

Trollope Anthony

Is He Popenjoy?



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Anthony Trollope Is He Popenjoy?

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTORY. – NUMBER ONE

I would that it were possible so to tell a story that a reader should beforehand know every detail of it up to a certain point, or be so circumstanced that he might be supposed to know. In telling the little novelettes of our life, we commence our narrations with the presumption that these details are borne in mind, and though they be all forgotten, the stories come out intelligible at last. "You remember Mary Walker. Oh yes, you do; – that pretty girl, but such a queer temper! And how she was engaged to marry Harry Jones, and said she wouldn't at the church-door, till her father threatened her with bread and water; and how they have been living ever since as happy as two turtle-doves down in Devonshire, – till that scoundrel, Lieutenant Smith, went to Bideford! Smith has been found dead at the bottom of a saw-pit. Nobody's sorry for him. She's in a madhouse at Exeter; and Jones has disappeared, and couldn't have had more than thirty shillings in his pocket." This is quite as much as anybody ought to want to know previous to the unravelling of the tragedy of the Jones's. But such stories as those I have to tell cannot be written after that fashion. We novelists are constantly twitted with being long; and to the gentlemen who condescend to review us, and who take up our volumes with a view to business rather than pleasure, we must be infinite in length and tedium. But the story must be made intelligible from the beginning, or the real novel readers will not like it. The plan of jumping at once into the middle has been often tried, and sometimes seductively enough for a chapter or two; but the writer still has to hark back, and to begin again from the beginning, – not always very comfortably after the abnormal brightness of his few opening pages; and the reader who is then involved in some ancient family history, or long local explanation, feels himself to have been defrauded. It is as though one were asked to eat boiled mutton after woodcocks, caviare, or macaroni cheese. I hold that it is better to have the boiled mutton first, if boiled mutton there must be.

The story which I have to tell is something in its nature akin to that of poor Mrs. Jones, who was happy enough down in Devonshire till that wicked Lieutenant Smith came and persecuted her; not quite so tragic, perhaps, as it is stained neither by murder nor madness. But before I can hope to interest readers in the perplexed details of the life of a not unworthy lady, I must do more than remind them that they do know, or might have known, or should have known the antecedents of my personages. I must let them understand how it came to pass that so pretty, so pert, so gay, so good a girl as Mary Lovelace, without any great fault on her part, married a man so grim, so gaunt, so sombre, and so old as Lord George Germain. It will not suffice to say that she had done so. A hundred and twenty little incidents must be dribbled into the reader's intelligence, many of them, let me hope, in such manner that he shall himself be insensible to the process. But unless I make each one of them understood and appreciated by my ingenious, open-hearted, rapid reader, – by my reader who will always have his fingers impatiently ready to turn the page, – he will, I know, begin to masticate the real kernel of my story with infinite prejudices against Mary Lovelace.

Mary Lovelace was born in a country parsonage; but at the age of fourteen, when her life was in truth beginning, was transferred by her father to the deanery of Brotherton. Dean Lovelace had been a fortunate man in life. When a poor curate, a man of very humble origin, with none of what we commonly call Church interest, with nothing to recommend him but a handsome person, moderate education, and a quick intellect, he had married a lady with a considerable fortune, whose

family had bought for him a living. Here he preached himself into fame. It is not at all to be implied from this that he had not deserved the fame he acquired. He had been active and resolute in his work, holding opinions which, if not peculiar, were at any rate advanced, and never being afraid of the opinions which he held. His bishop had not loved him, nor had he made himself dear to the bench of bishops generally. He had the reputation of having been in early life a sporting parson. He had written a book which had been characterised as tending to infidelity, and had more than once been invited to state dogmatically what was his own belief. He had never quite done so, and had then been made a dean. Brotherton, as all the world knows, is a most interesting little city, neither a Manchester nor a Salisbury; full of architectural excellencies, given to literature, and fond of hospitality. The Bishop of Brotherton, – who did not love the dean, – was not a general favourite, being strict, ascetic, and utterly hostile to all compromises. At first there were certain hostile passages between him and the new dean. But the Dean, who was and is urbanity itself, won the day, and soon became certainly the most popular man in Brotherton. His wife's fortune doubled his clerical income, and he lived in all respects as a dean ought to live. His wife had died very shortly after his promotion, and he had been left with one only daughter on whom to lavish his cares and his affection.

Now we must turn for a few lines to the family of Lord George Germain. Lord George was the brother of the Marquis of Brotherton, whose family residence was at Manor Cross, about nine miles from the city. The wealth of the family of the Germaines was not equal to their rank, and the circumstances of the family were not made more comfortable by the peculiarities of the present marquis. He was an idle, self-indulgent, ill-conditioned man, who found that it suited his tastes better to live in Italy, where his means were ample, than on his own property, where he would have been comparatively a poor man. And he had a mother and four sisters, and a brother with whom he would hardly have known how to deal had he remained at Manor Cross. As it was, he allowed them to keep the house, while he simply took the revenue of the estate. With the marquis I do not know that it will be necessary to trouble the reader much at present. The old marchioness and her daughters lived always at Manor Cross in possession of a fine old house in which they could have entertained half the county, and a magnificent park, – which, however, was let for grazing up to the garden-gates, – and a modest income unequal to the splendour which should have been displayed by the inhabitants of Manor Cross.

And here also lived Lord George Germain, to whom at a very early period of his life had been entrusted the difficult task of living as the head of his family with little or no means for the purpose. When the old Marquis died, – very suddenly, and soon after the Dean's coming to Brotherton, – the widow had her jointure, some two thousand a year, out of the property, and the younger children had each a small settled sum. That the four ladies, – Sarah, Alice, Susanna, and Amelia, – should have sixteen thousand pounds among them, did not seem to be so very much amiss to those who knew how poor was the Germain family; but what was Lord George to do with four thousand pounds, and no means of earning a shilling? He had been at Eton, and had taken a degree at Oxford with credit, but had gone into no profession. There was a living in the family, and both father and mother had hoped that he would consent to take orders; but he had declined to do so, and there had seemed to be nothing for him but to come and live at Manor Cross. Then the old Marquis had died, and the elder brother, who had long been abroad, remained abroad. Lord George, who was the youngest of the family, and at that time about five-and-twenty, remained at Manor Cross, and became not only ostensibly but in very truth the managing head of the family.

He was a man whom no one could despise, and in whom few could find much to blame. In the first place he looked his poverty in the face, and told himself that he was a very poor man. His bread he might earn by looking after his mother and sisters, and he knew no other way in which he could do so. He was a just steward, spending nothing to gratify his own whims, acknowledging on all sides that he had nothing of his own, till some began to think that he was almost proud of his

poverty. Among the ladies of the family, his mother and sisters, it was of course said that George must marry money. In such a position there is nothing else that the younger son of a marquis can do. But Lord George was a person somewhat difficult of instruction in such a matter. His mother was greatly afraid of him. Among his sisters Lady Sarah alone dared to say much to him; and even to her teaching on this subject he turned a very deaf ear. "Quite so, George," she said; "quite so. No man with a spark of spirit would marry a woman for her money," – and she laid a great stress on the word "for," – "but I do not see why a lady who has money should be less fit to be loved than one who has none. Miss Barm is a most charming young woman, of excellent manners, admirably educated, if not absolutely handsome, quite of distinguished appearance, and she has forty thousand pounds. We all liked her when she was here." But there came a very black frown upon Lord George's brow, and then even Lady Sarah did not dare to speak again in favour of Miss Barm.

Then there came a terrible blow. Lord George Germain was in love with his cousin, Miss De Baron! It would be long to tell, and perhaps unnecessary, how that young lady had made herself feared by the ladies of Manor Cross. Her father, a man of birth and fortune, but not perhaps with the best reputation in the world, had married a Germain of the last generation, and lived, when in the country, about twenty miles from Brotherton. He was a good deal on the turf, spent much of his time at card-playing clubs, and was generally known as a fast man. But he paid his way, had never put himself beyond the pale of society, and was, of course, a gentleman. As to Adelaide de Baron, no one doubted her dash, her wit, her grace, or her toilet. Some also gave her credit for beauty; but there were those who said that, though she would behave herself decently at Manor Cross and houses of that class, she could be loud elsewhere. Such was the lady whom Lord George loved, and it may be conceived that this passion was distressing to the ladies of Manor Cross. In the first place, Miss De Baron's fortune was doubtful and could not be large; and then – she certainly was not such a wife as Lady Brotherton and her daughters desired for the one male hope of the family.

But Lord George was very resolute, and for a time it seemed to them all that Miss de Baron, – of whom the reader will see much if he go through with our story, – was not unwilling to share the poverty of her noble lover. Of Lord George personally something must be said. He was a tall, handsome, dark-browed man, silent generally and almost gloomy, looking, as such men do, as though he were always revolving deep things in his mind, but revolving in truth things not very deep, – how far the money would go, and whether it would be possible to get a new pair of carriage-horses for his mother. Birth and culture had given to him a look of intellect greater than he possessed; but I would not have it thought that he traded on this or endeavoured to seem other than he was. He was simple, conscientious, absolutely truthful, full of prejudices, and weak-minded. Early in life he had been taught to entertain certain ideas as to religion by those with whom he had lived at college, and had therefore refused to become a clergyman. The bishop of the diocese had attacked him; but, though weak, he was obstinate. The Dean and he had become friends, and so he had learned to think himself in advance of the world. But yet he knew himself to be a backward, slow, unappreciative man. He was one who could bear reproach from no one else, but who never praised himself even to himself.

But we must return to his love, which is that which now concerns us. His mother and sisters altogether failed to persuade him. Week after week he went over to Baronscourt, and at last threw himself at Adelaide's feet. This was five years after his father's death, when he was already thirty years old. Miss De Baron, though never a favourite at Manor Cross, knew intimately the history of the family. The present marquis was over forty, and as yet unmarried; – but then Lord George was absolutely a pauper. In that way she might probably become a marchioness; but then of what use would life be to her, should she be doomed for the next twenty years to live simply as one of the ladies of Manor Cross? She consulted her father, but he seemed to be quite indifferent, merely reminding her that though he would be ready to do everything handsomely for her wedding, she would have no fortune till after his death. She consulted her glass, and told herself that, without

self-praise, she must regard herself as the most beautiful woman of her own acquaintance. She consulted her heart, and found that in that direction she need not trouble herself. It would be very nice to be a marchioness, but she certainly was not in love with Lord George. He was handsome, no doubt – very handsome; but she was not sure that she cared much for men being handsome. She liked men that "had some go in them," who were perhaps a little fast, and who sympathised with her own desire for amusement. She could not bring herself to fall in love with Lord George. But then, the rank of a marquis is very high! She told Lord George that she must take time to consider.

When a young lady takes time to consider she has, as a rule, given way, Lord George felt it to be so, and was triumphant. The ladies at Manor Cross thought that they saw what was coming, and were despondent. The whole county declared that Lord George was about to marry Miss De Baron. The county feared that they would be very poor; but the recompence would come at last, as the present marquis was known not to be a marrying man. Lady Sarah was mute with despair. Lady Alice had declared that there was nothing for them but to make the best of it. Lady Susanna, who had high ideas of aristocratic duty, thought that George was forgetting himself. Lady Amelia, who had been snubbed by Miss De Baron, shut herself up and wept. The Marchioness took to her bed. Then, exactly at the same time, two things happened, both of which were felt to be of vital importance at Manor Cross. Miss De Baron wrote a most determined refusal to her lover, and old Mr. Tallowax died. Now old Mr. Tallowax had been Dean Lovelace's father-in-law, and had never had a child but she who had been the Dean's wife.

Lord George did in truth suffer dreadfully. There are men to whom such a disappointment as this causes enduring physical pain, – as though they had become suddenly affected with some acute and yet lasting disease. And there are men, too, who suffer the more because they cannot conceal the pain. Such a man was Lord George. He shut himself up for months at Manor Cross, and would see no one. At first it was his intention to try again, but very shortly after the letter to himself came one from Miss De Baron to Lady Alice, declaring that she was about to be married immediately to one Mr. Houghton; and that closed the matter. Mr. Houghton's history was well known to the Manor Cross family. He was a friend of Mr. De Baron, very rich, almost old enough to be the girl's father, and a great gambler. But he had a house in Berkeley Square, kept a stud of horses in Northamptonshire, and was much thought of at Newmarket. Adelaide De Baron explained to Lady Alice that the marriage had been made up by her father, whose advice she had thought it her duty to take. The news was told to Lord George, and then it was found expedient never to mention further the name of Miss De Baron within the walls of Manor Cross.

But the death of Mr. Tallowax was also very important. Of late the Dean of Brotherton had become very intimate at Manor Cross. For some years the ladies had been a little afraid of him, as they were by no means given to free opinions. But he made his way. They were decidedly high; the bishop was notoriously low; and thus, in a mild manner, without malignity on either side, Manor Cross and the Palace fell out. Their own excellent young clergyman was snubbed in reference to his church postures, and Lady Sarah was offended. But the Dean's manners were perfect. He never trod on any one's toes. He was rich, and as far as birth went, nobody, – but he knew how much was due to the rank of the Germains. In all matters he obliged them, and had lately made the deanery very pleasant to Lady Alice, – to whom a widowed canon at Brotherton was supposed to be partial. The interest between the deanery and Manor Cross was quite close; and now Mr. Tallowax had died leaving the greater part of his money to the Dean's daughter.

When a man suffers from disappointed love he requires consolation. Lady Sarah boldly declared her opinion, – in female conclave of course, – that one pretty girl is as good to a man as another, and might be a great deal better if she were at the same time better mannered and better dowered than the other. Mary Lovelace, when her grandfather died, was only seventeen. Lord George was at that time over thirty. But a man of thirty is still a young man, and a girl of seventeen may be a young woman. If the man be not more than fifteen years older than the woman

the difference of age can hardly be regarded as an obstacle. And then Mary was much loved at Manor Cross. She had been a most engaging child, was clever, well-educated, very pretty, with a nice sparkling way, fond of pleasure no doubt, but not as yet instructed to be fast. And now she would have at once thirty thousand pounds, and in course of time would be her father's heiress.

All the ladies at Manor Cross put their heads together, – as did also Mr. Canon Holdenough, who, while these things had been going on, had been accepted by Lady Alice. They fooled Lord George to the top of his bent, smoothing him down softly amidst the pangs of his love, not suggesting Mary Lovelace at first, but still in all things acting in that direction. And they so far succeeded that within twelve months of the marriage of Adelaide De Baron to Mr. Houghton, when Mary Lovelace was not yet nineteen and Lord George was thirty-three, with some few grey hairs on his handsome head, Lord George did go over to the deanery and offer himself as a husband to Mary Lovelace.

CHAPTER II. INTRODUCTORY NUMBER TWO

"**What** ought I to do, papa?" The proposition was in the first instance made to Mary through the Dean. Lord George had gone to the father, and the father with many protestations of personal goodwill, had declared that in such a matter he would not attempt to bias his daughter. "That the connection would be personally agreeable to myself, I need hardly say," said the Dean. "For myself, I have no objection to raise. But I must leave it to Mary. I can only say that you have my permission to address her." But the first appeal to Mary was made by her father himself, and was so made in conformity with his own advice. Lord George, when he left the deanery, had thus arranged it, but had been hardly conscious that the Dean had advised such an arrangement. And it may be confessed between ourselves, – between me and my readers, who in these introductory chapters may be supposed to be looking back together over past things, – that the Dean was from the first determined that Lord George should be his son-in-law. What son-in-law could he find that would redound more to his personal credit, or better advance his personal comfort. As to his daughter, where could a safer husband be found! And then she might in this way become a marchioness! His own father had kept livery stables at Bath. Her other grandfather had been a candlemaker in the Borough. "What ought I to do, papa?" Mary asked, when the proposition was first made to her. She of course admired the Germaines, and appreciated, at perhaps more than its full value the notice she had received from them. She had thought Lord George to be the handsomest man she had ever seen. She had heard of his love for Miss De Baron, and had felt for him. She was not as yet old enough to know how dull was the house at Manor Cross, or how little of resource she might find in the companionship of such a man as Lord George. Of her own money she knew almost nothing. Not as yet had her fortune become as a carcase to the birds. And now, should she decide in Lord George's favour, would she be saved at any rate from that danger.

"You must consult your own feelings, my dear," said her father. She looked up to him in blank dismay. She had as yet no feelings.

"But, papa –"

"Of course, my darling, there is a great deal to be said in favour of such a marriage. The man himself is excellent, – in all respects excellent. I do not know that there is a young man of higher principles than Lord George in the whole county."

"He is hardly a young man, papa."

"Not a young man! He is thirty. I hope you do not call that old. I doubt whether men in his position of life should ever marry at an earlier age. He is not rich."

"Would that matter?"

"No; I think not. But of that you must judge. Of course with your fortune you would have a right to expect a richer match. But though he has not money, he has much that money gives. He lives in a large house with noble surroundings. The question is whether you can like him?"

"I don't know, papa." Every word she spoke she uttered hesitatingly. When she had asked whether "that would matter," she had hardly known what she was saying. The thing was so important to her, and yet so entirely mysterious and as yet unconsidered, that she could not collect her thoughts sufficiently for proper answers to her father's sensible but not too delicate inquiries. The only ideas that had really struck her were that he was grand and handsome, but very old.

"If you can love him I think you would be happy," said the Dean. "Of course you must look at it all round. He will probably live to be the Marquis of Brotherton. From all that I hear I do not think that his brother is likely to marry. In that case you would be the Marchioness of Brotherton, and the property, though not great, would then be handsome. In the meanwhile you would be Lady

George Germain, and would live at Manor Cross. I should stipulate on your behalf that you should have a house of your own in town, for, at any rate, a portion of the year. Manor Cross is a fine place, but you would find it dull if you were to remain there always. A married woman too should always have some home of her own."

