of himself, and fretting from morning till evening, and often all the sleepless night through as well, was gradually losing his colour, and becoming like the ghost of his own natural self.

Christmas came. Harland Harris and Vincent went down to pass the holidays with Mrs. Ellison, at Brighton; and for the same purpose Lord Musselburgh returned to the Bedford Hotel. The four of them dined together on Christmas evening. It was not a very boisterous party, considering that the pragmatical and pedantic voice of the man of wealth was heard discoursing on such light and fanciful themes as the payment of returning officers' expenses, the equalisation of the death duties, and the establishment of state-assisted intermediate schools; but Musselburgh threw in a little jest now and again, to mitigate the ponderosity of the harangue. Vincent was almost silent. Since coming down from London, he had not said a single word to any one of them about Mr. Bethune or his

granddaughter: no doubt they would have told him—and perhaps rejoiced to tell him—that he had been betrayed. But Mrs. Ellison, sitting there, and watching more than listening, was concerned about the looks of her boy, as she called him; and before she left the table, she took up her glass, and said—

”I am going to ask you two gentlemen to drink a toast—and it is the health of the coming member for Mendover. And I’m going to ask him to pull himself together, and show some good spirits; for there’s nothing a constituency likes so much as a merry and good-humoured candidate.”

It was clear moonlight that night: Vin’s room faced the sea. Hour after hour he sate at the window, looking on the wide, grey plain and the faint blue-grey skies; and getting no good of either; for the far-searching doves of his thoughts came back to him without a twig of hope in their bill. The whole world seemed empty—and silent. He began to recall the time in which he used to think—or to fear—that some day a vast and solitary sea would come between Maisrie and himself; it was something he had dreamed or imagined; but this was altogether different now—this blank ignorance of where she might be was a far more terrible thing. He went over the different places he had heard her mention—Omaha, Chicago, Boston, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec: they only seemed to make the world the wider—to remove her further away from him, and interpose a veil between. She had vanished like a vision; and yet it was but the other day that he had found her clinging tight to his arm, her beautiful brown hair blown wet about her face, her eyes with love shining through her tears, her lips—when he kissed them—salt with the flying spray. And no longer—after that first and sudden outburst of indignant wrath—did he accuse her of any faithlessness or treachery: rather it was himself whom he reproached. Had he not promised, at the very moment when she had made her maiden confession to him, and spoken to him as a girl speaks once only in her life, had he not promised that always and always he would say to himself ‘Wherever Maisrie is—wherever she may be—she loves me, and is thinking of me?’ This was the Mizpah set up between those two; and he had vowed his vow. What her going away might mean he could not tell; but at all events it was not permitted him to doubt—he dared not doubt—her love.

As for these repeated allegations that old George Bethune was nothing less than a mendicant impostor, what did that matter to him? Even if these charges could be substantiated, how was that to affect Maisrie or himself? No association could sully that pure soul. Perhaps it was the case that Mr. Bethune was not over-scrupulous and careful about money matters; many otherwise excellent persons had been of like habit. The band of private inquiry agents had amongst them discovered that the old man had allowed Vincent to pay the bill at the various restaurants they frequented. Well, that was true. Among the vague insinuations and assumptions that had been pieced together to form an indictment, here

was one bit of solid fact. And what of it? Of what importance were those few trumpery shillings? It was of little moment which paid: here was an arrangement, become a habit, that had a certain convenience. And Vincent was proud to set against that, or against any conclusions that might be drawn from that, the incident of old George Bethune's stopping the poor woman in Hyde Park, and handing over to her all he possessed—sovereigns, shillings, and pence—so that he did not even leave himself the wherewithal to buy a biscuit for his mid-day meal. Perhaps there were more sides to George Bethune's character than were likely to occur to the imagination of Messrs. Harland Harris, Morris, and Company?

The white moon sailed slowly over to the west; the house was still; the night outside silent; but there was no peace for him at all. If only he could get to see Maisrie—for the briefest moment—that he might demand the reason of her sudden flight! Was it some over-strung sensitiveness of spirit? Did she fear that no one would understand this carelessness of her grandfather about money-matters; and that she might be suspected of complicity, of acquiescence, in certain doubtful ways? Was that the cause of her strange sadness, her resignation, her hopelessness? Was that why she had spoken of her 'degradation'—why she had declared she could never be his wife—why she had begged him piteously to go away, and leave this bygone friendship to be a memory and nothing more? 'Can you not understand, Vincent!' she had said to him, in heart-breaking accents, as though she could not bring herself to the brutality of plainer speech. Well, he understood this at all events: that in whatever circumstances Maisrie Bethune may have been placed, no contamination had touched *her*; white as the white moonlight out there was that pure soul; he had read her eyes.

The next morning Lord Musselburgh was out walking in the King's Road with the fair young widow who hoped soon to be re-transformed into a wife.

"That friend of yours down at Mendover," said she,— "what is his name?—Gosford?—well, he seems an unconscionable time dying. I wish he'd hurry up with his Chiltern Hundreds and put an end to himself at once. That is what is wanted for Vin—the novelty and excitement of finding himself in the House of Commons. Supposing Mr. Gosford were to resign at once, how soon could Vin be returned? There's some procedure, isn't there?—the High Sheriff or somebody, issues a writ, or something—?"

"I really cannot say," her companion answered blandly. "I belong to a sphere in which such violent convulsions are unknown."

"At all events, Parliament will meet about the middle of February?" she demanded.

"I presume so," was the careless answer.

"I wish the middle of February were here now, and Vin all securely returned," said she. "I suppose that even in the case of a small borough like Men-

dover, one's constituents can keep one pretty busy? They will watch how you vote, won't they?—and remonstrate when you go wrong; and pass resolutions; and expect you to go down and be cross-examined. Then there are always public meetings to be addressed; and petitions to be presented; and people wanting admission to the Speaker's Gallery—"

"Why, really, Madge, there's a sort of furious activity about you this morning," said he. "You quite take one's breath away. I shouldn't be surprised to see you on a platform yourself."

"It's all for Vin's sake I am so anxious," she exclaimed. "I can see how miserable and sad the poor boy is—though he bears it so bravely—never a word to one of us, lest we should ask him if he believes in those people now. I wonder if he can. I wonder if he was so blinded that even now he will shut his eyes to their true character?"

"They are quite gone away, then?" her companion asked.

"Oh, yes," she made answer. "I hope so. Indeed, I know they are. And on the whole it was opportune, just as this election was coming on; for now, if ever, Vin will have a chance of throwing off an infatuation that seemed likely to be his ruin, and of beginning that career of which we all hope such great things."

She glanced round, cautiously; and lowered her voice.

"But, oh, my goodness, if ever he should find out the means we took to persuade them to go, there will be the very mischief to pay: he will tear us to pieces! You know how impetuous and proud he is; and then those people have appealed to him in a curious way—their loneliness—their poverty—and their— Yes, I will admit it—certain personal qualities and characteristics. I don't deny it; any more than I would deny that the girl was extremely pretty, and the old man picturesque, and even well-mannered and dignified in his way. All the more dangerous—the pair of them. Well, now they are gone, I breathe more freely. While they were here, no argument was of any avail. Vin looked into the girl's appealing face—and everything was refuted. And at all events we can say this to our own conscience—that we have done them no harm. We are not mediæval tyrants; we have not flung the venerable patriot and the innocent maiden into a dungeon, to say nothing of breaking their bones on a rack. The venerable patriot and the innocent maiden, I have no doubt, consider themselves remarkably well off. And that reminds me that Harland Harris, although he is of opinion that all property should be under social control—"

"Not all property, my dear Madge," said Lord Musselburgh, politely. "He would say that all property should be under social control—except his property."

"At all events, it seems to me that he occasionally finds it pretty convenient to have plenty of money at his own individual command. Why, for him to denounce the accumulation of capital," she continued, with a pretty scorn, "when

no one makes more ostentatious use of the power of money! Is there a single thing he denies himself—one single thing that is only possible to him through his being a man of great wealth? I shouldn't wonder if, when he dies, he leaves instructions to have the electric light turned on into his coffin, just in case he should wake up and want to press the knob."

"Come, come, Madge," said Musselburgh. "Be generous. A man cannot always practice what he preaches. You must grant him the privilege of sighing for an ideal."

"Harland Harris sighing for an ideal," said Mrs. Ellison, with something of feminine spite, "would make a capital subject for an imaginative picture by Watts—if my dear brother-in-law weren't rather stout, and wore a black frock-coat."

Meanwhile, Vincent returned to London, and renewed his solitary search; it was the only thing he felt fit for; all other employments had no meaning for him, were impossible. But, as day by day passed, he became more and more convinced that they must have left London: he knew their familiar haunts so well, and their habits, that he was certain he must have encountered them somewhere if they were still within the great city. And here was the New Year drawing nigh, when friends far separated recalled themselves to each other's memory, with hopes and good wishes for the coming time. It seemed to him that he would not have felt this loneliness so much, if only he had known that Maisrie was in this or that definite place—in Madrid—in Venice—in Rome—or even in some huge steamship ploughing its way across the wide Atlantic.

But a startling surprise was at hand. About half-past ten on the last night of the old year a note was brought upstairs to him by a servant. His face grew suddenly pale when he saw the handwriting, which he instantly recognised.

"Who brought this?" he said, breathlessly.

"A man, sir."

"Is he waiting?"

"No, sir; he said there was no answer."

"What sort of man?" asked Vincent, with the same rapidity—and not yet daring to open the letter.

"A—a common sort of man, sir."

"Very well—you needn't wait."

The moment that the servant had retired, Vincent tore open the envelope; and the first thing that he noticed, with a sudden sinking of the heart, was that there was no address at the head of the letter. It ran thus—the handwriting being a little tremulous here and there—

'DEAR VINCENT,

When you receive this, we shall be far away; but I have arranged that you shall get it just before the New Year, and it brings my heart-felt wishes for your happiness, as well as the good-bye that I cannot say to you personally now. What I foresaw has come to pass; and it will be better for all of us, I think; though it is not with a very light heart that I write these few lines to you. Sometimes I wish that we had never met each other; and then again I should never have known all your kindness to me and to my grandfather, which will always be something to look back upon; and also the companionship we had for a time, which was so pleasant—you would understand how pleasant to me, if you had known what had gone before, and what is now likely to come after. But do not think I repine: more has been done for me than ever I can repay; and as I am the only one to whom my grandfather can look now for help and sympathy, I should be ungrateful indeed if I grudged it.

Forgive me, dear friend, if I speak so much of myself; my thoughts are far more often concerned about you than with anything that can happen to me. And I know that this step we are taking, though it may pain you for a little while, will be salutary in the end. You have a great future before you; your friends expect much of you; you owe it to yourself not to disappoint them. And after a little while, you will be able to go back to the places where we used to go; and there will be nothing but friendly recollections of pleasant evenings; and I am sure nothing need ever come between us (as you feared) I mean in the way of having kind thoughts of each other, always and always; and when you marry no one will more heartily wish you every happiness and blessing than I shall. This is to be my last letter to you; I have promised. I wish I could make it convey to you all I think; but you will understand, dear Vincent, that there is more in it than appears in these stiff and cold words. And another kindness I must beg of you, dear friend, before saying good-bye—and farewell—it is this, Would you try to forget a *little* of what I said to you that morning on the pier? If you thought anything I said was a little more than a girl should have confessed, would you try to forget it, dear Vincent? I was rather miserable—I foresaw we should have to say good-bye to each other, when you would not see it, for you were always so full of courage and confidence; and perhaps I told you more than I should have done—and you will try to forget that. I don't want you to forget it *all*, dear Vincent; only what you think was said too frankly—or hurriedly—at such a moment.

And now, dearest friend, this is good-bye; and it is good-bye for ever, as between you and me. I will pray for your happiness always.

MAISRIE.

P.S.—There was one thing I said to you that you *promised* you would not forget.

M.’

Was he likely to forget it, or any single word she had uttered, on that wild, wind-tossed morning? But in the meantime the immediate question was—How and whence had this letter come? For one thing, it had been brought by hand; so there was no post-mark. Who, then, had been the messenger? How had he come to be employed? What might he not know of Maisrie’s whereabouts? Was there a chance of finding a clue to Maisrie, after all, and just as the glad New Year was coming in?

It was barely eleven o’clock. He went down into the hall, whipped on overcoat and hat, and the next moment was striding away towards Mayfair; he judged, and judged rightly, that a boon companion and poet was not likely to be early abed on such a night. When he reached the lodging-house in the little thoroughfare off Park-street, he could hear singing going forward in the subterranean kitchen: nay, he could make out the raucous chorus—

*Says Wolseley, says he,
To Arabi,
You can fight other chaps, but you can’t fight me.*

He rapped at the door; the landlady’s daughter answered the summons; she showed him into a room, and then went below for her father. Presently Mr. Hobson appeared—quite creditably sober, considering the occasion.

”Did you bring a note down to me to-night, Hobson?” was the young man’s first question.

”I did, sir.”

His heart leapt up joyously: his swift surmise had been correct.

”And has Miss Bethune been here recently?” he asked, with the greatest eagerness.

”No, no, sir,” said Hobson, shaking his head. ”That was giv me when they was going away, and says she, ’Hobson,’ says she, ’I can trust you; and there’s never a word to be said about this letter—not to hany one whatever; and the night afore New Year’s Day you’ll take it down yourself, and leave it for Mr. Harris.’ Which I did, sir; though not waitin,’ as I thought there wasn’t a answer; and ope there’s nothing wrong, sir.”

Vincent was standing in the middle of the room—not listening.

"You have heard or seen nothing, then, of Mr. Bethune or of Miss Bethune, since they left?" he asked, absently.

"Nothing, sir—honly that I took notice of some advertisements, sir, in the papers—"

"I know about those," said Vincent.

So once more, as on many and many a recent occasion, his swiftly-blossoming hopes had been suddenly blighted; and there was nothing for him but to wander idly and pensively away back to Grosvenor Place. The New Year found him in his own room—with Maisrie's letter before him; while, with rather a careworn look on his face he studied every line and phrase of her last message to him.

But the New Year had something else in store for him besides that. He was returned, unopposed, for the borough of Mendover. And about the first thing that his constituents heard, after the election, was that their new member proposed to pay a visit to the United States and Canada, and that at present no date had been fixed for his coming back.

CHAPTER II.

BEYOND SEAS.

Out here on the deck of this great White Star Liner—with the yellow waters of the Mersey lapping in the sunlight, and a brisk breeze blowing, and the curious excitement of departure thrilling through all the heterogeneous crowd of passengers—here something of hope came to him at last. This was better than haunting lonely restaurants, or walking through solitary streets; he seemed to know that Maisrie was no longer in the land he was leaving; she had fled away across the ocean—gone back to the home, to some one of the various homes, of her childhood and girlhood. And although it appeared a mad thing that a young man should set out to explore so vast a continent in search of his lost love, it was not at all the impossible task it looked. He had made certain calculations. Newspaper offices are excellent centres of intelligence; and Scotch-American newspaper offices would still further limit the sphere of his inquiries. He had dreamed of a wide and sorrowful sea lying between him and her; but instead of that imaginary and impassable sea, why, there was only the familiar Atlantic, that nowadays you can cross in less than a week. And when he had found

her, and seized her two hands fast, he would reproach her—oh, yes, he would reproach her—though perhaps there might be more of gladness than of anger in his tones.... 'Ah, false love—traitress—coward heart—that ran away! What Quixotic self-sacrifice was it, then, that impelled you?—what fear of relatives?—what fire of wounded pride? No matter now: you are caught and held. You gave yourself to me; you cannot take yourself away again; nor shall any other. No more sudden disappearances—no more trembling notes of farewell—while I have you by the hand!'

The last good-byes had been called by the people crowded on the deck of the tender, the great ship was cautiously creeping down the stream, and the passengers, having done with the waving of handkerchiefs (and here and there a furtive drying of eyes) set about preparing for the voyage—securing their places at table, investigating their cabins, and getting their things unpacked. These occupations kept most of them in their state-rooms until close on dinner-time, so that they had not much chance of examining each other; but it is wonderful how rumour runs in a ship—especially if the Purser be a cheerful and communicative sort of person; and so it was that when all were assembled in the long and gorgeous saloon, two things had already become known; first, that the tall and handsome young Englishman who seemed to have no companion or acquaintance on board was the newly-elected member for Mendover; and second, that the extremely pretty woman who had the seat of honour at the Captain's table was a Mrs. de Lara, a South American, as might have been guessed from her complexion, her eyes, and hair. It appeared to be a foregone conclusion that Mrs. de Lara was to be the belle of the ship on this voyage; such things are very soon settled; perhaps one or two of the commercial gentlemen may have crossed with her before, and seen her exercise her sway. As for Vin Harris, his unopposed return for such an insignificant place as Mendover would not have secured much notice throughout the country had it not been that, immediately after the election, the great — had been kind enough to write to the new member a charming note of congratulation, which, of course, had to be published. It was a significant pat on the back, of which any young man might very well have been proud; and Mrs. Ellison bought innumerable copies of that morning's newspapers, and cut the letter out, and sent it round to her friends, lest they should not have seen it. Mr. Ogden was also so condescending as to send a similar message—but that was not published.

Now during the first evening on board ship, strangers mostly remain strangers to each other; but next morning things become different—especially if the weather be fine, and everyone is on deck. Small courtesies are tendered and accepted; people get introduced, or introduce each other, on the smallest pretence—except the old stagers, the wary ones, who hang aloof, in order to pick

and choose. As for Vincent, he was well content with his own society, varied by an occasional chat with the Purser, when that ubiquitous official could spare a few moments. He was not anxious to make acquaintances. His thoughts were far ahead. He saw—not the thin, blue line of the Irish coast that actually was visible on the horizon—but the shallow waters at Sandy Hook, the broad bay, the long dusky belt of the city, with its innumerable spires jutting up into the white sky. He was wondering how long ago it was since Maisrie and her grandfather had crossed the Newfoundland Banks: it was a long start, but he would overtake them yet. Perhaps, when he was down in the big and busy town, making his inquiries from one newspaper-office to another he might suddenly find himself face to face with the splendid old man, and the beautiful, pensive-eyed girl... 'Ah, Maisrie, you thought you would escape?—but I have you now—never to let you go again! And if you would rather not return to England—if your pride has been wounded—if you are indignant at what has been said or suspected of you and your grandfather—well, then, I will remain with you here! My love is more to me than my home: we will fight the world together—the three of us together: remaining here, if that pleases you better—only, no further thought of separation between you and me!'

On this brisk and bracing morning he was leaning idly with his elbows on the rail, and looking towards the distant line of the Irish coast that was slowly becoming more definite in form, when Mr. Purser Collins came up to him.

"There's a very charming lady would like to make your acquaintance," said the officer. "Will you come with me, and I will introduce you?"

"Oh, very well," Vincent said, but with no great eagerness. "Tell me her name now that I may make sure of it."

"You are favoured—Mrs. de Lara."

"Oh, really," he said, indifferently. "She seems to me to have had half the men on the ship fetching and carrying for her all the morning."

And indeed, when he followed the Purser in order to be introduced to this lady, he found her pretty well surrounded by assiduous gentlemen; and 'if you please—if you please,' Mr. Collins had to keep repeating, before he could bring the new comer into the august presence. Mrs. de Lara—who, on closer inspection, turned out to be quite a young woman, with a pale, clear, olive complexion, softly-lustrous dark eyes that could say a good deal, a pretty smile and dimple, and magnificent hair—received him very graciously; and at once, and completely, and without the slightest compunction, proceeded to ignore the bystanders who had been so officiously kind to her. Of course their conversation was at first the usual nothings. Wonderful weather. Might be midsummer, but for the cold wind. Captain been on the bridge ever since Liverpool, poor man; get some rest after leaving Queenstown. Was she a good sailor?—Some ladies remained in their

berths all the way over. Dry champagne, and plenty of it, the only safe-guard? Crossed many times? And so forth. But at length she said—

“Couldn’t you find a chair, and bring it along?”

Now the assiduous gentlemen had managed to find a very snug corner for Mrs. de Lara, where there was just room for two deck chairs—her own and that of her companion and friend, Miss Martinez; and Vincent, being rather shy, had no intention of jamming himself into this nook. He made some little excuse—and remained standing with the others: whereupon Mrs. de Lara said to her companion—

“Isabel, will you go and see that the letters I left in my cabin are all properly stamped and put in the post-bag for Queenstown. Thank you, dear!”

Then, the moment her faithful friend was gone, she said, with something of a French manner—

“Here is a seat for you: come, tell me what the news of the ship is!”

Vincent could not very well refuse; though the result of her open preference and selection was that her other obsequious admirers fell away one by one, under some pretence of playing rope-quoits or shovel-board: so that, eventually, he and she were left alone together, for Miss Martinez did not return.

“Now,” said the young grass-widow, whose very pretty chin was cushioned on abundant furs, “I am going to make you happy. But first of all I must tell you—you are in love.”

“Oh, really?” said Vincent.

“Ah, yes, yes, yes,” she said, with a charming insistence. “I have watched you. I know. You keep apart; you look far away; you speak to no one. And then I said to myself that I would make you happy. How? By asking you to tell me all about her.”

Whereupon Vincent said to himself, ‘You’re a very impertinent woman—although you’ve got pretty eyes.’ And again he said, ‘But after all you are a woman; and perhaps from you I may learn something more about Maisrie.’ So he said aloud—

“The deck of a steamer is hardly the place for secrets.”

“Why not?” she protested. “Besides, it is no secret—to anyone with eyes. Come, tell me all about her—and be happy! I wish to interest you; I wish you to interest me; and so let us talk about the only thing that is worth talking about—that is, love. No, there are two things, perhaps—love, and money; but love is so full of surprises; it is the perpetual miracle that no one can understand; it is such a wonderful, unexpected, desperate kind of thing, that it will always be the most interesting. Now!”

“Well,” said he—for there was something catching in the mad audacity of this young matron—“it must be secret for secret. My story for yours!”

She laughed long and heartily—until her merriment brought tears to her eyes.

"Why, I'm an old married woman!" she exclaimed. "Ah, I see what your bargain means. You only want to put me off. You think the time and place are not romantic enough; some night—out in mid-Atlantic—with perhaps a moon—and you'll be more communicative, when you forsake the smoking-room for half-an-hour, and send me a little message to meet you. Very well. Perhaps there are too many people tramping up and down. Shall we have a tramp too? Sitting still so stiffens one. There—can you pull off the rugs, do you think? They've swathed me up like a mummy. Now give me your arm; and mind you don't let me go flying—I'm never steady on my feet for the first day or two."

Well, he found the grass-widow a most charming companion—bright, loquacious, and happy, until, indeed, they steamed into the entrance to Cork Harbour. Here, as most of the passengers were going on board the tender, for a scamper ashore, while the ship waited for the mails to arrive, Mrs. de Lara began to look a little wistful. All of a sudden it occurred to him that he ought, if only in common gratitude for her marked condescension, to ask her if she would care to go also.

"Oh—Mrs. de Lara," said he, "wouldn't you like to go ashore, and have a look round Queenstown?"

Her face lighted up in an instant; but there was a curious, amused expression in her eyes.

"I couldn't go alone with you, you know," said she.

"Why not?" said he.

She did not answer that question.

"If you like to ask Miss Martinez as well as myself," she continued, "I'm sure we should be delighted—and it would be very kind of you."

"Of course I will!" he said—and at once he went off in search of the needful companion. A few minutes thereafter the three of them were on board the tender, along with the rest of this crowd of eager, chattering passengers.

And a very pleasant visit it was they paid to the picturesque watering-place and its wide-stretching bay. First of all he took his two guests to a hotel, and gave them an excellent lunch, at which Mrs. de Lara made merry like an enfranchised schoolgirl; then he got an open carriage, and they were driven all about the place; and he bought them such fruit and flowers as he could find, until they were quite laden by the time they got back to the tender. They were in plenty of time; the mails were late. When they eventually returned on board the steamer, Vincent was on the whole very well pleased with that little excursion; only he hoped that the new acquaintanceship that had been formed had not been too conspicuously displayed, for people are given to talking during the *longueurs* of an Atlantic

voyage.

And indeed it very soon appeared that after this little adventure ashore Mrs. de Lara meant to claim him as her own. When she came on deck for the usual promenade before dinner, she sent for him (though there were plenty of gentlemen only too anxious to wait on her), and she took his arm during that perfunctory march up and down. Then she said to him—

"Would you think me very rude if I asked you to come and sit at our table? The fact is, I want somebody to be good to me, and to look after me; and the Captain, although he is a most delightful man when he happens to be there, is nearly always away, on duty, no doubt. I hate sitting next an empty chair—that throws me on to Miss Martinez and she and I have exhausted all our subjects long ago. You've no particular friend, have you? Come to our table!"

"But I couldn't think of turning anybody out!" he protested.

"Oh, that's all right!" she made answer, cheerfully enough. "Miss Martinez will get a place somewhere else—Mr. Collins will arrange that—I dare say she will be rather pleased to be set free."

And so it came to pass that at dinner Vincent found himself in the seat that had been vacated by the useful Isabel; and perhaps his promotion provoked a few underhand comments and significant glances at certain of the other tables, for very small trifles are noted on board ship. At all events he only knew that Mrs. de Lara was as engaging, and complaisant, and loquacious as ever; and that she talked away with very little regard as to who might overhear her. Nor was she any longer the merry, rattle-pated creature of the Queenstown hotel. Oh, no. Her conversation now was of a quite superior order. It was literary; and she had caught up plenty of the phrases of the rococo school; she could talk as well as another of environments, conditions, the principal note, style charged with colour, and the like. Nay, she adventured upon an epigram now and again—or, at least, something that sounded like an epigram. "England," she said, "was a shop; France a stage; Germany a camp; and the United States a caucus." And again she said, "There are three human beings whom I wish to meet with before I die: a pretty Frenchwoman, a modest American, and an honest Greek. But I am losing hope." And then there was a tirade against affectation in writing. "Why should the man thrust himself upon me?" she demanded. "I don't want to know him at all. I want him to report honestly and simply what he has seen of the world and of human nature, and I am willing to be talked to, and I am willing to believe; but when he begins to posture and play tricks, then I become resentful. Why should he intrude his own personality at all?—he was never introduced to me; I have no wish for his acquaintance. So long as he expresses an honest opinion, good and well; I am willing to listen; but when he begins to interpose his clever little tricks and grimaces, then I say, 'Get away, mountebank—and get a red-hot poker ready

for pantaloons.” And in this way she went on, whimsical, petulant, didactic by turns, to the stolid astonishment of a plethoric and red-faced old lady opposite, who contributed nothing to the conversation but an indigestion cough, and sate and stared, and doubtless had formed the opinion that any one who could talk in that fashion before a lot of strangers was no better than she should be.

But it was not of literature that Mrs. de Lara discoursed when Vincent returned that evening to the saloon, after having been in the smoking-room for about an hour, watching the commercials playing poker and getting up sweepstakes on the next day’s run. When she caught sight of him, she immediately rose and left the group of newly-formed acquaintances with whom she had been sitting—in the neighbourhood of the piano—and deliberately came along and met him half-way.

”Let us remain here,” said she; ”and then if we talk we shan’t interfere with the music.”

She lay back in her chair as if waiting for him to begin; he was thinking how well her costume became her—her dress of black silk touched here and there with yellow satin—the sharp scarlet stroke of her fan—the small crescent of diamonds in her jet-black hair. Then the softened lamplight seemed to lend depth and lustre to her dark eyes; and gave something of warmth, too, to the pale and clear complexion. She had crossed her feet; her fan lay idle in her lap; she regarded him from under those long, out-curving lashes.

”They cannot hear you,” she said—perhaps thinking that he was silent out of politeness to the innocent young damsels who were doing their best at the piano—”and you cannot hear them, which is also fortunate. Music is either divine—or intolerable; what they are doing is not divine; I have been listening. But good music—ah, well, it is not to be spoken of. Only this; isn’t it strange that the two things that can preserve longest for you associations with some one you have been fond of are music and scent? Not painting—not any portrait; not poetry—not anything you have read, or may read: but music and scent. You will discover that some day.”

He laughed.

”How curiously you talk! I dare say I am older than you—though that is not saying much.”

”But I have seen the world,” said she, with a smile, almost of sadness.

”Not half of what I have seen of it, I’ll answer for that.”

”Oh, but you,” she continued, regarding him with much favour and kindness, ”you are an *ingénu*—you have the frank English character—you would believe a good deal—in any one you cared for, I mean.”

”I suppose I should,” he said, simply enough. ”I hope so.”

”But as I say,” she resumed, ”the two things that preserve associations the

longest—and are apt to spring on you suddenly—are music and scent. You may have forgotten in every other direction; oh, yes, forgetting is very easy, as you will find out; for 'constancy lives in realms above,' and not here upon earth at all: well, when you have forgotten the one you were fond of, and cannot remember, and perhaps do not care to remember all that happened at that too blissful period of life—then, on some occasion or another there chances to come a fragment of a song, or a whiff of scent, and behold! all that bygone time is before you again, and you tremble, you are bewildered! Oh, I assure you," she went on, with a very charming smile, "it is not at all a pleasant experience. You think you had buried all that past time, and hidden away the ghosts; you are beginning to feel pretty comfortable and content with all existing circumstances; and then—a few notes of a violin—a passing touch of perfume—and your heart jumps up as if it had been shot through with a rifle-ball. What is your favourite scent?" she asked, somewhat abruptly.

"Sandal-wood," said he (for surely that was revealing no secret?)

"Then she wore a string of sandal-wood beads," said Mrs. de Lara, with a quick look.

He was silent.

"And perhaps she gave them to you as a keep-sake?" was the next question. Here, indeed, he was startled; and she noticed it; and laughed a little.