"You want me to do it, papa?"

"Certainly not. I want you to please yourself. If I find that you please yourself by accepting this man, I myself shall be better pleased than if you please yourself by rejecting him; but you shall never know that by my manner. I shall not put you on bread and water, and lock you up in the garret either if you accept him, or if you reject him." The Dean smiled as he said this, as all the world at Brotherton knew that he had never in his life even scolded his daughter.

"And you, papa?"

"I shall come and see you, and you will come and see me. I shall get on well enough. I have always known that you would leave me soon. I am prepared for that." There was something in this which grated on her feelings. She had, perhaps, taught herself to believe that she was indispensable to her father's happiness. Then after a pause he continued: "Of course you must be ready to see Lord George when he comes again, and you ought to remember, my dear, that marquises do not grow on every hedge."

With great care and cunning workmanship one may almost make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but not quite. The care which Dean Lovelace had bestowed upon the operation in regard to himself had been very great, and the cunning workmanship was to be seen in every plait and every stitch. But still there was something left of the coarseness of the original material. Of all this poor Mary knew nothing at all; but yet she did not like being told of marquises and hedges where her heart was concerned. She had wanted, – had unconsciously wanted, – some touch of romance from her father to satisfy the condition in which she found herself. But there was no touch of romance there; and when she was left to herself to work the matter out in her own heart and in her own mind she was unsatisfied.

Two or three days after this Mary received notice that her lover was coming. The Dean had seen him and had absolutely fixed a time. To poor Mary this seemed to be most unromantic, most unpromising. And though she had thought of nothing else since she had first heard of Lord George's intention, though she had laid awake struggling to make up her mind, she had reached no conclusion. It had become quite clear to her that her father was anxious for the marriage, and there was much in it which recommended it to herself. The old elms of the park of Manor Cross were very tempting. She was not indifferent to being called My Lady. Though she had been slightly hurt when told that marquises did not grow on hedges, still she knew that it would be much to be a marchioness. And the man himself was good, and not only good but very handsome. There was a nobility about him beyond that of his family. Those prone to ridicule might perhaps have called him Werter-faced, but to Mary there was a sublimity in this. But then was she in love with him?

She was a sweet, innocent, ladylike, high-spirited, joyous creature. Those struggles of her father to get rid of the last porcine taint, though not quite successful as to himself, had succeeded thoroughly in regard to her. It comes at last with due care, and the due care had here been taken. She was so nice that middle-aged men wished themselves younger that they might make love to her, or older that they might be privileged to kiss her. Though keenly anxious for amusement, though over head and ears in love with sport and frolic, no unholy thought had ever polluted her mind. That men were men, and that she was a woman, had of course been considered by her. Oh, that it might some day be her privilege to love some man with all her heart and all her strength, some man who should be, at any rate to her, the very hero of heroes, the cynosure of her world! It was thus that she considered the matter. There could surely nothing be so glorious as being well in love. And the one to be thus worshipped must of course become her husband. Otherwise would her heart be broken, and perhaps his, – and all would be tragedy. But with tragedy she had no sympathy. The

loved one must become her husband. But the pictures she had made to herself of him were not at all like Lord George Germain. He was to be fair, with laughing eyes, quick in repartee, always riding well to hounds. She had longed to hunt herself, but her father had objected. He must be sharp enough sometimes to others, though ever soft to her, with a silken moustache and a dimpled chin, and perhaps twenty-four years old. Lord George was dark, his eyes never laughed; he was silent generally, and never went out hunting at all. He was dignified, and tall, very handsome, no doubt, — and a lord. The grand question was that; — could she love him? Could she make another picture, and paint him as her hero? There were doubtless heroic points in the side wave of that coal-black lock, — coal-black where the few grey hairs had not yet shown themselves, in his great height, and solemn polished manners.

When her lover came, she could only remember that if she accepted him she would please everybody. The Dean had taken occasion to assure her that the ladies at Manor Cross would receive her with open arms. But on this occasion she did not accept him. She was very silent, hardly able to speak a word, and almost sinking out of sight when Lord George endeavoured to press his suit by taking her hand. But she contrived at last to make him the very answer that Adelaide De Baron had made. She must take time to think of it. But the answer came from her in a different spirit. She at any rate knew as soon as it was given that it was her destiny in life to become Lady George Germain. She did not say "Yes" at the moment, only because it is so hard for a girl to tell a man that she will marry him at the first asking! He made his second offer by letter, to which the Dean wrote the reply: —

"My dear Lord George,

"My daughter is gratified by your affection, and flattered by your manner of showing it. A few plain words are perhaps the best. She will be happy to receive you as her future husband, whenever it may suit you to come to the deanery.

"Yours affectionately,

"Henry Lovelace."

Immediately upon this the conduct of Lord George was unexceptionable. He hurried over to Brotherton, and as he clasped his girl in his arms, he told her that he was the happiest man in England. Poor as he was he made her a handsome present, and besought her if she had any mercy, any charity, any love for him, to name an early day. Then came the four ladies from Manor Cross, — for Lady Alice had already become Lady Alice Holdenough, — and caressed her, and patted her, and petted her, and told her that she should be as welcome as flowers in May. Her father, too, congratulated her with more of enthusiasm, and more also of demonstrated feeling than she had ever before seen him evince. He had been very unwilling, he said, to express any strong opinion of his own. It had always been his desire that his girl should please herself. But now that the thing was settled he could assure her of his thorough satisfaction. It was all that he could have desired; and now he would be ready at any time to lay himself down, and be at rest. Had his girl married a spendthrift lord, even a duke devoted to pleasure and iniquity, it would have broken his heart. But he would now confess that the aristocracy of the county had charms for him; and he was not ashamed to rejoice that his child should be accepted within their pale. Then he brushed a real tear from his eyes, and Mary threw herself into his arms. The tear was real, and in all that he said there was not an insincere word. It was to him a very glory of glories that his child should be in the way of becoming the Marchioness of Brotherton. It was even a great glory that she should be Lady George Germain. The Dean never forgot the livery stable, and owned day and night that God had been very good to him.

It was soon settled that Mary was to be allowed three months for preparation, and that the marriage was to be solemnized in June. Of course she had much to do in preparing her wedding garments, but she had before her a much more difficult task than that at which she worked most

sedulously. It was now the great business of her life to fall in love with Lord George. She must get rid of that fair young man with the silky moustache and the darling dimple. The sallow, the sublime, and the Werter-faced must be made to take the place of laughing eyes and pink cheeks. She did work very hard, and sometimes, as she thought, successfully. She came to a positive conclusion that he was the handsomest man she ever saw, and that she certainly liked the few grey hairs. That his manner was thoroughly noble no one could doubt. If he were seen merely walking down the street he would surely be taken for a great man. He was one of whom, as her husband, she could be always proud; – and that she felt to be a great thing. That he would not play lawn tennis, and that he did not care for riding were points in his character to be regretted. Indeed, though she made some tenderly cautious inquiries, she could not find what were his amusements. She herself was passionately fond of dancing, but he certainly did not dance. He talked to her, when he did talk, chiefly of his family, of his own poverty, of the goodness of his mother and sisters, and of the great regret which they all felt that they should have been deserted by the head of their family.

"He has now been away," said Lord George, "for ten years; but not improbably he may return soon, and then we shall have to leave Manor Cross."

"Leave Manor Cross!"

"Of course we must do so should he come home. The place belongs to him, and we are only there because it has not suited him to reside in England."

This he said with the utmost solemnity, and the statement had been produced by the answer which the Marquis had made to a letter announcing to him his brother's marriage. The Marquis had never been a good correspondent. To the ladies of the house he never wrote at all, though Lady Sarah favoured him with a periodical quarterly letter. To his agent, and less frequently to his brother, he would write curt, questions on business, never covering more than one side of a sheet of notepaper, and always signed "Yours, B." To these the inmates of Manor Cross had now become accustomed, and little was thought of them; but on this occasion he had written three or four complete sentences, which had been intended to have, and which did have, a plain meaning. He congratulated his brother, but begged Lord George to bear in mind that he himself might not improbably want Manor Cross for his own purpose before long. If Lord George thought it would be agreeable, Mr. Knox, the agent, might have instructions to buy Miss Lovelace a present. Of this latter offer Lord George took no notice; but the intimation concerning the house sat gravely on his mind.

The Dean did exactly as he had said with reference to the house in town. Of course it was necessary that there should be arrangements as to money between him and Lord George, in which he was very frank. Mary's money was all her own, – giving her an income of nearly £1500 per annum. The Dean was quite of opinion that this should be left to Lord George's management, but he thought it right as Mary's father to stipulate that his daughter should have a home of her own. Then he suggested a small house in town, and expressed an opinion that his daughter should be allowed to live there six months in the year. The expense of such a sojourn might be in some degree shared by himself if Lord George would receive him for a month or so in the spring. And so the thing was settled, Lord George pledging himself that the house should be taken. The arrangement was distasteful to him in many ways, but it did not seem to be unreasonable, and he could not oppose it. Then came the letter from the Marquis. Lord George did not consider himself bound to speak of that letter to the Dean; but he communicated the threat to Mary. Mary thought nothing about it, except that her future brother-in-law must be a very strange man.

During all those three months she strove very hard to be in love, and sometimes she thought that she had succeeded. In her little way she studied the man's character, and did all she could to ingratiate herself with him. Walking seemed to be his chief relaxation, and she was always ready to walk with him. She tried to make herself believe that he was profoundly wise. And then, when

she failed in other things, she fell back upon his beauty. Certainly she had never seen a handsomer face, either on a man's shoulders or in a picture. And so they were married.

Now I have finished my introduction, – having married my heroine to my hero, – and have, I hope, instructed my reader as to those hundred and twenty incidents, of which I spoke – not too tediously. If he will go back and examine, he will find that they are all there. But perhaps it will be better for us both that he should be in quiet possession of them without any such examination.

CHAPTER III. LIFE AT MANOR CROSS

The married couple passed their honeymoon in Ireland, Lady Brotherton having a brother, an Irish peer, who lent them for a few months his house on the Blackwater. The marriage, of course, was celebrated in the cathedral, and equally of course, the officiating clergymen were the Dean and Canon Holdenough. On the day before the marriage Lord George was astonished to find how rich a man was his father-in-law.

"Mary's fortune is her own," he said; "but I should like to give her something. Perhaps I had better give it to you on her behalf."

Then he shuffled a cheque for a thousand pounds into Lord George's hands. He moreover gave his daughter a hundred pounds in notes on the morning of the wedding, and thus acted the part of the benevolent father and father-in-law to a miracle. It may be acknowledged here that the receipt of the money removed a heavy weight from Lord George's heart. He was himself so poor, and at the same time so scrupulous, that he had lacked funds sufficient for the usual brightness of a wedding tour. He would not take his mother's money, nor lessen his own small patrimony; but now it seemed that wealth was showered on him from the deanery.

Perhaps a sojourn in Ireland did as well as anything could towards assisting the young wife in her object of falling in love with her husband. He would hardly have been a sympathetic companion in Switzerland or Italy, as he did not care for lakes or mountains. But Ireland was new to him and new to her, and he was glad to have an opportunity of seeing something of a people as to whom so little is really known in England. And at Ballycondra, on the Blackwater, they were justified in feeling a certain interest in the welfare of the tenants around them. There was something to be done, and something of which they could talk. Lord George, who couldn't hunt, and wouldn't dance, and didn't care for mountains, could enquire with some zeal how much wages a peasant might earn, and what he would do with it when earned. It interested him to learn that whereas an English labourer will certainly eat and drink his wages from week to week, – so that he could not be trusted to pay any sum half-yearly, – an Irish peasant, though he be half starving, will save his money for the rent. And Mary, at his instance, also cared for these things. It was her gift, as with many women, to be able to care for everything. It was, perhaps, her misfortune that she was apt to care too much for many things. The honeymoon in Ireland answered its purpose, and Lady George, when she came back to Manor Cross, almost thought that she had succeeded. She was at any rate able to assure her father that she had been as happy as the day was long, and that he was absolutely – "perfect."

This assurance of perfection the Dean no doubt took at its proper value. He patted his daughter's cheek as she made it, and kissed her, and told her that he did not doubt but that with a little care she might make herself a happy woman. The house in town had already been taken under his auspices, but of course was not to be inhabited yet.

It was a very small but a very pretty little house, in a quaint little street called Munster Court, near Storey's Gate, with a couple of windows looking into St. James's Park. It was now September, and London for the present was out of the question. Indeed, it had been arranged that Lord George and his wife should remain at Manor Cross till after Christmas. But the house had to be furnished, and the Dean evinced his full understanding of the duties of a father-in-law in such an emergency. This, indeed, was so much the case that Lord George became a little uneasy. He had the greater part of the thousand pounds left, which he insisted on expending, – and thought that that should have sufficed. But the Dean explained in his most cordial manner, – and no man's manner could be more cordial than the Dean's, – that Mary's fortune from Mr. Tallowax had been unexpected, that having had but one child he intended to do well by her, and that, therefore, he could now assist in

starting her well in life without doing himself a damage. The house in this way was decorated and furnished, and sundry journeys up to London served to brighten the autumn which might otherwise have been dull and tedious.

At this period of her life two things acting together, and both acting in opposition to her anticipations of life, surprised the young bride not a little. The one was her father's manner of conversation with her, and the other was her husband's. The Dean had never been a stern parent; but he had been a clergyman, and as a clergyman he had inculcated a certain strictness of life, – a very modified strictness, indeed, but something more rigid than might have come from him had he been a lawyer or a country gentleman. Mary had learned that he wished her to attend the cathedral services, and to interest herself respecting them, and she had always done so. He had explained to her that, although he kept a horse for her to ride, he, as the Dean of Brotherton, did not wish her to be seen in the hunting field. In her dress, her ornaments, her books, her parties, there had been always something to mark slightly her clerical belongings. She had never chafed against this because she loved her father and was naturally obedient; but she had felt something perhaps of a soft regret. Now her father, whom she saw very frequently, never spoke to her of any duties. How should her house be furnished? In what way would she lay herself out for London society? What enjoyments of life could she best secure? These seemed to be the matters on which he was most intent. It occurred to her that when speaking to her of the house in London he never once asked her what church she would attend; and that when she spoke with pleasure of being so near the Abbey, he paid little or no attention to her remark. And then, too, she felt, rather than perceived, that in his counsels to her he almost intimated that she must have a plan of life different from her husband's. There were no such instructions given, but it almost seemed as though this were implied. He took it for granted that her life was to be gay and bright, though he seemed to take it also for granted that Lord George did not wish to be gay and bright.

All this surprised her. But it did not perhaps surprise her so much as the serious view of life which her husband from day to day impressed upon her. That hero of her early dreams, that man with the light hair and the dimpled chin, whom she had not as yet quite forgotten, had never scolded her, had never spoken a serious word to her, and had always been ready to provide her with amusements that never palled. But Lord George made out a course of reading for her, – so much for the two hours after breakfast, so much for the hour before dressing, – so much for the evening; and also a table of results to be acquired in three months, – in six months, – and so much by the close of the first year; and even laid down the sum total of achievements to be produced by a dozen years of such work! Of course she determined to do as he would have her do. The great object of her life was to love him; and, of course, if she really loved him, she would comply with his wishes. She began her daily hour of Gibbon after breakfast with great zeal. But there was present to her an idea that if the Gibbon had come from her father, and the instigations to amuse herself from her husband, it would have been better.

These things surprised her; but there was another matter that vexed her. Before she had been six weeks at Manor Cross she found that the ladies set themselves up as her tutors. It was not the Marchioness who offended her so much as her three sisters-in-law. The one of the family whom she had always liked best had been also liked best by Mr. Holdenough, and had gone to live next door to her father in the Close. Lady Alice, though perhaps a little tiresome, was always gentle and good-natured. Her mother-in-law was too much in awe of her own eldest daughter ever to scold anyone. But Lady Sarah could be very severe; and Lady Susanna could be very stiff; and Lady Amelia always re-echoed what her elder sisters said.

Lady Sarah was by far the worst. She was forty years old, and looked as though she were fifty and wished to be thought sixty. That she was, in truth, very good, no one either at Manor Cross or in Brotherton or any of the parishes around ever doubted. She knew every poor woman on the estate, and had a finger in the making of almost every petticoat worn. She spent next to nothing

on herself, giving away almost all her own little income. She went to church whatever was the weather. She was never idle and never wanted to be amused. The place in the carriage which would naturally have been hers she had always surrendered to one of her sisters when there had been five ladies at Manor Cross, and now she surrendered again to her brother's wife. She spent hours daily in the parish school. She was doctor and surgeon to the poor people, – never sparing herself. But she was harsh-looking, had a harsh voice, and was dictatorial. The poor people had become used to her and liked her ways. The women knew that her stitches never gave way, and the men had a wholesome confidence in her medicines, her plasters, and her cookery. But Lady George Germain did not see by what right she was to be made subject to her sister-in-law's jurisdiction.

Church matters did not go quite on all fours at Manor Cross. The ladies, as has before been said, were all high, the Marchioness being the least exigent in that particular, and Lady Amelia the most so. Ritual, indeed, was the one point of interest in Lady Amelia's life. Among them there was assent enough for daily comfort; but Lord George was in this respect, and in this respect only, a trouble to them. He never declared himself openly, but it seemed to them that he did not care much about church at all. He would generally go of a Sunday morning; but there was a conviction that he did so chiefly to oblige his mother. Nothing was ever said of this. There was probably present to the ladies some feeling, not uncommon, that religion is not so necessary for men as for women. But Lady George was a woman.

And Lady George was also the daughter of a clergyman. There was now a double connexion between Manor Cross and the Close at Brotherton. Mr. Canon Holdenough, who was an older man than the Dean, and had been longer known in the diocese, was a most unexceptional clergyman, rather high, leaning towards the high and dry, very dignified, and quite as big a man in Brotherton as the Dean himself. The Dean was, indeed, the Dean; but Mr. Holdenough was uncle to a baronet, and the Holdenoughs had been Holdenoughs when the Conqueror came. And then he also had a private income of his own. Now all this gave to the ladies at Manor Cross a peculiar right to be great in church matters, – so that Lady Sarah was able to speak with much authority to Mary when she found that the bride, though a Dean's daughter, would only go to two services a week, and would shirk one of them if the weather gave the slightest colouring of excuse.

"You used to like the cathedral services," Lady Sarah said to her, one day, when Mary had declined to go to the parish church, to sing the praises of St. Processus.

"That was because they were cathedral services," said Mary.

"You mean to say that you attended the House of God because the music was good!" Mary had not thought the subject over sufficiently to be enabled to say that good music is supplied with the object of drawing large congregations, so she only shrugged her shoulders. "I, too, like good music, dear; but I do not think the want of it should keep me from church." Mary again shrugged her shoulders, remembering, as she did so, that her sister-in-law did not know one tune from another. Lady Alice was the only one of the family who had ever studied music.

"Even your papa goes on Saints' days," continued Lady Sarah, conveying a sneer against the Dean by that word "even."

"Papa is Dean. I suppose he has to go."

"He would not go to church, I suppose, unless he approved of going."

The subject then dropped. Lady George had not yet arrived at that sort of snarling home intimacy, which would have justified her in telling Lady Sarah that if she wanted a lesson at all, she would prefer to take it from her husband.

The poor women's petticoats was another source of trouble. Before the autumn was over, – by the end of October, – when Mary had been two months at Manor Cross, she had been got to acknowledge that ladies living in the country should employ a part of their time in making clothes for the poor people; and she very soon learned to regret the acknowledgment. She was quickly driven into a corner by an assertion from Lady Sarah that, such being the case, the time to be so

employed should be defined. She had intended to make something, – perhaps an entire petticoat, – at some future time. But Lady Sarah was not going to put up with conduct such as that. Mary had acknowledged her duty. Did she mean to perform it, or to neglect it? She made one petticoat, and then gently appealed to her husband. Did not he think that petticoats could be bought cheaper than they could be made? He figured it out, and found that his wife could earn three-halfpence a day by two hours' work; and even Lady Sarah did not require from her more than two hours daily. Was it worth while that she should be made miserable for ninepence a week, – less than £2 a-year? Lady George figured it out also, and offered the exact sum, £1 19s., to Lady Sarah, in order that she might be let off for the first twelve months. Then Lady Sarah was full of wrath. Was that the spirit in which offerings were to be made to the Lord? Mary was asked, with stern indignation, whether in bestowing the work of her hands upon the people, whether in the very fact that she was doing for the poor that which was distasteful to herself, she did not recognise the performance of a duty? Mary considered a while, and then said that she thought a petticoat was a petticoat, and that perhaps the one made by the regular petticoat-maker would be the best. She did not allude to the grand doctrine of the division of labour, nor did she hint that she might be doing more harm than good by interfering with regular trade, because she had not studied those matters. But that was the line of her argument. Lady Sarah told her that her heart in that matter was as hard as a nether millstone. The young wife, not liking this, withdrew; and again appealed to her husband. His mind was divided on the subject. He was clearly of opinion that the petticoat should be obtained in the cheapest market, but he doubted much about that three-halfpence in two hours. It might be that his wife could not do better at present; but experience would come, and in that case, she would be obtaining experience as well as earning three-halfpence. And, moreover, petticoats made at Manor Cross would, he thought, undoubtedly be better than any that could be bought. He came, however, to no final decision; and Mary, finding herself every morning sitting in a great petticoat conclave, hardly had an alternative but to join it.

It was not in any spirit of complaint that she spoke on the subject to her father as the winter came on. A certain old Miss Tallowax had come to the deanery, and it had been thought proper that Lady George should spend a day or two there. Miss Tallowax, also, had money of her own, and even still owned a share in the business; and the Dean had pointed out, both to Lord George and his wife, that it would be well that they should be civil to her. Lord George was to come on the last day, and dine and sleep at the deanery. On this occasion, when the Dean and his daughter were alone together, she said something in a playful way about the great petticoat contest.

"Don't you let those old ladies sit upon you," said the Dean. He smiled as he spoke, but his daughter well knew, from his tone, that he meant his advice to be taken seriously.

"Of course, papa, I should like to accommodate myself to them as much as I can."

"But you can't, my dear. Your manner of life can't be their manner, nor theirs yours. I should have thought George would see that."

"He didn't take their part, you know."

"Of course he didn't. As a married woman you are entitled to have your own way, unless he should wish it otherwise. I don't want to make this matter serious; but if it is pressed, tell them that you do not care to spend your time in that way. They cling to old fashions. That is natural enough; but it is absurd to suppose that they should make you as old-fashioned as themselves."

He had taken the matter up quite seriously, and had given his daughter advice evidently with the intention that she should profit by it. That which he had said as to her being a married woman struck her forcibly. No doubt these ladies at Manor Cross were her superiors in birth; but she was their brother's wife, and as a married woman had rights of her own. A little spirit of rebellion already began to kindle itself within her bosom; but in it there was nothing of mutiny against her husband. If he were to desire her to make petticoats all day, of course she would make them; but in this contest he had been, as it were, neutral, and had certainly given her no orders. She thought

a good deal about it while at the deanery, and made up her mind that she would sit in the petticoat conclave no longer. It could not be her duty to pass her time in an employment in which a poor woman might with difficulty earn sixpence a day. Surely she might do better with her time than that, even though she should spend it all in reading Gibbon.

CHAPTER IV. AT THE DEANERY

There was a dinner-party at the deanery during Miss Tallowax's sojourn at Brotherton. Mr. Canon Holdenough and Lady Alice were there. The bishop and his wife had been asked, – a ceremony which was gone through once a year, – but had been debarred from accepting the invitation by the presence of clerical guests at the palace. But his lordship's chaplain, Mr. Groschut, was present. Mr. Groschut also held an honorary prebendal stall, and was one of the chapter, – a thorn sometimes in the Dean's side. But appearances were well kept up at Brotherton, and no one was more anxious that things should be done in a seemly way than the Dean. Therefore, Mr. Groschut, who was a very low churchman and had once been a Jew, but who bore a very high character for theological erudition, was asked to the deanery. There were also one or two other clergymen there, with their wives, and Mr. and Mrs. Houghton. Mrs. Houghton, it will be remembered, was the beautiful woman who had refused to become the wife of Lord George Germain. Before taking this step, the Dean had been careful to learn whether his son-in-law would object to meet the Houghtons. Such objection would have been foolish, as the families had all known each other. Both Mr. De Baron, Mrs. Houghton's father, and Mr. Houghton himself, had been intimate with the late marquis, and had been friends of the present lord before he had quitted the country. A lady when she refuses a gentleman gives no cause of quarrel. All this the Dean understood; and as he himself had known both Mr. Houghton and Mr. De Baron ever since he came to Brotherton, he thought it better that there should be such a meeting. Lord George blushed up to the roots of his hair, and then said that he should be very glad to meet the gentleman and his wife.

The two young brides had known each other as girls, and now met with, at any rate, an appearance of friendship.

"My dear," said Mrs. Houghton, who was about four years the elder, "of course I know all about it, and so do you. You are an heiress, and could afford to please yourself. I had nothing of my own, and should have had to pass all my time at Manor Cross. Are you surprised?"

"Why should I be surprised?" said Lady George, who was, however, very much surprised at this address.

"Well, you know; he is the handsomest man in England. Everybody allows that; and, then, such a family – and such possibilities! I was very much flattered. Of course he had not seen you then, or only seen you as a child, or I shouldn't have had a chance. It is a great deal better as it is, – isn't it?"

"I think so, certainly."

"I am so glad to hear that you have a house in town. We go up about the first of April, when the hunting is over. Mr. Houghton does not ride much, but he hunts a great deal. We live in Berkeley Square, you know; and I do so hope we shall see ever so much of you."

"I'm sure I hope so too," said Lady George, who had never hitherto been very fond of Miss De Baron, and had entertained a vague idea that she ought to be a little afraid of Mrs. Houghton. But when her father's guest was so civil to her she did not know how to be other than civil in return.

"There is no reason why what has passed should make any awkwardness; – is there?"

"No," said Lady George, feeling that she almost blushed at the allusion to so delicate a subject.

"Of course not. Why should there? Lord George will soon get used to me, just as if nothing had happened; and I shall always be ever so fond of him, – in a way, you know. There shall be nothing to make you jealous."

"I'm not a bit afraid of that," said Lady George, almost too earnestly.

"You need not be, I'm sure. Not but what I do think he was at one time very – very much attached to me. But it couldn't be. And what's the good of thinking of such a thing when it can't be? I don't pretend to be very virtuous, and I like money. Now Mr. Houghton, at any rate, has got a large income. If I had had your fortune at my own command, I don't say what I might not have done."

Lady George almost felt that she ought to be offended by all this, – almost felt that she was disgusted; but, at the same time, she did not quite understand it. Her father had made a point of asking the Houghtons, and had told her that of course she would know the Houghtons up in town. She had an idea that she was very ignorant of the ways of life; but that now it would behove her, as a married woman, to learn those ways. Perhaps the free and easy mode of talking was the right thing. She did not like being told by another lady that that other lady would have married her own husband, only that he was a pauper; and the offence of all this seemed to be the greater because it was all so recent. She didn't like being told that she was not to be jealous, especially when she remembered that her husband had been desperately in love with the lady who told her so not many months ago. But she was not jealous, and was quite sure she never would be jealous; and, perhaps, it did not matter. All this had occurred in the drawing-room before dinner. Then Mr. Houghton came up to her, telling that he had been commissioned by the Dean to have the honour of taking her down to dinner. Having made his little speech, Mr. Houghton retired, – as gentlemen generally do retire when in that position.

"Be as nice as you can to him," said Mrs. Houghton. "He hasn't much to say for himself, but he isn't half a bad fellow; and a pretty woman like you can do what she likes with him."

Lady George, as she went down to dinner, assured herself that she had no slightest wish to take any unfair advantage of Mr. Houghton.

Lord George had taken down Miss Tallowax, the Dean having been very wise in this matter; and Miss Tallowax was in a seventh heaven of happiness. Miss Tallowax, though she had made no promises, was quite prepared to do great things for her noble connexions, if her noble connexions would treat her properly. She had already made half-a-dozen wills, and was quite ready to make another, if Lord George would be civil to her. The Dean was in his heart a little ashamed of his aunt; but he was man enough to be able to bear her eccentricities without showing his vexation, and sufficiently wise to know that more was to be won than lost by the relationship.

"The best woman in the world," he had said to Lord George beforehand, speaking of his aunt; "but, of course, you will remember that she was not brought up as a lady."

Lord George, with stately urbanity, had signified his intention of treating Miss Tallowax with every consideration.

"She has thirty thousand pounds at her own disposal," continued the Dean. "I have never said a word to her about money, but, upon my honour, I think she likes Mary better than any one else. It's worth bearing in mind, you know."

Lord George smiled again in a stately manner, – perhaps showing something of displeasure in his smile. But, nevertheless, he was well aware that it was worth his while to bear Miss Tallowax and her money in his mind.

"My lord," said Miss Tallowax, "I hope you will allow me to say how much honoured we all feel by Mary's proud position." Lord George bowed and smiled, and led the lady into the deanery dining-room. Words did not come easily to him, and he hardly knew how to answer the lady. "Of course, it's a great thing for people such as us," continued Miss Tallowax, "to be connected with the family of a Marquis." Again Lord George bowed. This was very bad, indeed, – a great deal worse than he had anticipated from the aunt of so courtly a man as his father-in-law, the Dean. The lady looked to be about sixty; very small, very healthy, with streaky red cheeks, small grey eyes, and a brown front. Then came upon him an idea, that it would be a very long time before the thirty thousand pounds, or any part of it, would come to him. And then there came to him another idea, that as he had married the Dean's daughter, it was his duty to behave well to the Dean's aunt,

even though the money should never come to him. He therefore told Miss Tallowax that his mother hoped to have the pleasure of seeing her at Manor Cross before she left Brotherton. Miss Tallowax almost got out of her seat, as she curtsied with her head and shoulders to this proposition.

The Dean was a very good man at the head of his own dinner-table, and the party went off pleasantly in spite of sundry attempts at clerical pugnacity made by Mr. Groschut. Every man and every beast has his own weapon. The wolf fights with his tooth, the bull with his horn, and Mr. Groschut always fought with his bishop, – so taught by inner instinct. The bishop, according to Mr. Groschut, was inclined to think that this and that might be done. That such a change might be advantageously made in reference to certain clerical meetings, and that the hilarity of the diocese might be enhanced by certain evangelical festivities. These remarks were generally addressed to Mr. Canon Holdenough, who made almost no reply to them. But the Dean was, on each occasion, prepared with some civil answer, which, while it was an answer, would still seem to change the conversation. It was a law in the Close that Bishop Barton should be never allowed to interfere with the affairs of Brotherton Cathedral; and if not the bishop, certainly not the bishop's chaplain. Though the Canon and the Dean did not go altogether on all fours in reference to clerical affairs generally they were both agreed on this point. But the Chaplain, who knew the condition of affairs as well as they did, thought the law a bad law, and was determined to abolish it. "It certainly would be very pleasant, Mr. Holdenough, if we could have such a meeting within the confines of the Close. I don't mean to-day, and I don't mean to-morrow; but we might think of it. The bishop, who has the greatest love for the cathedral services, is very much of that mind."

"I do not know that I care very much for any out-of-door gatherings," said the Canon.

"But why out of doors?" asked the Chaplain.

"Whatever meeting there is to be in the Close, will, I hope, be held in the deanery," said the Dean; "but of all meetings, I must say that I like meetings such as this, the best. Germain, will you pass the bottle?" When they were alone together he always called his son-in-law, George; but in company he dropped the more familiar name.

Mr. De Baron, Mrs. Houghton's father, liked his joke. "Sporting men," he said, "always go to a meet, and clerical men to a meeting. What's the difference?"

"A good deal, if it is in the colour of the coat," said the Dean.

"The one is always under cover," said the Canon. "The other, I believe, is generally held out of doors."

"There is, I fancy, a considerable resemblance in the energy of those who are brought together," said the Chaplain.

"But clergymen ain't allowed to hunt, are they?" said Mr. Houghton, who, as usual, was a little in the dark as to the subject under consideration.

"What's to prevent them?" asked the Canon, who had never been out hunting in his life, and who certainly would have advised a young clergyman to abstain from the sport. But in asking the question, he was enabled to strike a sidelong blow at the objectionable chaplain, by seeming to question the bishop's authority.

"Their own conscience, I should hope," said the Chaplain, solemnly, thereby parrying the blow successfully.

"I am very glad, then," said Mr. Houghton, "that I didn't go into the Church." To be thought a real hunting man was the great object of Mr. Houghton's ambition.

"I am afraid you would hardly have suited us, Houghton," said the Dean. "Come, shall we go up to the ladies?"

In the drawing-room, after a little while, Lord George found himself seated next to Mrs. Houghton – Adelaide De Baron, as she had been when he had sighed in vain at her feet. How it had come to pass that he was sitting there he did not know, but he was quite sure that it had come to pass by no arrangement contrived by himself. He had looked at her once since he had been in

the room, almost blushing as he did so, and had told himself that she was certainly very beautiful. He almost thought that she was more beautiful than his wife; but he knew, – he knew now, – that her beauty and her manners were not as well suited to him as those of the sweet creature whom he had married. And now he was once more seated close to her, and it was incumbent on him to speak to her. "I hope," she said, almost in a whisper, but still not seeming to whisper, "that we have both become very happy since we met last."

"I hope so, indeed," said he.

"There cannot, at least, be any doubt as to you, Lord George. I never knew a sweeter young girl than Mary Lovelace; so pretty, so innocent, and so enthusiastic. I am but a poor worldly creature compared to her."

"She is all that you say, Mrs. Houghton." Lord George also was displeased, – more thoroughly displeased than had been his wife. But he did not know how to show his displeasure; and though he felt it, he still felt, also, the old influence of the woman's beauty.

"I am so delighted to have heard that you have got a house in Munster Court. I hope that Lady George and I may be fast friends. Indeed, I won't call her Lady George; for she was Mary to me before we either of us thought of getting husbands for ourselves." This was not strictly true, but of that Lord George could know nothing. "And I do hope, – may I hope, – that you will call on me?"

"Certainly I will do so."

"It will add so much to the happiness of my life, if you will allow me to feel that all that has come and gone has not broken the friendship between us."

"Certainly not," said Lord George.

The lady had then said all that she had got to say, and changed her position as silently as she had occupied it. There was no abruptness of motion, and yet Lord George saw her talking to her husband at the other side of the room, almost while his own words were still sounding in his own ears. Then he watched her for the next few minutes. Certainly, she was very beautiful. There was no room for comparison, they were so unlike; otherwise, he would have been disposed to say that Adelaide was the more beautiful. But Adelaide certainly would not have suited the air of Manor Cross, or have associated well with Lady Sarah.

On the next day the Marchioness and Ladies Susannah and Amelia drove over to the deanery in great state, to call on Miss Tallowax, and to take Lady George back to Manor Cross. Miss Tallowax enjoyed the company of the Marchioness greatly. She had never seen a lady of that rank before. "Only think how I must feel," she said to her niece, that morning, "I, that never spoke to any one above a baronet's lady in my life."