"No, I am not a witch," she said. "All that has happened before now: do you think you are the first? Why, I'm sure, now, you've worn those beads next your heart, in the daytime, and made yourself very uncomfortable; yes, and you've tried wearing them at night, and couldn't sleep because they hurt you. Never mind, I will tell you what to do: get them made into a watch chain, with small gold links connecting the beads; and when you wear it with evening dress, every woman will recognise it as a love-gift—every one of them will say 'A girl gave him that.'"

"Perhaps I might not wish to make a display of it," said Vincent.

"Then you're in the first stage of inconstancy," said she, promptly. "If you're not madly anxious that the whole world should know you have won her favour, then you've taken the first step on the downward road to indifference; you are regarding certain things as bygone, and your eyes are beginning to rove elsewhere. Well, why not? It's the way of the world. It's human nature. At the same time I want to hear some more about the young lady of the sandal-wood necklace."

"I have told you more than I intended," he answered her.

"You haven't told me anything; I guessed for myself."

"Well, now, I am going to ask your advice," said he—for how could he tell but that this bright, alert, intrepid person, with her varied experience of the world, might be able to help him? She was far different from Maisrie, to be sure; different

as night from day; but still she was a woman; and she might perhaps be able to interpret a nature wholly alien from her own.

So she sat mute and attentive, and watching every expression of his face, while he put before her a set of imaginary circumstances. It was not his own story; but just so much of it as might enable her to give him counsel. And he had hardly finished when she said—

"You don't know where to find her; and yet you have never thought of a means of bringing her to you at once?"

"What means?" said he.

"Why, it is so simple!" she exclaimed. "Have you no invention? But I will tell you, then. As soon as you land in New York, get yourself knocked over by a tram-car. The accident to the rich young Englishman who has just arrived in America will be in all the papers, and will lose nothing in the telling. Your father's name is known; you have recently been elected a member of Parliament; they will make the most of the story—and of course you needn't say your life is *not* in danger. Then on the wings of love the fair one comes flying; flops down by the side of your bed, in tears; perhaps she would even consent to a marriage—if you were looking dreadfully pale; then you could get well again in double quick time—and live happy ever after."

She was still watching him from under her long, indolent lashes; and of a sudden she changed her tone.

"Are you vexed? You find me not sympathetic? Perhaps I am not. Perhaps I am a little incredulous. You have told me very little; but I surmise; and when a young lady remains away from her lover, and does not wish it to be known where she is, then I confess I grow suspicious. Instead of 'Seek the woman,' it is 'Find the man'—oh, I mean in most cases—I mean in most cases—not in all—you must not misunderstand me!"

"In this case you are mistaken, then," said Vincent, briefly.

Indeed the gay young grass-widow found that she could not get very far into Vincent's confidence in this matter; and when she indulged in a little pleasantry, he grew reserved and showed a disposition to withdraw; whereupon she thought it better to give up the subject altogether. But she did not give him up; on the contrary, she took possession of him more completely than ever; and made no secret of the favour she bestowed on him. For example, there was an amateur photographer on board; and one morning (everybody knew everybody else by this time) he came up to Mrs. de Lara, who was seated in her deck-chair, with a little band of devoted slaves and admirers surrounding her.

"Mrs. de Lara," said he, "I've taken nearly everybody on board except you. Aren't you going to give me a chance?"

"Oh, yes," said she. "Yes, certainly." Then she looked round, and added, in

the most natural way in the world—"But where is Mr. Harris?"

"He's in the saloon writing letters—I saw him there a minute ago," said one of the bystanders.

"Won't somebody go and fetch him?" she continued. "We ought to be all in—if Mr. Searle can manage it."

Accordingly Vincent was summoned from below, and forthwith made his appearance.

"You come and sit by me, Mr. Harris," said the young matron. "It would look absurd to have one sitting and all the others standing."

"Oh, no—this will do," said Vincent, seating himself on a signal-cannon that was close to the rail, while he steadied himself by putting a hand on the shrouds.

"Not at all," she protested, with a certain imperious wilfulness. "You're too far over; you'll be out of the picture altogether. There is Isabel's chair over there: fetch that."

And, of course, he had to do as he was bid; though it was rather a conspicuous position to assume. Then, when that negative was taken, she would have the grouping altered; Vincent had to stand by her side, with his arm on her chair; again he had to seat himself on the deck at her feet; whatever suggestions were made by the artist, she managed somehow that she and Vincent should be together. And when, next day, the bronze-brown proofs were handed about, they were very much admired—except, perhaps, by the lady-passengers, who could not understand why Mrs. de Lara should pose as the only woman on board the steamer.

But it was not Mrs. de Lara who was in his thoughts when, early one morning, he found himself on the upper deck, just under the bridge, with his eyes fixed on a far strip of land that lay along the western horizon. Not a thin sharp line of blue, but a low-lying bulky mass of pale neutral tint; and there were faint yellow mists hanging about it, and also covering the smooth, long-undulating surface of the sea. However, the sunrise was now declared; this almost impalpable fog would soon be dispersed; and the great continent behind that out-lying coast would gradually awaken to the splendour of the new day. And in what part of its vast extent was Maisrie now awaiting him?—no, not awaiting him, but perhaps thinking of him, and little dreaming he was so near?

They cautiously steamed over the shallow waters at Sandy Hook; they sailed up the wide bay; momentarily the long flat line of New York, with its towering buildings and steeples jutting up here and there, was drawing nigh. Mrs. de Lara, rather wistfully, asked him whether she was ever likely to see him again; he answered that he did not know how soon he might have to leave New York; but, if she would be so kind as to give him her address, he would try to call before he went. She handed him her card; said something about the pleasant voyage they

had had; and then went away to see that Isabel had not neglected anything in her packing.

They slowed into the wharf; the luggage was got ashore and examined—in this universal scrimmage he lost sight of Mrs. de Lara and her faithful companion: and by and by he was being jolted and pitched and flung about in the coach that was carrying him to the hotel he had chosen. With an eager curiosity he kept watching the passers-by on the side-walk, searching for a face that was nowhere to be seen. He had heard and known of many strange coincidences: it would only be another one—if a glad and wonderful one—were he to find Maisrie on the very first day of his arrival in America.

As soon as he had got established in his hotel, and seen that his luggage had been brought up, he went out again and made away for the neighbourhood of Printing House Square. It needs hardly be said that the *Western Scotsman* was not in possession of a vast white marble building, with huge golden letters shining in the afternoon sun; all the same he had little difficulty in finding the small and unpretentious office; and his first inquiry was for Mr. Anstruther. Mr. Anstruther had been there in the morning; but had gone away home, not feeling very well. Where did he live?—over in Brooklyn. But he would be at the office the next day? Oh, yes; almost certainly; it was nothing but a rather bad cold; and as they went to press on the following evening, he would be pretty sure to be at the office in the morning.

Then Vincent hesitated. This clerk seemed a civil-spoken kind of young fellow.

"Do you happen to know if—if a Mr. Bethune has called at this office of late?"

"Bethune?—not that I am aware of," was the answer.

"He is a friend of Mr. Anstruther's," Vincent went on, led by a vague hope, "an old gentleman with white hair and beard—a handsome old man. There would be a young lady with him most probably."

"No, sir; I have not seen any one of that description," said the clerk. "But he might have called on Mr. Anstruther at his home."

"Oh, yes, certainly—very likely," said Vincent. "Thank you. I will come along to-morrow morning, and hope to find Mr. Anstruther quite well again."

So he left and went out into the gathering dusk of the afternoon; and as he had nothing to do now, he walked all the way back to his hotel, looking at the various changes that had taken place since last he had been in the busy city. And then, when he reached the sumptuous and heavily-decorated apartment that served him at once as sitting-room and bed-room, he set to work to put his things in order, for they had been rather hurriedly jammed into his portmanteau on board ship.

He was thus engaged when there came a knock at the door.

"Entrez!" he called out, inadvertently (with some dim feeling that he was in a foreign town.)

The stranger needed no second invitation. He presented himself. He was a small man, with a sallow and bloodless face, a black beard closely trimmed, a moustache allowed to grow its natural length, and dark, opaque, impassive eyes. He was rather showily dressed, and wore a pince-nez.

For a second he paused at the door to take out his card-case; then, without uttering a word, he stepped forward and placed his card on the table. Vincent was rather surprised at this form of introduction; but of course he took up the card. He read thereon. '*Mr. Joseph de Lara.*'

"Oh, really," said he (but what passed through his mind was—'Is that confounded woman going to persecute me on shore as well as at sea?'). "How do you do? Very glad to make your acquaintance."

"Oh, indeed, are you?" the other said, with a peculiar accent, the like of which Vincent had never heard before. "Perhaps not, when you know why I am here. Ah, do not pretend!—do not pretend!"

Vincent stared at him, as if this were some escaped lunatic with whom he had to deal.

"Sir, I am here to call you to account," said the little foreigner, in his thick voice. "It has been the scandal of the whole ship—the talk of all the voyage over—and it is an insult to me—to me—that my wife should be spoken of. Yes, you must make compensation—I demand compensation—and how? By the only way that is known to an Englishman. An Englishman feels only in his pocket; if he does wrong, he must pay; I demand from you a sum that I expend in charity——"

Vincent who saw what all this meant in a moment, burst out laughing—a little scornfully.

"You've come to the wrong shop, my good friend!" said he.

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" the little dark man exclaimed, with an affectation of rising wrath: "Look at this—I tell you, look at this!" He drew from his pocket one of the photographs which had been taken on board the steamer, and smacked it with the back of his hand. "Do you see that?—the scandal of the whole voyage! My wife compromised—the whole ship talking—you think you are to get off for nothing? No! No! you do not! The only punishment that can reach you is the punishment of the pocket—you must pay."

"Oh, don't make a fool of yourself!" said Vincent, with angry contempt. "I've met members of your profession before. But this is too thin."

"Oh—too thin? You shall find out!" the other said, vindictively—and yet the black and beady eyes behind the pince-nez were impassive and watchful. "There, on the other side of my card, is my address. You can think over it. Perhaps I shall

see you to-morrow. If I do not—if you do not come there to give the compensation I demand, I will make this country too hot to hold you—yes, very much too hot, as you shall discover. I will make you sorry—I will make you sorry—you shall see—”

He went on vapouring in this fashion for some little time longer, affecting all the while to become more and more indignant; but at length Vincent, growing tired, walked to the door and opened it.

”This is the way out,” he said curtly.

Mr. de Lara took the hint with a dignified equanimity.

”You have my address,” he said, as he passed into the corridor; ”I do not wish to do anything disagreeable—unless I am compelled. You will think over it; and I shall see you to-morrow, I hope. I wish to be friendly—it will be for your interest, too. Good night!”

Vincent shut the door and went and sate down, the better to consider. Not that he was in the least perturbed by this man’s ridiculous threats; what puzzled him—and frightened him almost—was the possible connection of the charming and fascinating Mrs. de Lara with this barefaced attempt at blackmail. But no; he could not, he would not, believe it! He recalled her pretty ways, her frankness, her engaging manner, her good humour, her clever, wayward talk, her kindness towards himself; and he could not bring himself to think that all the time she had been planning a paltry and despicable conspiracy to extort money, or even that she would lend herself to such a scheme at the instigation of her scapegrace husband. However, his speculations on these points were now interrupted by the arrival of the dinner-hour; and he went below to the table d’hôte.

During dinner he thought that a little later on in the evening he would go along to Lexington Avenue, and call on a lawyer whose acquaintance he had made on a former visit to New York. He might by chance be at home and disengaged; and an apology could be made for disturbing him at such an unusual hour. And this, accordingly, Vincent did; found that Mr. Griswold was in the house; was shown into the study; and presently the lawyer—a tall, thin man, with a cadaverous and deeply-lined face and cold grey eyes—came in and received his unexpected visitor politely enough.

”De Lara?” said he, when Vincent had told his story. ”Well, yes, I know something of De Lara. And a very disagreeable fellow he is to have any dealings with.”

”But I don’t want to have any dealings with him,” Vincent protested, ”and I don’t see how there should be any necessity. The whole thing is a preposterous attempt at extortion. If only he were to put down on paper what he said to me this evening, I would show him something—or at least I should do so if he and I were in England.”

"He is not so foolish," the lawyer said. "Well, what do you propose to do?—compromise for the sake of peace and quietness?"

"Certainly not," was the instant reply.

"He's a mischievous devil," said Mr. Griswold, doubtfully. "And of course you don't want to have things said about you in newspapers, however obscure. Might get sent over to England. Yes, he's a mischievous devil when he turns ugly. What do you say now?—for the sake of peace and quietness—a little matter of a couple of hundred dollars—and nobody need know anything about it—"

"Give a couple of hundred dollars to that infernal scoundrel?—I will see him d—d first!" said Vincent, with a decision that was unmistakable.

"There's no reason why you should give him a cent—not the slightest," the lawyer went on. "But some people do, to save trouble. However, you will not be remaining long in this city; I see it announced that you are going on a tour through the United States and Canada."

"The fact is, Mr. Griswold," said Vincent, "I came along—at this unholy hour, for which I hope you will forgive me—not to ask you what I should do about that fellow's threats—I don't value them a pin's-point—but merely to see if you knew anything about those two—"

"The De Lara's?"

"Yes, what does he do, to begin with? What's his occupation—his business?"

"Nominally," said Mr. Griswold, "he belongs to my own profession; but I fancy he is more mixed up with some low-class newspapers. I have heard, indeed, that one of his sources of income is levying black-mail on actresses. The poor girls lose nerve, you understand: they won't fight; they would rather 'see' him, as the phrase is, than incur his enmity."

"Well, then, what I want to know still more particularly," the young man proceeded, "is this: is Mrs. de Lara supposed to take part in these pretty little plans for obtaining money?"

The lawyer smiled.

"You ought to know her better than I do; in fact, I don't know her at all."

Vincent was silent for a second.

"No; I should not have imagined it of her. It seems incredible. But if you don't know her personally, perhaps you know what is thought of her? What is her general reputation?"

"Her reputation? I can hardly answer that question. I should say," Mr. Griswold went on, in his slow and deliberate manner, "that there is a kind of—a kind of impression—that, so long as the money was forthcoming, Mrs. de Lara would not be too anxious to inquire where it came from."

"She was at the Captain's table!" Vincent exclaimed.

"Ship captains don't know much about what is going on on shore," was the reply. "Besides, if Mrs. de Lara wanted to sit at the Captain's table, it's at the Captain's table you would find her, and that without much delay! In any case why are you so anxious to find out about Mrs. de Lara's peculiarities—apart from her being a very pretty woman?"

"Oh," said Vincent, as he rose to apologise once more for this intrusion, and to say good-night, "one is always meeting with new experiences. Another lesson in the ways of the world, I suppose."

But all the same, as he walked slowly and thoughtfully back to his hotel, he kept saying to himself that he would rather not believe that Mrs. de Lara had betrayed him and was an accomplice in this shameless attempt to make money out of him. Nay, he said to himself that he would refuse to believe until he was forced to believe: though he did not go a step further, and proceed to ask himself the why and wherefore of this curious reluctance.

CHAPTER III. WEST AND EAST.

When Vincent went along the next morning to the office of the *Western Scotsman*, he was at once shown into the editorial room, and there he found before him a short, thick-set man with a leonine profusion of light chestnut hair thrown back from a lofty forehead, somewhat irregular features, and clear blue eyes that had at present something of a cold scrutiny in them. To any one else, the editor of the *Western Scotsman* might have appeared a somewhat commonplace-looking person; but to Vincent he was far from commonplace. Here was one who had befriended the two world-wanderers; who had known them in the bygone years; perhaps Maisrie herself had sat, in this very room, patiently waiting, while the two men talked. And yet when he asked for news of old George Bethune and his granddaughter, Mr. Anstruther's manner was unaccountably reserved.

"No," said he, "I know nothing of them, nothing whatever; but I can well understand that George Bethune might be in New York, or might have passed through New York, without calling on me."

"Why?" said Vincent in surprise.

"Oh, well," said the Editor, with some touch of asperity and even of indignation, "I should like to believe the best of an old friend; and certainly George

Bethune always seemed to me a loyal Scot—proud of his country—proud of the name he bears, as well he might; but when you find him trying to filch the idea of a book—from a fellow-countryman, too—and making use of the letter of introduction I gave him to Lord Musselburgh to get money—”

”But that can all be explained,” said Vincent, eagerly—and he even forgot his immediate disappointment in his desire to clear away those imputations from Maisrie’s grandfather. ”The money was repaid to Lord Musselburgh as soon as it was found that the American book was coming out; I know it was—I am certain of it; and when the volume did come out, no one was so anxious to welcome it, and give it a helping hand, as Mr. Bethune himself. He wrote the review in the *Edinburgh Chronicle*—”

”Oh, did he?” said the Editor, with some slight alteration in his tone. ”I am glad of that. I could see it was written by some one with ample knowledge: in fact, I quoted the article in the *Scotsman*, it seemed to me so well done. Yes, I am glad of that,” Mr. Anstruther repeated.

”And then,” continued Vincent, ”the old man may easily have persuaded himself that, being familiar with the subject, he was entitled to publish a volume on the other side of the water. But I know this, that what he desired above all was that honour should be done to those Scotchmen who had written about their affection for their native country while living in other lands, and that the people at home should know those widely-scattered poets; and when he found that this work had already been undertaken, and was actually coming out, there was no jealousy in his mind—not the slightest—he was only anxious that the book should be known everywhere, but especially in Scotland.”

”I can assure you I am very glad to hear it,” said Mr. Anstruther, who was clearly much mollified by this vague but earnest vindication. ”And I may say that when some one came here making inquiries about George Bethune, I did not put matters in their worst light—”

”Oh, some one has been here making inquiries?” said Vincent, quickly.

”About a month ago, or more.”

”Who was it?”

”I forget the name,” the Editor replied. ”In fact, I was rather vexed at the time about my friend Ross’s book—and Mr. Bethune getting money from Lord Musselburgh; and I did not say very much. I am glad there is some explanation; one likes to think the best of a brother Scot. But you—you are not a Scot?” he demanded with a swift glance of inquiry.

”No, I am not,” said Vincent, ”but I am very much interested in Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter; and as they quite suddenly disappeared from London, I thought it very likely they had returned to the United States; and also, if they had come to New York, I imagined you would be sure to know.”

"One thing is pretty certain," said Mr. Anstruther. "If George Bethune is in this city, he will be heard of to-morrow evening."

"To-morrow evening?" Vincent repeated, vaguely.

"The twenty-fifth!" exclaimed the Editor, with an astonished stare.

And yet the young man seemed none the wiser.

"It is evident you are no Scotchman," Mr. Anstruther said at length, and with good humour. "You don't remember that 'a blast o' Janwar win' blew hansel in on Robin'? The twenty-fifth of January—the birthday of Robert Burns!"

"Oh, yes—oh, certainly," said Vincent, with guilty haste.

"There will be a rare gathering of the clans to-morrow night," the Editor continued; "and if George Bethune is on this side the water, he'll either show up himself or somebody will have heard of him."

"I think he must be over here," Vincent said. "At first I imagined he might have gone to Scotland: he was thinking of a topographical and antiquarian book on the various places mentioned in the Scotch songs—and he had often spoken of making a pilgrimage through the country for that purpose. So I went down to Scotland for a few days, but I could hear nothing of him."

"What do you say—that you have been quite recently in Scotland?" Mr. Anstruther said, with a sudden accession of interest.

"About three weeks ago," was the answer.

"Well, well, well!" the Editor exclaimed, and he regarded the young man with quite a kindly curiosity. "Do ye tell me that! In Scotland—not more than three weeks since! And whereabouts—whereabouts?"

"I was in Edinburgh most of the time," Vincent said.

"In Edinburgh?—did ye see the Corstorphine Hills?" was the next eager question; and the man's eyes were no longer coldly scrutinising, but full of a lively interest and friendliness. "Ay, the Corstorphine Hills: ye would see them if ye went up to the top of Nelson's Monument, and looked away across the town—away along Princes Street—that wonderful view!—wonderful!—when I think of it, I seem to see it all a silver-white—and Scott's Monument towering high in the middle, like some splendid fountain turned to stone. Ay, ay, and ye were walking along Princes Street not more than three weeks ago; and I suppose ye were thinking of old Christopher, and the Ettrick Shepherd, and Sir Walter, and Jeffrey, and the rest of them? Dear me, it's a kind of strange thing! Did ye go out to Holyrood? Did ye climb up Arthur's Seat? Did ye see Portobello, and Inch Keith, and the Berwick Law—"

"The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith," Vincent quoted, with a smile.

The other's eyes flashed recognition; and he laughed aloud.

"Ay, ay, that was a great favourite with the old man. Many's the time he has announced himself coming up these very stairs with that."

"Did Maisrie ever come with him?" Vincent asked—with his heart going a bit quicker.

"His granddaughter? Oh, yes, to be sure—sometimes. He was fond of coming down the night before we went to press, and looking over the columns of Scotch news, and having a chat. You see we have to boil down the smaller Scotch papers for local news—news that the bigger papers don't touch; and very often you notice a name that is familiar to you, or something of that kind. Well, now, I wish the old man was here this very minute! I do indeed—most heartily. We'd let bygones be bygones—no doubt I was mistaken—I'll back George Bethune for a true and loyal Scot. Ah say, man," continued Mr. Anstruther, pulling out his big silver watch—and now all his assumption of the reserved American manner was gone, and he was talking with enthusiastic emphasis—"There's a countryman of mine—a most worthy fellow—close by here, who would be glad to see any friend of old George Bethune's. It's just about his lunch time; and he'll no grudge ye a farl of oatcake and a bit of Dunlop cheese; in fact nothing pleases him better than keeping open house for his cronies. A man of sterling worth; and a man of substance, too: sooner or later, I expect, he'll be going away back to the old country and buying a bit place for himself in his native county of Aberdeeen. Well, well," said the Editor, as he locked his desk, and put on his hat, and opened the door for his visitor, "and to think it was but the other day ye were walking along Princes Street in Edinburgh! Did ye go out at night, when the old town was lit up?—a grand sight, wasn't it—nothing like it in the world! Ye must tell honest John—John MacVittie, that is—that ye've just come straight from the 'land of brown heath and shaggy wood,' and ye'll no want for a welcome!"

And indeed it was a very frank and friendly welcome he received when they at length reached Mr. MacVittie's place of business, and were shown into the merchant's private room. Here they found himself and his two partners (all Scotchmen) about to sit down at table; and places were immediately prepared for the new-comers. The meal was a much more varied affair than the Editor had foreshadowed: its remarkable feature being, as Vincent was informed, that nearly everything placed on the board had been sent over from Scotland. Mr. MacVittie made a little apology.

"It's a kind of hobby of mine," said he; "and even with perishable things it's not so difficult nowadays, the ice-houses of the big steamers being so convenient. What would you like to drink, sir? I can give ye a choice of Talisker, Glenlivet, Long John, and Lagavulin; but perhaps ye would prefer something lighter in the middle of the day. I hope you don't object to the smell of the peats; we Scotch folk are rather fond of it; I think our good friend here, Anstruther, would rather have a sniff of the peat than the smell of the best canvas-back duck that was ever carried through a kitchen. I get those peats sent over from Islay: you see, I try to

have Scotland—or some fragments of it—brought to me, since I cannot go to it.”

”But why don’t you go to Scotland, sir?” said Vincent—knowing he was speaking to a man of wealth.

”At my time of life,” Mr. MacVittie answered, ”one falls into certain ways and grooves, and it’s an ill job getting out of them. No, I do not think I shall ever be in Scotland again, until I’m taken there—in a box. I shall have to be like the lady in ‘The Gay Goss-hawk’—

’An asking, an asking, my father dear,
An asking grant ye me!
That if I die in merry England,
In Scotland you’ll bury me.’”

”Oh, nonsense, John!” one of his partners cried. ”Nonsense, man! We’ll have you building a castle up somewhere about Kincardine O’Neil; and every autumn we’ll go over and shoot your grouse and kill your salmon for you. That’s liker it!”

Now here were three sharp and shrewd business men met together in the very heart of one of the great commercial cities of the world; and the fourth was a purveyor of news (Vincent did not count: he was so wonderstruck at meeting people who had known George Bethune and Maisrie in former days, and so astonished and fascinated by any chance reference to them that he did not care to propound any opinions of his own: he was well content to listen) and it might naturally have been supposed that their talk would have been of the public topics of the hour—politics home and foreign, the fluctuations of trade, dealings with that portentous surplus that is always getting in the way, and so forth. But it was nothing of the kind. It was all about the dinner of the Burns’ Society of New York, to be given at Sutherland’s in Liberty-street the following evening, in celebration of the birthday of the Scotch poet; and Tom MacVittie—a huge man with a reddish-brown beard and a bald head—in the enthusiasm of the moment was declaring that again and again, on coming across a song, by some one of the minor Scotch poets, that was particularly fine, he wished he had the power to steal it and hand it over to the Ayrshire bard—no doubt on the principle that, ’whosoever hath, to him shall be given.’ Then there was a comparison of this gem and that; favourites were mentioned and extolled; the air was thick with Willie Laidlaw, Allan Cunningham, Nicol, Hogg, Motherwell, Tannahill, and the rest; while the big Tom MacVittie, returning to his original thesis, maintained that it would be only fair punishment if John Mayne were mulcted of his ’Logan Braes,’ because of his cruel maltreatment of ’Helen of Kirkconnell.’

"Yes, I will say," he continued—and his fist was ready to come down on the table if needs were. "Robbie himself might well be proud of 'Logan Braes;' and John Mayne deserves to have something done to him for trying to spoil so fine a thing as 'Helen of Kirkconnell.' I cannot forgive that. I cannot forgive that at all. No excuse. Do ye think the man that wrote the 'Siller Gun' did not know he was making the fine old ballad into a fashionable rigmarole? Confound him, I would take 'Logan Braes' from him in a minute, if I could, and hand it over to Robbie—"

"Did you ever notice," interposed the editor of the Scotch paper, "the clever little trick of repetition in the middle of every alternate verse—"

'By Logan's streams that rin so deep,
Fu' aft wi' glee I've herded sheep;
Herded sheep, or gathered slaes,
Wi' my dear lad on Logan braes.
But wae's my heart, thae days are gane,
And I wi' grief may herd alane;
While my dear lad maun face his faes,
Far, far frae me and Logan braes.'

I do not remember Burns using that device, though it was familiar in Scotch song—you recollect 'Annie Laurie'—'her waist ye weel might span.' And Landor used it in 'Rose Aylmer'—

'Rose Aylmer, all were thine.
Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes—"

"I would like now," continued Tom MacVittie, with a certain impatience over the introduction of a glaiket Englisher, "to hand over to Robbie 'There's nae luck about the house.' The authorship is disputed anyhow; though I tell you that if William Julius Mickle ever wrote those verses I'll just eat my hat—and coat, too! It was Jean Adams wrote that song; I say it was none other than Jean Adams. Mickle—and his Portuguese stuff—"

"God bless me, Tom, do you forget 'Cumnor Hall?'" his brother exclaimed.

"'Cumnor Hall?' I do not forget 'Cumnor Hall?'" Tom MacVittie rejoined, with a certain disdain. "'Cumnor Hall!'—a wretched piece of fustian, that no one would have thought of twice, only that Walter Scott's ear was taken with the first verse. Proud minions—simple nymphs—Philomel on yonder thorn: do ye mean that a man who wrote stuff like that could write like this—"

'Rise up and mak' a clean fireside,
 Put on the mickle pot;
 Gie little Kate her cotton gown,
 And Jock his Sunday's coat;
 And mak' their shoon as black as slaes,
 Their stockins' white as snaw;
 It's a' to pleasure our gudeman—
 He likes to see them braw.'

That's human nature, man; there you've the good-wife, and the goodman, and the bairns; none o' your Philomels, and nymphs, and swains! That bletherin' idiot, Dr. Beattie, wrote additional verses—well, he might almost be forgiven for the last couplet,

'The present moment is our ain,
 The neist we never saw.'—"

"That was a favourite quotation of old George Bethune's," said the elder

MacVittie, with a smile, to Vincent.

The young man was startled out of a reverie. It was so strange for him to sit and hear conversation like this, and to imagine that George Bethune had joined in it, and no doubt led it, in former days, and that perhaps Maisrie had been permitted to listen.

"Yes," he made answer, modestly; "and no man ever carried the spirit of it more completely into his daily life."

"What makes ye think he is in New York, or in the United States, at least?" was the next question.

"I can hardly say," said Vincent, "except that I knew he had many friends here."

"If George Bethune is in New York," Tom MacVittie interposed, in his decisive way, "I'll wager he'll show up at Sutherland's to-morrow night—I'll wager my coat and hat!"

And then the Editor put in a word.

"If I thought that," said he, "I would go along to the Secretary, and see if I could have a ticket reserved for him. I'm going to ask Mr. Harris here to be my guest; for if he isn't a Scotchman, at least he has been in Scotland since any of us were there."

"And I hope you don't need to be a Scotchman in order to have an admiration for Robert Burns," said Vincent; and with that appropriate remark the

symposium broke up; for if MacVittie, MacVittie, and Hogg chose to enliven their brief mid-day meal with reminiscences of their native land and her poets, they were not in the habit of wasting much time or neglecting their business.

A good part of the next day Vincent spent in the society of Hugh Anstruther; for in the stir and ferment then prevailing among the Scotch circles in New York, it was possible that George Bethune might be heard of at any moment; and, indeed, they paid one or two visits to Nassau-street, to ask of the Secretary of the Burns Society whether Mr. Bethune had not turned up in the company of some friend applying for an additional ticket. And in the meantime Vincent had frankly confessed to this new acquaintance what had brought him over to the United States.