"I don't think you'll find much difference," said Mary.

"You're used to it. You're one of them yourself. You're above a baronet's lady, – ain't you, my dear?"

"I have hardly looked into all that as yet, aunt." There must surely have been a little fib in this, or the Dean's daughter must have been very much unlike other young ladies.

"I suppose I ought to be afraid of you, my dear; only you are so nice and so pretty. And as for Lord George, he was quite condescending." Lady George knew that praise was intended, and therefore made no objection to the otherwise objectionable epithet.

The visit of the Marchioness was passed over with the less disturbance to Miss Tallowax because it was arranged that she was to be taken over to lunch at Manor Cross on the following day. Lord George had said a word, and Lady Sarah had consented, though, as a rule, Lady Sarah did not like the company of vulgar people. The peasants of the parish, down to the very poorest of the poor, were her daily companions. With them she would spend hours, feeling no inconvenience from their language or habits. But she did not like gentlefolk who were not gentle. In days now long gone by, she had only assented to the Dean, because holy orders are supposed to make a gentleman; for she would acknowledge a bishop to be as grand a nobleman as any, though he might have been born the

son of a butcher. But nobility and gentry cannot travel backwards, and she had been in doubt about Miss Tallowax. But even with the Lady Sarah a feeling has made its way which teaches them to know that they must submit to some changes. The thing was to be regretted, but Lady Sarah knew that she was not strong enough to stand quite alone. "You know she is very rich," the Marchioness had said in a whisper; "and if Brotherton marries, your poor brother will want it so badly."

"That ought not to make any difference, mamma," said Lady Sarah. Whether it did make any difference or not, Lady Sarah herself probably hardly knew; but she did consent to the asking of Miss Tallowax to lunch at Manor Cross.

CHAPTER V. MISS TALLOWAX IS SHOWN THE HOUSE

The Dean took his aunt over to Manor Cross in his brougham. The Dean's brougham was the neatest carriage in Brotherton, very much more so than the bishop's family carriage. It was, no doubt, generally to be seen with only one horse; and neither the bishop or Mrs. Barton ever stirred without two; but then one horse is enough for town work, and that one horse could lift his legs and make himself conspicuous in a manner of which the bishop's rather sorry jades knew nothing. On this occasion, as the journey was long, there were two horses – hired; but, nevertheless, the brougham looked very well as it came up the long Manor Cross avenue. Miss Tallowax became rather frightened as she drew near to the scene of her coming grandeur.

"Henry," she said to her nephew, "they will think so little of me."

"My dear aunt," replied the Dean, "in these days a lady who has plenty of money of her own can hold her head up anywhere. The dear old marchioness will think quite as much of you as you do of her."

What perhaps struck Miss Tallowax most at the first moment was the plainness of the ladies' dresses. She, herself, was rather gorgeous in a shot-silk gown and a fashionable bonnet crowded with flowers. She had been ashamed of the splendour of the article as she put it on, and yet had been ashamed also of her ordinary daily head gear. But when she saw the Marchioness, and especially when she saw Lady Sarah, who was altogether strange to her, she wished that she had come in her customary black gown. She had heard something about Lady Sarah from her niece, and had conceived an idea that Lady Sarah was the dragon of the family. But when she saw a little woman, looking almost as old as herself, – though in truth the one might have been the other's mother, – dressed in an old brown merino, with the slightest morsel of white collar to be seen round her neck, she began to hope that the dragon would not be very fierce.

"I hope you like Brotherton, Miss Tallowax," said Lady Sarah. "I think I have heard that you were here once before."

"I like Brotherton very much, my lady." Lady Sarah smiled as graciously as she knew how. "I came when they first made Henry dean, a long time ago now it seems. But he had not then the honour of knowing your mamma or the family."

"It wasn't long before we did know him," said the Marchioness. Then Miss Tallowax turned round and again curtsied with her head and shoulders.

The Dean at this moment was not in the room, having been withdrawn from the ladies by his son-in-law at the front door; but as luncheon was announced, the two men came in. Lord George gave his arm to his wife's great aunt, and the Dean followed with the Marchioness.

"I really am a'most ashamed to walk out before her ladyship," said Miss Tallowax, with a slight attempt at laughing at her own ignorance.

But Lord George rarely laughed at anything, and certainly did not know how to treat pleasantly such a subject as this. "It's quite customary," he said very gravely.

The lunch was much more tremendous to Miss Tallowax than had been the dinner at the deanery. Though she was ignorant, – ignorant at any rate of the ways of such people as those with whom she was now consorting, – she was by no means a stupid old woman. She was soon able to perceive that in spite of the old merino gown, it was Lady Sarah's spirit that quelled them all. At first there was very little conversation. Lord George did not speak a word. The Marchioness never exerted herself. Poor Mary was cowed and unhappy. The Dean made one or two little efforts, but without much success. Lady Sarah was intent upon her mutton chop, which she finished to the last shred, turning it over and over in her plate so that it should be economically disposed of, looking

at it very closely because she was short-sighted. But when the mutton chop had finally done its duty, she looked up from her plate and gave evident signs that she intended to take upon herself the weight of the conversation. All the subsequent ceremonies of the lunch itself, the little tarts and the jelly, and the custard pudding, she despised altogether, regarding them as wicked additions. One pudding after dinner she would have allowed, but nothing more of that sort. It might be all very well for parvenu millionaires to have two grand dinners a-day, but it could not be necessary that the Germaines should live in that way, even when the Dean of Brotherton and his aunt came to lunch with them.

"I hope you like this part of the country, Miss Tallowax," she said, as soon as she had deposited her knife and fork over the bone.

"Manor Cross is quite splendid, my lady," said Miss Tallowax.

"It is an old house, and we shall have great pleasure in showing you what the people call the state rooms. We never use them. Of course you know the house belongs to my brother, and we only live here because it suits him to stay in Italy."

"That's the young Marquis, my lady?"

"Yes; my elder brother is Marquis of Brotherton, but I cannot say that he is very young. He is two years my senior, and ten years older than George."

"But I think he's not married yet?" asked Miss Tallowax.

The question was felt to be disagreeable by them all. Poor Mary could not keep herself from blushing, as she remembered how much to her might depend on this question of her brother-in-law's marriage. Lord George felt that the old lady was enquiring what chance there might be that her grand niece should ever become a marchioness. Old Lady Brotherton, who had always been anxious that her elder son should marry, felt uncomfortable, as did also the Dean, conscious that all there must be conscious how important must be the matter to him.

"No," said Lady Sarah, with stately gravity; "my elder brother is not yet married. If you would like to see the rooms, Miss Tallowax, I shall have pleasure in showing you the way."

The Dean had seen the rooms before, and remained with the old lady. Lord George, who thought very much of everything affecting his own family, joined the party, and Mary felt herself compelled to follow her husband and her aunt. The two younger sisters also accompanied Lady Sarah.

"This is the room in which Queen Elizabeth slept," said Lady Sarah, entering a large chamber on the ground floor, in which there was a four-post bedstead, almost as high as the ceiling, and looking as though no human body had profaned it for the last three centuries.

"Dear me," said Miss Tallowax, almost afraid to press such sacred boards with her feet. "Queen Elizabeth! Did she really now?"

"Some people say she never did actually come to Manor Cross at all," said the conscientious Lady Amelia; "but there is no doubt that the room was prepared for her."

"Laws!" said Miss Tallowax, who began to be less afraid of distant royalty now that a doubt was cast on its absolute presence.

"Examining the evidence as closely as we can," said Lady Sarah, with a savage glance at her sister, "I am inclined to think that she certainly did come. We know that she was at Brotherton in 1582, and there exists the letter in which Sir Humphrey Germaine, as he was then, is desired to prepare rooms for her. I myself have no doubt on the subject."

"After all it does not make much difference," said Mary.

"I think it makes all the difference in the world," said Lady Susanna. "That piece of furniture will always be sacred to me, because I believe it did once afford rest and sleep to the gracious majesty of England."

"It do make a difference, certainly," said Miss Tallowax, looking at the bed with all her eyes. "Does anybody ever go to bed here now?"

"Nobody, ever," said Lady Sarah. "Now we will go through to the great dining hall. That's the portrait of the first earl."

"Painted by Kneller," said Lady Amelia, proudly.

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Tallowax.

"There is some doubt as to that," said Lady Sarah. "I have found out that Sir Godfrey Kneller was only born in 1648, and as the first earl died a year or two after the restoration, I don't know that he could have done it."

"It was always said that it was painted by Kneller," said Lady Amelia.

"There has been a mistake, I fear," said Lady Sarah.

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Tallowax, looking up with intense admiration at a very ill-drawn old gentleman in armour. Then they entered the state dining-room or hall, and Miss Tallowax was informed that the room had not been used for any purpose whatever for very many years. "And such a beautiful room!" said Miss Tallowax, with much regret.

"The fact is, I believe, that the chimney smokes horribly," said Lord George.

"I never remember a fire here," said Lady Sarah. "In very cold weather we have a portable stove brought in, just to preserve the furniture. This is called the old ball room."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Miss Tallowax, looking round at the faded yellow hangings.

"We did have a ball here once," said Lady Amelia, "when Brotherton came of age. I can just remember it."

"Has it never been used since?" asked Mary.

"Never," said Lady Sarah. "Sometimes when it's rainy we walk up and down for exercise. It is a fine old house, but I often wish that it were smaller. I don't think people want rooms of this sort now as much as they used to do. Perhaps a time may come when my brother will make Manor Cross gay again, but it is not very gay now. I think that is all, Miss Tallowax."

"It's very fine; – very fine indeed," said Miss Tallowax, shivering. Then they all trooped back into the morning room which they used for their daily life.

The old lady when she had got back into the brougham with her nephew, the Dean, was able to express her mind freely. "I wouldn't live in that house, Henry, not if they was to give it me for nothing."

"They'd have to give you something to keep it up with."

"And not then, neither. Of course it's all very well having a bed that Queen Elizabeth slept in."

"Or didn't sleep in."

"I'd teach myself to believe she did. But dear me, that isn't everything. It nearly gave me the horrors to look at it. Room after room, – room after room, – and nobody living in any of them."

"People can't live in more than a certain number of rooms at once, aunt."

"Then what's the use of having them? And don't you think for the daughters of a Marchioness they are a little what you'd call – dowdy?"

"They don't go in for dress much."

"Why, my Jemima at home, when the dirty work is done, is twice smarter than Lady Sarah. And, Henry, – don't you think they're a little hard upon Mary?"

"Hard upon her; – how?" The Dean had listened to the old woman's previous criticisms with a smile; but now he was interested and turned sharply round to her. "How hard?"

"Moping her up there among themselves; and it seemed to me they snubbed her whenever she spoke." The Dean had not wanted his aunt's observation to make him feel this. The tone of every syllable addressed to his girl had caught his ear. He had been pleased to marry her into so good a family. He had been delighted to think that by means of his prosperity in the world his father's grand-daughter might probably become a peeress. But he certainly had not intended that even for such a reward as that his daughter should become submissive to the old maids at Manor Cross. Foreseeing something of this he had stipulated that she should have a house of her own

in London; but half her time would probably be spent in the country, and with reference to that half of her time it would be necessary that she should be made to understand that as the wife of Lord George she was in no respect inferior to his sisters, and that in some respects she was their superior. "I don't see the good of living in a big house," continued Miss Tallowax, "if all the time everything is to be as dull as dull."

"They are older than she is, you know."

"Poor little dear! I always did say that young folk should have young folk about 'em. Of course it's a great thing for her to have a lord for her husband. But he looks a'most too old himself for such a pretty darling as your Mary."

"He's only thirty-three."

"It's in the looks, I suppose, because he's so grand. But it's that Lady Sarah puzzles me. It isn't in her looks, and yet she has it all in her own way. Well; – I liked going there, and I'm glad I've been; but I don't know as I shall ever want to go again." Then there was silence for some time; but as the brougham was driven into Brotherton Miss Tallowax spoke again. "I don't suppose an old woman like me can ever be of any use, and you'll always be at hand to look after her. But if ever she should want an outing, just to raise her spirits, old as I am, I think I could make it brighter for her than it is there." The Dean took her hand and pressed it, and then there was no more said.

When the brougham was driven away Lord George took his wife for a walk in the park. She was still struggling hard to be in love with him, never owning failure to herself, and sometimes assuring herself that she had succeeded altogether. Now, when he asked her to come with him, she put on her hat joyfully, and joined her hands over his arm as she walked away with him into the shrubbery.

"She's a wonderful old woman; – is not she, George?"

"Not very wonderful."

"Of course you think she's vulgar."

"I didn't say so."

"No; you're too good to say so, because she's papa's aunt. But she's very good. Don't you think she's very good?"

"I dare say she is. I don't know that I run into superlatives quite so much as you do."

"She has brought me such a handsome present. I could not show it you before them all just now, and it only came down from London this morning. She did not say a word about it before. Look here." Then she slipped her glove off and showed him a diamond ring.

"You should not wear that out of doors."

"I only put it on to show you. Wasn't it good of her? 'Young people of rank ought to wear nice things,' she said, as she gave it me. Wasn't it an odd thing for her to say? and yet I understood her." Lord George frowned, thinking that he also understood the old woman's words, and reminding himself that the ladies of rank at Manor Cross never did wear nice things. "Don't you think it was nice?"

"Of course she is entitled to make you a present if she pleases."

"It pleased me, George."

"I dare say, and as it doesn't displease me all is well. You, however, have quite sense enough to understand, that in this house more is thought of – of – of – " he would have said blood, but that he did not wish to hurt her, – "more is thought of personal good conduct than of rings and jewels."

"Rings and jewels, and – personal conduct may go together; mayn't they?"

"Of course they may."

"And very often do. You won't think my – personal conduct – will be injured because I wear my aunt's ring?"

When Lord George made his allusion to personal conduct one of her two hands dropped from his arm, and now, as she repeated the words, there was a little sting of sarcasm in her voice.

"I was intending to answer your aunt's opinion that young people ought to wear nice things. No doubt there is at present a great rage for rich ornaments and costly dress, and it was of these she was thinking when she spoke of nice things. When I spoke of personal conduct being more thought of here, I intended to imply that you had come into a family not given to rich ornaments and costly dress. My sisters feel that their portion in this world is assured to them without such outward badges, and wish that you should share the feeling."

This was a regular sermon, and to Mary's thinking was very disagreeable, and not at all deserved. Did her husband really mean to tell her that, because his sisters chose to dress themselves down in the country like dowdy old maids whom the world had deserted, she was to do the same up in London? The injustice of this on all sides struck home to her at the moment. They were old and she was young. They were plain; she was pretty. They were poor; she was rich. They didn't feel any wish to make themselves what she called "nice." She did feel a very strong wish in that direction. They were old maids; she was a young bride. And then what right had they to domineer over her, and to send word to her through her husband of their wishes as to her manner of dressing? She said nothing at the moment; but she became red, and began to feel that she had power within her to rebel at any rate against her sisters-in-law. There was silence for a moment or so, and then Lord George reverted to the subject.

"I hope you can sympathise with my sisters," he said. He had felt that the hand had been dropped, and had understood something of the reason.

She wished to rebel against them, but by no means wished to oppose him. She was aware, as though by instinct, that her life would be very bad indeed should she fail to sympathise with him. It was still the all-paramount desire of her heart to be in love with him. But she could not bring herself to say that she sympathised with them in this direct attack that was made on her own mode of thought.

"Of course, they are a little older than I am," she said, hoping to get out of the difficulty.

"And therefore, the more entitled to consideration. I think you will own that they must know what is, and what is not, becoming to a lady."

"Do you mean," said she, hardly able to choke a rising sob, "that they – have anything – to find fault with in me?"

"I have said nothing as to finding fault, Mary."

"Do they think that I do not dress as I ought to do?"

"Why should you ask such a question as that?"

"I don't know what else I am to understand, George. Of course I will do anything that you tell me. If you wish me to make any change, I will make it. But I hope they won't send me messages through you."

"I thought you would have been glad to know that they interested themselves about you." In answer to this Mary pouted, but her husband did not see the pout.

"Of course they are anxious that you should become one of them. We are a very united family. I do not speak now of my elder brother, who is in a great measure separated from us and is of a different nature. But my mother, my sisters, and I, have very many opinions in common. We live together, and have the same way of thinking. Our rank is high, and our means are small. But to me blood is much more than wealth. We acknowledge, however, that rank demands many sacrifices, and my sisters endeavour to make those sacrifices most conscientiously. A woman more thoroughly devoted to good works than Sarah I have never even read of. If you will believe this, you will understand what they mean, and what I mean, when we say that here at Manor Cross we think more of personal conduct than of rings and jewels. You wish, Mary, to be one of us; do you not?"

She paused for a moment, and then she answered, "I wish to be always one with you."

He almost wanted to be angry at this, but it was impossible. "To be one with me, dearest," he said, "you must be one, also, with them."

"I cannot love them as I do you, George. That, I am sure, is not the meaning of being married." Then she thought of it all steadily for a minute, and after that, made a further speech. "And I don't think I can quite dress like them. I'm sure you would not like it if I did."

As she said this she put her second hand back upon his arm.

He said nothing further on the subject till he had brought her back to the house, walking along by her side almost mute, not quite knowing whether he ought to be offended with her or to take her part. It was true that he would not have liked her to look like Lady Sarah, but he would have liked her to make some approach in that direction, sufficient to show submission. He was already beginning to fear the absence of all control which would befall his young wife in that London life to which, she was to be so soon introduced, and was meditating whether he could not induce one of his sisters to accompany them. As to Sarah he was almost hopeless. Amelia would be of little or no service, though she would be more likely to ingratiate herself with his wife than the others. Susanna was less strong than Sarah and less amiable than Amelia. And then, how would it be if Mary were to declare that she would rather begin the campaign without any of them?