"Man, do ye think I could not guess that!" Hugh Anstruther exclaimed: he was having luncheon with Vincent at the latter's hotel. "Here are you, a fresh-elected member of Parliament—and I dare say as proud as Punch in consequence; and within a measurable distance of your taking your place in the House, you leave England, and come away over to America to hunt up an old man and a young girl. Do I wonder?—I do not wonder. A bonnier lassie, a gentler creature, does not step the ground anywhere; ay, and of good birth and blood, too; though there may be something in that to account for George Bethune's disappearance. A proud old deevil, ye see; and wilful; and always with those wild dreams of his of getting a great property—"

"Well, but is there the slightest possibility of their ever getting that property?" Vincent interposed.

"There is a possibility of my becoming the President of the United States of America," was the rather contemptuous (and in point of fact, inaccurate) answer. "The courts have decided: you can't go and disturb people who have been in possession for generations—at least, I should think not! As for the chapter of accidents: no doubt the estates might come to them for want of a more direct heir; such things certainly do happen; but how often? However, the old man is opinionated."

"Not as much as he was," Vincent said. "Not on that point, at least. He does not talk as much about it as he used—so Maisrie says."

"Oh, Maisrie? I was not sure. A pretty name. Well, I congratulate you; and when, in the ordinary course of things, it falls upon you to provide her with a home, I hope she will lead a more settled, a happier life, than I fancy she could have led in that wandering way."

Vincent was silent. There were certain things about which he could not talk to this new acquaintance, even though he now seemed so well disposed towards old George Bethune and that solitary girl. There were matters about which he had given up questioning himself: mysteries that appeared incapable of expla-

nation. In the meantime his hopes and speculations were narrowed down to this one point: would Maisrie's grandfather—from whichever part of the world he might hail—suddenly make his appearance at this celebration to-night? For in that case she herself could not be far off.

And wildly enthusiastic this gathering proved to be, even from the outset. Telegrams were flying this way and that (for in the old country the ceremonies had begun some hours previously); there was no distinction between members and friends; and as Scot encountered Scot, each vied with the other in recalling the phrases and intonation of their younger years. In the midst of this turmoil of arrival and joyous greeting, Vincent's gaze was fixed on the door; at any moment there might appear there a proud-featured old man, white-haired, keen-eyed, of distinguished bearing—a striking figure—and not more picturesque than welcome! For would not Maisrie, later on in the evening, be still waiting up for him? And if, at the end of the proceedings, one were to walk home with the old man, and have a chance of saying five words to Maisrie herself, by way of good-night? No, he would not reproach her! He would only take her hand, and say, 'To-morrow—to-morrow, Maisrie, I am coming to scold you!'

Thin Scot, burly Scot, red-headed Scot, black-a-vised Scot, Lowlander and Highlander—all came trooping in, eager, talkative, delighted to meet friends and acquaintances; but there was no George Bethune. And when they had settled down in their places, and when dinner had begun, Hugh Anstruther, who was 'Croupier' on this occasion, turned to his guest and said:—

"You must not be disappointed. I hardly expected him; I could not hear of any one who had invited him. But it is quite likely he may turn up latter on—very likely, indeed, if he is anywhere within travelling distance of New York. George Bethune is not the one to forget the twenty-fifth of January; and of course he must know that many of his friends are assembled here."

Then presently the Croupier turned to his guest and said in an undertone—

"There's a toast that's not down in the list; and I'm going to ask ye to drink it; we'll drink it between ourselves. Fill your glass, man—bless me, what's the use of water!—see, here's some hock—Sutherland's famous for his hock—and now this is the toast. 'Here's to Scotch lassies, wherever they may be!'"

"Yes—'wherever they may be,'" Vincent repeated, absently.

"Oh, don't be downhearted!" his lion-maned friend said, with cheerful good humour. "If that self-willed old deevil has taken away the lassie, thinking to make some grand heiress of her, he'll find it's easier to talk about royal blood than to keep a comfortable house over her head; and some day he may be glad enough to bring her back and see her safely provided with a husband well-to-do and able to take care of her. Royal blood?—I'm not sure that I haven't heard him maintain that the Bethunes were a more ancient race than the Stewarts. I shouldn't wonder

if he claimed to be descended from Macbeth, King of Scotland. Oh, he holds his head high, the old scoundrel that has 'stole bonny Glenlyon away.' But you'll be even with him yet; you'll be even with him yet. Why, if he comes in to-night, and finds ye sitting here, he'll be as astonished as Maclean of Duart was at Inverary, when he looked up from the banquet and saw his wife at the door."

So Vincent had perforce to wait in vague expectancy; but nevertheless the proceedings of the evening interested him not a little, and all the more that he happened to know two of the principal speakers. For to Mr. Tom MacVittie was entrusted the toast of the evening—"The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns"—and very eloquently indeed did the big merchant deal with that well-worn theme. What the subject lacked in novelty was amply made up by the splendid enthusiasm of his audience: the most familiar quotations—rolled out with MacVittie's breadth of accent and strong north-country burr—were welcome as the songs of Zion sung in a strange land; this was the magic speech that could stir their hearts, and raise visions of their far-off and beloved native home. Nor were they at all *laudatores temporis acti*—these perfervid and kindly Scots. When the Croupier rose to propose the toast that had been allotted to him—"The Living Bards of Scotland"—cheer after cheer greeted names of which Vincent, in his southern ignorance, had never even heard. Indeed, to this stranger, it seemed as if the Scotland of our own day must be simply alive with poets; and not of the kind that proclaimed at Paisley "They sterve us while we're leevin, and raise monuments to us when we're deed;" but of a quiet and modest character, their subjects chiefly domestic, occasionally humorous, more frequently exhibiting a sincere and effective pathos. For, of course, the Croupier justified himself with numerous excerpts; and there was no stint to the applause of this warm-blooded audience; insomuch that Vincent's idle fancies went wandering away to those (to him) little known minstrels in the old land, with a kind of wish that they could be made aware how they were regarded by their countrymen across the sea. Nay, when the Croupier concluded his speech, "coupling with this toast" a whole string of names, the young man, carried away by the prevailing ardour, said—

"Mr. Anstruther, surely nothing will do justice to this toast but a drop of whiskey!"

—and the Croupier, passing him the decanter, said in reply—

"Surely—surely—on an evening like this; and yet I'm bound to say that if it had not been for the whiskey, my list of living Scotch poets would have been longer."

The evening passed; and Vincent's hopes, that had been too lightly and easily raised, were slowly dwindling. Had George Bethune been in New York, or within any reasonable distance of it, he would almost certainly have come to this celebration, at which several of his old friends were assembled. As Vincent

walked home that night to his hotel, the world seemed dark and wide; and he felt strangely alone. He knew not which way to turn now. For one thing, he was not at all convinced, as Hugh Anstruther appeared to be, that it was Mr. Bethune who had taken his granddaughter away, and that, sooner or later, he would turn up at one or other of those trans-Atlantic gatherings of his Scotch friends. Vincent could not forget Maisrie's last farewell; and if this separation were of her planning and executing, then there was far less chance of his encountering them in any such haphazard fashion. 'It is good-bye for ever between you and me,' she had written. And of what avail now were her wild words, 'Vincent, I love you!—I love you!—you are my dearest in all the world! You will remember, always and always, whenever you think of me, that that is so: you will not forget: remember that I love you always, and am thinking of you!' Idle phrases, that the winds had blown away! Of what use were they now? Nay, why should he believe them, any more than the pretty professions that Mrs. de Lara had made on board the steamer? Were they not both women, those two? And then he drew back with scorn of himself; and rebuked the lying Satan that seemed to walk by his side. Solitariness—wounded pride—disappointment—almost despair—might drive him to say or imagine mad things at the moment; but never—never once—in his heart of hearts had he really doubted Maisrie's faith and honour. All other things might be; not that.

He resolved to leave New York and go out west; it was just possible that Maisrie had taken some fancy for revisiting the place of her birth; he guessed they might have certain friends there also. Hugh Anstruther came to the railway station to see him off.

"Yes," he said, "you may hear something about them in Omaha; but it is hardly probable; for those western cities grow at a prodigious pace, and the traces of people who leave them get very soon obliterated. Besides, the population is more or less shifting; there are ups and downs; and you must remember it is a considerable time since Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter left Omaha. However, in case you don't learn anything of them there, I have brought you a letter of introduction to Daniel Thompson of Toronto—the well-known banker—you may have heard of him—and he is as likely as any one to know anything that can be known of George Bethune. They are old friends."

Vincent was very grateful.

"And I suppose," he said, as he was getting his smaller belongings into the car, "I shan't hear anything further of that fellow de Lara?"

"Not a bit—not a bit!" the good-natured Scotch Editor made answer. "You took the right way with him at the beginning. He'll probably call you a scoundrel and a blackguard in one or two obscure papers; but that won't break bones."

"I have a stout oak cudgel that can, though," said Vincent, "if there should

be need.”

It was a long and a lonely journey; Vincent was in no mood for making acquaintances; and doubtless his fellow-passengers considered him an excellent specimen of the proud and taciturn travelling Englishman. But at last he came in sight of the wide valley of the Missouri, with its long mud-banks and yellow water-channels; and beyond that again the flat plain of the city, dominated by the twin-spired High School perched on a distant height. And he could see how Omaha had grown even within the short time that had elapsed since his last visit; where he could remember one-storeyed tenements stuck at haphazard amongst trees and waste bits of green there were now streets with tram-cars and important public buildings; the city had extended in every direction; it was a vast wilderness of houses that he beheld beyond the wide river. Perhaps Maisrie had been surprised too—on coming back to her old home? Alas! it seemed so big a place in which to search for any one; and he knew of no kindly Scotch Editor who might help.

And very soon he got to recognise that Hugh Anstruther’s warnings had been well founded. Omaha seemed to have no past, nor any remembrance of bygone things; the city was too busy pushing ahead to think of those who had gone under, or left. It is true that at the offices of the Union Pacific Railway, he managed to get some scant information about the young engineer with whom fortune had dealt so hardly; but these were not personal reminiscences; there were new men everywhere, and Maisrie’s father had not been known to any of them. As for the child-orphan and the old man who had come to adopt her, who was likely to remember them? They were not important enough; Omaha had its ‘manifest destiny’ to think of; besides, they were now gone some years—and some years in a western city is a century.

This was not a wholesome life that Vincent was leading—so quite alone was he—and anxious—and despairing. He could not sleep very well. At intervals during the night he would start up, making sure that he heard the sound of a violin; and sometimes the distant and almost inaudible notes seemed to have a suggestion of Maisrie’s voice in them—*‘I daurna tryst wi’ you, Willie ... I daurna tryst ye here ... But we’ll hold our tryst in heaven, Willie ... In the spring-time o’ the year’*—and then he would listen more and more intently, and convince himself it was only the moaning of the wind down the empty street. He neglected his meals. When he took up a newspaper, the printed words conveyed no meaning to him. And then he would go away out wandering again, through those thoroughfares that had hardly any interest for him now; while he was becoming more and more hopeless as the long hours went by, and feeling himself baffled at every point.

But before turning his face eastward again, he had written to Mr. Daniel Thompson of Toronto, mentioning that he had a letter of introduction from Hugh

Anstruther, and stating what had brought him out here to the west. Then he went on:

"Mr. Bethune was never very communicative about money-matters—at least, to me; indeed, he seemed to consider such things too trivial for talking about. At the same time I understood from him that when his son, Miss Bethune's father, died, there was either some remnant of his shattered fortunes—or perhaps it was some fund subscribed by sympathising friends—I never could make out which, and was not curious enough to inquire—that produced a certain small annual income. Now I thought that if I could discover the trustees who paid over this income, they would certainly know where Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter were now living; or, on the other hand, supposing the fund was derived from some investment, if I could find out the bank which held the securities, they also might be able to tell me. But all my inquiries have been in vain. I am a stranger; people don't want to be bothered; sometimes I can see they are suspicious. However, it has occurred to me that you, as an old friend of Mr. Bethune, might chance to know who they are who have this fund in trust; and if you could tell me, you would put me under a life-long debt of gratitude. If you were aware of all the circumstances, you would be convinced that no ill-use is likely to be made of the information. When I first became acquainted with Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter, they seemed to me to be living a very happy and simple and contented life in London; and I am afraid I am in some measure responsible for their having suddenly resolved to leave these quiet circumstances, and take to that wandering life of which Miss Bethune seemed so sadly tired. If I can get no news of them here, I propose returning home by Toronto and Montreal, and I shall then give myself the pleasure of calling upon you, when I may be able to assure you that, if you should hear anything of Mr. Bethune and Miss Bethune, you would be doing no injury to them, or to any one, in letting me know."

Then came the answer—from a cautious Scot.

"Dear Sir,—As you rightly observe, my old friend George Bethune was never very communicative about money matters; and perhaps he was even less so with me than with others—fearing that any such disclosures might be misconstrued into an appeal for help. I was vaguely aware, like yourself, that he had some small annual income—for the maintenance of his granddaughter, as I understood; but from whence it was derived I had, and have, no knowledge whatever; so that I regret I cannot give you the information you seek. I shall be pleased to see you on your way through Toronto; and still further pleased to give you any assistance that may lie in my power."

There was not much encouragement in this letter; but after these weary and lonely days in this hopeless city, he was glad to welcome any friendly hand held out to him. And he grew to think that he would be more likely to hear of Maisrie

in Toronto or Montreal than in this big town on the banks of the Missouri. Canada had been far longer her home. She used to talk of Toronto or Montreal—more rarely of Quebec—as if she were familiar with every feature of them; whereas she hardly ever mentioned Omaha. He remembered her telling him how she used to climb up to the top of the tower of Toronto College, to look away across the wide landscape to the lofty column of soft white smoke that rose from Niagara Falls into the blue of the summer sky. He recalled her description of the small verandahed villa in which they lived, out amongst the sandy roads and trees and gardens of the suburbs. Why, it was the *Toronto Globe* or the *Toronto Mail* that old George Bethune was reading, when first he had dared to address them in Hyde Park. Then Montreal: he recollected so well her talking of the Grey Nunnery, of Notre Dame, of Bonsecours Market, of the ice palaces, and toboggan slides, and similar amusements of the hard northern winter. But a trivial little incident that befell him on his arrival in Toronto persuaded him, more than any of these reminiscences, that in coming to Canada he was getting nearer to Maisrie—that at any moment he might be within immediate touch of her.

It was rather late in the evening when he reached his hotel; he was tired; and he thought he would go soon to bed. His room looked out into a side street that was pretty sure to be deserted at this hour; so that, just as he was turning off the light, he was a trifle surprised to hear a slight and distant sound as of singing; and from idle curiosity he went to the window. There was a full moon; the opposite pavement and the fronts of the houses were white in the cold and clear radiance; silence reigned save for this chance sound he had heard. At the same moment he descried the source of it. There were two young girls coming along the pavement opposite—hurrying home, apparently, arm-in-arm—while they amused themselves by singing a little in an underhand way, one of them even attempting a second from time to time. And how could he mistake the air?—it was the *Claire Fontaine*! The girls were singing in no sad fashion; but idly and carelessly to amuse themselves on their homeward way; and indeed so quietly that even in this prevailing silence he could only guess at the words—

J'ai perdu ma maîtresse
 Sans l'avoir mérité,
 Pour un bouquet de roses
 Que je lui refusai.

* * * * *

Je voudrais que la rose
 Fût encore au rosier,

Et moi et ma maîtresse
 Dans les mêms amitiés.

And then the two slight, dark figures went by in the white moonlight; and eventually the sound ceased in the distance. But he had been greatly cheered and comforted. This was a friendly and familiar air. He had reached Maisrie's home at last; *la Claire Fontaine* proclaimed it. And if, when he neared the realms of sleep, his heart was full of the old refrain—

Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
 Jamais je ne t'oublierai,

there was something of hopefulness there as well: he had left the despair of Omaha behind him.

CHAPTER IV. ENLIGHTENMENT.

Next morning he was up and out betimes—wandering through this town that somehow seemed to be pervaded by Maisrie's presence, or, at least, by recollections of her and associations with her. He had hardly left his hotel when he heard a telegraph-boy whistling the air of 'Isabeau s'y promène.' He went from one street to another, recognising this and that public building: the polished marble pillars shining in the cold, clear sunlight. Then he walked away up College Avenue, and entered Queen's Park; and there, after some little delay, he obtained permission to ascend to the top of the University tower. But in vain he sought along the southern horizon for the cloud of soft white smoke of which Maisrie had often spoken; the distant Niagara was frozen motionless and mute. When he returned to the more frequented thoroughfares, the business-life of the city was now in full flow; nevertheless he kept his eyes on the alert; even amid this hurrying crowd, the figure of George Bethune would not readily escape recognition. But, indeed, he was only seeking to pass the time, for he thought he ought not to call on the banker before mid-day.

Mr. Daniel Thompson he found to be a tall, spare man, of well over sixty, with short white whiskers, a face otherwise clean shaven, and eyes that were

shrewd and observant, but far from unkindly. He listened to the young man's tale with evident interest.

"And so you have come all the way across the Atlantic," said he, "to look for my old friend George Bethune and little Maggie."

"Maggie," repeated Vincent, somewhat startled. "Maisrie, you mean."

"Maisrie!" the banker said, with a certain impatience. "Does he still keep up that nonsense? The girl's name is Margaret; Margaret Bethune—surely a good enough name for any Christian. But his head is just full of old ballads and stuff of that kind; any fancy that strikes him is just as real to him as fact; I dare say he could persuade himself that he was intimately acquainted with Sir Patrick Spens and the Scots lords who were drinking in Dunfermline town—"

"But in any case," Vincent protested (for how could he surrender the name that was so deeply graven on his heart)? "Maisrie is only a form of Margaret—as Marjorie is—a pet name—"

"Maisrie!" said the banker, contemptuously. "Who ever heard of any human creature being called Maisrie—outside of poetry-books and old ballads? I warned the little monkey, many and many a day ago, when I first got her to write to me, that she must sign her own name, or she would see what I would do to her. Well, how is the little Omahussy? What does she look like now? A sly little wretch she used to be—making people fond of her with her earnest eyes—"

"I don't think you quite understand," said Vincent, who resented this familiar tone, though in truth it only meant an affectionate kindness. "Miss Bethune is no longer the little girl you seem to imagine; she is quite a young lady now—and taller than most."

"The little Omahussy grown up to be a tall young lady?" said he, in a pleased fashion. "Yes, yes, I suppose so. No doubt. And tall, you say? Even when she was here last she was getting on; but the only photograph I have of her was done long before that—when she was hardly more than twelve; and then I'm an old bachelor, you see; I'm not accustomed to watch children grow up; and somehow I remember her mostly as when I first knew her—a shy young thing, and yet something of a little woman in her ways. Grown up good-looking, too, I suppose?—both her father and mother were handsome."

"If you saw her now," said Vincent, "I think you would say she was beautiful; though it might not be her beauty that would take your attention the most."

The elderly banker regarded this young man for a second or so—and with a favouring glance: he was clearly well impressed.

"I hope you will not consider me intrusive or impertinent if I ask you a question," said he. "I am an old friend of George Bethune's—perhaps the oldest alive now; and besides that I have always regarded myself as a sort of second father to the little Margaret—though their wandering way of life has taken her

out of my care. Now—don't answer unless you like—tell me to mind my own business—but at the same time one would almost infer, from your coming over here in search of them, that you have some particular interest in the young lady—

—”

”It is the chief interest of my life,” said Vincent, with simple frankness. ”And that is why I cannot rest until I find them.”

”Well, now, one question more,” the banker continued. ”I don't wish to pry into any young lady's secrets—but—but perhaps there may be some understanding between her and you?”

”I hope so,” said Vincent.

”And the young wretch never wrote me a line to tell me of it!” Mr. Thompson exclaimed—but it was very obvious that this piece of news had caused him no chagrin. ”The little Omahussy grows up to be a fine and tall young lady; chooses her sweetheart for herself; thinks of getting married and all the rest of it; and not a word to me! Here is filial gratitude for you! Why, does she forget what I have promised to do for her? Not that I ever said so to her; you don't fill a school-girl's head full of wedding fancies; but her grandfather knew; her grandfather must have told her when this affair was settled between you and her——”

But here Vincent had to interpose and explain that nothing was settled; that unhappily everything was unsettled; and further he went on to tell of all that had happened preceding the disappearance of Maisrie and her grandfather. For this man seemed of a kindly nature; he was an old friend of those two; then Vincent had been very much alone of late—there was no one in Omaha in whom he could confide. Mr. Thompson listened with close attention; and at last he said—

”I can see that you have been placed in a very peculiar position; and that you have stood the test well. The description of my old friend Bethune that your father put before you could be made to look very plausible; and I imagine that most young men would have been staggered by it. I can fancy that a good many young men would have been apt to say 'Like grandfather, like granddaughter'—and would have declined to have anything more to do with either. And yet I understand that, however doubtful or puzzled you may have been, at least you never had any suspicion of Margaret?”

”Suspicion?” said Vincent. ”Of the girl whom I hope to make my wife? I need not answer the question.”

Mr. Thompson gave a bit of a laugh, in a quiet, triumphant manner.

”Evidently my little Omahussy had her eyes widely and wisely open when she made her choice,” said he, apparently to himself.

”And what can I do now?” Vincent went on, in a half-despairing way. ”You say you are certain they are not in Canada or they would have come to see you. The Scotchmen in New York told me they were positive Mr. Bethune was not

there, or he would have shown up at the Burns Anniversary. Well, where can I go now? I must find her—I cannot rest until I have found her—to have everything explained—and—and to find out her reason for going away—”

”I wonder,” said Mr. Thompson, slowly, ”what old George had in his head this time? To him, as I say, fancies are just as real as facts, and I cannot but imagine that this has been his doing. She would not ask him to break up all his arrangements and ways of living for her sake; she was too submissive and dependent on him for that; it is she who has conformed to some sudden whim of his. You had no quarrel with him?”

”A quarrel? Nothing of the kind—not the shadow of a quarrel!” Vincent exclaimed.

”Did you mention to him those reports about himself?” was the next question.

”Well, yes, I did, in a casual sort of way,” the young man answered honestly. ”But it was merely to account for any possible opposition on the part of my father; and, in fact, I wanted Mr. Bethune to consent to an immediate marriage between Maisrie and myself.”

”And what did Margaret say to that?” Mr. Thompson proceeded to ask; he was clearly trying to puzzle out for himself the mystery of this situation.

”You mean the last time I saw her—the very last time?” the young man answered him. ”Well, she seemed greatly troubled: as I mentioned to you, there was some wild talk about degradation—fancy degradation having anything to do with Maisrie Bethune!—and she said it would be better for us to separate; and she made me promise certain things. But I wouldn’t listen to her; I was going down to Mendover; I made sure everything would come right as soon as I could get back. And then, when I got back, they were gone—and not a trace of them left behind.”

”Had old George got any news about the Balloray estates?” the banker asked, with a quick look.

”Not that I know of,” Vincent answered. ”Besides, if there had been any news of importance, it would have been in the papers; we should all have seen it!”

”And you and Margaret parted on good terms?”

”Good terms?” said Vincent. ”That is hardly the phrase. But beyond what I told you, I cannot say more. There are some things that are for myself alone.”

”Quite right—quite right,” said Mr. Thompson, hastily, ”I quite understand.” At this moment a card was brought in.

”Tell the gentleman I will see him directly,” was the reply.

Vincent, of course, rose.

”I confess,” said the banker, ”that the whole affair perplexes me; and I should

like a little time to think it over. Have you any engagement for this evening?"

"No," said Vincent; "I only arrived in Toronto last night: and I don't suppose I know any one in the town."

"Come and dine with me at my club, then, this evening, will you? Just our two selves: the — club, at seven. I want to talk to you about this matter; for I have a particular interest, as you may suppose, in the little Maggie; and I want to know what it all means. I should like to learn something more about you, too, in view of certain possibilities. And perhaps I can give you a few hints about my old friend George, for you don't quite seem to understand, even with all the chances you have had. Yes, I can see a little doubt in your mind at times. You would rather shut your eyes—for Margaret's sake, no doubt; but I want to show you that there isn't much of that needed, if you only look the right way. However, more of that when we meet. At seven, then. Sorry to seem so rude—but this is an appointment—"

That proved to be a memorable evening. To begin with small things: Vincent, after his late solitary wanderings in unfamiliar conditions of life, now and suddenly found himself at home. The quiet, old-fashioned unobtrusive comfort of this club; the air of staid respectability; the manner of the waiters; the very cooking, and the order in which the wines were handed—all appeared to him to be so thoroughly English; and the members, judging by little points here and there, seemed also to be curiously English in their habits and ways. He had received a similar impression on his first visit to Toronto; but on this occasion it was more marked than ever; perhaps the good-humoured friendliness of this Scotch banker had something to do with it, and their being able to talk about people in whom they had a common concern. However, it was after dinner, in a snug corner of the smoking-room, that Mr. Thompson proceeded to talk of his old friend in a fashion that considerably astonished the young man who was his guest.

"Yes," he continued, after he had examined and cross-examined Vincent with regard to certain occurrences, "there is no doubt at all that George Bethune is a rank old impostor; but the person on whom he has mostly imposed, all his life through, has been—George Bethune. I suppose, now, every one of us has in his nature a certain amount of self-deception; it would be a pity if it weren't so. But here is this man who has been gifted with a quite unlimited faculty of self-deception; and with a splendid imagination, too—the imagination of a poet, without a poet's responsibilities; so that he lives in a world entirely of his own creation, and sees things just as he wants to see them. As I say, he has the imagination of a poet, and the unworldliness of a poet, without any one calling him to do anything to prove his powers; he is too busy constructing his own fanciful universe for himself; and all the common things of life—debts, bills, undertakings, and so forth—they have no existence for him. Ah, well, well," Mr. Thompson

went on, as he lay back in his chair, and watched the blue curls of smoke from his cigar, "I don't know whether to call it a pity or not. Sometimes one is inclined to envy him his happy temperament. I don't know any human creature who has a braver spirit, whose conscience is clearer to himself, who can sleep with greater equanimity and content. Why should he mind what circumstances are around him when in a single second he can transport himself to the Dowie Dens o' Yarrow or be off on a raid with Kinmont Willie? And there's nothing that he will not seize if he has a mind to it—a sounding name, a tradition, a historical incident—why, he laid hold of the Bonnie mill-dams o' Binnorie, carried them off bodily to Balloray, and I suppose wild horses wouldn't tear from him the admission that Balloray never had anything to do with those mill-dams or the story of the two sisters—"

"I know," said Vincent; "Maisrie told me about that."

"Maisrie!" said Mr. Thompson, with a return of his former impatience. "That is another of his fantasticalities. I tell you her name is Margaret—"

"But she has been Maisrie to me, and Maisrie she will be to me always," Vincent made answer stoutly—for surely he had some right to speak on this matter too. "As I said this morning, it is only a pet name for Margaret; and if she chooses to use it, to please her grandfather, or to please herself even—"

"Stay a moment: I want to show you something."

The banker put his hand into his breast-pocket; and pulled out an envelope.

"Not the photograph?" said Vincent, rather breathlessly.

Mr. Thompson smiled in his quiet, sagacious way.

"When I mentioned this portrait to you to-day," said he, "I saw something in your eyes—though you were too modest to put your request into words. Well, I have brought it; here it is; and if you'll look at the foot you'll see that the little Omahussy signs herself, as she ought to sign herself, 'Margaret Bethune.'"

And what a revelation was this, of what Maisrie had been in the years before he had known her! The quaint, prim, small miss!—he could have laughed, with a kind of delight: only that here were those calm, grave, earnest eyes, that seemed to know him, that seemed to speak to him. Full of wistfulness they were, and dreams: they said to him, 'I am looking forward; I am waiting till I meet you—my friend; life has that in store—for you and me.'

"I thought you would be interested," said Mr. Thompson, blandly. "And I know you would like me to give you that photograph: perhaps you think you have some right to it, having won the young lady herself—"

"Won her?" said Vincent, still contemplating this strange, quaint portrait that seemed to speak to him somehow. "It hardly looks like it."

"Well, I cannot give you the photograph," the elderly Scotchman continued, in his friendly way, "but, if you like, I will have it copied—perhaps even enlarged,

if it will stand it—and I will send you one—”

”Will you?” said Vincent, with a flash of gratitude in his eyes. ”To me it would be simply a priceless treasure.”

”I just thought it would be,” Mr. Thompson said, considerately. ”I’ve seen something of the ways of young people in my time. Yes; I’ll send you a copy or two as soon as I can get them done.”

Vincent handed back the photograph—reluctantly, and keeping his eyes on it until it had disappeared.

”I brought it out to show you she could sign her name properly when under proper instruction,” the banker continued. ”And now to return to her grandfather, who seems to have puzzled you a little, as well might be the case. I can see how you have been trying to blind yourself to certain things: no doubt you looked towards Margaret, and thought she would make up for all. But I surmise you have been a little unjust to my old friend; notwithstanding your association with him, you have not quite understood him; and perhaps that is hardly to be wondered at. And certainly you would never take him to be what I consider him to be—a very great man who has been spoiled by a fatal inheritance. I do truly and honestly believe there were the makings of a great man in George Bethune—a man with his indomitable pluck and self-reliance, his imagination, his restless energy, his splendid audacity and independence of character. Even now I see something heroic in him: he seems to me a man of heroic build—of heroic attitude towards the rest of the world: people may say what they like about George Bethune; but I know him better than most, and I wholly admire him and love him. If it hadn’t been for that miserable property! I suppose, now, a large estate may turn out a fortunate or unfortunate legacy accordingly as you use it; but if your legacy is only the knowledge that the estate ought to be yours, and isn’t, that is a fine set of circumstances! And I have little doubt it was to forget that wretched lawsuit, to escape from a ceaseless and useless disappointment, that he took refuge in a world of imagination, and built up delusions round about him—just as other people take refuge in gin or in opium. At all events, his spirit has not been crushed. Did you ever hear him whine and complain?—I should think not! He has kept a stout heart, has old George Bethune. Perhaps, indeed, his pride has been excessive. Here am I, for example: I’m getting well on in years, and I haven’t a single near relative now living; I’ve scraped together a few sixpences in my time; and nothing would give me greater pleasure than if George Bethune were to come to me and ask me to share my purse with him. And he knows it too. But would he? Not a bit! Rather than come to me and get some useful sum, he would go and get a few pounds out of some newspaper-office on account of one of his frantic schemes to do something fine for poor old Scotland. No,” the banker proceeded, with rather an injured air, ”I suppose I’m not distinguished

enough. Friend George has some very high and mighty notions about the claims of long descent—and *noblesse oblige*—and all that. It is a condescension on his part to accept help from any one; and it is the privilege of those who have birth and lineage like himself to be allowed to come to his aid. I'm only Thompson. If I were descended from Richard Coeur de Lion I suppose it would be different. Has he ever accepted any money from you?"

"Never," said Vincent—who was not going to recall a few restaurant bills and cab fares.

"No," resumed the banker, "Your name is Harris. But when it comes to Lord Musselburgh, that is quite different, that is all right. No doubt Lord Musselburgh was quite proud to be allowed to subscribe—how much was it?—towards a book that never came out."

"Oh, but I ought to explain that that money was paid back," said Vincent, quickly.

"Paid back?" repeated the banker, staring. "That is a new feature, indeed! The money paid back to Lord Musselburgh? How did that come about? How did friend George yield to a weakness of that kind?"

"The fact is," said Vincent, blushing like a school-boy, "I paid it."

"Without letting the old gentleman know?"

"Yes."

"Then excuse my saying so," Mr. Thomson observed, "but you threw away your money to very little purpose. If George Bethune is willing to take a cheque from Lord Musselburgh—if he can do so without the slightest loss of self-respect or dignity—why should not his lordship be allowed to help a brother Scot? Why should you interfere?"

"It was for Maisrie's sake," said Vincent, looking down.

"Ah, yes, yes," the banker said, knitting his brows. "That is where the trouble comes in. I shouldn't mind letting George Bethune go his own way; he is all right; his self-sufficiency will carry him through anything: but for a sensitive girl like that it must be terrible. I wonder how much she suspects," he went on. "I wonder how much she sees. Or if it is possible he has blinded her as well as himself to their circumstances? For you must remember this—I am talking to you now, Mr. Harris, as one who may have a closer relationship with these two—you must remember this, that to himself George Bethune's conscience is as clear as that of a one-year-old child. Do you think he sees anything shady or unsatisfactory in these little transactions or forgetfulnesses of his? He is careless of money because he despises it. If he had any, and you wanted it, it would be yours."

"I know that," said Vincent, eagerly; and he told the story of their meeting the poor woman in Hyde Park.

"Take that string of charges you spoke of," the banker resumed. "I have not

the least doubt that from the point of view of the people who discovered those things their story was quite accurate. Except, perhaps, about his calling himself Lord Bethune: I don't believe that, and never heard of it; that was more likely a bit of toadyism on the part of some bar-loungers. But, as I say, from a solicitor's point of view, George Bethune would no doubt be regarded as a habitual impostor; whereas to himself he is no impostor at all, but a perfectly honourable person, whose every act can challenge the light of day. If there is any wrong or injury in the relations between him and the world, be sure he considers himself the wronged and injured one: though you must admit he does not complain. The question is—does Margaret see? Or has he brought her up in that world of imagination—careless of the real facts of life—persuading yourself of anything you wish to believe—thinking little of rent or butchers' bills so long as you can escape into the merry green-wood and live with Burd Helens and May Colleans and the like? You see, when I knew her she was little more than a child; it would never occur to her to question the conduct of her grandfather; but now you say she is a woman—she may have begun to look at things for herself—”

Mr. Thompson paused, and eyed his companion curiously. For a strange expression had come into Vincent's face.

”What then?” asked the banker.

”I am beginning to understand,” the young man said, ”and—and—perhaps here is the reason of Maisrie's going away. Suppose she imagined that I suspected her grandfather—suppose she thought I considered those reports true: then she might take that as a personal insult; she might be too proud to offer any defence; she would go to her grandfather and say 'Grandfather, if this is what he and his friends think of us, it is time we should take definite steps to end this companionship.' It has been all my doing, then, since I was so blind?” Vincent continued, evidently in deep distress. ”I don't wonder that she was offended and insulted—and—and she would be too proud to explain. I have all along had a kind of notion that she had something to do, perhaps everything to do, with their going away. And yet—”

He was silent. Mr. Thompson waited for a second or two, not wishing to interrupt: then he said—

”Of course you know her better than I do; but that is not how I should read the situation. It is far more probable that her own eyes have been gradually opening—not to what her grandfather is, but to what he may appear to be in the eyes of the world; and when she has come more and more to perceive the little likelihood of his being considerably judged, she may have determined that you should be set free from all association with him and with her. I think that is far more likely, in view of the things you have told me. And I can imagine her doing that. A resolute young creature; ready to sacrifice herself; used to wandering,

too—her first solution of any difficulty would be to 'go away.' A touch of pride, perhaps, as well. I dare say she has discovered that if you look at George Bethune through blue spectacles, his way of life must look rather questionable; but if you look at him through pink spectacles, everything is pleasant, and fine, and even grand. But would she ask anyone to put on a pair of pink spectacles? No; for she has the stiff neck of the Bethunes. I imagine she can hold her head as high as any one, now she is grown up. And of course she will not ask for generous interpretation; she will rather 'go away.'"

Vincent was still silent; but at length he said—as if speaking to himself—
"I wonder what Maisrie must have thought of me."

He had evidently been going over all that had happened in those bygone days—by the light of this new knowledge.

"What do you mean?" the banker said.

"Why, if there were any generous interpretation needed or expected, surely it should have come first of all from me. The outside world might be excused for thinking this or that of Mr. Bethune; but I was constantly with him; and then, look at the relations that existed between Maisrie and myself. I thought I was doing enough in the way of generosity when I tried to shut my eyes to certain things; whereas I should have tried to see more clearly. I might have understood—if any one. I remember now Maisrie's saying to me on one occasion—it was about that book on the Scottish-American poets—she said quite piteously: 'Don't you understand? Don't you understand that grandfather can persuade himself of anything? If he has thought a thing over, he considers it done, and is ready for something else.' And then there was another time——"

"Come, come," said Mr. Thompson, good-naturedly, "I don't see you have much to reproach yourself with. You must admit that that affair—if he really did see the proof-sheets in New York—looked pretty bad. You say yourself that Hugh Anstruther was staggered by it——"

"Yes, he was," said Vincent, "until I explained that the money had been repaid to Lord Musselburgh, and also that I had no doubt Mr. Bethune considered himself, from his knowledge of the subject, quite entitled to publish a volume on the other side of the water. Mr. Ross's book was published only on this side—at least, that is my impression."

"Did you tell Anstruther who repaid the money to Lord Musselburgh?" Mr. Thompson asked, with a shrewd glance.

"No," answered Vincent, looking rather shame-faced.

"Ah, well," the banker said, "a freak of generosity is very pardonable in a young man, especially where a young lady is concerned. And you had the means besides. Your father is a rich man, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes, pretty well."

"And you—now forgive my curiosity—it only arises from my interest in Margaret—I dare say you are allowed a sufficient income?"

"I have more money than I need," said Vincent, frankly, "but of course that would not be the case if I married Maisrie Bethune, for then I should have to depend on my own resources. I should have to earn my own living."

"Oh, earn your own living? Well, that is very commendable, in any case. And how do you propose to earn your own living?"

"By writing for the newspapers."

"Have you had any experience?" Maisrie's 'second father' continued.

"Yes, a little; and I have had fair encouragement. Besides, I know one or two important people in the newspaper world."

"And what about your seat in Parliament?"

"That would not interfere: there are several journalists in the House."

The banker considered for a little while.

"Seems a little hazardous, doesn't it, to break away from a certainty of income?" he asked, at length. "Are you quite convinced that if you married Margaret your relatives would prove so implacable?"

"It isn't what they would do that is the question," Vincent responded, with promptitude. "It is what I should be inclined to do. At present they regard Maisrie as nothing more nor less than a common adventuress and swindler—or rather an uncommon one—a remarkably clever one. Now do you think I am going to take her by the hand, and lead her up to them, and say, 'Dear Papa,' or 'Dear Aunt,' as the case may be, 'Here is the adventuress and swindler whom I have married, but she is not going to be wicked any more; she is going to reform; and I beg you to receive her into the family, and forgive her all that she has been; and also I hope that you will give me money to support her and myself.' You see," continued Vincent, "before I did that I think I would rather try to find out how much a week I could make by writing leading-articles."

"Quite right—quite right," said Mr. Thompson, with a smile: for why this disdain?—*he* had not counselled the young man to debase himself so.

"And then it isn't breaking away from any certainty of income," Vincent proceeded, "but quite the reverse. The certainty is that as soon as I announce my intention of marrying Miss Bethune, my father will suggest that I should shift for myself. Very well. I'm not afraid. I can take my chance, like another. They say that poverty is a good test of affection: I am ready to face it, for one."

"Oh, as for that," the banker interposed, "I wish you to understand this—that your bride won't come to you empty-handed. George Bethune may hold aloof from me as long as he likes. If he thinks it is more dignified for him to go gadging about with vague literary projects—all for the honour and glory of Scotland, no doubt—instead of letting his oldest friend share his purse with him, I have nothing

to say. My name's only Thompson; *noblesse oblige* has nothing to do with me. But when my little Margaret walks into church to meet the man of her choice, it will be my business to see that she is suitably provided for. I do not mean to boast, or make rash promises, or raise false expectations; but when her husband brings her away it will be no pauper he is taking home with him. And I want to add this, since we are talking in confidence: I hope her husband will be none other than yourself. I like you. I like the way you have spoken of both grandfather and granddaughter; and I like your independence. By all means when you get back to the old country: by all means carry out that project of yours of earning an income for yourself. It can do you no harm, whatever happens; it may be invaluable to you in certain circumstances. And in the meantime, if I may still further advise, give up this search of yours for the present. I dare say you are now convinced they are not on this side the water; well, let that suffice for the time being. Here is Parliament coming together; you have your position to make; and the personal friend and protégé of — should surely have a great chance in public life. Of course, you will say it is easy to talk. But don't misunderstand me. What can you do except attend to these immediate and practical affairs? If George Bethune and Margaret have decided, for reasons best known to themselves, to sever the association between you and them, mere advertising won't bring them back. And searching the streets of this or that town is a pretty hopeless business. No; if you hear of them, it will not be in that way: it will be through some communication with some common friend, and just as likely as not that friend will be myself."

All this seemed very reasonable—and hopeless. Vincent rose.

"I must not keep you up too late," said he, in an absent sort of way. "I suppose you are right—I may as well go away back to England at once. But of course I will call to see you before I go—to-morrow if I may—to thank you for all your kindness."

"Ah, but you must keep up your heart, you know," the banker said, regarding the young man in a favouring way. "No despair. Why, I am sure to hear from one or other of them; they cannot guess that you have been here; even if they wish to keep their whereabouts concealed from you they would have no such secret from me. And be sure I will send you word the moment I hear anything. I presume the House of Commons will be your simplest and surest address."

As he walked away home that night Vincent had many things to ponder over; but the question of questions was as to whether Maisrie had indignantly scorned him for his blindness in not perceiving more clearly her grandfather's nature and circumstances, or for his supineness in wavering, and half-admitting that these charges might bring disquiet. For now the figure of old George Bethune seemed to stand out distinctly enough: an amiable and innocent monomaniac; a romantic enthusiast; a sublime egotist; a dreamer of dreams; a thaumaturgist

surrounding himself with delusions and not knowing them to be such. And if Daniel Thompson's reading of the character of his old friend was accurate—if George Bethune had merely in splendid excess that faculty of self-deception which in lesser measure was common to all mortals—who was going to cast the first stone?

CHAPTER V.

MARRIAGE NOT A LA MODE.

London had come to life again; the meeting of Parliament had summoned fathers of families from distant climes and cities—from Algiers and Athens, from Constantinople and Cairo; the light blazed at the summit of the Clock-tower; cabs and carriages rattled into Palace Yard. And here, at a table in the Ladies' Dining-room of the House of Commons, sate Mrs. Ellison and her friend Louie Drexel, along with Lord Musselburgh and Vincent Harris, the last-named playing the part of host. This Miss Drexel was rather an attractive-looking little person, brisk and trim and neat, with a healthy complexion, a pert nose, and the most astonishingly clear blue eyes. Very frank those eyes were; almost ruthless in a way; about as ruthless as the young lady's tongue, when she was heaping contempt and ridicule on some conventionality or social superstition. "Seeva the Destroyer" Vincent used gloomily to call her, when he got a little bit tired of having her flung at his head by the indefatigable young widow. Nevertheless she was a merry and vivacious companion; with plenty of independence, too: if she was being flung at anybody's head it was with no consent of her own.

"You don't say!" she was observing to her companion. "Fancy any one being in Canada in the winter and not going to see the night tobogganing at Rideau Hall!"

"I never was near Ottawa," said Vincent, in answer to her; "and, besides, I don't know the Viceroy."

"A member of the British Parliament—travelling in Canada: I don't think you would have to wait long for an invitation," said she. "Why, you missed the loveliest thing in the world—just the loveliest thing in the whole world!—the toboggan-slide all lit up with Chinese lanterns—the black pine woods all around—the clear stars overhead. Then they have great bonfires down in the hollow—to keep the chaperons from freezing: poor things, it isn't much fun for them; I dare

say they find out what a good thing hot coffee is on a cold night. And you were at Toronto?" she added.

"Yes, I was at Toronto," he answered, absently: indeed at this time he was thinking much oftener of Toronto than this young lady could have imagined—wondering when, or if ever, a message was coming to him from the friendly Scotch banker there.

Mrs. Ellison was now up in town making preparations for her approaching marriage; but so anxious was she that Louie Drexel and Vincent should get thrown together, that she crushed the natural desire of a woman's heart for a fashionable wedding, and proposed that the ceremony should be quite a quiet little affair, to take place at Brighton, with Miss Drexel as her chief attendant and Vincent as best man. And of course there were many consultations; and Mrs. Ellison and her young friend were much together; and they seemed to think it pleasanter, in their comings and goings, to have a man's escort, so that the Parliamentary duties of the new member for Mendover were very considerably interfered with.

"Look here, aunt," said he, at this little dinner, "do you think I went into the House of Commons simply to get you places in the Ladies' gallery and entertain you in the Ladies' Dining-room?"

"I consider that a very important part of your duties," said the young widow, promptly. "And I tell you this: when we come back from the Riviera, for the London season, I hope to be kept informed of everything that is going on—surely, with a husband in one House and a nephew in the other!"

"But what I want to know is," said Lord Musselburgh on this same occasion, "what Vin is going to do about the taxation of ground rents. I think that is about the hardest luck I ever heard of. Here is a young man, who no sooner gets into Parliament than he is challenged to say whether he will support the taxation of ground rents; and lo and behold! every penny of his own fortune is invested in ground rents! Isn't that hard? Other things don't touch him. Welsh Disestablishment will neither put a penny in his pocket nor take one out; while he can make promises by the dozen about the abolition of the tea duty, extension of Factory Acts, triennial Parliaments, and all the rest of it. Besides, it isn't only a question of money. He knows he has no more right to tax ground rents than to pillage a baker's shop; he knows he oughtn't to give the name of patriot to people who merely want to steal what doesn't belong to them; and I suppose he has his own ideas about contracts guaranteed by law, and the danger of introducing the legislation of plunder. But what is he going to do? What are you going to do, Marcus Curtius? Jump in, and sacrifice yourself, money and principles and all?"

"You are not one of my constituents," said Vincent, "and I decline to answer."

Day after day went by, and week after week; but no tidings came of the

two fugitives. In such moments of interval as he could snatch from his various pursuits (for he was writing for an evening paper now, and that occupied a good deal of his time) his imagination would go wandering away over the surface of the globe, endeavouring to picture them here or there. He had remembered Maisrie's injunction; he could not forget that; but of what avail was it now? Busy as he was, he led a solitary kind of life; much thinking, especially during the long hours of the night, was eating into his spirit; in vain did Mrs. Ellison scheme and plan all kinds of little festivities and engagements in order to get him interested in Louie Drexel. But he was grateful to the girl, in a sort of way; when they had to go two and two (which Mrs. Ellison endeavoured to manage whenever there was a chance) she did all the talking; she did not seem to expect attention; she was light-hearted and amusing enough. He bought her music; sent her flowers; and so forth; and no doubt Mrs. Ellison thought that all was going well; but it is to be presumed that Miss Drexel herself was under no misapprehension, for she was an observant and shrewd-witted lass. Once, indeed, as they were walking up Regent-street, she ventured to hint, in a sisterly sort of fashion, that he might be a little more confidential with her; but he did not respond to this invitation; and she did not pursue the subject further.

Then the momentous wedding-day drew near; and it was with curious feelings that Vincent found himself on the way to Brighton again. But he was not alone. The two Drexel girls and Lord Musselburgh were with him, in this afternoon Pullman; and Miss Louie was chattering away like twenty magpies. Always, too, in an oddly personal way. You—the person she was addressing—you were responsible for everything that had happened to her, or might happen to her, in this country; you were responsible for the vagaries of the weather, for the condition of the cab that brought her, for the delay in getting tickets.

"Why," she said to Vincent, "you know perfectly well that all that your English poets have written about your English spring is a pure imposture. Who would go a-Maying when you can't be sure of the weather for ten minutes at a time? 'Hail, smiling morn!'—just you venture to say that, on the finest day you ever saw in an English spring; the chances are your prayer will be answered, and the chances are that the morn does begin to hail, like the very mischief. You know perfectly well that Herrick is a fraud. There never were such people as Corydon and Phyllis—with ribbons at their knees and in their caps. The farm-servants of Herrick's time were no better off than the farm-servants of this present time—stupid, ignorant louts, not thinking of poetry at all, but living the most dull and miserable of lives, with an occasional guzzle. But in this country, you believe anything that is told you. One of your great men says that machine-made things are bad; and so you go and print your books on hand-made paper—and worry yourselves to death before you can get the edges out. I call the man who mul-

tiplies either useful or pretty things by machinery a true philanthropist; he is working for the mass of the people; and it's about time they were being considered. In former days—"

"Don't you want to hire a hall, Louie?" said her sister Anna.

"Oh, I've no patience with sham talk of that kind!" continued Miss Drexel, not heeding the interruption. "As I say, in former days no one was supposed to have anything fine or beautiful in their house, except princes and nobles. The goldsmiths, and the lapidaries, and the portrait-painters—and the poor wretches who made Venetian lace—they all worked for the princes and nobles; and the common people were not supposed to have anything to do with art or ornament; they could herd like pigs. Well, I'm for machinery. I'm for chromolithography, when it can give the labourer a very fair imitation of a Landseer or a Millais to hang up in his cottage; I'm for the sewing-machine that can give the £150-a-year people a very good substitute for Syrian embroidery to put in their drawing-room. You've been so long used to princes and nobles having everything and the poor people nothing—"

"But we're learning the error of our ways," said Vincent, interposing. "My father is a Socialist."

"A Socialist," observed Lord Musselburgh, "who broke the moulds of a dessert-service lest anybody else should have plates of the same pattern!"

"Who has been telling tales out of school?" Vincent asked; but the discussion had to end here, for they were now slowing into the station.

Nor did Mrs. Ellison's plans for throwing those two young people continuously and obviously together work any better in Brighton; for Vincent had no sooner got down than he went away by himself, seeking out the haunts he had known when Maisrie and her grandfather had been there. Wretchedness, loneliness, was destroying the nerve of this young man. He had black moods of despair; and not only of despair, but of remorse; he tortured himself with vain regrets, as one does when thinking of the dead. If only he could have all those opportunities over again, he would not misunderstand or mistrust! If only he could have them both here!—the resolute, brave-hearted old man who disregarded all mean and petty troubles while he could march along, with head erect, repeating to himself a verse of the Psalms of David, or perhaps in his careless gaiety singing a farewell to Bonny Mary and the pier o' Leith. And Maisrie?—but Maisrie had gone away, proud, and wounded, and indignant. She had found him unworthy of the love she had offered him. He had not risen to her height. She would seek some other, no doubt, better fitted to win her maiden trust. He thought of 'Urania'—

'Yet show her once, ye heavenly Powers,
One of some worthier race than ours!

One for whose sake she once might prove
How deeply she who scorns can love.'

And that other one, that worthier one, she would welcome—

'And she to him will reach her hand,
And gazing in his eyes will stand,
And know her friend, and weep for glee,
And cry: *Long, long I've looked for thee.*'

Then again his mood would change. If Maisrie were only here—if but for a second or so he could look into her clear, pensive, true eyes, surely he could convince her of one thing—that even when his father had offered him chapter and verse to prove that she was nothing but the accomplice of a common swindler, his faith in her had never wavered, never for an instant. And would she not forgive his blindness in not understanding so complex a character as that of her grandfather? He had not told her of his half-suspicious; nay, he had treated those charges with an open contempt. And if her quick eyes had perceived that behind those professions there lingered some unconfessed doubt, would she not be generous and willing to pardon? It was in her nature to be generous. And he had borne some things for her sake that he had never revealed to any mortal.

He ought to have been attending to his groomsman's duties, and acting as escort to the young ladies who had gone down; but instead of that he paid a visit to German-place, to look at the house in which the two Bethunes had lodged; and he slowly passed up and down the Kemp-Town breakwater, striving to picture to himself the look in Maisrie's eyes when her soul made confession; and he went to the end of the Chain Pier, to recall the tempestuous morning on which Maisrie, with her wet hair blown about by the winds, and her lips salt with the sea-spray, had asked him to kiss her, as a last farewell. And his promise?—"Promise me, Vincent, that you will never doubt that you are my dearest in all the world; promise me that you will say to yourself always and always, 'Wherever Maisrie is at this moment, she loves me—she is thinking of me.'" He had made light of her wild words; he could not believe in any farewell; and now—now all the wide, unknown world lay between him and her, and there was nothing for him but the memory of her broken accents, her sobs, her distracted, appealing eyes.

Mrs. Ellison affected not to notice his remissness; nay, she went on the other tack.

"Don't you think it is a pity, Vin," she said on one occasion when she found him alone—and there was a demure little smile on her very pretty and expressive

face: "Don't you think it is a pity the two marriages couldn't be on the same day?"

"What two marriages?" he demanded, with a stare.

"Oh, yes, we are so discreet!" she said, mockingly. "We wouldn't mention anything for worlds. But other people aren't quite blind, young gentleman. And I do think it would have been so nice if the four of us could have gone off on this trip together; Louie despises conventions—she wouldn't mind. Many's the time I've thought of it; four make such a nice number for driving along the Riviera; and four who all know each other so well would be quite delightful. If it came to that, I dare say it could be arranged yet: I'm sure I should be willing to have our marriage postponed for a month, and I have no doubt I could persuade Hubert to agree: then the two weddings on the same day would be jolly—"

"What are you talking about, aunt!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, well," she said, with a wise and amiable discretion, "I don't want to hurry on anything, or even to interfere. But of course we all expect that the attentions you have been paying to Louie Drexel will lead to something—and it would have been very nice if the two weddings could have been together."

He was still staring at her.

"Mind you," she went on, "I wish you distinctly to understand that Louie has not spoken a single word to me on the subject—"

"Well, I should hope not!" said Vincent, with quick indignation.

"Oh, don't be angry! Do you think a girl doesn't interpret things?" continued Mrs. Ellison. "She has her own pride, of course; she wouldn't speak until she is spoken to. But *I* can speak; and surely you know that it is only your interests I have at heart. And that is why we have been so glad to see this affair coming along—"

"Who have been glad to see it?" he asked again.

"Well, Hubert, for one. And I should think your father. Of course they must see how admirable a wife she would make you, now you are really embarked in public life. Clever, bright, amusing; of a good family; with a comfortable dowry, no doubt—but that would be of little consequence, so long as your father was pleased with the match: you will have plenty. And this is my offer, a very handsome one, I consider it: even now, at the last moment, I will try to get Hubert to postpone our marriage, if you and Louie will have your wedding on the same day with us. I have thought of it again and again; but somehow I didn't like to speak. I was waiting for you to tell me that there was a definite understanding between you and Louie Drexel—"

"Well, there is not," he said calmly. "Nor is there ever likely to be."

"Oh, come, come," she said insidiously, "don't make any rash resolve, simply because I may have interfered a little too soon. Consider the circumstances. Did

you ever hear of any young man getting into Parliament with fairer prospects than you? Your friendship with — is of itself enough to attract attention to you. You have hardly opened your mouth in the House yet; all the same I can see a disposition on the part of the newspapers to pet you—”

”What has that got to do with Louie Drexel?” Vincent asked bluntly.

”Everything,” was the prompt reply. ”You must have social position. You must begin and entertain—and make your own circle of friends and allies. Then I shall want you to come to Musselburgh House—you and your wife—so that my dinner parties shan’t be smothered up with elderly people and political bores. You can’t begin too early to form your own set; and not only that, but with a proper establishment and a wife at the head of it, you can pay compliments to all kinds of people, even amongst those who are not of your own set. Why shouldn’t you ask Mr. Ogden to dinner, for example?—there’s many a good turn he might do you in time to come. Wait till you see how I mean to manage at Musselburgh House—if only Hubert would be a little more serious, and profess political beliefs even if he hasn’t any. For I want you to succeed, Vincent. You are my boy. And you don’t know how a woman who can’t herself do anything distinguished is proud to look on and admire one of her own family distinguishing himself, and would like to have all the world admiring him too. I tell you you are losing time; you are losing your opportunities. What is the use—what on earth can be the use,” continued this zealous and surely disinterested councillor, ”of your writing for newspapers? If the articles were signed, then I could understand their doing you some good; or if you were the editor of an important journal, that would give you a position. But here you are slaving away—for what? Is it the money they give you? It would be odd if the son of Harland Harris had to make that a consideration. What otherwise, then? Do you think half-a-dozen people know that you write in the — — —.”

”My dear aunt,” he answered her, ”all that you say is very wise and very kind; but you must not bother about me when your own affairs are so much more important. If I have been too attentive to Miss Drexel—I’m sure I wasn’t aware of it, but I may have been—I will alter that—”

”Oh, Vin, don’t be mean!” Mrs. Ellison cried. ”Don’t do anything shabby. You won’t go and quarrel with the girl simply because I ventured to hope something from your manner towards her—you wouldn’t do such a thing as that—”

”Certainly not,” said he, in a half-amused way. ”Miss Drexel and I are excellent friends—”

”And you will continue to be so!” said Mrs. Ellison, imploringly. ”Now, Vincent, promise me! You know there are crises in a woman’s life when she expects a little consideration—when she expects to be petted—and have things a little her own way: well, promise me now you will be very kind to Louie—kinder

than ever—why, what an omen at a wedding it would be if my chief attendant and the groomsman were to fall out—”

”Oh, we shan’t fall out, aunt, be sure of that,” he said good-naturedly.

”Ah, but I want more,” she persisted. ”I shall consider myself a horrid mischief-maker if I don’t see that you are more attentive and kind to Louie Drexel than ever. It’s your duty. It’s your place as groomsman. You’ll have to propose their health at the wedding-breakfast; and of course you’ll say something nice about American girls—could you say anything too nice, I wonder?—and you’ll have to say it with an air of conviction. For they’ll expect you to speak well, of course: you, a young member of Parliament; and where could you find a more welcome toast, at a wedding-breakfast, than the toast of the unmarried young ladies? Yes, yes; you’ll have plenty of opportunity of lecturing a sleepy House of Commons about Leasehold Enfranchisement and things of that kind; but this is quite another sort of chance; and I’m looking forward to my nephew distinguishing himself—as he ought to do, when he will have Louie and Anna Drexel listening.” And here this astute and insidious adviser ceased, for her future husband came into the room, to pay his last afternoon call.

Whether Vincent spoke well or ill on that auspicious occasion does not concern us here: it only needs to be said that the ceremony, and the quiet little festivities following, all passed off very satisfactorily; and that bride and bridegroom (the former being no novice) drove away radiant and happy, amid the usual symbolic showers. It was understood they were to break their journey southward at Paris for a few days; and Vincent—who had meanwhile slipped along to his hotel to change his attire—went up to the railway station to see them off. He was surprised to find both the Drexel girls there.

”Now, look here, Vin,” said the charming, tall, pretty-eyed, and not inexperienced bride, ”I want you to do me a favour. If a woman isn’t to be humoured and petted on her wedding day—when, then? Well, Louie and Anna don’t return to town till to-morrow morning; and what are they to do in that empty house with old Mrs. Smythe? I want you to take them in hand for the afternoon—to please me. Leave that wretched House of Commons for one more evening: in any case you couldn’t go up now before the five o’clock express.”

And then she turned to the two young ladies. ”Louie, Vincent has promised to look after you two girls; and he’ll see you safely into your train to-morrow morning. So you must do your best to entertain him in the meanwhile; the afternoon will be the dullest—you must find something to amuse yourselves with—”

Miss Drexel seemed a little self-conscious, and also inclined to laugh.

”If he will trust himself entirely to us,” said she, with covertly merry eyes fixed on the bride, ”Anna and I will do our best. But he must put himself entirely in our charge. He must be ruled and governed. He must do everything we ask—

—”

”Training him for a husband’s duties,” said Lord Musselburgh, without any evil intention whatever; for indeed he was more anxious about getting a supply of foot-warmers into the carriage that had been reserved for him.