The young wife, as soon as she found herself alone in her own bedroom, sat down and resolved that she would never allow herself to be domineered by her husband's sisters. She would be submissive to him in all things, but his authority should not be delegated to them.

CHAPTER VI. BAD TIDINGS

About the middle of October, there came a letter from the Marquis of Brotherton to his brother, which startled them all at Manor Cross very much indeed. In answering Lord George's communication as to the marriage, the Marquis had been mysterious and disagreeable; – but then he was always disagreeable and would on occasions take the trouble to be mysterious also. He had warned his brother that he might himself want the house at Manor Cross; but he had said the same thing frequently during his residence in Italy, being always careful to make his mother and sisters understand that they might have to take themselves away any day at a very short warning. But now the short warning had absolutely come, and had come in such a shape as to upset everything at Manor Cross, and to upset many things at the Brotherton Deanery. The letter was as follows: —

"My dear George,

"I am to be married to the Marchesa Luigi. Her name is Catarina Luigi, and she is a widow. As to her age, you can ask herself when you see her, if you dare. I haven't dared. I suppose her to be ten years younger than myself. I did not expect that it would be so, but she says now that she would like to live in England. Of course I've always meant to go back myself some day. I don't suppose we shall be there before May, but we must have the house got ready. My mother and the girls had better look out for a place as soon as they can. Tell my mother of course I will allow her the rent of Cross Hall, to which indeed she is entitled. I don't think she would care to live there, and neither she nor the girls would get on with my wife.

"Yours, B.

"I am waiting to know about getting the house painted and furnished."

When Lord George received this letter, he showed it first in privacy to his sister Sarah. As the reader will have understood, there had never been any close family affection between the present Marquis and his brothers and sisters; nor had he been a loving son to his mother. But the family at Manor Cross had always endeavoured to maintain a show of regard for the head of the family, and the old Marchioness would no doubt have been delighted had her eldest son come home and married an English wife. Lady Sarah, in performing what she had considered to be a family duty, had written regular despatches to her elder brother, telling him everything that happened about the place, – despatches which he, probably, never read. Now there had come a blow indeed. Lady Sarah read the letter, and then looked into her brother's face.

"Have you told Mary?" she asked.

"I have told no one."

"It concerns her as much as any of us. Of course, if he has married, it is right that he should have his house. We ought to wish that he should live here."

"If he were different from what he is," said Lord George.

"If she is good it may be that he will become different. It is not the thing, but the manner in which he tells it to us! Did you ever hear her name before?"

"Never."

"What a way he has of mentioning her; – about her age," said Lady Sarah, infinitely shocked. "Well! Mamma must be told, of course. Why shouldn't we live at Cross Hall? I don't understand what he means about that. Cross Hall belongs to mamma for her life, as much as Manor Cross does to him for his."

Just outside the park gate, at the side of the park furthest away from Brotherton, and therefore placed very much out of the world, there stood a plain substantial house built in the days of Queen Anne, which had now for some generations been the habitation of the dowager of the Brotherton family. When the late marquis died, this had become for her life the property of the Marchioness; but had been ceded by her to her son, in return for the loan of the big house. The absentee Marquis had made with his mother the best bargain in his power, and had let the dower house, known as Cross Hall, to a sporting farmer. He now kindly offered to allow his mother to have the rent of her own house, signifying at the same time his wish that all his family should remove themselves out of his way.

"He wishes that we should take ourselves off," said Lord George, hoarsely.

"But I do not see why we are to give way to his wishes. George, where are we to go? Of what use can we be in a strange country? Wherever we are we shall be very poor, but our money will go further here than elsewhere. How are we to get up new interests in life? The land is his, but the poor people belong to us as much as to him. It is unreasonable."

"It is frightfully selfish."

"I for one am not prepared to obey him in this," said Lady Sarah. "Of course mamma will do as she pleases, but I do not see why we should go. He will never live here all the year through."

"He will be sick of it after a month. Will you read the letter to my mother?"

"I will tell her, George. She had better not see the letter, unless she makes a point of it. I will read it again, and then do you keep it. You should tell Mary at once. It is natural that she should have built hopes on the improbability of Brotherton's marriage."

Before noon on that day the news had been disseminated through the house. The old Marchioness, when she first heard of the Italian wife, went into hysterics, and then was partly comforted by reminding herself that all Italians were not necessarily bad. She asked after the letter repeatedly; and at last, when it was found to be impossible to explain to her otherwise what her eldest son meant about the houses, it was shown to her. Then she began to weep afresh.

"Why mayn't we live at Cross Hall, Sarah?" she said.

"Cross Hall belongs to you, mamma, and nothing can hinder you from living there."

"But Augustus says that we are to go away."

The Marchioness was the only one of the family who ever called the Marquis by his Christian name, and she did so only when she was much disturbed.

"No doubt he expresses a wish that we should do so?"

"Where are we to go to, and I at my age?"

"I think you should live at Cross Hall."

"But he says that we mayn't. We could never go on there if he wants us to go away."

"Why not, mamma? It is your house as much as this is his. If you will let him understand that when you leave this you mean to go there, he will probably say nothing more about it."

"Mr. Price is living there. I can't make Mr. Price go away directly the painter people come in here. They'll come to-morrow, perhaps, and what am I to do then?"

The matter was discussed throughout the whole day between Lady Sarah and her mother, the former bearing the old woman's plaintive weakness with the utmost patience, and almost succeeding, before the evening came, in inducing her mother to agree to rebel against the tyranny of her son. There were peculiar difficulties and peculiar hardships in the case. The Marquis could turn out all the women of his family at a day's notice. He had only to say to them, "Go!" and they must be gone. And he could be rid of them without even saying or writing another word. A host of tradesmen would come, and then of course they must go. But Mr. Price at Cross Hall must have a regular year's notice, and that notice could not now be given till Lady-day next.

"If the worst comes to the worst, mamma we will go and live in Brotherton for the time. Mr. Holdenough or the Dean would find some place for us." Then the old lady began to ask how

Mary had borne the news; but as yet Lady Sarah had not been able to interest herself personally about Mary.

Lord George was surprised to find how little his wife was affected by the terrible thunderbolt which had fallen among them. On him the blow had been almost as terrible as on his mother. He had taken a house in town, at the instance of the Dean, and in consequence of a promise made before his marriage, which was sacred to him but which he regretted. He would have preferred himself to live the whole year through at Manor Cross. Though he had not very much to do there the place was never dull to him. He liked the association of the big house. He liked the sombre grandeur of the park. He liked the magistrates' bench, though he rarely spoke a word when he was there. And he liked the thorough economy of the life. But as to that house in town, though his wife's fortune would enable him to live there four or five months, he knew that he could not stretch the income so as to bear the expense of the entire year. And yet, what must he do now? If he could abandon the house in town, then he could join his mother as to some new country house. But he did not dare to suggest that the house in town should be abandoned. He was afraid of the Dean, and afraid, so to say, of his own promise. The thing had been stipulated, and he did not know how to go back from the stipulation.

"Going to leave Manor Cross," said Mary, when she was told. "Dear me; how odd. Where will they go to?"

It was evident to her husband from the tone of her voice that she regarded her own house in Munster Court, for it was her own, as her future residence, – as hers and his. In asking where "they" would live, she spoke of the other ladies of the family. He had expected that she would have shown some disappointment at the danger to her future position which this new marriage would produce. But in regard to that she was, he thought, either perfectly indifferent, or else a very good actor. In truth, she was almost indifferent. The idea that she might some day be Lady Brotherton had been something to her, but not much. Her happiness was not nearly as much disturbed by this marriage as it had been by the allusion made to her dress. She herself could hardly understand the terrible gloom which seemed during that evening and the whole of the next day to have fallen on the entire family.

"George, does it make you very unhappy?" she said, whispering to him on the morning of the second day.

"Not that my brother should marry," he said, "God forbid that I, as a younger brother, should wish to debar him from any tittle of what belongs to him. If he would marry well it ought to be a joy to us all."

"Is not this marrying well?"

"What, with a foreigner; with an Italian widow? And then there will, I fear, be great trouble in finding a comfortable home for my mother."

"Amelia says she can go to Cross Hall."

"Amelia does not know what she is talking of. It would be very long before they could get into Cross Hall, even if they can go there at all. It would have to be completely furnished, and there is no money to furnish it."

"Wouldn't your brother – ?" Lord George shook his head. "Or papa." Lord George again shook his head – "What will they do?"

"If it were not for our house in London we might take a place in the country together," said Lord George.

All the various facts of the proposition now made to her flashed upon Mary's mind at once. Had it been suggested to her, when she was first asked to marry Lord George, that she should live permanently in a country house with his mother and sisters, in a house of which she would not be and could not be the mistress, she would certainly have rejected the offer. And now the tedium of such a life was plainer to her than it would have been then. But, under her father's auspices, a

pleasant, gay little house in town had been taken for her, and she had been able to gild the dullness of Manor Cross with the brightness of her future prospects. For four or five months she would be her own mistress, and would be so in London. Her husband would be living on her money, but it would be the delight of her heart that he should be happy while doing so. And all this must be safe and wise, because it was to be done under the advice of her father. Now it was proposed to her that she should abandon all this and live in some smaller, poorer, duller country residence, in which she would be the least of the family instead of the mistress of her own house. She thought of it all for a moment, and then she answered him with a firm voice.

"If you wish to give up the house in London we will do so."

"It would distress you I fear." When we call on our friends to sacrifice themselves, we generally wish them also to declare that they like being sacrificed.

"I should be disappointed of course, George."

"And it would be unjust," said he.

"If you wish it I will not say a word against it."

On that afternoon he rode into Brotherton to tell the tidings to the Dean. Upon whatever they might among them decide, it was expedient that the Dean should be at once told of the marriage. Lord George, as he thought over it all on horseback, found difficulties on every side. He had promised that his wife should live in town, and he could not go back from that promise without injustice. He understood the nature of her lately offered sacrifice, and felt that it would not liberate his conscience. And then he was sure that the Dean would be loud against any such arrangement. The money no doubt was Mary's own money and, subject to certain settlement, was at Lord George's immediate disposal; but he would be unable to endure the Dean's reproaches. He would be unable also to endure his own, unless – which was so very improbable – the Dean should encourage him. But how were things to be arranged? Was he to desert his mother and sisters in their difficulty? He was very fond of his wife; but it had never yet occurred to him that the daughter of Dean Lovelace could be as important to him as all the ladies of the house of Germain. His brother purposed to bring his wife to Manor Cross in May, when he would be up in London. Where at that moment, and after what fashion, would his mother and sisters be living?

The Dean showed his dismay at the marriage plainly enough.

"That's very bad, George," he said; "very bad indeed!"

"Of course we don't like her being a foreigner."

"Of course you don't like his marrying at all. Why should you? You all know enough of him to be sure that he wouldn't marry the sort of woman you would approve."

"I don't know why my brother should not have married any lady in England."

"At any rate he hasn't. He has married some Italian widow, and it's a misfortune. Poor Mary!"

"I don't think Mary feels it at all."

"She will some day. Girls of her age don't feel that kind of thing at first. So he is going to come over at once. What will your mother do?"

"She has Cross Hall."

"That man Price is there. He will go out of course?"

"With notice he must go."

"He won't stand about that, if you don't interfere with his land and farm-yard. I know Price. He's not a bad fellow."

"But Brotherton does not want them to go there," said Lord George, almost in a whisper.

"Does not want your mother to live in her own house! Upon my word the Marquis is considerate to you all! He has said that plainly, has he? If I were Lady Brotherton I would not take the slightest heed of what he says. She is not dependent on him. In order that he may be relieved from the bore of being civil to his own family she is to be sent out about the world to look for a home in her old age! You must tell her not to listen for a minute to such a proposition."

Lord George, though he put great trust in his father-in-law, did not quite like hearing his brother spoken of so very freely by a man who was, after all, the son of a tradesman. It seemed to him as though the Dean made himself almost too intimate with the affairs at Manor Cross, and yet he was obliged to go on and tell the Dean everything.

"Even if Price went, there must be some delay in getting the house ready."

"The Marquis surely won't turn your mother out before the spring?"

"Tradesmen will have to come in. And then I don't quite know what we are to do as to the – expense of furnishing the new house. It will cost a couple of thousand pounds, and none of us have ready money." The Dean assumed a very serious face. "Every spoon and fork at Manor Cross, every towel and every sheet belongs to my brother."

"Was not the Cross House ever furnished?"

"Many years ago; in my grandmother's time. My father left money for the purpose, but it was given up to my sister Alice when she married Holdenough." He found himself explaining all the little intricacies of his family to the Dean, because it was necessary that he should hold council with some one. "I was thinking of a furnished house for them elsewhere."

"In London?"

"Certainly not there. My mother would not like it, nor would my sisters. I like the country very much the best myself."

"Not for the whole year?"

"I have never cared to be in London; but, of course, as for Mary and myself that is settled. You would not wish her to give up the house in Munster Court?"

"Certainly not. It would not be fair to her to ask her to live always under the wing of your mother and sisters. She would never learn to be a woman. She would always be in leading strings. Do you not feel that yourself?"

"I feel that beggars cannot be choosers. My mother's fortune is £2000 a year. As you know we have only 5000*l.* a piece. There is hardly income enough among us for a house in town and a house in the country."

The Dean paused a moment, and then replied that his daughter's welfare could not be made subordinate to that of the family generally. He then said that if any immediate sum of money were required he would lend it either to the dowager or to Lord George.

Lord George, as he rode home, was angry both with himself and with the Dean. There had been an authority in the Dean's voice which had grated upon his feelings; of course he intended to be as good as his word; but, nevertheless, his wife was his wife and subject to his will; and her fortune had been her own and had not come from the Dean. The Dean took too much upon himself. And yet, with all that, he had consulted the Dean about everything, and had confessed the family poverty. The thing, however, was quite certain to him; he could not get out of the house in town.

During the whole of that day Lady Sarah had been at work with her mother, instigating her to insist on her own rights, and at last she had succeeded.

"What would our life be, mamma," Lady Sarah had said, "if we were removed altogether into a new world. Here we are of some use. People know us, and give us credit for being what we are. We can live after our own fashion, and yet live in accordance with our rank. There is not a man or a woman or a child in the parish whom I do not know. There is not a house in which you would not see Amelia's and Susanna's work. We cannot begin all that over again."

"When I am gone, my dear, you must do so."

"Who can say how much may be done before that sad day shall come to us? He may have taken his Italian wife back again to Italy. Mamma, we ought not to run away from our duties."

On the following morning it was settled among them that the dowager should insist on possession of her own house at Cross Hall, and a letter was written to the Marquis, congratulating

him of course on his marriage, but informing him at the same time that the family would remain in the parish.

Some few days later Mr. Knox, the agent for the property, came down from London. He had received the orders of the Marquis, and would be prepared to put workmen into the house as soon as her ladyship would be ready to leave it. But he quite agreed that this could not be done at once. A beginning no doubt might be made while they were still there, but no painting should be commenced or buildings knocked down or put up till March. It was settled at the same time that on the first of March the family should leave the house.

"I hope my son won't be angry," the Marchioness said to Mr. Knox.

"If he be angry, my lady, he will be angry without a cause. But I never knew him to be very angry about anything."

"He always did like to have his own way, Mr. Knox," said the mindful mother.

CHAPTER VII. "CROSS HALL GATE."

While Mr. Knox was still in the country negotiations were opened with Mr. Price, the sporting farmer, who, like all sporting farmers, was in truth a very good fellow. He had never been liked by the ladies at Manor Cross, as having ways of his own which were not their ways. He did not go to church as often as they thought he ought to do; and, being a bachelor, stories were told about him which were probably very untrue. A bachelor may live in town without any inquiries as to any of the doings of his life; but if a man live forlorn and unmarried in a country house, he will certainly become the victim of calumny should any woman under sixty ever be seen about his place. It was said also of Mr. Price that sometimes, after hunting, men had been seen to go out of his yard in an uproarious condition. But I hardly think that old Sir Simon Bolt, the master of the hounds, could have liked him so well, or so often have entered his house, had there been much amiss there; and as to the fact of there always being a fox in Cross Hall Holt, which a certain little wood was called about half a mile of the house, no one even doubted that. But there had always been a prejudice against Price at the great house, and in this even Lord George had coincided. But when Mr. Knox went to him and explained to him what was about to happen, – that the ladies would be forced, almost before the end of winter, to leave Manor Cross and make way for the Marquis, Mr. Price declared that he would clear out, bag and baggage, top-boots, spurs, and brandy-bottles, at a moment's notice. The Prices of the English world are not, as a rule, deficient in respect for the marquises and marchionesses. "The workmen can come in to-morrow," Price said, when he was told that some preparations would be necessary. "A bachelor can shake down anywhere, Mr. Knox." Now it happened that Cross Hall House was altogether distinct from the Cross Hall Farm, on which, indeed, there had been a separate farmhouse, now only used by labourers. But Mr. Price was a comfortable man, and, when the house had been vacant, had been able to afford himself the luxury of living there.