Then the kissing had to be gone through; there were final farewells and good wishes; away went the train; there was a fluttering of handkerchiefs; and here was Vincent Harris, a captive in the hands of those two young American damsels—who, at first, did not seem to know what to do with him.

But very soon their shyness wore off; and it must be freely conceded that they treated him well. To begin with, they took him down into the town, and led him to a little table at a confectioner’s, and ordered two ices for themselves and for him a glass of sherry and a biscuit. When that fluid was placed before him, he made no remark: his face was perfectly grave.

”What’s the matter now?” Louie Drexel asked, looking at him.

”I said nothing,” he answered.

”What are you thinking, then?”

”Nothing—nothing.”

”But I insist on knowing.”

”Oh, very well,” he said. ”But it isn’t my fault. I promised to obey. If you ask me to drink a glass of confectioner’s sherry I will do so—though it seems a pity to die so young.”

”What would you rather have then—tea or an ice?”

She got an ice for him; and duly paid for the three—much to his consternation, but he had undertaken to be quite submissive. Then they took him for a walk and showed him the beauties of the place, making believe to recognise the chief features and public buildings of New York. Then they carried him with them to Mrs. Ellison’s house, and ascended into the drawing room there, chatting, laughing, nonsense-making, in a very frank and engaging manner. Finally, towards six o’clock, Miss Drexel rang the bell, and ordered the carriage.

”Oh, I say, don’t do that,” Vincent interposed, grown serious for a moment. ”People don’t like tricks being played with their horses. You may do anything else in a house but that.”

”And pray who asked you to interfere?” she retorted, in a very imperious manner; so there was nothing for it but acquiescence and resignation.

And very soon—in a few minutes, indeed—the carriage was beneath the windows: coachman on the box, footman at the door, maidservant descending the steps with rugs, all in order. It did not occur to Vincent to ask how those horses came to be harnessed in so miraculously brief a space of time; he accepted anything that might befall; he was as clay in the hands of the potter. And really the two girls did their best to make things lively—as they drove away he knew not,

and cared not, whither. The younger sister was rather more subdued, perhaps; but the elder fairly went daft, as the saying is; and her gaiety was catching. Not but that she could be dexterous in the midst of her madness. For example, she was making merry over the general inaptitude of Englishmen for speech-making; and was describing scenes she had herself witnessed in both Houses of Parliament, when she suddenly checked herself.

"At all events," she said, "I will say this for your House of Commons, that there are a number of very good-looking men in it. No one can deny that. But the House of Lords—whew! You know, my contention is that my pedigree is just as long as that of any of your lords; but I've got to admit that, some of them more nearly resemble their ancestors—I mean their quadrumanous ancestors—"

"Louie!" said the sister, reprovingly.

And she was going on to say some very nice things about the House of Commons (as contrasted with the Upper Chamber) when Vincent happened to look out into the now gathering dusk.

"Why," said he, "we're at Rottingdean; and we're at the foot of an awfully steep hill; I must get out and walk up."

"No, no, no," said Miss Drexel, impatiently. "The horses have done nothing all day but hang about the church door. You English are so absurdly careful of your horses: more careful of them than of yourselves—as I've noticed myself at country houses in wet weather. I wonder, when I get back home, if the people will believe me when I tell them that I've actually seen horses in England with leather shoes over their feet to keep the poor things warm and comfortable. Yes, in this very town of Brighton—"

But here Miss Louie had the laugh turned against her, when he had gravely to inform her that horses in England wore over-shoes of leather, not to keep their feet warm, but to prevent their cutting the turf when hauling a lawn-roller.

"But where are we going?" said he again.

"Oh, never mind," she answered, pertly.

"All right—all right," he said, and he proceeded to ensconce himself still more snugly in the back seat. "Well, now, since you've told us of all the absurd and ludicrous things you've seen in England, won't you tell us of some of the things you have admired? We can't be insane on every point, surely."

"I know what you think I am," she said of a sudden. "A comparison-monger."

"You were born in America," he observed.

"And you despise people who haven't the self-sufficiency, the stolid satisfaction, of the English."

"We don't like people who are too eager to assert themselves—who are always beating drums and tom-toms—quiet folk would rather turn aside, and give them the highway."

"But all the same, you know," Miss Drexel proceeded, "some of your countrymen have been very complimentary when they were over with us: of course you've heard of the one who said that the biggest things he had seen in America were the eyes of the women?"

"What else could he say?—an Englishman prides himself on speaking the truth," he made answer, very properly.

By this time, however, he was beginning seriously to ask himself whither those two young minxes meant to take him—a runaway expedition carried out with somebody else's horses! At all events they were going to have a fine night for it. For by now it ought to have been quite dark; but it was not dark: the long-rolling downs, the wide strip of turf along the top of the cliffs, and the far plain of the sea were all spectrally visible in a sort of grey uncertainty; and he judged that the moon was rising, or had risen in the east. What did Charles and Thomas, seated on the box, think of this pretty escapade? In any case, his own part and lot in the matter had already been decided: unquestioning obedience was what had been demanded of him. It could not be that Gretna Green was the objective point?—this was hardly the way.

At last they descended from those grey moonlit solitudes, and got down into a dusky valley, where there were scattered yellow lights—lamp lights and lights of windows. "This is Newhaven," he thought to himself; but he did not say anything; for Miss Drexel was telling of a wild midnight frolic she and some of her friends had had on Lake Champlain. Presently the footfalls of the horses sounded hollow; they were going over a wooden bridge. Then they proceeded cautiously for a space, and there was a jerk or two; they were crossing a railway line. And now Vincent seemed to understand what those mad young wretches were after. They were going down to the Newhaven Pier Hotel. To dine there? Very well; but he would insist on being host. It was novel, and odd, and in a certain way fascinating, for him to sit in a restaurant and find himself entertained by two young ladies—find them pressing another biscuit on him, and then paying the bill; but, of course, the serious business of dinner demanded the intervention of a man.

What followed speedily drove these considerations out of his head. The enterprising young damsels having told the coachman when to return with the carriage, conducted their guest to the hotel, and asked for the coffee-room. A waiter opened the door for them. The next thing that Vincent saw was that, right up at the end of the long room, Lord Musselburgh and his bride were seated at a side table, and that they were regarding the new comers—especially himself—with some little amusement. They themselves were in no wise disconcerted, as they ought to have been.

"Come along!" the bridegroom said, rather impatiently. "You're nearly half-

an-hour late, and we're famishing. Here, waiter, dinner at once, please! Vin, my boy, you sit next Miss Drexel—that's all right!"

At this side-table, covers were already laid for five. As Vincent took his place, he said:—

"Well, this is better than being had up before a magistrate for stealing a carriage and a pair of horses!"

"Sure they didn't let on?" the bride demanded, with a glance at the two girls.

"Not a word!" he protested. "I had not the remotest idea where or what we were bound for. Looked more like Gretna Green than anything else."

"The nearest way to Gretna Green," said she, regarding Vincent with significant eyes, "is through Paris—to the British Embassy."

Now although this remark (which Miss Drexel affected not to hear—she was so busy taking off her gloves) seemed a quite haphazard and casual thing, it very soon appeared, during the progress of this exceedingly merry dinner, that Lady Musselburgh, as she now was, had been wondering whether they might not carry the frolic a bit further; whether, in short, this little party of five might not go on to Paris together by the eleven o'clock boat that same night.

"Why, Louie, you despise conventionalities," she exclaimed. "Well, now is your chance!"

Miss Louie pretended to be much frightened.

"Oh, but I couldn't do that!" she cried. "Neither Nan nor I have any things with us."

"The idea of American girls talking of taking things with them to Paris!" the bride said, with a laugh. "That is the very reason you should go to Paris—to get the things."

"Do you really mean to cross to-night?" Vincent asked, turning to Musselburgh.

"Oh, yes, certainly. The fixed service—eleven o'clock—so there's no hurry, whatever you decide on."

For he, too, seemed rather taken with this audacious project; said he thought it would be good fun; pleasant company, and all that; also he darkly hinted—perhaps for the benefit of the American young ladies—that Paris had been altogether too pallid of late, and wanted a little crimson added to its complexion. And indeed as the little banquet proceeded, these intrepid schemes widened out, in a half-jocular way. Why should the runaway party stop at Paris? Why should they not all go on to the Mediterranean together, to breathe the sweet airs blown in from the sea, and watch the Spring emptying her lavish lap-full of flowers over the land? Alas! it fell to Vincent's lot to demolish these fairy-like dreams. He said he would willingly wait to see the recruited party off

by that night's steamer; and would send any telegrams for them, or deliver any messages; but he had to return to London the next morning, without fail. And then Miss Louie Drexel said it was a pity to spoil a pleasant evening by talking of impossibilities; and that they had already sufficiently outraged conventionalities by running away with a carriage and pair and breaking in upon a wedding tour. So the complaisant young bride had for the moment to abandon her half-serious, half-whimsical designs; and perhaps she even hoped that Miss Drexel had not overheard her suggested comparison between the British Embassy at Paris and Gretna Green.

At nine o'clock the carriage came round, and at nine o'clock the younger people, having got their good-byes said all over again, set out for home.

"I suppose we ought to keep this little expedition a secret," said Vincent, as they were climbing up from the dusky valley to the moonlight above, which was now very clear and white.

"Why?" said Miss Louie.

"Rather unusual—isn't it?" he asked, doubtfully, for he knew little of such matters.

"That's what made it so nice," she answered, promptly. "Don't you think they were charmed? Fancy their being quite alone in that big hotel, waiting for a steamer! We had it all planned out days ago. Didn't you suspect in the least—when you knew they were going by Newhaven and Dieppe, and that they would have to wait till eleven to-night? I'm sure they would have been delighted if we had gone over to Paris with them, and down to the Mediterranean: but I suppose that would have been a little too much—just a little too much!"

And if Miss Drexel was vivacious and talkative on her way out, she was equally so on the way back; so that Vincent, in such cheerful company, had little reason to regret their having captured and run away with him. Then again the night was surpassingly beautiful—the moonlight grey on the land and white on the sea; the heavens cloudless; the world everywhere apparently silent and asleep. Not that they were to get all the way home without a little bit of an adventure, however. When they reached the top of the height just west of Rottingdean, Louie Drexel proposed that they should get out and walk along the cliff for a while, leaving the carriage to go slowly on by road. This they accordingly did; and very soon the carriage was out of sight; for at this point the highway is formed by a deep cutting in the chalk. It was pleasant to be by themselves on such a night—high up on this lofty cliff, overlooking the wide, far-shimmering, silver sea.

Presently there came into the stillness a sound of distant voices; and shortly afterwards, at the crest of the hill, a band of strayed revellers appeared in sight, swaying much in their walk, and singing diverse choruses with energy rather

than with skill. They were in high good humour, all of them. As they drew near, Vincent perceived that one of them was a soldier; and he seemed the centre of attraction; this one and that clung to his arm, until their legs, becoming involved, carried them wide away, when two other members of the group would occupy the twin places of honour. The soldier was drunk, too; but he had the honour of the flag to maintain; and made some heroic effort to march straight.

Now what with their insensate howling and staggering, they were almost on Vincent and his two companions before they were aware; but instantly there was a profusion of offers of hospitality. The gentleman must drink with them, at the Royal Oak. The gentleman declined to drink, and civilly bade them good-night. At the same moment another member of the jovial crew appeared to have discovered that there were also two young ladies here; most probably he had a dim suspicion there might only be one; however, it was this one, the one nearest, he insisted should also go down and have a glass at the Royal Oak. It was all done in good fellowship, with no harm meant; but when at the same time this particular roysterer declared he would have his sweetheart come along o' him, and caught Miss Louie by the arm, he had distinctly overstept the bounds of prudence.

"Hands off!" said Vincent; and he slung the fellow a clip on the ear that sent him staggering, until his legs got mixed up somehow, and away he went headlong on to the grass.

Then he said in a rapid undertone to the two girls—

"Off you go to the carriage—quick!"

He turned to the now murmuring group.

"What do you want?" he said. "I can't fight all of you: I'll fight the soldier—make a ring, to see fair play—"

He glanced over his shoulder: the two girls had disappeared: now he breathed freely.

"But, look here," said he in a most amicable tone, "you've had a glass—any one can see that—and it's no use a man trying to fight if he's a bit unsteady on his pins; you know that quite well. And I don't want to fight any of you. If you ask me in a friendly way, I'll go down to the Royal Oak and have something with you; or I'll treat you, if you like that better. I call that fair."

And they seemed to think it fair, too; so they picked up their companion (who looked drowsy) and helped him along. But they hadn't gone half-a-dozen yards when two dark figures appeared at the top of the chalk cutting; and these, when they came quickly up, Vincent to his surprise discovered to be the coachman and footman.

"Where are the young ladies?" he demanded, instantly and angrily.

"Miss Drexel is on the box, sir—she sent us to you," said the coachman—

staring with amazement at the revellers, and no doubt wondering when the fighting was about to begin.

"Oh, go away back!" said he. "Get the ladies into the carriage and drive them home! I'm going to have a drink with these good fellows—I'll follow on foot!"

"I'm quite sure, sir, Miss Drexel won't go," said the coachman.

But here the soldier stepped forward. He had arrived at some nebulous perception of the predicament; and he constituted himself spokesman of the party. They had no wish to inconvenience the gentleman. He hoped some other night—proud to see such a gentleman—wouldn't interfere with ladies—not interfere with anybody—all gentlemen and good friends—no use in animosity—no offence I meant—no offence taken—

This harangue might have gone on all night had not Vincent cut it short by requesting to be allowed to hand his friends five shillings to drink his health withal; and away the jocund brethren went to obtain more liquor—if haply they could induce the landlord of the Royal Oak to serve them.

And here, sure enough, was Miss Louie Drexel seated sedately on the box, whip and reins in hand; and there was Miss Anna, in the white moonlight, at the horses' heads. When Vincent and his two companions were in the carriage again, he said to the elder of them—

"Why didn't you drive away home?"

"Drive away home?" said she, with some touch of vibrant indignation in her voice. "And leave you there? I was just as near as possible going back myself, with the whip in my hand. Do you think I couldn't have lashed my way through those drunken fools?"

CHAPTER VI.

A SPLIT AT LAST.

The renovation of Musselburgh House took more time than had been hoped; bride and bridegroom remained abroad, basking in the sweet airs and sunlight of the Mediterranean spring; and it was not until well on in the month of May that they returned to London. Immediately after their arrival Vincent called on them—one afternoon on his way down to St. Stephen's. He stayed only a few minutes; and had little to say. But the moment he had left Lady Musselburgh

turned to her husband.

"Oh, Hubert, isn't it dreadful! Did you ever see such a change in any human being? And no one to tell us of it—not even his own father—nor a word from Louie Drexel, though she wrote often enough about him and what he was doing in the House—"

"Yes, he does look ill," said Lord Musselburgh, with a seriousness not usual with him. "Very ill, indeed. Yet he doesn't seem to know it—declares there is nothing the matter with him—shows a little impatience, even, when you begin to ask questions. I suppose he has been working too hard; too eager and anxious all the way round; too ambitious—not like most young men. He'd better give up that newspaper-nonsense, for one thing."

"Oh, it isn't that, Hubert; it isn't that!" she exclaimed, in rather piteous accents; and she walked away to the window (this was the very room in which Vincent had first set eyes on Maisrie Bethune and her grandfather).

She stood there, alone, for a time. Then her husband went and joined her, and linked his arm within hers. She was crying a little.

"I did it for the best, Hubert," she sobbed.

"Did what for the best?"

"Getting that girl away. I never thought it would come to this."

"Now, now, Madge," said he, in a very affectionate fashion, "don't you worry about nothing—or rather, it isn't nothing, for Vin does look pretty seedy; but you mustn't assume that you are in any way responsible. People don't die nowadays of separation and a broken heart—not nowadays. He is fagged; he is not used to the late hours of the House of Commons; then there's that newspaper work—"

"But his manner, Hubert, his manner!" she exclaimed. "He seemed as if he no longer cared for anything in life; he hardly listened when I told him where we had been; he appeared to be thinking of something quite different—as if he were looking at ghosts."

"And perhaps he was looking at ghosts," said her husband. "For it was by that table there he first saw those two people who have made all this trouble. But why should you consider yourself responsible, Madge? It wasn't your money that sent them out of the country. It wasn't you who found out what they really were."

She passed her handkerchief across her eyes.

"I was quite sure," she went on—not heeding this consolation—"that as soon as she was got away—as soon as he was removed from the fascination of her actual presence—he would begin to see things in their true light. And then, thrown into the society of a charming and clever girl like Louie Drexel, I hoped everything for him. And is this all that has come of it, that he looks as if he were at death's door? It isn't the House of Commons, Hubert; and it isn't the newspaper-

work: it is simply that he still believes in that girl, and that he is eating his heart out about her absence, and has no one to confide in. For that is the worst of it all: it is all a sealed book now, as between him and us. He was for leaving my house in Brighton—oh, the rage he was in with me about her!—and it would have been for the last time too, I know; only that I promised never again to mention the subject to him, and on that condition we have got on fairly well since. But how am I to keep silence any longer? I cannot see my boy like that. I must speak to him; I must ask him if he is still so mad as to believe in the honesty of those two people; and then, if I find that his infatuation still exists, even after all this time, then I must simply tell him that they took money to go away. How can he get over that? How can he get over that, Hubert?"

In her despair, this was almost a challenge as well as an appeal. But her husband was doubtful.

"When a man is in love with a woman," said he, "he can forgive a good lot—confound it, he can forgive everything, or nearly everything, so long as she can persuade him she loves him in return——"

"But not this, Hubert, not this!" the young wife exclaimed. "Even if he could forgive her being a thief and the accomplice of an old charlatan and swindler—and what an 'if!—imagine that of Vincent—of Vincent, who is as proud as Lucifer—imagine that of him!—but even if he were willing to forgive all that, how could he forgive her being bought over, her taking money to remain away from him? No, no, Hubert: surely there is a limit, even to a young man's folly!"

"Of course you know best," her husband said, in a dubious kind of way. "I've seen some queer things in my time, with young men. And Vin is an obstinate devil, and tenacious: he sticks to anything he takes up: look at him and that wretched newspaper-work, for example. If he has persuaded himself of the innocence and honour of this girl, it may be hard to move him. And I remember there was something very winning and attractive about her—something that bespoke favour——"

"That was what made her so useful to that old impostor!" Lady Musselburgh said, vindictively.

"Of course," he admitted, "as you say, here is the undoubted fact of their taking the money. If Vin is to be convinced at all, it is possible that may convince him."

"Very well, then," said she, with decision, "he must and shall be convinced; and that no further off than to-morrow morning. I'll tell Harland I'm coming along to lunch; so that he may be in the house, to give me any papers I may want. And surely, surely, when Vincent perceives what these people are, and what an escape he has had, he will cease to mope and fret: at his time of life there ought to be other things to think of than a girl who has deceived him all

the way through, and ended by taking money to leave the country!"

But notwithstanding all this brave confidence, Lady Musselburgh felt very nervous and anxious as she went down next morning to Grosvenor Place. She was alone—her husband was coming along later, for lunch; and she went on foot, to give her a little more time to arrange her plan of procedure. For this was her last bolt, and she knew it. If his fatal obstinacy withstood this final assault, then there was no hope for him, or for her far-reaching schemes with regard to him.

She went into the drawing-room; and he came as soon as he was sent for. These two were now alone.

"Do you know, Vin," she began at once, "Hubert and I have been much concerned about you; for though you won't admit there is anything the matter, the change in your appearance struck us yesterday the moment you came in: indeed, it made me quite anxious; and after you were gone, Hubert and I talked a little about you and your affairs—you may be sure with only the one wish in our minds. Hubert thinks you are over-fagged; that you are too close in your attendance at the House; and that you should give up your newspaper-writing for a time. I wish it were no more than that. But I suspect there is something else—"

"Aunt," said he, interrupting her—and yet with something of a tired air, "do you think there is any use in talking, and inquiring, and suggesting? What has happened, has happened. It is something you don't understand; and something you couldn't put right—with all your good wishes."

"Yes, yes," she said eagerly, for she was rejoiced to find that he took her interference so amiably: "that is quite right; and mind you, I don't forget the agreement we came to at Brighton, that a certain subject should never be referred to by either of us. I quite remember that; and you know I have never sought to return to it again in any way whatever. But your looks yesterday, Vin, frightened me; and at this moment—why, you are not like my dear boy at all. I wish in all seriousness you had come over to Paris with us—you and Louie—and gone with us to the Mediterranean; we should not have allowed you to fall into this condition—"

"Oh, I'm well enough, aunt!" said he.

"You are not well!" she insisted. "And why? Because your mind is ill at ease—"

"And very little comfort I have to hope for from you," said he, remembering former conversations: but there was no bitterness in his tone—only a sort of resigned hopelessness.

"Now, that is not fair, Vin!" she protested. "If I said things to you you did not like, what motive had I but your happiness? And now at this moment, if I re-open that subject, it is not the kind of comfort you apparently hope for that

I am prepared to bring you, but something quite different. I should like to heal your mental ailment, once and for all, by convincing you of the truth."

"Yes, I think we have heard something of that sort on previous occasions," he said, rather scornfully. "The truth as it is in George Morris! Well, I will tell you what would be more useful, more to the point, and more becoming. Before saying anything further about that old man and his granddaughter, I think you ought to go and seek them out, and go down on your knees to them, and ask their pardon—"

"For what?"

"For what you have already said of them—and suspected."

"Really you try my patience too much!" she exclaimed, with some show of temper. "What have I said or suspected of them that was not amply justified by the account of them that your father offered to show you? Of course you wouldn't look at it. Certainly not! Facts are inconvenient things, most uncomfortable things, where one's prepossessions are involved. But I had no objection to looking at it—"

"I suppose not!" said he.

"And my eyes were not blinded: I could accept evidence when it was put before me."

"Evidence!" he repeated. "You forget that I have been across the Atlantic since that precious document was compiled. I heard how that evidence had been got: I could see how it could be perverted to suit the malignant theories of a pack of detectives. And if I came back with any settled conviction, it was that you and one or two others—myself, too, in a way—could do no better than go and humble ourselves before that old man and that girl, and beg for their forgiveness, and their forgetfulness of the wrongs and insults we have put upon them."

"Oh, this is beyond anything!" she cried—rather losing command of herself. "You drive me to speak plain. Everything your father and I could think of was tried to cure you of this mad infatuation—the most patient inquiry—expenditure of money—representations that would have convinced any sane person. Nothing was of any use. What was to be done next? Well, we could only buy up those honourable persons—who were not adventurers in any kind of way—oh, certainly not!—but all the same they were willing to be bought; and so, on payment of a substantial consideration, they agreed to pack up their traps and be off. What do you think of that? What do you say to that? Where was the old gentleman's indomitable pride?—where was the girl's pretended affection for you?—when they consented to take a good round sum of money and be off? How can you explain that away?"

She regarded him with a certain defiance—for she was moved to anger by his obduracy. But if she expected him to wince under this sudden stab she was

mistaken.

"How do I know that this is true?" he said, calmly.

"I am not in the habit of speaking untruths," she said, slightly drawing herself up.

"Oh, of course not," he answered. "But all through this matter there has been a good deal of twisting about and misrepresentation. I should like to know from whom Mr. Bethune got this money—and in what form."

Well, she was prepared.

"I suppose you would be convinced," said she, "if I showed you the receipt—a receipt for £5,000—which he signed and gave to George Morris?"

"Where is that receipt?" he asked.

"In this house. I will go to your father, and get it. Shall I ask him at the same time for those other documents which you would not read? Perhaps all taken together they might enable you to realise the truth at last."

"No, thank you," said he, coldly. "I know how those other documents were procured. I shall be glad to see the receipt."

She hurried away, anxious to strike while the iron was hot, and certain she had already made a profound impression. And so she had, in one way, all unknowing. When she left the room, he remained standing, gazing blankly at the sides of the books on the table: outwardly impassive, but with his brain working rapidly enough. He made no manner of doubt that she could produce this receipt. He took it for granted that George Bethune had accepted the money. Of course, Maisrie had nothing to do with it; her grandfather kept her in ignorance of his pecuniary affairs; and it would be enough for him to say that she must go away with him from England—she was obedient in all things. And no doubt the old man had been cajoled and flattered into believing he was acting justly and in the best interests of every one concerned; there could have been little difficulty about that; he was quick to persuade himself of anything that happened to fall in with the needs of the moment. All this Vincent understood at once. But when he came to consider that it was his own relatives who had brought upon him all the long torture and suffering of these bygone months—and not only that: for what was he or his hidden pain?—but also that they had once more driven forth those two tired wanderers—the old man who had some wistful notion of ending his days in his own country, the young girl whose maiden eyes had just made confession of her love-secret—then his heart grew hot within him. It was too cruel. When Lady Musselburgh returned with the receipt in her hand, he took the paper, and merely glanced at it.

"And whose clever and original idea was this?" he demanded—with what she took to be indifference.

"But Vincent—are you convinced at last!" she exclaimed. "Surely you must

see for yourself now. You will give up thinking of them—thinking of that girl especially when you see what she is—”

”Whose idea was it to get them sent away?” he repeated.

”Well, it was my idea,” she said; ”but your father paid the money.”

He was silent for a second or two, and then he said slowly—

”And you are my nearest relatives; and this is what you have done, not to me only, but to one who is dearer to me than life. So be it. But you cannot expect me to remain longer under this roof, or to sit down at table, anywhere, with my cruellest enemies—”

She turned very pale.

”Vincent!” she exclaimed.

”It is a question of taking sides,” he went on, with perfect composure; ”and I go over to the other side. They most need help: they are poor and friendless. I hope the mischief you have done is not irreparable; I cannot tell; but I dare say when you and I meet again time will have shown.”

She was thunderstruck and stupefied; she did not even seek to detain him as he left the room. For there was a curious air of self-possession, of resolution, about his manner: this was no pique of disappointed passion, nor any freak of temper. And she could not but ask herself, in a breathless sort of way, whether after all he might not be in the right about those people; and, in that case, what was this that she had brought about? She was frightened—too frightened to reason with herself, perhaps: she only saw Vincent leaving his father’s roof—cutting himself off from his own family—and she had a dumb consciousness that it was her work, through some fatal error of judgment. And she seemed to know instinctively that this step that he had taken was irrevocable—and that she was in some dim way responsible for all that had occurred.

When Lord Musselburgh arrived, he and Harland Harris came upstairs together; and almost directly afterwards luncheon was announced. As they were about to go down to the dining-room the great Communist-capitalist looked round with a little air of impatience and said—

”But where is Vin?”

”He was here a short time ago,” said Lady Musselburgh: she dared not say more.

Mr. Harris, from below, sent a message to his son’s room: the answer—which Lady Musselburgh heard in silence—was that they were not to wait luncheon for him.

”Too busy with his reply to the *Sentinel*,” Musselburgh suggested. ”Sharp cuts and thrusts going. I wonder that celestial minds should grow so acrid over such a subject as the nationalisation of tithe.”

There was some scuffle on the stairs outside, to which nobody (except Lady

Musselburgh, whose ears were painfully on the alert) paid any attention; but when a hansom was called up to the front door, Harland Harris happened to look out.

"What, is he going off somewhere? I never knew any creature so careless about his meals. I presume his indifference means a good digestion."

"Oh, Vin's digestion is all right," Lord Musselburgh said. "I hear he dines every night at the House of Commons—and yet he is alive—"

"But there are his portmanteaus!" Mr. Harris exclaimed, and he even rose and went to the window for a second. Well, he was just in time to see Vincent step into the cab, and drive off; and therewith he returned to his place at table, and proceeded, in his usual bland and somewhat patronising manner, to tell Lord Musselburgh of certain experiments he was having made in copper-lustre. He was not in the least concerned about that departing cab; nor did he know that that was the last glimpse of his son he was to have for many and many a day.

And meanwhile Lady Musselburgh sate there frightened, and guilty, and silent. And that without reason; for what she had done she had done with the full concurrence and approval of her brother-in-law and her *fiancé* (as he then was). Yet somehow she seemed to feel herself entirely answerable for all that had happened—for the failure of all her schemes—for the catastrophe that had resulted. And the moment she got outside her brother-in-law's house, she began and confessed the whole truth to her husband.

"But why didn't you tell Harris?" said he, pausing as if even now he would go back.

"Oh, I couldn't, Hubert; I daren't!" she said, evidently in great distress. "I was so confident everything would come right—I advised him—I persuaded him to pay the £5,000—"

"Oh, nonsense!" was the impatient reply. "A man doesn't hand over £5,000 unless he is himself convinced that it is worth while. And he got what he bargained for. Those people have gone away; they don't interfere any more—"

"Ah, but that is not all," Lady Musselburgh put in, rather sadly. "I made so sure that Vin would forget—that as soon as the hallucination had worn off a little, he would see what those people really were, and turn his eyes elsewhere: yet apparently he believes in their honesty more firmly than ever—talks of my going and asking their pardon—and the like; and now he has wholly broken away from us—declares he will never be under the same roof with us, or sit down at the same table with us. He has gone over to the other side, he says, because they are poor and friendless. Poor and friendless!" she repeated, with a snap of anger—"living on the fat of the land through their thieving! And yet—"

And here again she paused, as if recalling something to herself: "Do you know, Hubert, I was startled and frightened by Vin's manner to-day; for I had

suddenly to ask myself whether after all it was possible he might be in the right, and we altogether wrong. In all other things he shows himself so clear-headed and able and shrewd; and then he has seen the world; you would not take him to be one who could be easily deceived. Sometimes I hardly know what to think. But at all events, this is what you must do now, Hubert: you must get hold of him, and persuade him to go back home, before Harland knows anything of what had been intended. He can invent some excuse about the portmanteaus. You can go down to the House to-night, and see him there; and if you persuade him to return to Grosvenor Place, that will be so much of the mischief set straight. That is the first thing to be done; but afterwards—”

It was quite clear that she knew not what to think, for she went on again, almost as if talking to herself—

”Of course, if the girl were a perfectly good and honest girl, and above suspicion of every kind, Vin’s constancy and devotion to her would be a very fine and noble thing; and I for one should be proud of him for it. But as things are, it is a monomania—nothing else than a monomania! He must see that she is in league with that old man to get money on false pretences.”