So far the primary difficulties lessened themselves when they were well looked in the face. And yet things did not run altogether smoothly. The Marquis did not condescend to reply to his brother's letter; but he wrote what was for him a long letter to Mr. Knox, urging upon the agent the duty of turning his mother and sisters altogether out of the place. "We shall be a great deal better friends apart," he said. "If they remain there we shall see little or nothing of each other, and it will be very uncomfortable. If they will settle themselves elsewhere, I will furnish a house for them; but I don't want to have them at my elbow." Mr. Knox was of course bound to show this to Lord George, and Lord George was bound to consult Lady Sarah. Lady Sarah told her mother something of it, but not all; but she told it in such a way that the old lady consented to remain and to brave her eldest son. As for Lady Sarah herself, in spite of her true Christianity and real goodness, she did not altogether dislike the fight. Her brother was her brother, and the head of the family, and he had his privileges; but they too had their rights, and she was not disposed to submit herself to tyranny. Mr. Knox was therefore obliged to inform the Marquis in what softest language he could find applicable for the purpose that the ladies of the family had decided upon removing to the dower-house.

About a month after this there was a meet of the Brotherton Hunt, of which Sir Simon Bolt was the master, at Cross Hall Gate. The grandfather of the present Germaines had in the early part of the century either established this special pack, or at any rate become the master of it. Previous to that the hunting probably had been somewhat precarious; but there had been, since his time, a regular Brotherton Hunt associated with a collar and button of its own, – a blue collar on a red coat, with B. H. on the buttons, – and the thing had been done well. They had four days a week, with an occasional bye, and £2,500 were subscribed annually. Sir Simon Bolt had been the master

for the last fifteen years, and was so well known that no sporting pen and no sporting tongue in England ever called him more than Sir Simon. Cross Hall Gate, a well-loved meet, was the gate of the big park which opened out upon the road just opposite to Mr. Price's house. It was an old stone structure, with a complicated arch stretching across the gate itself, with a lodge on each side. It lay back in a semi-circle from the road, and was very imposing. In old days no doubt the gate was much used, as the direct traffic from London to Brotherton passed that way. But the railway had killed the road; and as the nearer road from the Manor Cross House to the town came out on the same road much nearer to Brotherton, the two lodges and all the grandeur were very much wasted. But it was a pretty site for a meet when the hounds were seated on their haunches inside the gate, or moving about slowly after the huntsman's horse, and when the horses and carriages were clustered about on the high road and inside the park. And it was a meet, too, much loved by the riding men. It was always presumed that Manor Cross itself was preserved for foxes, and the hounds were carefully run through the belt of woods. But half an hour did that, and then they went away to Price's Little Holt. On that side there were no more gentlemen's places; there was a gorse cover or two and sundry little spinnies; but the county was a country for foxes to run and men to ride; and with this before them, the members of the Brotherton Hunt were pleased to be summoned to Cross Hall Gate.

On such occasions Lord George was always there. He never hunted, and very rarely went to any other meet; but on these occasions he would appear mounted, in black, and would say a few civil words to Sir Simon, and would tell George Scruby, the huntsman, that he had heard that there was a fox among the laurels. George would touch his hat and say in his loud, deep voice, "Hope so, my lord," having no confidence whatever in a Manor Cross fox. Sir Simon would shake hands with him, make a suggestion about the weather, and then get away as soon as possible; for there was no sympathy and no common subject between the men. On this occasion Lady Amelia had driven down Lady Susanna in the pony-carriage, and Lady George was there, mounted, with her father the Dean, longing to be allowed to go away with the hounds but having been strictly forbidden by her husband to do so. Mr. Price was of course there, as was also Mr. Knox, the agent, who had a little shooting-box down in the country, and kept a horse, and did a little hunting.

There was good opportunity for talking as the hounds were leisurely taken through the loose belt of woods which were by courtesy called the Manor Cross coverts, and Mr. Price took the occasion of drawing a letter from his pocket and showing it to Mr. Knox.

"The Marquis has written to you!" said the agent in a tone of surprise, the wonder not being that the Marquis should write to Mr. Price, but that he should write to any one.

"Never did such a thing in his life before, and I wish he hadn't now."

Mr. Knox wished it also when he had read the letter. It expressed a very strong desire on the part of the Marquis that Mr. Price should keep the Cross Hall House, saying that it was proper that the house should go with the farm, and intimating the Marquis's wish that Mr. Price should remain as his neighbour. "If you can manage it, I'll make the farm pleasant and profitable to you," said the Marquis.

"He don't say a word about her ladyship," said Price; "but what he wants is just to get rid of 'em all, box and dice."

"That's about it, I suppose," said the agent.

"Then he's come to the wrong shop, that's what he has done, Mr. Knox. I've three more year of my lease of the farm, and after that, out I must go, I dare say."

"There's no knowing what may happen before that, Price."

"If I was to go, I don't know that I need quite starve, Mr. Knox."

"I don't suppose you will."

"I ain't no family, and I don't know as I'm just bound to go by what a lord says, though he is my landlord. I don't know as I don't think more of them ladies than I does of him. – him, Mr. Knox."

And then Mr. Price used some very strong language indeed. "What right has he to think as I'm going to do his dirty work? You may tell him from me as he may do his own."

"You'll answer him, Price?"

"Not a line. I ain't got nothing to say to him. He knows I'm a-going out of the house; and if he don't, you can tell him."

"Where are you going to?"

"Well, I was going to fit up a room or two in the old farmhouse; and if I had anything like a lease, I wouldn't mind spending three or four hundred pounds there. I was thinking of talking to you about it, Mr. Knox."

"I can't renew the lease without his approval."

"You write and ask him, and mind you tell him that there ain't no doubt at all as to any going out of Cross Hall after Christmas. Then, if he'll make it fourteen years, I'll put the old house up and not ask him for a shilling. As I'm a living sinner, they're on a fox! Who'd have thought of that in the park? That's the old vixen from the holt, as sure as my name's Price. Them cubs haven't travelled here yet."

So saying, he rode away, and Mr. Knox rode after him, and there was consternation throughout the hunt. It was so unaccustomed a thing to have to gallop across Manor Cross Park! But the hounds were in full cry, through the laurels, and into the shrubbery, and round the conservatory, close up to the house. Then she got into the kitchen-garden, and back again through the laurels. The butler and the gardener and the housemaid and the scullery-maid were all there to see. Even Lady Sarah came to the front door, looking very severe, and the old Marchioness gaped out of her own sitting-room window upstairs. Our friend Mary thought it excellent fun, for she was really able to ride to the hounds; and even Lady Amelia became excited as she flogged the pony along the road. Stupid old vixen, who ought to have known better! Price was quite right, for it was she, and the cubs in the holt were now finally emancipated from all maternal thralldom. She was killed ignominiously in the stokehole under the greenhouse, – she who had been the mother of four litters, and who had baffled the Brotherton hounds half a dozen times over the cream of the Brotherton country!

"I knew it," said Price in a melancholy tone, as he held up the head which the huntsman had just dissevered from the body. "She might 'a done better with herself than come to such a place as this for the last move."

"Is it all over?" asked Lady George.

"That one is pretty nearly all over, miss," said George Scruby, as he threw the fox to the hounds. "My Lady, I mean, begging your Ladyship's pardon." Some one had prompted him at the moment. "I'm very glad to see your Ladyship out, and I hope we'll show you something better before long."

But poor Mary's hunting was over. When George Scruby and Sir Simon and the hounds went off to the holt, she was obliged to remain with her husband and sisters-in-law.

While this was going on Mr. Knox had found time to say a word to Lord George about that letter from the Marquis. "I am afraid," he said, "your brother is very anxious that Price should remain at Cross Hall."

"Has he said anything more?"

"Not to me; but to Price he has."

"He has written to Price?"

"Yes, with his own hand, urging him to stay. I cannot but think it was very wrong." A look of deep displeasure came across Lord George's face. "I have thought it right to mention it, because it may be a question whether her Ladyship's health and happiness may not be best consulted by her leaving the neighbourhood."

"We have considered it all, Mr. Knox, and my mother is determined to stay. We are very much obliged to you. We feel that in doing your duty by my brother you are anxious to be courteous to us. The hounds have gone on; don't let me keep you."

Mr. Houghton was of course out. Unless the meets were very distant from his own place, he was always out. On this occasion his wife also was there. She had galloped across the park as quickly as anybody, and when the fox was being broken up in the grass before the hall-door, was sitting close to Lady George. "You are coming on?" she said in a whisper.

"I am afraid not," answered Mary.

"Oh, yes; do come. Slip away with me. Nobody'll see you. Get as far as the gate, and then you can see that covert drawn."

"I can't very well. The truth is, they don't want me to hunt."

"They! Who is they? 'They' don't want me to hunt. That is, Mr. Houghton doesn't. But I mean to get out of his way by riding a little forward. I don't see why that is not just as good as staying behind. Mr. Price is going to give me a lead. You know Mr. Price?"

"But he goes everywhere."

"And I mean to go everywhere. What's the good of half-doing it? Come along."

But Mary had not even thought of rebellion such as this – did not in her heart approve of it, and was angry with Mrs. Houghton. Nevertheless, when she saw the horsewoman gallop off across the grass towards the gate, she could not help thinking that she would have been just as well able to ride after Mr. Price as her old friend Adelaide de Baron. The Dean did go on, having intimated his purpose of riding on just to see Price's farm.

When the unwonted perturbation was over at Manor Cross Lord George was obliged to revert again to the tidings he had received from Mr. Knox. He could not keep it to himself. He felt himself obliged to tell it all to Lady Sarah.

"That he should write to such a man as Mr. Price, telling him of his anxiety to banish his own mother from her own house!"

"You did not see the letter?"

"No; but Knox did. They could not very well show such a letter to me; but Knox says that Price was very indignant, and swore that he would not even answer it."

"I suppose he can afford it, George? It would be very dreadful to ruin him."

"Price is a rich man. And after all, if Price were to do all that Brotherton desires him, he could only keep us out for a year or so. But don't you think you will all be very uncomfortable here. How will my mother feel if she isn't ever allowed to see him? And how will you feel if you find that you never want to see his wife?"

Lady Sarah sat silent for a few minutes before she answered him, and then declared for war. "It is very bad, George; very bad. I can foresee great unhappiness; especially the unhappiness which must come from constant condemnation of one whom we ought to wish to love and approve of before all others. But nothing can be so bad as running away. We ought not to allow anything to drive mamma from her own house, and us from our own duties. I don't think we ought to take any notice of Brotherton's letter to Mr. Price." It was thus decided between them that no further notice should be taken of the Marquis's letter to Mr. Price.

CHAPTER VIII. PUGSBY BROOK

There was great talking about the old vixen as they all trotted away to Cross Hall Holt; – how it was the same old fox that they hadn't killed in a certain run last January, and how one old farmer was quite sure that this very fox was the one which had taken them that celebrated run to Bamham Moor three years ago, and how she had been the mother of quite a Priam's progeny of cubs. And now that she should have been killed in a stokehole! While this was going on a young lady rode up along side of Mr. Price, and said a word to him with her sweetest smile.

"You remember your promise to me, Mr. Price?"

"Surely, Mrs. Houghton. Your nag can jump a few, no doubt."

"Beautifully. Mr. Houghton bought him from Lord Mountfencer. Lady Mountfencer couldn't ride him because he pulls a little. But he's a perfect hunter."

"We shall find him, Mrs. Houghton, to a moral; and do you stick to me. They generally go straight away to Thrupp's larches. You see the little wood. There's an old earth there, but that's stopped. There is only one fence between this and that, a biggish ditch, with a bit of a hedge on this side, but it's nothing to the horses when they're fresh."

"Mine's quite fresh."

"Then they mostly turn to the right for Pugsby; nothing but grass then for four miles a-head."

"And the jumping?"

"All fair. There's one bit of water, – Pugsby Brook, – that you ought to have as he'll be sure to cross it ever so much above the bridge. But, lord love you, Mrs. Houghton, that horse'll think nothing of the brook."

"Nothing at all, Mr. Price. I like brooks."

"I'm afraid he's not here, Price," said Sir Simon, trotting round the cover towards the whip, who was stationed at the further end.

"Well, Sir Simon, her as we killed came from the holt, you know," said the farmer, mindful of his reputation for foxes. "You can't eat your cake and have it too, can you, Sir Simon?"

"Ought to be able in a covert like this."

"Well, perhaps we shall. The best lying is down in that corner. I've seen a brace of cubs together there a score of times." Then there was one short low, dubious, bark, and then another a little more confirmed. "That's it, Sir Simon. There's your 'cake.'"

"Good hound, Blazer," cried Sir Simon, recognising the voice of his dog. And many of the pack recognised the well-known sound as plainly as the master, for you might hear the hounds rustling through the covert as they hurried up to certify to the scent which their old leader had found for them. The holt though thick was small and a fox had not much chance but by breaking. Once up the covert and once back again the animal went, and then Dick, the watchful whip, holding his hand up to his face, holloed him away. "Gently, gentlemen," shouted Sir Simon, "let them settle. Now, Mr. Bottomley, if you'll only keep yourself a little steady, you'll find yourself the better for it at the finish." Mr. Bottomley was a young man from London, who was often addressed after this fashion, was always very unhappy for a few minutes, and then again forgot it in his excitement.

"Now, Mr. Price," said Mrs. Houghton in a fever of expectation. She had been dodging backwards and forwards trying to avoid her husband, and yet unwilling to leave the farmer's side.

"Wait a moment, ma'am; wait a moment. Now we're right; here to the left." So saying Mr. Price jumped over a low hedge, and Mrs. Houghton followed him, almost too closely. Mr. Houghton saw it, and didn't follow. He had made his way up, resolved to stop his wife, but she gave him the slip at the last moment. "Now through the gate, ma'am, and then on straight as an arrow for the little

wood. I'll give you a lead over the ditch, but don't ride quite so close, ma'am." Then the farmer went away feeling perhaps that his best chance of keeping clear from his too loving friend was to make the pace so fast that she should not be able quite to catch him. But Lady Mountfencer's nag was fast too, was fast and had a will of his own. It was not without a cause that Lord Mountfencer had parted with so good a horse out of his stable. "Have a care, ma'am," said Price, as Mrs. Houghton canoned against him as they both landed over the big ditch; "have a care, or we shall come to grief together. Just see me over before you let him take his jump." It was very good advice, and is very often given; but both ladies and gentlemen, whose hands are a little doubtful, sometimes find themselves unable to follow it. But now they were at Thrupp's larches. George Scruby had led the way, as becomes a huntsman, and a score or more had followed him over the big fence. Price had been going a little to the left, and when they reached the wood was as forward as any one.

"He won't hang here, Sir Simon," said the farmer, as the master came up, "he never does."

"He's only a cub," said the master.

"The holt cubs this time of the year are nigh as strong as old foxes. Now for Pugsby."

Mrs. Houghton looked round, fearing every moment that her husband would come up. They had just crossed a road, and wherever there was a road there, she thought, he would certainly be.

"Can't we get round the other side, Mr. Price?" she said.

"You won't be any better nor here."

"But there's Mr. Houghton on the road," she whispered.

"Oh-h-h," ejaculated the farmer, just touching the end of his nose with his finger and moving gently on through the wood. "Never spoil sport," was the motto of his life, and to his thinking it was certainly sport that a young wife should ride to hounds in opposition to an old husband. Mrs. Houghton followed him, and as they got out on the other side, the fox was again away. "He ain't making for Pugsby's after all," said Price to George Scruby.

"He don't know that country yet," said the huntsman. "He'll be back in them Manor Cross woods. You'll see else."

The park of Manor Cross lay to the left of them, whereas Pugsby and the desirable grass country away to Bamham Moor were all to the right. Some men mindful of the big brook and knowing the whereabouts of the bridge, among whom was Mr. Houghton, kept very much to the right and were soon out of the run altogether. But the worst of it was that though they were not heading for their good country, still there was the brook, Pugsby brook, to be taken. Had the fox done as he ought to have done, and made for Pugsby itself, the leap would have been from grass to grass; but now it must be from plough to plough, if taken at all. It need hardly be said that the two things are very different. Sir Simon, when he saw how the land lay, took a lane leading down to the Brotherton road. If the fox was making for the park he must be right in that direction. It is not often that a master of hounds rides for glory, and Sir Simon had long since left all that to younger men. But there were still a dozen riders pressing on, and among them were the farmer and his devoted follower, – and a gentleman in black.

Let us give praise where praise is due, and acknowledge that young Bottomley was the first at the brook, – and the first over it. As soon as he was beyond Sir Simon's notice, he had scurried on across the plough, and being both light and indiscreet, had enjoyed the heartfelt pleasure of passing George Scruby. George, who hated Mr. Bottomley, grunted out his malediction, even though no one could hear him. "He'll soon be at the bottom of that," said George, meaning to imply in horsey phrase that the rider, if he rode over ploughed ground after that fashion, would soon come to the end of his steed's power. But Bottomley, if he could only be seen to jump the big brook before any one else, would have happiness enough for a month. To have done a thing that he could talk about was the charm that Bottomley found in hunting. Alas, though he rode gallantly at the brook and did get over it, there was not much to talk about; for, unfortunately, he left his horse behind him

in the water. The poor beast going with a rush off the plough, came with her neck and shoulders against the opposite bank, and shot his rider well on to the dry land.

"That's about as good as a dead'un," said George, as he landed a yard or two to the right. This was ill-natured, and the horse in truth was not hurt. But a rider, at any rate a young rider, should not take a lead from a huntsman unless he is very sure of himself, of his horse, and of the run of the hounds. The next man over was the gentleman in black, who took it in a stand, and who really seemed to know what he was about. There were some who afterwards asserted that this was the Dean, but the Dean was never heard to boast of the performance.

Mrs. Houghton's horse was going very strong with her. More than once the farmer cautioned her to give him a pull over the plough. And she attempted to obey the order. But the horse was self-willed, and she was light; and in truth the heaviness of the ground would have been nothing to him had he been fairly well ridden. But she allowed him to rush with her through the mud. As she had never yet had an accident she knew nothing of fear, and she was beyond measure excited. She had been near enough to see that a man fell at the brook, and then she saw also that the huntsman got over, and also the gentleman in black. It seemed to her to be lovely. The tumble did not scare her at all, as others coming after the unfortunate one had succeeded. She was aware that there were three or four other men behind her, and she was determined that they should not pass her. They should see that she also could jump the river. She had not rid herself of her husband for nothing. Price, as he came near the water, knew that he had plenty to do, and knew also how very close to him the woman was. It was too late now to speak to her again, but he did not fear for his own horse if she would only give him room. He steadied the animal a yard or two from the margin as he came to the headland that ran down the side of the brook, and then took his leap.

But Mrs. Houghton rode as though the whole thing was to be accomplished by a rush, and her horse, true to the manner of horses, insisted on following in the direct track of the one who had led him so far. When he got to the bank he made his effort to jump high, but had got no footing for a fair spring. On he went, however, and struck Price's horse on the quarter so violently as to upset that animal, as well as himself.

Price, who was a thoroughly good horseman, was knocked off, but got on to the bank as Bottomley had done. The two animals were both in the brook, and when the farmer was able to look round, he saw that the lady was out of sight. He was in the water immediately himself, but before he made the plunge he had resolved that he never again would give a lady a lead till he knew whether she could ride.

Mr. Knox and Dick were soon on the spot, and Mrs. Houghton was extracted. "I'm blessed if she ain't dead," said the whip, pale as death himself. "H – sh!" said Mr. Knox; "she's not dead, but I'm afraid she's hurt." Price had come back through the water with the woman in his arms, and the two horses were still floundering about, unattended. "It's her shoulder, Mr. Knox," said Price. "The horse has jammed her against the bank under water." During this time her head was drooping, and her eyes were closed, and she was apparently senseless. "Do you look to the horses, Dick. There ain't no reason why they should get their death of cold." By this time there were a dozen men round them, and Dick and others were able to attend to the ill-used nags. "Yes; it's her shoulder," continued Price. "That's out, any way. What the mischief will Mr. Houghton say to me when he comes up!"

There is always a doctor in the field, – sent there by some benignity of providence, – who always rides forward enough to be near to accidents, but never so forward as to be in front of them. It has been hinted that this arrangement is professional rather than providential; but the present writer, having given his mind to the investigation of the matter, is inclined to think that it arises from the general fitness of things. All public institutions have, or ought to have, their doctor, but in no institution is the doctor so invariably at hand, just when he is wanted, as in the hunting field. A very skilful young surgeon from Brotherton was on the spot almost as soon as the lady was out of the water, and declared that she had dislocated her shoulder.

What was to be done? Her hat had gone; she had been under the water; she was covered with mud; she was still senseless, and of course she could neither ride nor walk. There were ever so many suggestions. Price thought that she had better be taken back to Cross Hall, which was about a mile and a half distant. Mr. Knox, who knew the country, told them of a side gate in the Manor Cross wall, which made the great house nearer than Cross Hall. They could get her there in little over a mile. But how to get her there? They must find a door on which to carry her. First a hurdle was suggested, and then Dick was sent galloping up to the house for a carriage. In the meantime she was carried to a labourer's cottage by the roadside on a hurdle, and there the party was joined by Sir Simon and Mr. Houghton.

"It's all your fault," said the husband, coming up to Price as though he meant to strike him with his whip. "Part of it is no doubt, sir," said Price, looking his assailant full in the face, but almost sobbing as he spoke, "and I'm very unhappy about it." Then the husband went and hung over his wife, but his wife, when she saw him, found it convenient to faint again.

At about two o'clock the cortège with the carriage reached the great house. Sir Simon, after expressions of deep sorrow had, of course, gone on after his hounds. Mr. Knox, as belonging to Manor Cross, and Price, and, of course, the doctor, with Mr. Houghton and Mr. Houghton's groom, accompanied the carriage. When they got to the door all the ladies were there to receive them. "I don't think we want to see anything more of you," said Mr. Houghton to the farmer. The poor man turned round and went away home, alone, feeling himself to be thoroughly disgraced. "After all," he said to himself, "if you come to fault it was she nigh killed me, not me her. How was I to know she didn't know nothing about it!"

"Now, Mary, I think you'll own that I was right," Lord George said to his wife, as soon as the sufferer had been put quietly to bed.

"Ladies don't always break their arms," said Mary.

"It might have been you as well as Mrs. Houghton."

"As I didn't go, you need not scold me, George."

"But you were discontented because you were prevented," said he, determined to have the last word.

CHAPTER IX. MRS. HOUGHTON

Lady Sarah, who was generally regarded as the arbiter of the very slender hospitalities exercised at Manor Cross, was not at all well pleased at being forced to entertain Mrs. Houghton, whom she especially disliked; but, circumstanced as they were, there was no alternative. She had been put to bed with a dislocated arm, and had already suffered much in having it reduced, before the matter could be even discussed. And then it was of course felt that she could not be turned out of the house. She was not only generally hurt, but she was a cousin, also. "We must ask him, mamma," Lady Sarah said. The Marchioness whined piteously. Mr. Houghton's name had always been held in great displeasure by the ladies at Manor Cross. "I don't think we can help it. Mr. Sawyer" – Mr. Sawyer was the very clever young surgeon from Brotherton – "Mr. Sawyer says that she ought not to be removed for at any rate a week." The Marchioness groaned. But the evil became less than had been anticipated, by Mr. Houghton's refusal. At first, he seemed inclined to stay, but after he had seen his wife he declared that, as there was no danger, he would not intrude upon Lady Brotherton, but would, if permitted, ride over and see how his wife was progressing on the morrow. "That is a relief," said Lady Sarah to her mother; and yet Lady Sarah had been almost urgent in assuring Mr. Houghton that they would be delighted to have him.

In spite of her suffering, which must have been real, and her fainting, which had partly been so, Mrs. Houghton had had force enough to tell her husband that he would himself be inexpressibly bored by remaining at Manor Cross, and that his presence would inexpressibly bore "all those dowdy old women," as she called the ladies of the house. "Besides, what's the use?" she said; "I've got to lay here for a certain time. You would not be any good at nursing. You'd only kill yourself with ennui. I shall do well enough, and do you go on with your hunting." He had assented; but finding her to be well enough to express her opinion as to the desirability of his absence strongly, thought that she was well enough, also, to be rebuked for her late disobedience. He began, therefore, to say a word. "Oh! Jeffrey, are you going to scold me," she said, "while I am in such a state as this!" and then, again, she almost fainted. He knew that he was being ill-treated, but knowing, also, that he could not avoid it, he went away without a further word.

But she was quite cheerful that evening when Lady George came up to give her her dinner. She had begged that it might be so. She had known "dear Mary" so long, and was so warmly attached to her. "Dear Mary" did not dislike the occupation, which was soon found to comprise that of being head nurse to the invalid. She had never especially loved Adelaide De Baron, and had felt that there was something amiss in her conversation when they had met at the deanery; but she was brighter than the ladies at Manor Cross, was affectionate in her manner, and was at any rate young. There was an antiquity about every thing at Manor Cross, which was already crushing the spirit of the young bride.

"Dear me! this is nice," said Mrs. Houghton, disregarding, apparently altogether, the pain of her shoulder; "I declare, I shall begin to be glad of the accident!"

"You shouldn't say that."

"Why not, if I feel it? Doesn't it seem like a thing in a story that I should be brought to Lord George's house, and that he was my lover only quite the other day?" The idea had never occurred to Mary, and now that it was suggested to her, she did not like it. "I wonder when he'll come and see me. It would not make you jealous, I hope."

"Certainly not."

"No, indeed. I think he's quite as much in love with you as ever he was with me. And yet, he was very, very fond of me once. Isn't it odd that men should change so?"

"I suppose you are changed, too," said Mary, – hardly knowing what to say.

"Well, – yes, – no. I don't know that I'm changed at all. I never told Lord George that I loved him. And what's more, I never told Mr. Houghton so. I don't pretend to be very virtuous, and of course I married for an income. I like him very well, and I always mean to be good to him; that is, if he lets me have my own way. I'm not going to be scolded, and he need not think so."

"You oughtn't to have gone on to-day, ought you?"

"Why not? If my horse hadn't gone so very quick, and Mr. Price at that moment hadn't gone so very slow, I shouldn't have come to grief, and nobody would have known anything about it. Wouldn't you like to ride?"

"Yes; I should like it. But are not you exerting yourself too much?"

"I should die if I were made to lie here without speaking to any one. Just put the pillow a little under me. Now I'm all right. Who do you think was going as well as anybody yesterday? I saw him."

"Who was it?"

"The very Reverend the Dean of Brotherton, my dear."

"No!"

"But he was. I saw him jump the brook just before I fell into it. What will Mr. Groschut say?"

"I don't think papa cares much what Mr. Groschut says."

"And the Bishop?"

"I'm not sure that he cares very much for the Bishop either. But I am quite sure that he would not do anything that he thought to be wrong."

"A Dean never does, I suppose."

"My papa never does."

"Nor Lord George, I dare say," said Mrs. Houghton.

"I don't say anything about Lord George. I haven't known him quite so long."

"If you won't speak up for him, I will. I'm quite sure Lord George Germain never in his life did anything that he ought not to do. That's his fault. Don't you like men who do what they ought not to do?"

"No," said Mary, "I don't. Everybody always ought to do what they ought to do. And you ought to go to sleep, and so I shall go away." She knew that it was not all right, – that there was something fast, and also something vulgar, about this self-appointed friend of hers. But though Mrs. Houghton was fast, and though she was vulgar, she was a relief to the endless gloom of Manor Cross.

On the next day Mr. Houghton came, explaining to everybody that he had given up his day's hunting for the sake of his wife. But he could say but little, and could do nothing, and he did not remain long. "Don't stay away from the meet another day," his wife said to him; "I shan't get well any the sooner, and I don't like being a drag upon you." Then the husband went away, and did not come for the next two days. On the Sunday he came over in the afternoon and stayed for half-an-hour, and on the following Tuesday he appeared on his way to the meet in top boots and a red coat. He was, upon the whole, less troublesome to the Manor Cross people than might have been expected.

Mr. Price came every morning to enquire, and very gracious passages passed between him and the lady. On the Saturday she was up, sitting on a sofa in a dressing gown, and he was brought in to see her. "It was all my fault, Mr. Price," she said immediately. "I heard what Mr. Houghton said to you; I couldn't speak then, but I was so sorry."

"What a husband says, ma'am, at such a time, goes for nothing."

"What husbands say, Mr. Price, very often does go for nothing." He turned his hat in his hand, and smiled. "If it had not been so, all this wouldn't have happened, and I shouldn't have upset you into the water. But all the same, I hope you'll give me a lead another day, and I'll take great

care not to come so close to you again." This pleased Mr. Price so much, that as he went home he swore to himself that if ever she asked him again, he would do just the same as he had done on the day of the accident.

When Price, the farmer, had seen her, of course it became Lord George's duty to pay her his compliments in person. At first he visited her in company with his wife and Lady Sarah, and the conversation was very stiff. Lady Sarah was potent enough to quell even Mrs. Houghton. But later in the afternoon Lord George came back again, his wife being in the room, and then there was a little more ease. "You can't think how it grieves me," she said, "to bring all this trouble upon you." She emphasised the word "you," as though to show him that she cared nothing for his mother and sisters.

"It is no trouble to me," said Lord George, bowing low. "I should say that it was a pleasure, were it not that your presence here is attended with so much pain to yourself."

"The pain is nothing," said Mrs. Houghton. "I have hardly thought of it. It is much more than compensated by the renewal of my intimacy with Lady George Germain." This she said with her very prettiest manner, and he told himself that she was, indeed, very pretty.

Lady George, – or Mary, as we will still call her, for simplicity, in spite of her promotion, – had become somewhat afraid of Mrs. Houghton; but now, seeing her husband's courtesy to her guest, understanding from his manner that he liked her society, began to thaw, and to think that she might allow herself to be intimate with the woman. It did not occur to her to be in any degree jealous, – not, at least, as yet. In her innocence she did not think it possible that her husband's heart should be untrue to her, nor did it occur to her that such a one as Mrs. Houghton could be preferred to herself. She thought that she knew herself to be better than Mrs. Houghton, and she certainly thought herself to be the better looking of the two.

Mrs. Houghton's beauty, such as it was, depended mainly on style; on a certain dash and manner which she had acquired, and which, to another woman, were not attractive. Mary knew that she, herself, was beautiful. She could not but know it. She had been brought up by all belonging to her with that belief; and so believing, had taught herself to acknowledge that no credit was due to herself on that score. Her beauty now belonged entirely to her husband. There was nothing more to be done with it, except to maintain her husband's love, and that, for the present, she did not in the least doubt. She had heard of married men falling in love with other people's wives, but she did not in the least bring home the fact to her own case.

In the course of that afternoon all the ladies of the family sat for a time with their guest. First came Lady Sarah and Lady Susanna. Mrs. Houghton, who saw very well how the land lay, rather snubbed Lady Sarah. She had nothing to fear from the dragon of the family. Lady Sarah, in spite of their cousinship, had called her Mrs. Houghton, and Mrs. Houghton, in return, called the other Lady Sarah. There was to be no intimacy, and she was only received there because of her dislocated shoulder. Let it be so. Lord George and his wife were coming up to town, and the intimacy should be there. She certainly would not wish to repeat her visit to Manor Cross.

"Some ladies do like hunting, and some don't," she said, in answer to a severe remark from Lady Sarah. "I am one of those who do, and I don't think an accident like that has anything to do with it."

"I can't say I think it an amusement fit for ladies," said Lady Sarah.

"I suppose ladies may do what clergymen do. The Dean jumped over the brook just before me." There was not much of an argument in this, but Mrs. Houghton knew that it would vex Lady Sarah, because of the alliance between the Dean and the Manor Cross family.

"She's a detestable young woman," Lady Sarah said to her mother, "and I can only hope that Mary won't see much of her up in town."

"I don't see how she can, after what there has been between her and George," said the innocent old lady. In spite, however, of this strongly expressed opinion, the old lady made her visit, taking Lady Amelia with her. "I hope, my dear, you find yourself getting better."

"So much better, Lady Brotherton! But I am so sorry to have given you all this trouble; but it has been very pleasant to me to be here, and to see Lord George and Mary together. I declare I think hers is the sweetest face I ever looked upon. And she is so much improved. That's what perfect happiness does. I do so like her."

"We love her very dearly," said the Marchioness.

"I am sure you do. And he is so proud of her!" Lady Sarah had said that the woman was detestable, and therefore the Marchioness felt that she ought to detest her. But, had it not been for Lady Sarah, she would have been rather pleased with her guest than otherwise. She did not remain very long, but promised that she would return on the next day.

On the following morning Mr. Houghton came again, staying only a few minutes; and while he was in his wife's sitting-room, both Lord George and Mary found them. As they were all leaving her together, she contrived to say a word to her old lover. "Don't desert me all the morning. Come and talk to me a bit. I am well now, though they won't let me move about." In obedience to this summons, he returned to her when his wife was called upon to attend to the ordinary cloak and petticoat conclave of the other ladies. In regard to these charitable meetings she had partly carried her own way. She had so far thrown off authority as to make it understood that she was not to be bound by the rules which her sisters-in-law had laid down for their own guidance. But her rebellion had not been complete, and she still gave them a certain number of weekly stitches. Lord George had said nothing of his purpose; but for a full hour before luncheon he was alone with Mrs. Houghton. If a gentleman may call on a lady in her house, surely he may, without scandal, pay her a visit in his own. That a married man should chat for an hour with another man's wife in a country house is not much. Where is the man and where the woman who has not done that, quite as a matter of course? And yet when Lord George knocked at the door there was a feeling on him that he was doing something in which he would not wish to be detected. "This is so good of you," she said. "Do sit down; and don't run away. Your mother and sisters have been here, – so nice of them, you know; but everybody treats me as though I oughtn't to open my mouth for above five minutes at a time. I feel as though I should like to jump the brook again immediately."

"Pray don't do that."

"Well, no; not quite yet. You don't like hunting, I'm afraid?"

"The truth is," said Lord George, "that I've never been able to afford to keep horses."

"Ah, that's a reason. Mr. Houghton, of course, is a rich man; but I don't know anything so little satisfactory in itself as being rich."

"It is comfortable."

"Oh yes, it is comfortable; but so unsatisfactory! Of course Mr. Houghton can keep any number of horses; but, what's the use, when he never rides to hounds? Better not have them at all, I think. I am very fond of hunting myself."

"I daresay I should have liked it had it come in my way early in life."

"You speak of yourself as if you were a hundred years old. I know your age exactly. You are just seventeen years younger than Mr. Houghton!" To this Lord George had no reply to make. Of course he had felt that when Miss De Baron had married Mr. Houghton she had married quite an old man. "I wonder whether you were much surprised when you heard that I was engaged to Mr. Houghton?"

"I was, rather."

"Because he is so old?"

"Not that altogether."

"I was surprised myself, and I knew that you would be. But what was I to do?"

"I think you have been very wise," said Lord George.

"Yes, but you think I have been heartless. I can see it in your eyes and hear it in your voice. Perhaps I was heartless; – but then I was bound to be wise. A man may have a profession before him. He may do anything. But what has a girl to think of? You say that money is comfortable."

"Certainly it is."

"How is she to get it, if she has not got it of her own, like dear Mary?"

"You do not think that I have blamed you."

"But even though you have not, yet I must excuse myself to you," she said with energy, bending forward from her sofa towards him. "Do you think that I do not know the difference?"

"What difference?"