”He sees nothing of the kind,” said her husband bluntly. ”She may or she may not be; I know little or nothing about her; but if she is, Vin doesn’t see it: you may make up your mind about that.”

”And yet he seems sharp-sighted in other things,” said Lady Musselburgh in a pensive sort of way; and then she added: ”However, the first step to be taken is to get him back to his own family; and none can do that so well as you, Hubert; you are his old friend; and you stand between us, as it were. And there’s one thing about Vin: he can’t disappear out of the way; you can always get hold of him—at the House of Commons.”

Lord Musselburgh had not been long married; he did as he was bid. And very eagerly did Vincent welcome this ambassador, when he encountered him in the Lobby.

”Come out on to the Terrace. I was just going to write to you: I want you to do me the greatest service you can imagine!”

”Here I am, ready to do anybody any number of services,” said Lord Musselburgh, as they proceeded to stroll up and down this dark space, with the wide river flowing silently by, and the innumerable small beads of gold showing where London lay in the dusk. ”Only too happy. And I am in the best position for being mediator, for I have nothing to gain from either side—except, of course that I should be extremely sorry to see you quarrelling with your relations. This is always a mistake, Vin, my boy: bad for you, bad for them. And I hope you will let me go back with the important part of my commission done—that is to say, I was to persuade you to return to Grosvenor Place, just as if nothing had happened.

My wife is awfully upset about it—thinks it is entirely owing to her; whereas I don't see that it is at all. She has been trying to do her best for everybody—for your father as well as for yourself. And the notion that you should cut yourself off from your family naturally seems very dreadful to her; and if I can take her the assurance that you don't mean anything of the kind—very well!"

"Oh, but look here, Musselburgh," said Vincent, "you entirely mistake. It was not about that I wished to see you: not at all: on that point it is useless saying anything. You must assure Lady Musselburgh that this is no piece of temper on my part—nothing to be smoothed over, and hushed up. I have seen all along that it was inevitable. From the moment that my aunt and my father took up that position against—against Maisrie Bethune and her grandfather—I foresaw that sooner or later this must come. I have tried to reason with them; I have assured them that their suspicions and their definite charges were as cruel as they were false; and all to no purpose. And this last thing: this bribing of an old man, who can be too easily persuaded, to take his granddaughter away with him and subject her to the homeless life she had led for so many years—perhaps there are some other considerations I need not mention—this is too much. But I knew that sooner or later a severance would come between them and me; and I am not unprepared. You wondered at my drudging away at that newspaper work, when my father was allowing me a handsome income. Now do you see the use of it? I am independent. I can do as I please. I can't make a fortune; but I can earn enough to live—and something more. Let them go their way, as I go mine: it has not been all my doing."

Lord Musselburgh was disconcerted; but he was a dutiful husband; he went on to argue. He found he might as well attempt to argue with a milestone. Nothing could shake this young man's determination.

"I told Lady Musselburgh I had gone over to the other side, this time for good," said he. "We are in opposite camps now. We have been so all along—but not openly. This piece of treachery has been too much for me: we are better apart: I could not sit down at table with people who had acted like that—whatever their motives were. But you, Musselburgh, you were not concerned in that wretched piece of scheming; and as I tell you, you can do me the greatest possible service. Will you do it? Or will you rather cast in your lot with them?"

"Oh, well," said Musselburgh, rather disappointedly, "I don't see why I should be compelled to take sides. I want to do my best for everybody concerned. I've just come into the family, as you might say; and it seems a pity there should be any quarrel or break up. I had a kind of notion that we should all of us—but particularly my wife and myself and you and—and—your wife—I thought our little party of four might have a very pleasant time together, both at home and abroad. My wife and I have often talked of it, and amused ourselves with

sketching out plans. Seems such a pity—”

”Yes,” said Vincent, abruptly, ”but there are other things in life besides going to Monte Carlo and staking five-franc pieces.”

”What is this that you want me to do?” his friend asked next—seeing that those inducements did not avail.

”Well,” said Vincent, ”I suppose you know that Lady Musselburgh showed me this morning the receipt Mr. Bethune gave George Morris for the £5,000. It was a simple receipt: nothing more. But everybody knows George Morris is not the man to part with money unconditionally; there must have been arrangements and pledges; and I want to discover what Mr. Bethune undertook to do, where he undertook to go. Morris won’t tell me, that is certain enough: but he would probably tell you.”

Lord Musselburgh hesitated.

”Why,” said he, ”you know why that money was paid. It was paid for the express purpose of getting them away—so that you should not know where they are—”

”Precisely so,” said Vincent. ”And you would therefore be undoing a part of the wrong that has been done them, by your wife and my father.”

”Oh, I don’t call it doing a wrong to a man to give him £5,000,” said Lord Musselburgh, with a touch of resentment. ”He needn’t have taken the money unless he liked.”

”Do you know what representations were made to him to induce him to take it?” Vincent said.

”Well, I don’t,” was the reply. ”They settled all that amongst themselves; and I was merely made acquainted with the results. It would hardly have been my place to interfere, you see; it was before my marriage, remember; in any case, I don’t know that I should have wanted to have any say in the matter. However, the actual outcome we all of us know; and you must confess, Vin, whatever persuasions were used, it looks a rather shady transaction.”

”Yes—on the part of those who induced him to accept the bribe!” Vincent said, boldly.

”Oh, come, come,” Lord Musselburgh interposed, rather testily, ”don’t be so bigoted. It isn’t only your considering that girl to be everything that is fine and wonderful—I can understand that—the glamour of love can do anything; but you go too far in professing the greatest admiration and respect for this old man. Leave us some chance of agreeing with you, of believing you sane. For you can’t deny that he took the money: there is the plain and simple fact staring you in the face. More than that, his taking it was the justification of those who offered it: it proved to them that he was not the kind of person with whom you should be connected by marriage. I say nothing about the young lady; I don’t know

her; perhaps her association all these years with this old—well, I won't call him names—has not affected her in any way; perhaps she believes in him as implicitly as you appear to do. But as for him: well, take any unprejudiced outsider, like myself; what am I to think when I find him accepting this money from strangers?"

"Yes," said Vincent, a little absently, "I suppose, to an outsider, that would look bad. But it is because you don't know him, Musselburgh; or the story of his life; or his circumstances. I confess that at one time there were things that disquieted me; I rather shut my eyes to them; but now that I understand what this man is, and what he has gone through, and how he bears himself, it isn't only pity I feel for him, it is respect, and more than respect. But it's a long story; and it would have to be told to sympathetic ears; it would be little use telling it to my father or to my aunt—they have the detectives' version before them—they have the detectives' reading of the case."

"Well, tell me, at least," said his friend. "I want to get at the truth. I have no prejudice or prepossession one way or the other. For another thing, I like to hear the best of everybody—and to believe it, if I can; it makes life pleasanter; and I can't forget, either, that it was through me you got to know George Bethune."

It was a long story, as Vincent had said; and it was a difficult one to set in order and in a proper light: but it was chiefly based on what had been told him by the Toronto banker; and Mr. Thompson's generous interpretation of it ran through it all. Lord Musselburgh listened with the greatest interest and attention. What seemed mostly to strike him was the banker's phrase—"Call George Bethune an impostor, if you like; but the man he has imposed on, his whole life through, has been—George Bethune."

"Well, it's all very extraordinary," he said, when Vincent had finished. "I wish I had taken the trouble to become a little better acquainted with him; one is so apt to judge by the outside; I thought he was merely a picturesque old fellow with a mad enthusiasm about Scotland. And yet I don't know what to say even now. All that you have told me sounds very plausible and possible—if you take that way of looking at it; and the whole thing seems so pitiable, especially for the girl: he has his delusions and self-confidence—she has only her loneliness. But at the same time, Vin, you must admit that these little weaknesses of his might easily be misconstrued—"

"Certainly," said Vincent, with promptitude. "It is just as Mr. Thompson said: if you choose to look at George Bethune through blue spectacles, his way of life must appear very doubtful: if you choose to look at him through pink spectacles, there is something almost heroic about him. And I think, Musselburgh, if you knew the lion-hearted old man a little better, you wouldn't shrink from acknowledging that there was something fine and even grand in his character. As for Maisrie—as for Miss Bethune—she asks for no generous consideration, or

forbearance, or anything of the kind; she asks for no leniency of judgment, and needs none; she is beyond and above all that. I know her—none better than I; and she has only to remain what she is—'dass Gott sie erhalte, so schön und rein und hold'!"

There was a break in his voice as he spoke. Lord Musselburgh was silent for a moment—he felt like an intruder upon something too sacred. And yet he had his mission; so presently he forced himself to resume:

"Well, after all, Vin, I think you must grant that there is something to be said for your relatives, even if they have been mistaken. They could not know all that you know—all that you learned in Canada as well; they could only judge from the outside; they could only believe what they heard—"

"Why did they interfere at all?" Vincent demanded, in his turn. "Why had they Mr. Bethune's steps dogged by detectives?"

"You should be the last to protest. It was entirely for your sake that it was done."

"Yes," said Vincent, with a certain scorn. "It was for my sake they were so ready to suspect—it was for my sake they were so eager to regard everything from the attorney's point of view! They would not take my word for anything; they would rather trust to their private enquiry offices. I was supposed to be so easily blinded; the swindlers had such a willing dupe; no reliance was to be placed but on the testimony of spies. What childish rubbish! Why, I introduced my aunt to Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter: she could not find a word to say against them—but her suspicions remained all the same! And then apparently she went and consulted with my father. It was so dreadful that I was being cheated by those two dangerous characters! Couldn't the lawyers and their private inquiry agents—couldn't they make out some story that would appal me? Couldn't they make up some bogey—straw, and an old coat—that would terrify me out of my wits? And then when I wasn't appalled by their idle trash of stories—oh, for goodness sake, get those desperate creatures smuggled away out of the country! No safety unless they were hidden away somewhere! And then they went to the old man; and I can imagine how they persuaded him. The greatest kindness to every one concerned if only he would fall in with their views; he would save his granddaughter from entering a family who had mistaken, but undoubted, prejudices against her; and of course they couldn't allow him to put himself so much about without endeavouring to pay part of the cost. It was no solatium to the young lady—oh, no, certainly not!—probably she was destined for much higher things; and it was no gift to himself; it was merely that the relatives of that hot-headed young man were desirous of pleasing themselves by showing how much they appreciated his, Mr. Bethune's, generosity in making this little sacrifice. Well, they succeeded: but they little knew—and they little know—what

they have done!"

Perhaps there was something in the proud and withal disdainful tones of the young man's voice that was quite as convincing as his words; at all events, his friend said—

"Well, I sympathise with you, Vin, I do really. But you see how I am situated. I am an emissary—an intermediary—I want peace——"

"It is no use saying peace where there is no peace," Vincent broke in. "Nor need there be war. Silence is best. Let what has been done go; it cannot be undone now."

"Vincent—if you would only think how fond your aunt is of you—if you would think of her distress——"

"It was she who ought to have considered first," was the rejoinder. "Do you imagine I have suffered nothing, before I went to America, and then, and since? But that is of little account. I could forgive whatever has happened to myself. It is when I think of some one else—sent adrift upon the world again—but it is better not to talk!"

"Well, yes," persisted Lord Musselburgh, who was in a sad quandary; for the passionate indignation of this young man seemed so much stronger than any persuasive argument that could be brought against it, "I can perfectly understand how you may consider yourself wronged and injured; and how much more you feel what you consider wrong and injury done to others; but you ought to be a little generous, and take motives into account. Supposing your father and your aunt were mistaken in acting as they did, it was not through any selfishness on their part. It was for your welfare, as they thought. Surely you must grant that to them."

"I will grant anything to them, in the way of justification," said Vincent, "if they will only take the first step to make atonement for the mischief they have wrought. And that they can do through you. They can tell you on what conditions Mr. Bethune was persuaded to take the money; so that I may go to him, and bring him back—and her."

"But probably they don't know where he is!" his friend exclaimed, in perfect honesty. "My impression was that Mr. Bethune agreed to leave this country for a certain time; but of course no one would think of banishing him to any particular spot."

"And so they themselves don't know where Mr. Bethune has gone?" said Vincent, slowly.

"I believe not. I am almost certain they don't. But I will make inquiries, if you like. In the meantime," said Musselburgh, returning to his original prayer, "do consider, Vin, and be reasonable, and go back to your father's house to-night. Don't make a split in the family. Give them credit for wishing you well. Let me

take that message from you to my wife—that you will go home to Grosvenor Place to-night.”

“Oh, no,” said Vincent, with an air of quiet resolve. “No, no. This is no quarrel. This is no piece of temper. It is far more serious than that; and, as I say, I have seen all along that it was inevitable. After what I have told you, you must recognise for yourself what the situation is. I have spoken to you very freely and frankly; because I know you wish to be friendly; and because I think you want to see the whole case clearly and honestly. But how could I talk to them, or try to explain? Do you think I would insult Miss Bethune by offering them one word of excuse, either on her behalf or on that of her grandfather? No, and it would be no use besides. They are mad with prejudice. No doubt they say I am mad with prepossession. Very well; let it stand so.”

Lord Musselburgh at length perceived that his task was absolutely futile. His only chance now was to bring Vincent into a more placable disposition by getting him the information he sought; but he had not much hope on that score; for people do not pay £5,000 and then at once render up all the advantages they fancy they have purchased. So here was a deadlock—he moodily said to himself, as he walked away home to Piccadilly.

And as for Vincent? Well, as it chanced, on the next morning—it was a Wednesday morning—when he went across from the Westminster Palace Hotel to the House of Commons, and got his usual little bundle of letters, the very first one that caught his eye bore the Toronto post-mark. How anxiously he had looked for it from day to day—wondering why Mr. Thompson had heard no news—and becoming more and more heart-sick and hopeless as the weary time went by without a sign—and behold! here it was at last.

CHAPTER VII.

NEW WAYS OF LIFE.

But no sooner had he torn open the envelope than his heart seemed to stand still—with a sort of fear and amazement. For this was Maisrie’s own handwriting that he beheld—as startling a thing as if she herself had suddenly appeared before him, after these long, voiceless months. Be sure the worthy banker’s accompanying letter did not win much regard: it was this sheet of thin blue paper that he quickly unfolded, his eye catching a sentence here and there, and eager to grasp

all that she had to say at once. Alas! there was no need for any such haste: when he came to read the message that she had sent to Toronto, it had little to tell him of that which he most wanted to know. And yet it was a marvellous thing—to hear her speak, as it were! There was no date nor place mentioned in the letter; but none the less had this actual thing come all the way from her; her fingers had penned those lines; she had folded up this sheet of paper that now lay in his hands. It appeared to have been written on board ship: further than that all was uncertain and unknown.

He went into the Library, and sought out a quiet corner; there was something in the strange reticence of this communication that he wished to study with care. And yet there was an apparent simplicity, too. She began by telling Mr. Thompson that her grandfather had asked her to write to him, merely to recall both of them to his memory; and she went on to say that they often talked of him, and thought of him, and of bygone days in Toronto. "Whether we shall ever surprise you by an unexpected visit in Yonge-street," she proceeded, "I cannot tell; for grandfather's plans seem to be very vague at present, and, in fact, I do not think he likes to be questioned. But as far as I can judge he does not enjoy travelling as much as he used; it appears to fatigue him more than formerly; and from my heart I wish he would settle down in some quiet place, and let me care for him better than I can do in long voyages and railway-journeys. You know what a brave face he puts on everything—and, indeed, becomes a little impatient if you show anxiety on his behalf; still, I can see he is not what he was; and I think he should rest now. Why not in his own country?—that has been his talk for many a day; but I suppose he considers me quite a child yet, and won't confide in me; so that when I try to persuade him that we should go to Scotland, and settle down to a quiet life in some place familiar to him, he grows quite angry, and tells me I don't understand such things. But I know his own fancy goes that way. The other morning I was reading to him on deck, and somehow I got to think he was not listening; so I raised my head; and I saw there were tears running down his cheeks—he did not seem to know I was there at all—and I heard him say to himself—'The beech-woods of Balloray—one look at them—before I die!' And now I never read to him any of the Scotch songs that mention places—such as Yarrow, or Craigieburn, or Logan Braes—he becomes so strangely agitated; for some time afterwards he walks up and down, by himself, repeating the name, as if he saw the place before him; and I know that he is constantly thinking about Scotland, but won't acknowledge it to me or to any one.

"Then here is another piece of news, which is all the news one can send from on board a ship; and it is that poor dear grandfather has grown very *peremp-tory*! Can you believe it? Can you imagine him irritable and impatient? You know how he has always scorned to be vexed about trifles; how he could always

escape from everyday annoyances and exasperations into his own dream-world; but of late it has been quite different; and as I am constantly with him, I am the chief sufferer. Of course I don't mind it, not in the least; if I minded it I wouldn't mention it, you may be sure; I know what his heart really feels towards me. Indeed, it amuses me a little; it is as if I had grown a child again, it is 'Do this' and 'Do that'—and no reason given. Ah, well, there is not much amusement for either of us two: it is something." And here she went on to speak of certain common friends in Toronto, to whom she wished to be remembered; finally winding up with a very pretty message from "Yours affectionately, Margaret Bethune."

Then Vincent bethought him of the banker; what comments had he to make?

"Dear sir, I enclose you a letter, received to-day, from the pernicious little Omahussy, who says neither where she is nor where she is going, gives no date nor the name of the ship from which she writes, and is altogether a vexatious young witch. But I imagine this may be the old gentleman's doing; he may have been 'peremptory' in his instructions; otherwise I cannot understand why she should conceal anything from me. And why should he? There also I am in the dark; unless, indeed (supposing him to have some wish to keep their whereabouts unknown to you) he may have seen an announcement in the papers to the effect that you were going to the United States and Canada, in which case he may have guessed that you would probably call on one whose name they had mentioned to you as a friend of theirs. And not a bad guess either: George Bethune is long-headed—when he comes down from the clouds; though why he should take such elaborate precautions to keep away from you, I cannot surmise."

Vincent knew only too well! The banker proceeded:—

"I confess I am disappointed—for the moment. I took it for granted you would have no difficulty in discovering where they were; but, of course, if friend George is not going to give his address to anybody, for fear of their communicating with you, some time may elapse before you hear anything definite. I forgot to mention that the postmark on the envelope was Port Said—"

Port Said! Had Maisrie been at Port Said—and not so long ago either? Instantly there sprang into the young man's mind a vision of the place as he remembered it—a poor enough place, no doubt, but now all lit up by this new and vivid interest: he could see before him the rectangular streets of pink and white shanties, the sandy roads and arid squares, the swarthy Arabs and yellow Greeks and Italians, the busy quays and repairing-yards and docks, the green water and the swarming boats. And did Maisrie and her grandfather—while the great vessel was getting in her coals, and the air was being filled with an almost imperceptible black dust—did they escape down the gangway, and go ashore, and wander about, looking at the strange costumes, and the sun-blinds, and the half-burnt

tropical vegetation? Mr. Thompson went on to say that he himself had never been to Port Said; but that he guessed it was more a calling-place for steamers than a pleasure or health resort; and no doubt the Bethunes had merely posted their letters there en route. But were they bound East or West? There was no answer to this question—for they had not given the name of the ship.

So the wild hopes that had arisen in Vincent's breast when he caught sight of Maisrie's handwriting had all subsided again; and the world was as vague and empty as before. Sometimes he tried to imagine that the big steamer which he pictured to himself as lying in the harbour at Port Said was homeward-bound; and that, consequently, even now old George Bethune and his granddaughter might have returned to their own country; and then again something told him that it was useless to search papers for lists of passengers—that the unknown ship had gone away down the Red Sea and out to Australia or New Zealand, or perhaps had struck north towards Canton or Shanghai. He could only wait and watch—and he had a sandal-wood necklace when he wished to dream.

But the truth is he had very little time for dreaming; for Vin Harris was now become one of the very busiest of the millions of busy creatures crowding this London town. He knew his best distraction lay that way; but there were other reasons urging him on. As it chanced, the great statesman who had always been Vincent's especial friend and patron, finding that his private secretary wished to leave him, decided to put the office in commission; that is to say, he proposed to have two private secretaries, the one to look after his own immediate affairs and correspondence, the other to serve as his 'devil,' so to speak, in political matters; and the latter post he offered to Vincent, he having the exceptional qualification of being a member of the House. It is not to be supposed that the ex-Minister was influenced in his choice by the fact that the young man was now on the staff of two important papers, one a daily journal, the other a weekly; for such mundane considerations do not enter the sublime sphere of politics; nor, on the other hand, is it to be imagined that Vincent accepted the offer with all the more alacrity that his hold on those two papers might probably be strengthened by his confidential relations with the great man. Surmises and conjectures in such a case are futile—the mere playthings of one's enemies. It needs only to be stated that he accepted the office with every expectation of hard work; and that he got it. Such hunting up of authorities; such verification of quotations; such boiling-down of blue-books; such constant attendance at the House of Commons: it was all hardly earned at a salary of £400 a year. But very well he knew that there were many young men in this country who would have rejoiced to accept that position at nothing a year; for it is quite wonderful how private secretaries of Parliamentary chiefs manage, subsequently, to tumble in for good things.

Then it is probable that his journalistic enterprises—which necessarily be-

came somewhat more intermittent after his acceptance of the secretaryship—brought him in, on the average, another £400 a year. On this income he set seriously to work to make himself a miser. His tastes had always been simple—and excellent health may have been at once the cause and the effect of his abstemiousness; but now the meagre fare he allowed himself, and his rigidly economical habits in every way, had a very definite aim in view. He was saving money; he was building up a miniature fortune—by half-crowns and pence. Food and drink cost him next to nothing; if he smoked at all, it was a pipe the last thing in the morning before going to bed. Omnibusses served his turn unless some urgent business on behalf of his chief demanded a hansom. He could not give up his club; for that was in a way a political institution; and oftentimes he had to rush up thither to find someone who was not in the precincts of St. Stephen's; but then, on the other hand, in a good club things are much cheaper than in any restaurant or in the members' dining-room of the House of Commons. It was remarkable how the little fortune accumulated; and it was a kind of amusement in a fashion. He pinched himself—and laughed. He debated moral questions—for example as to whether it was lawful to use club-stationery in writing articles for newspapers; but he knew something of the ways of Government offices, and perhaps his conscience was salved by evil example. What the manager of the Westminster Palace Hotel thought of his manner of living can be imagined—if so august an official cared to enquire into such details. His solitary room, breakfast, and washing: no more: those were small bills that he called for week by week. And so his little hoard of capital gradually augmented—very gradually, it is true, but surely, as the rate of interest on deposits rose and fell.

In the meanwhile Lord Musselburgh had not been very successful in his endeavours to bring about a reconciliation between Vin Harris and his family; nor had he been able to obtain the information that Vincent demanded.

"You see, Vin," he said (they were again walking up and down the lamp-lit Terrace, by the side of the deep-flowing river), "my wife is awfully upset over this affair. She thinks it is entirely owing to her mismanagement. She would never have told you about the £5,000 if she had not been certain that that would be conclusive proof to you of the character of those two people; and now that she sees what has come of her telling you so much, she is afraid to tell you any more. Not that I suppose there is much to tell. Mr. Bethune and Miss Bethune are no longer in this country; but I doubt whether any one can say precisely where they are—"

"Nonsense!" Vincent broke in, impatiently. "They're humbugging you, Musselburgh. Consider this for a moment. Do you imagine that George Morris handed over that £5,000, as a lump sum, without making stipulations, and very definite stipulations? Do you imagine he would be content to take the word of a

man whom he considered a thief? It is absurd to think so. *Do ut facias* would be his motto; and he would take precious good care to keep control over the money in case of non-fulfilment—”

”But there is the receipt!” put in Lord Musselburgh.

”A receipt—for theatrical purposes!” said Vincent, with something of contempt. ”You may depend on it the money was not handed over in that unconditional fashion: that is not the way in which George Morris would do business. He has got some hold over Mr. Bethune; and he must know well enough where he is. Supposing Mr. Bethune had that money in his pocket, what is to prevent his returning to this country to-morrow? Where would be the penalty for his breaking his covenant? You don’t trust a man whom you consider a swindler; you must have some guarantee; and the guarantee means that you must be able to get at him when you choose. It stands to reason!”

”Yes, I suppose so—it would seem so,” said Lord Musselburgh, rather doubtfully; ”but at all events it isn’t George Morris who is going to open his mouth. I’ve been to him; he declines; refers me to your family. And then, you see, Vin, I’m rather in an awkward position. I don’t want to take sides; I don’t want to be a partisan; I would rather act as the friend of all of you; but the moment I try to do anything I am met by a challenge—and a particularly inconvenient challenge it is. Do I believe with them, or do I believe with you? I told your aunt what you said about Mr. Bethune—how you described his character, and all that; but I didn’t do it as well as you; for she remains unconvinced. As you told the story, it seemed natural and plausible; but as I told it—and I was conscious of it at the time—it was less satisfactory. And mind you, if you stick to hard facts, and don’t allow for any interpretation—”

”If you look through the blue spectacles, in short—”

”Precisely. Well, then, you are confronted with some extremely awkward things. I don’t wonder that your aunt asks pertinently why, if you are to begin and extend this liberal construction of conduct—this allowing for motives—this convenient doctrine of forgiving everything to self-deception—I don’t wonder that she asks why anybody should be sent to prison at all.”

”Oh, as for that,” said Vincent, frankly, ”I don’t say it would be good for the commonwealth if all of us were George Bethunes. Far from it. I look upon him as a sort of magnificent *lusus naturæ*; and I would not have him other than he is—not in any one particular. But a nation of George Bethunes?—it would soon strike its head against the stars.”

”Very well, then,” said his friend, ”you are not contending for any general principle. I don’t see why you and your family shouldn’t be prepared to agree. You may both of you be right. You don’t insist upon having the justifications you extend to Mr. Bethune extended to everyone else, or to any one else; you make

him the exception; and you needn't quarrel with those who take a more literal view of his character."

"Literal?" said Vincent, with a certain coldness. "Blindness—want of consideration—want of understanding—is that to be literal? Perhaps it is. But I thought you said something just now about Mr. Bethune and a prison: will you tell me of any one action of his that would suggest imprisonment?"

"Your aunt was merely talking of theories," said Musselburgh, rather uneasily, for he had not intended to use the phrase. "What I urge is this—why shouldn't both of you admit that there may be something in the other's view of Mr. Bethune, and agree to differ? I stand between you: I can see how much can be advanced on both sides."

"And so you would patch up a truce," said Vincent. "How long would it last? Of course I do not know for what period of banishment my kind relatives stipulated; £5,000 is a considerable sum to pay; I suppose they bargained that Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter should remain away from England for some time. But not for ever? Even then, is it to be imagined that they cannot be found? Either in this country or abroad, Miss Bethune and I meet face to face again; and she becomes my wife—I hope. It is what I live for. And then? Where will your patched-up truce be then? Besides, I don't want any sham friendships with people who have acted as they have done——"

"It was in your interest, Vin," his friend again urged. "Why not give them a little of the lenient judgment you so freely extend to those others——"

"To those others?" replied Vincent, firing up hotly. "To whom?"

"To Mr. Bethune, then," was the pacific reply.

"I don't think Mr. Bethune ever consciously wronged any human being. But they—were they not aware what they were doing when they played this underhand trick?—sending that girl out into the world again, through her devotion to her grandfather? I have told you before: there is no use crying peace, peace, when there is no peace. Let them undo some of the mischief they have done, first: then we will see. And look at this silly affectation of secrecy! They told me too much when they told me they had paid money to get George Bethune out of the country: then I understood why Maisrie went: then I knew I must have patience until she came back—in the same mind as when she left, that I know well. I was puzzled before, and sometimes anxious; but now I understand; now I am content to wait. And I have plenty to do in the meantime. I have to gain a proper foothold—and make some provision for the future as well: already I am independent of anybody and everybody. And perhaps, in time to come, when it is all over, when all these things have been set right, I may be able to forgive; but I shall not be able to forget."

This was all the message that Lord Musselburgh had to take home with

him, to his wife's profound distress. For she was very fond of her nephew, and very proud of him, too, and of the position he had already won for himself; and what she had done she had done with the best intentions towards him. Once, indeed, she confessed to her husband that in spite of herself she had a sort of sneaking admiration for Vincent's obdurate consistency and faith; insomuch (she said) that—if only the old man and all his chicaneries were out of the way—she could almost find it in her heart to try to like the girl, for Vincent's sake.

"The real question," she continued, "the thing that concerns me most of all to think of is this: can a girl who has been so dragged through the mire have retained her purity of mind and her proper self-respect? Surely she must have known that her grandfather was wheedling people out of money right and left—and that he took her about with him to enlist sympathy? Do you suppose she was not perfectly aware that Vincent invariably paid the bills at those restaurants? When tradespeople were pressing for money, do you fancy she was in ignorance all the time? Very well: what a life for any one to lead! How could she hold up her head amongst ordinarily honest and solvent people? Even supposing that she herself was all she ought to be, the humiliation must have sunk deep. And even if one were to try to like her, there would always be that consciousness between her and you. You might be sorry for her, in a kind of way; but you would be still sorrier for Vincent; and that would be dreadful."

"My dear Madge," her husband said—in his character of mediator and peace-maker, "you are arguing on a series of assumptions and prejudices. If Vin does hold on to his faith in those two—and if he does in the end marry Miss Bethune—I shall comfort myself with the conviction that he was likely to know more about them than anybody else. He and they have been on terms of closest intimacy, and for a long time; and you may be pretty sure that the girl Vin wants to marry is no tarnished kind of a person—in his eyes."

"Ah, yes—in his eyes!" said Lady Musselburgh, rather sadly.

"Well, his eyes are as clear as most folks'—at least, I've generally found them so," her husband said—trying what a little vague optimism would do.

One afternoon Vincent was walking along Piccadilly—and walking rapidly, as was his wont, for the twin purposes of exercise and economy—when he saw, some way ahead of him, Lady Musselburgh crossing the pavement to her carriage. She saw him, too, and stopped—colour mounting to her face. When he came up he merely lifted his hat, and would have kept on his way but that she addressed him.

"Vincent!" she said, in an appealing, half-reproachful fashion.

And then she said—

"I want you to come into the house for a few minutes—I must speak with you."

"Is there any use?" he asked, rather coldly.

However, she was very much embarrassed, as her heightened colour showed; and he could not keep her standing here in Piccadilly; he said 'Very well,' and followed her up the steps and into the house. When they had got into the drawing-room she shut the door behind them, and began at once—with not a little piteous agitation in her manner.

"Vin, this is too dreadful! Can nothing be done? Why are you so implacable? I suppose you don't understand what you have been to me, always, and how I have looked to your future as something almost belonging to me, something that I was to be proud of; and now that it is all likely to come true, you go and make a stranger of yourself! When I see your name in the papers, or hear you spoken of at a dinner-table—it is someone who is distant from me, as if I had no concern with him any longer. People come up to me and say 'Oh, I heard your nephew speak at the Mansion House the other afternoon,' or 'I met your nephew at the Foreign Office last night;' and I cannot say 'Don't you know; he has gone and made himself a stranger to us—?'"

"I wonder who it was who made a stranger of me!" he interposed—but quite impassively.

"I can only say, again and again, that it was done for the best, Vin!" she answered him. "The mistake I made was in letting you know. But I took it for granted that as soon as you were told that those people had accepted money from us to go away—"

"Those people? What people?" he demanded, with a sterner air.

"Oh, I meant only Mr. Bethune himself," said she, hastily. "Oh, yes, certainly, only him; there were no negotiations with any one else."

"Negotiations!" he said, with a touch of scorn. "Well, perhaps you can tell me what those negotiations were? How long did Mr. Bethune undertake to remain out of this country?"

"Three years, Vin," said she, timidly regarding him.

"Three years?" he repeated, in an absent way.

"But there is no reason," she added quickly, "why he should not return at any moment if he wishes: so I understand: of course, I did not make the arrangement—but I believe that is so."

"Return at any moment?" he said, slowly. "Do you mean to tell me that you put £5,000 into that old man's hands, on condition he should leave the country for three years, and that all the same you left him free to return at any moment?"

"Of course he would forfeit the money," said she, rather nervously.

"But how could he forfeit the money if he already has it? He has got the money: you showed me the receipt. Come, aunt," said he, in quite a different tone, "Let us be a little more honest and above-board. Shall I tell you how I read

the whole situation? You can contradict me if I am wrong. But that receipt you showed me: wasn't it produced for merely theatrical purposes? Wasn't it meant to crush and overwhelm me as a piece of evidence? The money wasn't handed over like that, was it? Supposing I were to conjecture that somebody representing you or representing my father has still got control over that money; and that it is to be paid in instalments as it is earned—by absence? Well isn't that so?"

He fixed his eyes on her; she hesitated—and was a little confused.

"I tell you, Vin," she said, "I had personally nothing to do with making the arrangement; all that was left in George Morris's hands; and of course he would take whatever precautions he thought necessary. And why should you talk about theatrical purposes? I really did think that when I could show you Mr. Bethune was ready to take money from strangers to go away from England you would change your opinion of him. But apparently, in your eyes, he can do no wrong. He is not to be judged by ordinary rules and standards. Everything is to be twisted about on his behalf, and forgiven, or even admired. Nobody else is allowed such latitude of construction; and everything is granted to him—because he is George Bethune. But I don't think it is quite fair: or that you should take sides against your own family."

This was an adroit stroke, following upon a very clever attempt to extricate herself from an embarrassing position; but his thoughts were otherwise occupied.

"I should like you to tell me," said he, "if you can, what moral wrong was involved in Mr. Bethune consenting to accept that money. Where was the harm—or the ignominy? Do you think I cannot guess at the representations and inducements put before him, to get him to stay abroad for three years? Why, I could almost tell you, word for word, what was said to him! Here was an arrangement that would be of incalculable benefit to everybody concerned. He would be healing up family dissensions. He would be guarding his granddaughter from a marriage that could only bring her disappointment and humiliation. Three years of absence and forgetfulness would put an end to all those projects. And then, of course, you could not ask him to throw up his literary engagements and incur the expense of travel, without some compensation. Here is a sum of £5,000, which will afford him some kind of security, in view of this disturbance of his engagements. A receipt? oh, yes, a receipt, if necessary! But then, again, on second thoughts, wouldn't it only be prudent to lodge this £5,000 with some third person, some man of position whom all could trust, and who would send it in instalments, to avoid the risk of carrying so large a sum about with one? There might be a little harmless condition or two attached, moreover. You undertake, for example, that the young people shall not have communication with each other; you say your granddaughter will do as you wish in all things. Very well, take her away: disappear, both of you; you are doing us an immense kindness, and you are act-

ing in the best interests of all concerned. Never mind a little misery here or there, or the risk of a broken heart; we can afford to pay for such things; we can afford to have the moulds of a dessert service destroyed—and a little matter of £5,000 is not much, when we have plans.... And so those two go out into the world again.” He paused for a second. “Well, aunt, you’ve had your way; and there’s no more to be said, except this, perhaps, that you don’t seem to realise the greatest of all the mistakes you have made. Your three years, even if they should be three years of absence, will not be years of forgetfulness on either Maisrie Bethune’s part or mine. Oh, no; nothing of the kind; don’t cherish any illusions on that score. It happened curiously that just before they left Brighton she and I had a little talk over one or two things; and she asked me for a promise, which I gave her, and which I mean to keep.”

Well, the handsome lad now standing before her had a great hold on her affection; and she even admired, in a covert way, this very bigotry of constancy and unswerving faith of his, so that for an instant her head swam, and she was on the point of crying out ‘Vincent—Vincent—go and bring her to me—and I will take her to my heart—for your sake!’ But the next moment she had recovered from that mad impulse: she saw that what had been done was not to be undone in that happy-go-lucky fashion, even if it could be undone at all; and she was silent and embarrassed. It was he who spoke.

“Well, you must excuse me, aunt; I’ve to be down at the House by question time.”

“You’re not going like that, Vin!” she exclaimed.

“What do you want of me?” he asked in a coldly civil way.

“I—I—want you to be as you once were, to all of us,” she cried, rather incoherently. “I want you to go back to Grosvenor Place; and to accept the allowance your father has made you ever since you came of age; and to resume the old by-gone relations with us. Surely it might be possible, with a little consideration on both sides. What we have done was done entirely out of thoughtfulness for you; and if we have made a mistake—we are only human beings! And remember, it is quite possible that you may be mistaken too, Vin; you may be mistaken just as much as we—and—and—”

“What you propose, aunt,” said he (for time was precious with him) “even if it were practicable, would only be temporary. I am looking forward to marrying Maisrie Bethune—in spite of your three years of forgetfulness!—and when that happens, your patched-up state of affairs would all come to bits again. So what is the use of professing a sort of sham reconciliation? I have no wish to return to Grosvenor Place. I have taken some rooms at the foot of Buckingham-street; and I have a key that lets me through by the Embankment Gardens into Villiers-street; it will be convenient for getting to the House. And I can tide along pretty

well without any allowance from my father; in fact, I'm saving a little money in a quiet way—”

”But at what a cost, Vincent—at what a cost!” she protested. ”I wish you could see how worn and ill you are looking—

”Well, I've had some things to think of lately—thanks to my kind relatives!” said he. ”But really I must be off—”

”Vincent,” she said, making one last despairing effort to bring things back to their former footing, ”when are you going to ask Louie Drexel and me to dine with you at the House?”

”I'm so busy, aunt, just now,” said he, as he opened the door for her. Then he saw her into her carriage; and she drove away—a most perplexed and unhappy woman.

These rooms that Vincent had taken at the foot of Buckingham-street were right up at the top of the building; and commanded a spacious prospect of the river, the Embankment gardens, the bridges, the great dusky world of London lying all around, and the dome of St. Paul's rising dim and phantasmal in the east. They were bachelor chambers, that had doubtless seen many tenants (the name of one, George Brand, was still over the door, and Vincent did not think it worth while to change it), but the young man had no sooner entered into possession than he began a series of alterations and improvements that bachelor chambers did not seem to demand. Not in any hurry, however; nor perhaps with any fixed intent; it was a kind of amusement for this or that odd half-hour he could snatch from his multifarious duties. To begin with, he had the woodwork painted a deep Indian red, and the walls a pearly-blue grey: while the former colour was repeated in the Japanese window-curtains, and the latter by the great world outside, on the lambent moonlight nights, or sometimes in the awakening of the dawn, as he lay in a low easy-chair, and watched the vast, silent city coming out of its sleep. This top-floor was a very still place, except for the early chattering of the tree-sparrows, into whose nests, swaying on the branches just beneath him, he could have tossed a biscuit. And then his peregrinations through London, rapid though they were as a rule, occasionally brought him face-to-face with a bric-a-brac shop; and from time to time he picked up one thing or another, just as it happened to strike his fancy. Perhaps these modest purchases were just a trifle too elegant for a bachelor's apartments; the sitting-room away up in that lofty situation came to look rather like a boudoir; for example, there was a music-stand in rosewood and ormolu—a tall stand it was, as if for a violin player—which he himself never used. Pictures he could not afford; but books he could; and the volumes which were one by one added to those shelves were of a more graceful and literary stamp than you would have expected to find in the library of a young and busy member of Parliament. It was not a lordly palace

of art, this humble suite of apartments in the neighbourhood of the Strand; but there was a prevailing air of selection and good taste; perhaps, one ought to say, of expectancy, also, in the presence of things not yet in use. Then the two large and low windows of the sitting-room were all surrounded with ivy, of long training; but besides that, there were flower-boxes; and at a moment's notice, and at small expense, these could be filled with potted geraniums, if one wished to be gay. And always outside was the varied panorama of the mighty city; the wide river and the bridges, the spires and the towers, the far masses of buildings becoming more and more spectral as they receded into the grey and wavering mist. Sometimes the rose and saffron of the dawn were there, ascending with a soft suffusion behind the purple dome of St. Paul's; sometimes there were blown and breezy days, with flying showers and watery gleams of sunlight; and sometimes the night lay blue and still and clear, the Surrey side in black and mysterious shadow, the white moon high in the south. These silent altitudes were a fine place for dreaming, after all the toil and moil of the working-hours were over; and a fine place for listening, too; sometimes, towards the morning, just as the leaves began to stir, you could fancy the wind was bringing a message with it—it seemed, coming from far away, to say something about *Claire Fontaine*.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN A NORTHERN VILLAGE.

But there were to be no three years of absence, still less of forgetfulness. One afternoon, on Vincent's going down to the House, he found a telegram along with his letters. He opened it mechanically, little thinking; but the next moment his eyes were staring with amazement. For these were the words he saw before him:—"Grandfather very ill; would like to see you. Maisrie Bethune, Crossmains, by Cupar." Then through his bewilderment there flashed the sudden thought: why, the lands of Balloray were up in that Fifeshire region!—had, then, the old man, tired of his world-wanderings, and feeling this illness coming upon him, had he at length crept home to die, perhaps as a final protest? And Maisrie was alone there, among strangers, with this weight of trouble fallen upon her. Why could not these intervening hours, and the long night, and the great distance, be at once annihilated?—he saw Maisrie waiting for him, with piteous eyes and outstretched hands.

He never could afterwards recall with any accuracy how he passed those hours: it all seemed a dream. And a dream it seemed next day, when he found himself in a dogcart, driving through a placid and smiling country, with the sweet summer air blowing all around him. He talked to the driver, to free his mind from anxious and futile forecasts. Crossmains, he was informed, was a small place. There was but the one inn in it—the Balloray Arms. Most likely, if two strangers were to arrive on a visit, they would put up at the inn; but very few people did go through—perhaps an occasional commercial traveller.

“And where is Balloray House—or Balloray Castle?” was the next question.

“Just in there, sir,” said the man, with a jerk of his whip towards the woods past which they were driving.

And of course it was with a great interest and curiosity that Vincent looked out for this place of which he had heard so much. At present nothing could be seen but the high stone wall that surrounds so many Scotch estates; and, branching over that, a magnificent row of beeches; but by and bye they came to a clearing in the “policies”; and all at once the Castle appeared in sight—a tall, rectangular building, with a battlemented parapet and corner turrets, perched on a spacious and lofty plateau. It looked more modern than he had imagined to himself; but perhaps it had been recently renovated. From the flag-staff overtopping the highest of the turrets a flag idly dropped and swung in the blue of the summer sky: no doubt the proprietor was at home—in proud possession; while the old man who considered himself the rightful owner of the place was lying, perhaps stricken unto death, in some adjacent cottage or village inn. Then the woods closed round again; and the mansion of Balloray was lost from view.

Vincent was not in search of the picturesque, or he might have been disappointed with this village of Crossmains—which consisted of but one long and wide thoroughfare, bordered on each hand with a row of bare and mean-looking cottages and insignificant houses. When they drove up to the inn, he did not notice that it was a small, two-storied, drab-hued building of the most commonplace appearance; that was not what he was thinking of at all; his heart was beating high with emotion—what wonder might not meet his eager gaze at any instant? And indeed he had hardly entered the little stone passage when Maisrie appeared before him; she had heard the vehicle arrive, and had quickly come down-stairs; and now she stood quite speechless—her trembling, warm hands clasped in his, her face upturned to him, her beautiful sad eyes all dimmed with tears, and yet having a kind of joy in them, too, and pride. She could not say a single word: he would have to understand that she was grateful to him for his instant response to her appeal. And perhaps there was more than gratitude; she seemed to hunger to look at him—for she had not seen him for so long a while: perhaps she had never thought to see him again.

"Have you any better news, Maisrie?" said he.

She turned and led the way into a little parlour.

"Yes," said she (and the sound of her voice startled him: the Maisrie of his many dreams, sleeping and waking, had been all so silent!). "Grandfather is rather better. I think he is asleep now—or almost asleep. It is a fever—a nervous fever—and he has been so exhausted—and often delirious; but he is quieter now—rest is everything—"

"Maisrie," he said again (in his bewilderment) "it is a wonderful thing to hear you speak! I can hardly believe it. Where have you been all this while? Why did you go away from me?"

"I went because grandfather wished it," said she. "I will tell you some other time. He is anxious to see you. He has been fretting about so many things; and he will not confide in me—not entirely—I can see that there is concealment. And Vincent," she went on, with her appealing eyes fixed on him, "don't speak to him about Craig-Royston!—and don't let him speak about it. When he got ill in Cairo, it was more home-sickness than anything else, as I think; and he said he wanted to go and die in his own country and among his own people; and so we began to come to Scotland by slow stages. And now that we are here, there is no one whom he knows; he is quite as much alone here as he was in Egypt; far more alone than we used to be in Canada. I fancy he expects that a message may come for me from Balloray—that I am to go there and be received; and of course that is quite impossible; I do not know them, they do not know me; I don't suppose they are even aware that we are living in this place. But if he is disappointed in that, it is Craig-Royston he will think of next—he will want to go there to seek out relatives on my account. Well, Vincent, about Craig-Royston——"

She hesitated; and the pale and beautiful face became suffused with a sort of piteous embarrassment.

"But I understand, Maisrie, quite well!" said he, boldly. "Why should you be troubled about that? You have found out there is no such place?—but I could have told you so long ago! There was a district so-named at one time; and that is quite enough for your grandfather; a picturesque name takes his fancy, and he brings it into his own life. Where is the harm of that? There may have been Grants living there at one time—and they may have intermarried with the Bethunes: anyhow your grandfather has talked himself into believing there was such a relationship; and even if it is a delusion, what injury does it do to any human creature? Why," he went on, quite cheerfully, to reassure her and give her comfort, "I am perfectly aware that no Scotch family ever had 'Stand Fast, Craig-Royston!' as its motto. But if the phrase caught your grandfather's ear, why should not he choose it for his motto? Every motto has been chosen by some one at some one time. And then, if he thereafter came to persuade himself that this motto had been worn by

his family, or by some branch of his family, what harm is there in that? It is only a fancy—it is an innocent delusion—it injures no one—”

”Yes, but, Vincent,” she said—for these heroic excuses did not touch the immediate point—”grandfather is quite convinced about the Grants of Craig-Royston; and he will be going away in search of them, so that I may find relatives and shelter. And the disappointment will be terrible. For he has got into a habit of fretting that never was usual with him. He has fits of distrusting himself, too, and begins to worry about having done this or done that; and you know how unlike that is to his old courage, when he never doubted for a moment but that everything he had done was done for the best. And to think that he should vex himself by imagining he had not acted well by me—when he has given his whole life to me, as long as I can remember—”

”Maisrie,” said he, ”when your grandfather gets well, and able to leave this place, where are you going?”

”How can I say?” she made answer, wistfully enough.

”For I do not mean to let you disappear again. No, no. I shall not let you out of my sight again. Do you know that I have a house waiting for you, Maisrie?”

”For me?” she said, looking up surprised.

”For whom else, do you imagine? And rather pretty the rooms are, I think. I have got a stand for your music, Maisrie: that will be handier for you than putting it on the table before you.”

She shook her head, sadly.

”My place is with my grandfather, Vincent,” she said. ”And now I will go and see how he is. He wished to know as soon as possible of your arrival.”

She left the room and was absent only for a couple of minutes.

”Yes; will you come upstairs, Vincent?” she said on her return. ”I’m afraid you will find him much changed. And sometimes he wanders a little in his talking; you must try to keep him as quiet as may be.”

As they entered the room, an elderly Scotchwoman—most probably the landlady—who had been sitting there, rose and came out. Vincent went forward. Despite Maisrie’s warning he was startled to notice the ravages the fever had wrought; but if the proud and fine features were pinched and worn, the eyes were singularly bright—bright and furtive at the same time. And at sight of his visitor, old George Bethune made a desperate effort to assume his usual gallant air.

”Ha?” said he—though his laboured breathing made this affectation of gaiety a somewhat pitiable thing—”the young legislator—fresh from the senate—the listening senate, the applause of multitudes—”

He turned his restless eyes on Maisrie; and said in quite an altered tone—

”Go away, girl, go away!”

Well, Maisrie's nerves were all unstrung by anxiety and watching; and here was her lover just arrived, to listen to her being so cruelly and sharply rebuked; and so, after a moment of indecision, she lost her self-control, she flung herself on her knees by the side of the bed, and burst out crying.

"Don't speak to me like that, grandfather," she sobbed, "don't speak to me like that!"

"Well, well, well," said he, in an altered tone, "I did not mean to hurt you. No, no, Maisrie; you're a good lass—a good lass—none better in the whole kingdom of Scotland. I was not thinking—I beg your pardon, my dear—I beg your pardon."

She rose, and kissed his hand, and left the room. Then old George Bethune turned to his visitor, and began to talk to him in a curiously rapid way—rapid and disconnected and confused—while the brilliant eyes were all the time fixed anxiously on the young man.

"Yes, I am glad you have come—I have been sorely perplexed," he said, in his husky and hurried fashion; "—perhaps, when one is ill, confidence in one's own judgment gives way a little—and it is not—every one whom you can consult. But that is not the main thing—not the main thing at all—a question of money is a minor thing—but yesterday—I think it was yesterday—my voice seemed to be going from me—and I thought—I would leave you a message. The book there—bring it—"

He looked towards a red volume that was lying on the window-sill. Vincent went and fetched it; though even as he did so, he thought it strange that a man who was perhaps lying on his deathbed should bother about a book of ballads. But when, he might have asked himself, had George Bethune ever seemed to realise the relative importance of the things around him? To him a harebell brought from the Braes of Gleniffer was of more value than a king's crown.

"Open at the mark," said the sick man, eagerly. "See if you understand—without much said—to her, I mean. Poor lass—poor lass—I caught her crying once or twice—while we were away—and I have been asking myself whether—whether it was all done for the best." Then he seemed to pull himself together a little. "Yes, yes, it was done for the best—what appeared best for every one; but now—well, now it may be judged differently—I am not what I was—I hope I—have done no wrong."

Vincent turned to the marked page; and there he found a verse of one of the ballads pencilled round, with the last line underscored. This is what he read:

He turned his face unto the wa',
 And death was with him dealing;
 "Adieu, adieu, my dear friends a'—
Be kind to Barbara Allen!"

The old man was watching him anxiously and intently.

"Yes, I understand," Vincent said. "And I think you may depend on me."

"Then there is another thing," the old man continued—his mind leaping from one point to another with marvellous quickness, though he himself seemed so languid and frail. "I—I wish to have all things left in order. If the summons—comes—I must be able to meet it—with head up—fear never possessed me during life. But who has not made mistakes—who has not made mistakes?—not understood at the time. And yet perhaps it was not a mistake—I am not the man I was—I have doubts—I thought I was doing well by all—but now—I am uneasy—questions come to me in the night-time—and I have not my old strength—I cannot cast them behind me as in better days."

He glanced towards the door.

"Keep Maisrie out," said he. "Poor lass—poor lass—I thought I was doing well for her—but when I found her crying— Take care she does not come back for a minute or two—"

"She won't come until you send for her," Vincent interposed.

"Then I must make haste—and you must listen. The money—that I was persuaded to take from your family—that must be paid back—to the last farthing; and it will not be difficult—oh, no, not difficult—not much of it has been used—Bevan and Morris will tell you—Bevan and Morris, Pall Mall, London. And indeed I meant to do what I promised—when I went away—but when I got ill—I could not bear the idea of being buried out of Scotland—I was like the Swiss soldier—in the trenches—who heard the Alphorn—something arose in my breast—and Maisrie, she was always a biddable lass—she was just as willing to come away. But the money—well, is there one who knows me who does not know how I have scorned that—that delight of the ignoble and base-born?—and yet this is different—this must be paid back—for Maisrie's sake—every farthing—to your family. She must be no beggar—in their eyes. And you must not tell her anything—I trust you—if I can trust you to take care of her I can trust you in smaller things—so take a pencil now—quick—when I remember it—and write down his address—Daniel Thompson—"

"Of Toronto?" said Vincent. "I know him."

At this moment George Bethune turned his head a little on one side, and wearily closed his eyes. Vincent, assuming that he now wished for rest—that perhaps he might even have sunk into sleep, which was the all-important thing for him—thought it an opportune moment to retire; and on tiptoe made for the door. But even that noiseless movement was sufficient to arouse those abnormally sensitive faculties; those restless eyes held him again.

"No—no—do not go," the old man said, in the same half-incoherent, eager

fashion. "I must have all put in order—Daniel Thompson—banker—Toronto—he will make all that straight with your family. For Maisrie's sake—and more than that he would do for her—and be proud and glad to do it too. He will be her friend—and you—well, I leave her to you—you must provide a house for her."

"It is ready," said Vincent.

"She will make a good wife—she will stand firm by the man she marries—she has courage—and a loyal heart. Perhaps—perhaps I should have seen to it before—perhaps you should have had your way at Brighton—and she—well, she was so willing to go—that deceived me. And there must be laughing now for her—it is natural for a young lass to be glad and merry—not any more weeping—she is in her own land. Why," said he, and his eyes burned still more brightly, and his speech became more inconsecutive, though always hurried and panting. "I remember a story—a story that a servant lass used to tell me when I was a child—I used to go into the kitchen—when she was making the bread—it was a story about a fine young man called Eagle—he had been carried away to an eagle's nest when he was an infant—and his sweetheart was called Angel. Well, I do not remember all the adventures—I have been thinking sometimes that they must have been of Eastern origin—Eastern origin—yes—the baker who tried to burn him in an oven—the Arabian Nights—but no matter—at the end he found his sweetheart—and there was a splendid wedding. And just as they were married, a white dove flew right down the middle of the church, and called aloud '*Kurroo, kurroo; Eagle has got his Angel now!*' I used to imagine I could see them at the altar—and the white dove flying down the church—"

"Don't you think you should try to get a little rest now?" Vincent said, persuasively. "You have arranged everything—all is put in order. But what we want is for you to get rest and quiet, until this illness leaves you, and you grow strong and well again."

"Yes, yes," said the old man, quickly, "that is quite right—that is so—for I must pay off Thompson, you know, I must pay off Thompson. Thompson is a good fellow—and an honest Scot—but he used to talk a little. Let him do this—for Maisrie's sake—afterwards—afterwards—when I am well and strong again—I will square up accounts with him. Oh, yes, very easily," he continued; and now he began to whisper in a mysterious manner. "Listen, now—I have a little scheme in mind—not a word to anybody—there might be some one quick to snatch it up. It is a volume I have in mind—a volume on the living poets of Scotland—think of that, now—a splendid subject, surely!—the voice of the people—everyday sorrows and joys—the minstrelsy of a whole race. There was the American book—but something went wrong—I did not blame any one—and I was glad it was published—Carmichael let me review it—yes, yes, there may be a chance for me yet—I may do something yet—for auld Scotland's sake! I have been looking into the *domus*

exilis Plutonia—the doors have been wide open—but still there may be a chance—there is some fire still burning within. But my memory is not what it was,” he went on, in a confused, perplexed way. “I once had a good memory—an excellent memory—but now things escape me. Yesterday—I think it was yesterday—I could not tell whether Bob Tennant was still with us—and his verses to Allander Water have all gone from me—all but a phrase—‘How sweet to roam by Allander’—‘How sweet to roam by Allander’—no, my head is not so clear as it ought to be—”

“No, of course not,” said Vincent, in a soothing sort of way. “How could you expect it, with this illness? But these things will all come back. And I’m going to help you as much as I can. When I was in New York I heard your friend, Hugh Anstruther, deliver a speech about those living Scotch poets, and he seemed to be well acquainted with them; I will write to him for any information you may want. So now—now that is all settled; and I would try to rest for a while, if I were you: that is the main thing—the immediate thing.”

But the old man went on without heeding him, muttering to himself, as it were:

“Chambers’s Journal—perhaps as far back as thirty years since—there’s one verse has rung in my ears all this time—but the rest is all blank—and the name of the writer forgotten, if it ever was published ... ”Tis by Westray that she wanders ... ’Tis by Westray that she strays ... O waft me, Heavens, to Westray ... in the spring of the young days!’ ... No, no, it cannot be Westray—Westray is too far north—Westray?—Yet it sounds right ... ”Tis by Westray that she wanders ... ’tis by Westray that she strays—”

There was a tap at the door, and the doctor appeared: a little, old, white-haired man, of sharp and punctilious demeanour. Behind him was the landlady, hanging back somewhat as if it were for further instructions; so, she being there to help, Vincent thought he would go downstairs and seek out Maisrie. He found her in the little parlour—awaiting him.

“What do you think, Vincent?” she said, quickly.

“I haven’t spoken to the doctor yet,” he made answer. “Of course, everyone can see that your grandfather is very ill; but if courage will serve, who could have a better chance? And I will tell you this, Maisrie, he is likely to have more peace of mind now. He has been vexing himself about many things, as you guessed; and although he was wandering a good deal while I was with him—perhaps all the time—I could not quite make sure—still, it is wonderful how he has argued these matters out, and how clearly you can follow his meaning. It was about you and your future he was most troubled—in the event of anything happening to him; and he has not been afraid to look all possibilities in the face; he told me the doors of the *domus exilis Plutonia* had stood wide open before him, and I know he was not the one to be alarmed, for himself. But about you, Maisrie: do you know

that he has given you over to me—if the worst comes to the worst? He asked me to provide a home for you: I told him it was already there, awaiting you. You see I have not forgotten what you said to me at Brighton; and I knew that some day you and I should find ourselves, as we now find ourselves, face to face—perhaps in sad circumstances, but all the more dependent on each other—”

”Do you think he is so very ill, Vincent?” she said: she seemed to have no thought of herself—only of her grandfather.

”You must see he is very ill, Maisrie—very,” he answered her. ”But, as I say, if splendid courage will serve, then you may hope for the best. And he ought to be quieter in mind now. We will hear what the doctor has to say—”

But at this moment there was an unwonted sound without in the still little village—the sound of carriage-wheels on the stony street; and presently some vehicle, itself unseen, was heard to stop in front of the inn. In another second or so, a servant-girl opened the door of the parlour and timidly said to Maisrie—

”Miss Bethune, Miss.”

”Miss Bethune?” Maisrie repeated, wondering.

”From the Castle, Miss,” the girl said, in awe-stricken tones.

And it was curious that at such a crisis Maisrie’s eyes should turn instinctively to Vincent—as if to appeal for advice. Of course his decision was taken on the instant.

”Ask Miss Bethune to step this way, then,” he said to the girl.

Maisrie rose—pale a little, but absolutely self-possessed. She did not know who this might be—perhaps the bearer of grave and harassing tidings for her grandfather; for she had grown to fear Balloray, and all its associations and belongings. As it turned out she had not much to fear from this emissary. There came into the room a tall and elegant lady of about thirty, not very pretty, but very gentle-looking, with kind grey eyes. For a brief second she seemed embarrassed on finding a third person present; but that passed directly; she went up to Maisrie, and took her hand and held it, and said, in a voice so sweet and winning that it went straight to the heart—

”Dr. Lenzie has told me of your trouble. I’m very, very sorry. Will you let me help you in any way that is possible? May I send to Edinburgh for a trained nurse to give you assistance; and in the meantime, if you wished it, I could send along my maid to do anything you wanted—”

Maisrie pressed her to be seated, and tried, in rather uncertain accents, to thank her for her exceeding kindness. For this stranger, with the greatest tact, made no apology for her intrusion; it was no case of the castle coming to the cottage, with acts of officious benevolence; it was simply one woman appealing to another woman to be allowed to help her in dire straits. Whether she knew that the old man upstairs claimed to be the rightful owner of Balloray, whether she

knew that the beautiful pensive-eyed girl who was speaking to her had indirectly suffered through that legal decision of generations ago, Vincent could not at the moment guess: what was obvious was merely this womanly act of sympathy and charity, for which Maisrie Bethune showed herself abundantly grateful. When the doctor came down, this visitor with the friendly eyes and the soft voice explained that, just in case the patient should need brandy to keep up his strength, she had taken the liberty of bringing some with her—of good quality: the resources of the Balloray Arms being limited in that respect. As she said this she hesitatingly blushed a little; and Vincent thought she looked really beautiful. He recalled to himself his aunt, Lady Musselburgh; and wondered whether she, with all her fine presence and eloquent eyes, could look as nobly beautiful as this poor woman, who was rather plain.

The doctor's report was on the whole encouraging; the temperature of the patient was the least thing lower, and he was more equable in mind.

"He appears to have been greatly pleased by your visit, sir," the little doctor said, in a strong east-country accent, to the young man. "Very pleased indeed. And it is just wonderful how he can reason and explain; though I'm not so sure he'll be able to remember all he's been saying. But now, he tells me, all his dispositions are made; he is content; there is nothing more on his mind—except, as I gather, about some book."

"I know all about that," said Maisrie. "I can pacify him about that; and I'm going upstairs directly."

Of course she had to wait and see Miss Bethune and the doctor leave; then she turned to Vincent.

"Will you go out for a walk, Vincent? I have asked Mrs. MacGill to let you have some dinner at seven."

"Oh, don't you bother about me, Maisrie!" he said. "Can't I be of any use to you upstairs?"

"Not unless grandfather asks for you again—then I will send for you," she answered.

She was going away when he interrupted her for a moment.

"I will come up whenever you want me," he said; and then he added: "But—but—you know him so much better than I do, Maisrie. Do you think we should tell him of Miss Bethune having been here?"

"Oh, no, no, Vincent!" she said, in earnest remonstrance. "Nothing would excite him more terribly. You know he has already been talking of some message coming from Balloray to me—of the possibility of it—and this would set his brain working in a hundred different directions. He might think they were coming to take me away from him—perhaps to do me some harm—or he might imagine that I had humbled myself before them, to make friends with them, and that would

trouble him more than anything else: you cannot tell what wild fancies might not get into his head. So there must not be a word said about Miss Bethune, Vincent."

"Of course you know best, Maisrie," said he. And still he did not let her go. What was he to say next, to detain her? It was so long since he had heard her voice! "When you go upstairs, Maisrie, I wish you would look at the book of ballads that is lying on the table. There are some lines marked—you will see a bit of paper to tell you the page. Do you know what that means? Your grandfather thought that he might not have strength enough left to speak to me when I came; and so this was to be a last message for me. Isn't it strange that in the face of so serious an illness he should be thinking about a ballad; but you know better than anyone that ballads are as real to your grandfather as the actual things around him. And I want you to look at that message. I have told your grandfather that he may depend on me."

She went upstairs; he passed out into the golden glow of the afternoon. It was not a beautiful village, this: plain, unlovely, melancholy in the last degree; moreover, his own mind was filled with dim and dark forebodings; so that a sort of gloom of death and separation seemed to hang over those houses. Nor was there anything to look at, for the distraction of thought. An English village would have had a picturesque old church and a pretty churchyard; here there was nothing but a small mission-house of the most dull and forbidding exterior, while, just beyond the last of the hovels, there was a cemetery—a mound enclosed by a stone wall. He went to the gate, and stood there a long time, with some curious fancies and imaginings coming into his head. He seemed to see an open grave there, and a small knot of people, himself the chief mourner. And then, after the simple and solemn ceremony, he saw himself leave the sad enclosure and go away back through the unlovely street, rather fearing what lay before him. For how was he to attempt to console the solitary girl awaiting him there in her despair and her tears? But behold now, if there were any charity and commiseration left in the world—if one, hitherto obdurate, would but consent to bury her enmity in that open grave they had left—as well she might, for there was no one to offend her now—and if she were to reach out a woman's hand to this lonely girl, and take her with her, and shelter her, until the time of her sorrow was over? This was a bleak, plain, commonplace sort of a burial ground into which he was gazing: but none the less had human hearts come away from it heavy and remorseful—remorseful when it was too late. And if some little atonement were to be offered in the way he had imagined—if it were the only thing now left? This girl, sitting alone there in her desperate grief—without kindred—without friends—without any home or habitation to turn her face to: surely her situation was of all things possible most forlorn—surely no woman's heart could resist that mute appeal for sympathy and association?

As he walked slowly and aimlessly back to the inn, he began to think he had been a little too hard on those relatives of his. Death, or even the menace of death, was a solvent of many things: it made all antagonisms, animosities, indignations appear so trivial and unworthy. He could not but remember that it was not through any selfishness those relatives of his had acted (unless some small trace of family ambition were a minor motive): what they had done they had done, as they imagined, to serve him; there might have been errors of judgment, but no ill-will on their part. And now, in this terrible crisis, if he were to write to Lady Musselburgh—write in all conciliation and kindness—and tell her how Maisrie Bethune was situated, would she not allow her heart to answer? She was a woman; she professed to be a Christian. And if the worst befel, or even if the worst were threatened, surely she would come at once to Scotland, and make what little amends were now within her power? How many homes had she—in London, Brighton, Mendover—how many friends, relations, well-wishers—as compared with this tragically lonely girl, who had nothing but the wide world around her, and no one offering her a sympathetic hand? He would write to his aunt a long and urgent letter—appealing to her own better nature—and asking to be allowed to summon her, by telegram, if there were need. He would even humble and abase himself—for Maisrie’s sake.

But when he got back to the inn, he found that all these sombre prognostications were, happily, not immediately called for. On the contrary, Maisrie came running down to say that her grandfather had been asleep, or apparently asleep, and that, when he woke up, he seemed much refreshed, with his memory grown infinitely clearer. He was especially proud that he could remember the verses about Allander Water. He wanted Vincent to go up to him at once.

”And you must please him, Vincent,” she said, breathlessly, ”by promising to do everything to help him with the book. Promise whatever he wishes. But be sure you don’t mention that Miss Bethune was here—don’t say a word about that—or anything about Balloray.”

CHAPTER IX.

A BABBLE O’ GREEN FIELDS: THE END.

There was a wonderful vitality, especially of the brain, in this old man; after long periods of languor and exhaustion, with low moanings and mutterings quite un-

intelligible to the patient watchers, he would flame up into something like his former self, and his speech would become eager and voluble, and almost consecutive. It was in those intervals that he showed himself proud of his recovered memory: again and again they could hear him repeat the lines that for a time had baffled him—

’How sweet to roam by Allander, to breathe the balmy air,
When cloudless are the summer skies, and woods and fields are fair;
To see the skylark soaring high, and chanting on the wing,
While in yon woods near Calder Kirk the wild birds sweetly sing.’

He was busy with the new book—choosing and arranging; and Maisrie, as his amanuensis, jotted down memoranda as to the poets to be included, and the pieces most characteristic of them. For he was not to be pacified into silence and acquiescence—in these clearer moods. There was hurry, he said. Some one else might step in. And he cross-examined Vincent about the quotations that Hugh Anstruther had made at the Burns’ Celebration in New York.

”I hardly remember,” Vincent answered him. ”There were a good many. But there was one piece I thought rather pathetic—I don’t recall the name of it—but it was about a little pair of shoes—the mother thinking of her dead child.”

”What?—what?” said the old man, quickly. ”Not James Smith’s? Not ’The Wee Pair o’ Shoon’?”

”Well, yes, I think that was the title,” said Vincent.

An anxious and troubled expression came into the sick man’s eyes: he was labouring with his memory—and Maisrie saw it.

”Never mind, grandfather: never mind just now: if you want it, I’ll write to Mr. Anstruther for it. See, I will put it down in the list; and I’ll send for it; and it will be back here in plenty of time.”

”But I know it quite well!” he said, fretfully, ”The last verse anyway. ’The eastlin wind blaws cauld, Jamie—the snaw’s on hill and plain—’” He repeated those two lines over and over again, with half-shut eyes; and then all at once he went on with the remainder—

”’The flowers that decked my lammie’s grave
Are faded noo, an’ gane!
O, dinna speak! I ken she dwells
In yon fair land aboon;
But sair’s the sicht that blin’s my e’e—
That wee, wee pair o’ shoon.’”

There was a kind of proud look in his face as he finished.

"Yes, yes; it's a fine thing to have a good memory—and I owe that to my father—he said there never was a minute in the day that need be wasted—you could always repeat to yourself a verse of the Psalms of David. I think the first word of approval—I ever got from him—ye see, Maisrie, we were brought up under strict government in those days—was when I repeated the CXIX. Psalm—the whole twenty-two parts—with hardly a mistake. And what a talisman to carry about with ye—on the deck of a steamer—on Lake Ontario—in the night—with the stars overhead—then the XLVI. Psalm comes into your mind—you are back in Scotland—you see the small church, and the boxed-in pews—the men and women standing up to sing—the men all in black—I wonder if they have *Ballerma* in the Scotch churches now—and *Drumclog*—and *New St. Ann's*—"

He shut his eyes—those unnaturally brilliant eyes—for a second or so; but the next second they were open and alert again.

"The book, Maisrie—the book—are you getting on?—no delay—no delay—in case someone should interfere. Ye've got Shairst in, haven't ye?—the burn of Quair—up yonder—above the Minch Moor—

'I heard the cushies croon,
Through the gowden afternoon,
And Quair burn singin' doon to the vale o' Tweed.'

Well do I know the very spot where he must have written those verses. Yes, yes; well I remember it," he continued, more absently. "But I have had my last look. I will see it no more—no more. You, Maisrie, you will go there—your young husband will take you there—"

"Grandfather, we will all go there together!" said Maisrie, piteously.

"And both of you," the old man went on, paying no attention to her, for he was apparently gazing at some distant thing, "both of you are young, and light of step—and light of heart, which is still better—well, well, my lass, perhaps not so light of heart as might be at your years—but all that will change for you—and I think when you are up at the burn of Quair—you will find it—in your mind—to cross the Minch Moor to Yarrow Water. Newark Castle you will see—then you will turn to go down the Yarrow Vale—but not with any sad heart, Maisrie—I forbid ye that—it's a beautiful place, Yarrow, though it had its tragedies and sorrows in the olden time—and you—you are young—you have life before you—and I tell ye it is with a light and glad heart you must go down the Yarrow Vale. Why, lass, you'll come to Mount Benger—you'll come to Dryhope Tower—you'll come to Altrive—and St. Mary's Loch—and the Loch o' the Lows—and Chapel-

hope—but mind ye now—if it's bad weather—ye're not to come running away, and altogether mistaking the place—ye'll just stop somewhere in the neighbourhood until it clears." And then he added, in a wistful kind of way: "I once had thoughts—of taking ye there myself, Maisrie."

"And so you will, grandfather!" she pleaded.

"No more—no more," he said, as if not heeding her. "And why should a young life be clouded?—the two of them—they'll be fine company for each other—when they're wandering—along by the side of Yarrow Water." But here he recalled himself; and would have Maisrie sit down again to that list; in order that the book might be pushed rapidly forward.

It was on this same evening that Dr. Lenzie, on arriving to pay his accustomed visit, went into the little parlour and sent for Vincent. Vincent came downstairs.

"Do ye see that?" said he, holding out a book that was in his hand.

Vincent took the volume from him and glanced at the title—Recent and Living Scottish Poets, by A. G. Murdoch. He was not in the least astonished—but he was angry and indignant.

"Very well," said he, "what of it? Do you mean to say you are going to vex an old man, who may be on his death-bed, by bringing charges of plagiarism against him? I dare say Mr. Bethune never saw the book, or, if he has seen it, he has forgotten it."

"I perceive ye do not understand," said the little doctor, without taking offence. "When I came to know what undertaking it was that Mr. Bethune had on his mind, I made sure I had either seen or heard of some such collection; and I sent to Edinburgh; and here it is, just arrived. Now the one thing he seems anxious about, the one that troubles him, is getting on with this work; and it occurred to me that if I could show him there was a similar book already published, he might cease fretting—"

"Cease fretting!" Vincent exclaimed, with a stare of astonishment. And then he hesitated. "Well, you are an older man than I, and you have more experience in these cases; but I should have said that a cruel disappointment such as this is sure to cause would distress his mind beyond measure. He must occupy himself with something; his brain is incessantly working; and so long as he is talking of getting out his book, he is at least looking forward with hope. But if you show him this volume, it will be a crushing blow; the very thing he seems to live for will be taken from him; he will feel injured by being anticipated, and brood over it. Of course I have no right to speak; I am not a relative; but ask his granddaughter—she knows him better than any one—"

"Perhaps you are right—perhaps you are right," said the little doctor. "It was merely an idea of mine—thinking it would quiet him. But on reflection I will

not risk it; it may be better not to risk it.”

”In that case,” Vincent struck in, promptly, ”will you let me tie up the book in paper, and will you take it away with you when you go? I mean, that I don’t wish Miss Bethune to see it. She has plenty to think of at present: don’t worry her with a trifling matter like this. It is of no consequence to her, or to any human being, how many collections of Scotch poems may be published—the more the merrier—so long as readers can be found for them; but she is anxious and nervous and tired at present—and it might surprise her, perhaps vex her, to find that this volume had been published.”

”Oh, certainly, certainly,” the doctor said, taking the failure of his ingenuous little scheme with much equanimity. ”I will put the book into that sideboard drawer until I come down; and then I can take it away with me without her or any one having seen it.”

The next day brought Vincent an unexpected and welcome surprise. He had been out-of-doors for a brief breathing-space, and was returning to the inn, when he saw in the distance, coming down the Cupar road, a waggonette and pair. He seemed somehow to recognise the two figures seated in the carriage; looked again; at last made certain—they were Lord and Lady Musselburgh. Of course, in such circumstances, when they drove up to the door of the inn, there was no great joyfulness of greeting; only a few customary questions, and professions of hope for the best; but at the same time, Vincent, who was touched by this friendly act, could not help saying—

”Well, this is like you, aunt.”

”Oh, your letter was too much for me, Vin,” she said, with frank good nature. ”I did not wait for the telegram—I trust there will be no need to telegraph for anybody. But I don’t want you to give me any credit. I want to appear as I am; and I’ve always told you I’m a selfish woman—the generous creature is Hubert here, who insisted on coming all this distance with me. And now I want you to understand the full extent of my selfishness. You are doing no good here—of course. You are probably in the way. But all your affairs in London will be compromised if you remain here: —’s private secretary cannot be absent at such a time—”

”There’s St. John!” Vincent exclaimed, referring to his colleague in the office that had been put in commission.

”He’s not in the House,” rejoined this practical and very charming person; ”and the short and the long of it is that you must get back to London at once. That is part of my scheme; the other is, that I shall take your place. I shall be of more use. You say there is no immediate danger. So much the better. Go away back to your post. If anything should happen—I could be of more service than you. What could you do? Miss Bethune could not return to London with you—and go

into lodgings of your choosing. I will look after her—if she will allow me—if she will let bygones be bygones. I will ask her pardon, or do anything; but I don't suppose she is thinking of that at present. You go back with Hubert and leave me here. I can shift for myself."

"I think it is a sensible arrangement," her husband said, idly looking around at the rather shabby furniture.

"It is very kind of you, aunt," Vincent said—"and very far from being selfish. But it is impossible. I must remain here. I have duties here as well as elsewhere—perhaps more important in my own sight. But—but—now that you are here—"

"Oh, yes, I'll stay," said she good-naturedly. "Well, Hubert, it is you who are packed off: I suppose you can return to Edinburgh to-night. I brought a few things with me, Vincent, in case I should be wanted: will you fetch them in from the waggonette? Still, I wish I could persuade you to go back to London!"

And in this manner it was that Lady Musselburgh became installed in the inn, making some little excuses to Maisrie. She and her husband had been in the neighbourhood. They had heard of Mr. Bethune's serious illness, and of Vincent's having come down from town. Could she be of any help? And so forth. Maisrie thanked her, of course; but did not take much notice of her; the girl just then having many things in her mind. For her grandfather's delirium was at times more pronounced now; and in these paroxysms she alone could soothe him.

Lady Musselburgh, indeed, rather hung back from entering the sick-room, without stating her reasons to anyone. On every occasion that she saw Maisrie she was most kind and considerate, and solicitous about the girl herself; but she betrayed no great concern about the old man, further than by making the usual enquiries. When Vincent suggested to her that, if she did not go into the room and see Mr. Bethune, his granddaughter might think it strange, she said in reply—

"But he won't remember me, Vin. We never met but at Henley."

"He remembers everything that ever happened to him," was the answer. "His memory is wonderful. And perhaps—afterwards—you may wish you had said a civil word or two."

"Oh, very well," she said. "Whatever you think right. Will you come with me now?"

She seemed a little apprehensive—she did not say why. They went upstairs together. The door of the sick-room was open. Maisrie, when she perceived this visitor, rose from her seat by the bedside; but Lady Musselburgh motioned her to keep her place, while she remained standing in the middle of the room, waiting to see if Mr. Bethune would take any notice of her. But his eyes were turned away; and he was muttering to himself almost inaudibly—they could only catch a word here and there—Galashiels—Torwoodlee—Selkirk—Jedburgh—no doubt he

was going over in his own mind those scenes of his youth. Then Maisrie said, very gently—

”Grandfather!”

He turned his eyes, and they rested on the stranger for a second or so, with a curiously puzzled expression. She went forward to the bedside.

”I’m afraid you don’t remember me,” said she, diffidently. ”It was at Henley we met—”

”I remember you very well, madam, very well indeed,” said he, receiving her with a sort of old-fashioned and ceremonious politeness—as far as the wasted frame and poor wandering wits would allow. ”I am sorry—to have to welcome you—to so poor a house—these are altered conditions truly—” He was still looking curiously at her. ”Yes, yes, I remember you well, madam—and—and I will not fail to send you my monograph on the—the Beatons of the Western Isles—I will not fail to send it—but if ye will forgive me—my memory is so treacherous—will you forgive me, madam, if your name has escaped me for the moment—”

”This is Lady Musselburgh, grandfather,” Maisrie interposed, quietly.

”Musselburgh—Musselburgh,” he said; and then he went on, amid the pauses of his laborious breathing: ”Ah, yes—your husband, madam, is a fine young man—and a good Scot—audacious, intrepid, and gallant—perhaps a little cynical in public affairs—great measures want earnest convictions—it may be that his lot has fallen in over-pleasant places—and he has chosen the easier path. Well, why not?—why not? There are some whose fate it is to—to fight a hard fight; while others—others find nothing but smoothness and peace—let them thank Heaven for it—and enjoy it. I hope he will hold on his way with a noble cheerfulness—despising the envy of enemies—a noble cheerfulness—I hope it may be his always—indeed, I know none deserving of better fortune.”

It was now abundantly clear to Lady Musselburgh that he did not in any way associate her with the arrangement that had been effected by George Morris; and she was much relieved.

”I mustn’t disturb you any longer,” said she. ”Indeed, I only came along to see if I could be of any assistance to Miss Bethune. I hear she has been doing far too much. Now that is very unwise; for when you are getting better, and need constant care, then she will find herself quite worn out.”

”Yes, yes, that is right,” said he, ”I wish ye would persuade her—take her in hand—make her look after herself—but she has a will of her own, the creature—a slim bit of a lass, ye might think—but it’s the spirit that endures—shining clear—clearer and clearer in dark times of trouble. And she—she has had her own troubles—and suffering—but never a word of complaining—obedient—willing—ready at all times and seasons—loyal—dutiful—and brave. What more could I say of her?—what more? Sometimes I have thought to myself—there was the—the

courage of a man in that slim bit creature—and the gentleness of all womankind as well—”

”Grandfather,” said Maisrie, ”you mustn’t talk any more now—you are keeping Lady Musselburgh waiting.”

”But, madam,” he continued, not heeding the girl at all, ”you must remember her descent—she comes of an inflexible race—she is of pure blood—it is the thoroughbred that holds on till its heart breaks in two. How could she help being proud-spirited, and silent in endurance, and brave? Perhaps you may know that it was of one of her ancestors—as he lay in his grave—that some one said—’There lies one who never feared the face of man,’—a noble inscription for a tombstone—’who never feared the face of man’—”

Maisrie leant over and said to him, quite gently—

”Grandfather, you are forgetting; it was of John Knox that was said.”

He looked at her doubtfully; and then seemed to be puzzling with his own memory.

”Perhaps—perhaps,” he said; and then he added, quite humbly, ”I beg your pardon for misleading you, madam—I did not intend it—but I forget things—and Maisrie is generally right. John Knox?—perhaps—perhaps—I thought it was a Beaton or a Bethune—but I cannot remember which of them—perhaps she is right—”

He closed his eyes, and turned away a little, as if to debate this question with himself—or perhaps to seek some rest: seeing which Lady Musselburgh and Vincent quietly withdrew, and went downstairs. ”Poor old man!” said she, when they were in the small parlour. ”There is a great change in him, entirely apart from his illness. Even in manner he is not nearly so—so grandiose as he used to be: sometimes he was quite humble. And as for her—my heart bleeds for her. I will do anything you like, Vin—if she will accept. What is more, I will confess to you now that, as far as she is concerned, I am convinced I was quite wrong. You were right: your eyes were wide open, after all. How can one judge of any one by an afternoon and an evening at Henley? That was my only chance. Then perhaps there was a little excuse for prejudice—there was the association—. But we’ll say no more about that. I confess I was wrong; you were right. That girl is as true as steel. If she gives her husband half the devotion she bestows on that old man, he’ll do very well.” She looked at her nephew. Then she said suddenly: ”Vin, you don’t say a word. I believe you have never forgiven me one bit!”

”Oh, yes, I have, aunt,” he made answer, uneasily. ”But there are some things that need never have happened.”

She regarded him again.

”Vin, you are too unforgiving! But can I not make up? See, now! If Miss Bethune is left alone—I should like to call her Maisrie, if she will let me: indeed

I should: but it is so difficult to get any nearer her—she is all wrapped up in her anxiety about her grandfather: well, if she is left alone, I will take her with me. I will take her to London. She will stay with me; there will be a home for her there, at any rate; and we may become better friends. Oh, I know we shall; it is only that at present she cares for nothing, and thinks of nothing, but her duty towards her grandfather. I intend to be very kind to her—I intend to win her affection if I can—”

”And I shall be very grateful to you, aunt,” said he. ”But it is hardly time yet to speak of such a thing: Mr. Bethune has always had a wonderful constitution.”

”Did you notice how reticent the doctor was this morning?” she asked,—and he did not answer.

But at least one thing that Lady Musselburgh had observed and mentioned was true: much, if not all, of the old grandiose manner had gone away from George Bethune. If on rare occasions some flash of defiance flamed up—as if he were still face to face with adversity and disappointment, and determined not to abate one jot of his pride and independence—he was ordinarily quite gentle and even humble, especially towards Maisrie. On this same evening he said—

”Margaret” (as he sometimes called her now, forgetting) ”will ye read to me the XLVI. Psalm?”

She went and got the book and began—

”God is our refuge and our strength,
 In straits a present aid;
 Therefore, although the earth remove,
 We will not be afraid:
 Though hills amidst the sea be cast;
 Though waters roaring make,
 And troubled be; yea, though the hills
 By swelling seas do shake.

”A river is, whose streams do glad
 The city of our God;
 The holy place, wherein the Lord
 Most high hath his abode.
 God in the midst of her doth dwell;
 Nothing shall her remove:
 The Lord to her our helper will,
 And that right early, prove.”

But when she had got so far, he said—

"Margaret—I hope ye will not take it ill—if I interrupt ye—it is no unkindness I mean, my lass—but, ye see, ye've got the English speech, as is natural—and I was trying to think how my father used to read out the Psalm at family worship—and ye've not got the Scotch way—nor the strong emphasis—how could ye?—how could ye? Ye'll not take it ill," he went on, with the most piteous concern visible in his face—"ye'll not think it's any unkindness—"

"No, no, no, grandfather!" she said. "Of course not. Shall I ask Mrs. MacGill to come up, to read to you in the Scotch way?"

"No, no one but you, Maisrie—no one but you—perhaps if you take the CXXVI. Psalm—'When Sion's bondage God turned back, as men that dreamed were we'—I mind, they used to sing that to the tune of *Kilmarnock*—and the young women's voices sounded beautiful. But you're not vexed, Maisrie!—for I did not mean any unkindness to ye, my dear—"

"No, no, grandfather," she said; and she turned to this other Psalm, and read it to him; and even after that it was some time before she could assure him that she had not been in the least hurt.

Two more of those long and anxious days went by; the fever waxing and waning by turns; but all the time the strength of that once powerful frame was slowly ebbing away. For one thing, his mind was well content. He had no more anxiety about Maisrie; he appeared to regard her future as well assured. He lay quietly murmuring to himself; and they could make out, from chance sentences here and there, that he was going over his boyhood's days again—bird's-nesting in the spring woods, making swaying seats out of the shelving branches of the beeches, guddling for trout in the small hill burns. An old refrain seemed to haunt him—

'Beyond thee, dearie, beyond thee, dearie,
And O to be lying beyond thee:
O sweetly, soundly, weel may he sleep,
That's laid in the bed beyond thee.'

'*Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde*': that phrase also returned again and again. And then he would go back to his school-days, and tell Maisrie about a little patch of garden that had been given all to himself; how he had watched the yellow spears of the crocuses pierce the dry earth, and the green buds begin to show on the currant-bushes; how he had planted scarlet-runners, and stuck the wands in, and trained the young shoots; how he had waited for the big red globes of the peonies to unroll; how he had white monkshood, and four distinct colours of columbine. Then his pets; his diversions; his terrible adventures—half drowned in a mill-dam—lost in a snowstorm on Laidlaw moor—the horrors of a certain

churchyard which he had sometimes to pass, alone, on the dark winter evenings. Maisrie did not seek to interrupt him. There was no agitation in these wandering reminiscences. Nay, they seemed to soothe him; and sometimes he sank into an altogether dozing state.

"Vincent," said Lady Musselburgh, when these two happened to find themselves together, in the room below, "have you no authority over that girl? She is killing herself!"

"It is no use remonstrating," said he. "She knows what the doctor has not dared to tell her. She sees that her grandfather is so weak he may slip away at any moment, without a word or a sign."

But on the evening of this second day, the old man, with such remnant of his former resolution and defiance as still clung to him, seemed to try to shake off this fatal lethargy—if only to say farewell. And in this last hour or so of his life, the spectacle that George Bethune presented was no unworthy one. Death, or the approach of death, which ennoble even the poorest and the meanest, was now dealing with this man; and all the husks and histrionic integuments that had obscured or hidden his true nature seemed to fall away from him. He stood out himself—no pressure of poverty distorting his mind—no hopeless regrets embittering his soul. It was Scotland he thought of. In those last minutes and moments, the deepest passion of his heart—an intense and proud love of his native land—burned pure and strong and clear; and if he showed any anxiety at all, it was merely that Maisrie, who was a kind of stranger, should form a liking for this country to which she, too, in a measure, belonged—that she should see it under advantageous conditions—that she should think of all that had been said of those hills and vales, and endow them with that added charm.

"But I do not fear," he said (his eyes, with some brilliancy still left in them, fixed on her, his voice low and panting). "You have an inheritance, Maisrie—it is in your blood—a sympathy—an insight—Scotland claims you—as one of her own. I knew that when—when—you used to play the Scotch airs for me—the trembling string, that made the soul tremble too—'The sun shines bright in France'—'The Lowlands o' Holland, that twined my love and me'—it was Scotch blood that made them thrill. Ye'll not be disappointed, Margaret—ye'll understand—when ye get to Yarrow—and Ettrick Water—and the murmur of the Tweed. I meant—to have taken ye myself—but it was not to be—ye'll have younger and happier guidance—as is but natural—I—I wish ye both well. And—and I would like ye—to go in the spring-time, Maisrie—and—and if ye could find out William Motherwell's grave—I have forgotten where it is—my memory is not what it used to be—but if ye could find out Motherwell's grave—ye might put a handful of primroses on it—for the sake of—of *Jeanie Morrison*."

He relapsed into silence; his breathing grew more laboured—and also fee-

bler; it was evident to those standing by that the end was not far off now. Maisrie sate holding his hand in hers; the fountain of her tears all dried up; her tragic grief seemed to have turned her to stone. Even those spring days of which he had spoken—when she would have her young husband by her side—they would want something. Her grandfather had been kind to her; and they had been through many years together.

He lay thus for nearly half-an-hour, the tide of life slowly receding. He made but one final effort to speak—nay, for a second, it seemed as if he would raise his head to give effect to his last proud protestation.

”Maisrie—Maisrie—they never saw me cowed—never once! I met—ill fortune—or good—face to face ... I held—by the watchword—of our house—Stand—Fast—Craig-Royston! ...”

It was his last breath. And so, with a lie on his lips, but with none in his heart, old George Bethune passed away: passed away from a world that had perhaps understood him but none too well.

THE END.

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