"Ah, you shouldn't ask. I may hint at it, but you shouldn't ask. But it wouldn't have done, would it?" Lord George hardly understood what it was that wouldn't have done; but he knew that a reference was being made to his former love by the girl he had loved; and, upon the whole, he rather liked it. The flattery of such intrigues is generally pleasant to men, even when they cannot bring their minds about quick enough to understand all the little ins and outs of the woman's manoeuvres. "It is my very nature to be extravagant. Papa has brought me up like that. And yet I had nothing that I could call my own. I had no right to marry any one but a rich man. You said just now you couldn't afford to hunt."

"I never could."

"And I couldn't afford to have a heart. You said just now, too, that money is very comfortable. There was a time when I should have found it very, very comfortable to have had a fortune of my own."

"You have plenty now."

She wasn't angry with him, because she had already found out that it is the nature of men to be slow. And she wasn't angry with him, again, because, though he was slow, yet also was he evidently gratified. "Yes," she said, "I have plenty now. I have secured so much. I couldn't have done without a large income; but a large income doesn't make me happy. It's like eating and drinking. One has to eat and drink, but yet one doesn't care very much about it. Perhaps you don't regret hunting very much?"

"Yes I do, because it enables a man to know his neighbours."

"I know that I regret the thing I couldn't afford."

Then a glimmer of what she meant did come across him, and he blushed. "Things will not always turn out as they are wanted," he said. Then his conscience upbraided him, and he corrected himself. "But, God knows that I have no reason to complain. I have been fortunate."

"Yes, indeed."

"I sometimes think it is better to remember the good things we have than to regret those that are gone."

"That is excellent philosophy, Lord George. And therefore I go out hunting, and break my bones, and fall into rivers, and ride about with such men as Mr. Price. One has to make the best of it, hasn't one? But you, I see, have no regrets."

He paused for a moment, and then found himself driven to make some attempt at gallantry. "I didn't quite say that," he replied.

"You were able to re-establish yourself according to your own tastes. A man can always do so. I was obliged to take whatever came. I think that Mary is so nice."

"I think so too, I can assure you."

"You have been very fortunate to find such a girl; so innocent, so pure, so pretty, and with a fortune too. I wonder how much difference it would have made in your happiness if you had seen her before we had ever been acquainted. I suppose we should never have known each other then."

"Who can say?"

"No; no one can say. For myself, I own that I like it better as it is. I have something to remember that I can be proud of."

"And I something to be ashamed of."

"To be ashamed of!" she said, almost rising in anger.

"That you should have refused me!"

She had got it at last. She had made her fish rise to the fly. "Oh, no," she said; "there can be nothing of that. If I did not tell you plainly then, I tell you plainly now. I should have done very wrong to marry a poor man."

"I ought not to have asked you."

"I don't know how that may be," she said in a very low voice, looking down to the ground. "Some say that if a man loves he should declare his love, let the circumstances be what they may. I rather think that I agree with them. You at any rate knew that I felt greatly honoured, though the honour was out of my reach." Then there was a pause, during which he could find nothing to say. He was trapped by her flattery, but he did not wish to betray his wife by making love to the woman. He liked her words and her manner; but he was aware that she was a thing sacred as being another man's wife. "But it is all better as it is," she said with a laugh, "and Mary Lovelace is the happiest girl of her year. I am so glad you are coming to London, and do so hope you'll come and see me."

"Certainly I will."

"I mean to be such friends with Mary. There is no woman I like so much. And then circumstances have thrown us together, haven't they; and if she and I are friends, real friends, I shall feel that our friendship may be continued, – yours and mine. I don't mean that all this accident shall go for nothing. I wasn't quite clever enough to contrive it; but I am very glad of it, because it has brought us once more together, so that we may understand each other. Good-bye, Lord George. Don't let me keep you longer now. I wouldn't have Mary jealous, you know."

"I don't think there is the least fear of that," he said in real displeasure.

"Don't take me up seriously for my little joke," she said as she put out her left hand. He took it, and once more smiled, and then left her.

When she was alone there came a feeling on her that she had gone through some hard work with only moderate success; and also a feeling that the game was hardly worth the candle. She was not in the least in love with the man, or capable of being in love with any man. In a certain degree she was jealous, and felt that she owed Mary Lovelace a turn for having so speedily won her own rejected lover. But her jealousy was not strong enough for absolute malice. She had formed no plot against the happiness of the husband and wife when she came into the house; but the plot made itself, and she liked the excitement. He was heavy, – certainly heavy; but he was very handsome, and a lord; and then, too, it was much in her favour that he certainly had once loved her dearly.

Lord George, as he went down to lunch, felt himself to be almost guilty, and hardly did more than creep into the room where his wife and sisters were seated.

"Have you been with Mrs. Houghton?" asked Lady Sarah in a firm voice.

"Yes, I have been sitting with her for the last half hour," he replied; but he couldn't answer the question without hesitation in his manner. Mary, however, thought nothing about it.

CHAPTER X. THE DEAN AS A SPORTING MAN

In Brotherton the Dean's performance in the run from Cross Hall Holt was almost as much talked of as Mrs. Houghton's accident. There had been rumours of things that he had done in the same line after taking orders, when a young man, – of runs that he had ridden, and even of visits which he had made to Newmarket and other wicked places. But, as far as Brotherton knew, there had been nothing of all this since the Dean had been a dean. Though he was constantly on horseback, he had never been known to do more than perhaps look at a meet, and it was understood through Brotherton generally that he had forbidden his daughter to hunt. But now, no sooner was his daughter married, and the necessity of setting an example to her at an end, than the Dean, with a rosette in his hat, – for so the story was told, – was after the hounds like a sporting farmer or a mere country gentleman! On the very next day Mr. Groschut told the whole story to the Bishop. But Mr. Groschut had not seen the performance, and the Bishop affected to disbelieve it. "I'm afraid, my lord," said the chaplain, "I'm afraid you'll find it's true." "If he rides after every pack of dogs in the county, I don't know that I can help it," said the Bishop. With this Mr. Groschut was by no means inclined to agree. A bishop is as much entitled to cause inquiries to be made into the moral conduct of a dean as of any country clergyman in his diocese. "Suppose he were to take to gambling on the turf," said Mr. Groschut, with much horror expressed in his tone and countenance. "But riding after a pack of dogs isn't gambling on the turf," said the Bishop, who, though he would have liked to possess the power of putting down the Dean, by no means relished the idea of being beaten in an attempt to do so.

And Mr. Canon Holdenough heard of it. "My dear," he said to his wife, "Manor Cross is coming out strong in the sporting way. Not only is Mrs. Houghton laid up there with a broken limb, but your brother's father-in-law took the brush on the same day."

"The Dean!" said Lady Alice.

"So they tell me."

"He was always so particular in not letting Mary ride over a single fence. He would hardly let her go to a meet on horseback."

"Many fathers do what they won't let their daughters do. The Dean has been always giving signs that he would like to break out a little."

"Can they do anything to him?"

"Oh dear no; – not if he was to hunt a pack of hounds himself, as far as I know."

"But I suppose it's wrong, Canon," said the clerical wife.

"Yes; I think it's wrong because it will scandalise. Everything that gives offence is wrong, unless it be something that is on other grounds expedient. If it be true we shall hear about it a good deal here, and it will not contribute to brotherly love and friendship among us clergymen."

There was another canon at Brotherton, one Dr. Pountner, a red-faced man, very fond of his dinner, a man of infinite pluck, and much attached to the Cathedral, towards the reparation of which he had contributed liberally. And, having an ear for music, he had done much to raise the character of the choir. Though Dr. Pountner's sermons were supposed to be the worst ever heard from the pulpit of the Cathedral, he was, on account of the above good deeds, the most popular clergyman in the city. "So I'm told you've been distinguishing yourself, Mr. Dean," said the Doctor, meeting our friend in the close.

"Have I done so lately, more than is usual with me?" asked the Dean, who had not hitherto heard of the rumour of his performances.

"I am told that you were so much ahead the other day in the hunting field, that you were unable to give assistance to the poor lady who broke her arm."

"Oh, that's it! If I do anything at all, though I may do it but once in a dozen years, I like to do it well, Dr. Pountner. I wish I thought that you could follow my example, and take a little exercise. It would be very good for you." The Doctor was a heavy man, and hardly walked much beyond the confines of the Close or his own garden. Though a bold man, he was not so ready as the Dean, and had no answer at hand. "Yes," continued our friend, "I did go a mile or two with them, and I enjoyed it amazingly. I wish with all my heart there was no prejudice against clergymen hunting."

"I think it would be an abominable practise," said Dr. Pountner, passing on.

The Dean himself would have thought nothing more about it had there not appeared a few lines on the subject in a weekly newspaper called the "Brotherton Church," which was held to be a pestilential little rag by all the Close. Deans, canons, and minor canons were all agreed as to this, Dr. Pountner hating the "Brotherton Church" quite as sincerely as did the Dean. The "Brotherton Church" was edited nominally by a certain Mr. Grease, – a very pious man who had long striven, but hitherto in vain, to get orders. But it was supposed by many that the paper was chiefly inspired by Mr. Groschut. It was always very laudatory of the Bishop. It had distinguished itself by its elaborate opposition to ritual. Its mission was to put down popery in the diocese of Brotherton. It always sneered at the Chapter generally, and very often said severe things of the Dean. On this occasion the paragraph was as follows; "There is a rumour current that Dean Lovelace was out with the Brotherton foxhounds last Wednesday, and that he rode with the pack all the day, leading the field. We do not believe this, but we hope that for the sake of the Cathedral and for his own sake, he will condescend to deny the report." On the next Saturday there was another paragraph, with a reply from the Dean; "We have received from the Dean of Brotherton the following startling letter, which we publish without comment. What our opinion on the subject may be our readers will understand.

"Deanery, November, 187 —

"Sir, – You have been correctly informed that I was out with the Brotherton foxhounds on Wednesday week last. The other reports which you have published, and as to which after publication, you have asked for information, are unfortunately incorrect. I wish I could have done as well as my enemies accuse me of doing.

"I am, Sir,

"Your humble servant,

"Henry Lovelace.

"To the Editor of the 'Brotherton Church.'"

The Dean's friends were unanimous in blaming him for having taken any notice of the attack. The Bishop, who was at heart an honest man and a gentleman, regretted it. All the Chapter were somewhat ashamed of it. The Minor Canons were agreed that it was below the dignity of a dean. Dr. Pountner, who had not yet forgotten the allusion to his obesity, whispered in some clerical ear that nothing better could be expected out of a stable; and Canon Holdenough, who really liked the Dean in spite of certain differences of opinion, expostulated with him about it.

"I would have let it pass," said the Canon. "Why notice it at all?"

"Because I would not have any one suppose that I was afraid to notice it. Because I would not have it thought that I had gone out with the hounds and was ashamed of what I had done."

"Nobody who knows you would have thought that."

"I am proud to think that nobody who knows me would. I make as many mistakes as another, and am sorry for them afterwards. But I am never ashamed. I'll tell you what happened, not to justify my hunting, but to justify my letter. I was over at Manor Cross, and I went to the meet, because Mary went. I have not done such a thing before since I came to Brotherton, because there

is, – what I will call a feeling against it. When I was there I rode a field or two with them, and I can tell you I enjoyed it."

"I daresay you did."

"Then, very soon after the fox broke, there was that brook at which Mrs. Houghton hurt herself. I happened to jump it, and the thing became talked about because of her accident. After that we came out on the Brotherton road, and I went back to Manor Cross. Do not suppose that I should have been ashamed of myself if I had gone on even half a dozen more fields."

"I'm sure you wouldn't."

"The thing in itself is not bad. Nevertheless, – thinking as the world around us does about hunting, – a clergyman in my position would be wrong to hunt often. But a man who can feel horror at such a thing as this is a prig in religion. If, as is more likely, a man affects horror, he is a hypocrite. I believe that most clergymen will agree with me in that; but there is no clergyman in the diocese of whose agreement I feel more certain than of yours."

"It is the letter, not the hunting, to which I object."

"There was an apparent cowardice in refraining from answering such an attack. I am aware, Canon, of a growing feeling of hostility to myself."

"Not in the Chapter?"

"In the diocese. And I know whence it comes, and I think I understand its cause. Let what will come of it I am not going to knock under. I want to quarrel with no man, and certainly with no clergyman, – but I am not going to be frightened out of my own manner of life or my own manner of thinking by fear of a quarrel."

"Nobody doubts your courage; but what is the use of fighting when there is nothing to win. Let that wretched newspaper alone. It is beneath you and me, Dean."

"Very much beneath us, and so is your butler beneath you. But if he asks you a question, you answer him. To tell the truth I would rather they should call me indiscreet than timid. If I did not feel that it would be really wrong and painful to my friends I would go out hunting three days next week, to let them know that I am not to be cowed."

There was a good deal said at Manor Cross about the newspaper correspondence, and some condemnation of the Dean expressed by the ladies, who thought that he had lowered himself by addressing a reply to the editor. In the heat of discussion a word or two was spoken by Lady Susanna, – who entertained special objections to all things low, – which made Mary very angry. "I think papa is at any rate a better judge than you can be," she said. Between sisters as sisters generally are, or even sisters-in-laws, this would not be much; but at Manor Cross it was felt to be misconduct. Mary was so much younger than they were! And then she was the grand-daughter of a tradesman! No doubt they all thought that they were willing to admit her among themselves on terms of equality; but then there was a feeling among them that she ought to repay this great goodness by a certain degree of humility and submission. From day to day the young wife strengthened herself in a resolution that she would not be humble and would not be submissive.

Lady Susanna, when she heard the words, drew herself up with an air of offended dignity. "Mary, dear," said Lady Sarah, "is not that a little unkind?"

"I think it is unkind to say that papa is indiscreet," said the Dean's daughter. "I wonder what you'd all think if I were to say a word against dear mamma." She had been specially instructed to call the Marchioness mamma.

"The Dean is not my father-in-law," said Lady Amelia, very proudly, as though in making the suggestion, she begged it to be understood that under no circumstances could such a connection have been possible.

"But he's my papa, and I shall stand up for him, – and I do say that he must know more about such things than any lady." Then Lady Susanna got up and marched majestically out of the room.

Lord George was told of this, and found himself obliged to speak to his wife. "I'm afraid there has been something between you and Susanna, dear."

"She abused papa, and I told her papa knew better than she did, and then she walked out of the room."

"I don't suppose she meant to – abuse the Dean."

"She called him names."

"She said he was indiscreet."

"That is calling him names."

"No, my dear, indiscreet is an epithet; and even were it a noun substantive, as a name must be, it could only be one name." It was certainly very hard to fall in love with a man who could talk about epithets so very soon after his marriage; but yet she would go on trying. "Dear George," she said, "don't you scold me. I will do anything you tell me, but I don't like them to say hard things of papa. You are not angry with me for taking papa's part, are you?"

He kissed her, and told her that he was not in the least angry with her; but, nevertheless, he went on to insinuate, that if she could bring herself to show something of submission to his sisters, it would make her own life happier and theirs and his. "I would do anything I could to make your life happy," she said.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD AND LADY GEORGE GO UP TO TOWN

Time went on, and the day arranged for the migration to London came round. After much delicate fencing on one side and the other, this was fixed for the 31st January. The fencing took place between the Dean, acting on behalf of his daughter, and the ladies of the Manor Cross family generally. They, though they conceived themselves to have had many causes of displeasure with Mary, were not the less anxious to keep her at Manor Cross. They would all, at any moment, have gladly assented to an abandonment of the London house, and had taught themselves to look upon the London house as an allurements of Satan, most unwisely contrived and countenanced by the Dean. And there was no doubt that, as the Dean acted on behalf of his daughter, so did they act on behalf of their brother. He could not himself oppose the London house; but he disliked it and feared it, and now, at last, thoroughly repented himself of it. But it had been a stipulation made at the marriage; and the Dean's money had been spent. The Dean had been profuse with his money, and had shown himself to be a more wealthy man than any one at Manor Cross had suspected. Mary's fortune was no doubt her own; but the furniture had been in a great measure supplied by the Dean, and the Dean had paid the necessary premium on going into the house. Lord George felt it to be impossible to change his mind after all that had been done; but he had been quite willing to postpone the evil day as long as possible.

Lady Susanna was especially full of fears, and, it must be owned, especially inimical to all Mary's wishes. She was the one who had perhaps been most domineering to her brother's wife, and she was certainly the one whose domination Mary resisted with the most settled determination. There was a self-abnegation about Lady Sarah, a downright goodness, and at the same time an easily-handled magisterial authority, which commanded reverence. After three months of residence at Manor Cross, Mary was willing to acknowledge that Lady Sarah was more than a sister-in-law, – that her nature partook of divine omnipotence, and that it compelled respect, whether given willingly or unwillingly. But to none of the others would her spirit thus humble itself, and especially not to Lady Susanna. Therefore Lady Susanna was hostile, and therefore Lady Susanna was quite sure that Mary would fall into great trouble amidst the pleasures of the metropolis.

"After all," she said to her elder sister, "what is £1,500 a year to keep up a house in London?"

"It will only be for a few months," said Lady Sarah.

"Of course she must have a carriage, and then George will find himself altogether in the hands of the Dean. That is what I fear. The Dean has done very well with himself, but he is not a man whom I like to trust altogether."

"He is at any rate generous with his money."

"He is bound to be that, or he could not hold up his head at all. He has nothing else to depend on. Did you hear what Dr. Pountner said about him the other day? Since that affair with the newspaper, he has gone down very much in the Chapter. I am sure of that."

"I think you are a little hard upon him, Susanna."

"You must feel that he is very wrong about this house in London. Why is a man, because he's married, to be taken away from all his own pursuits? If she could not accommodate herself to his tastes, she should not have accepted him."

"Let us be just," said Lady Sarah.

"Certainly, let us be just," said Lady Amelia, who in these conversations seldom took much part, unless when called upon to support her eldest sister.

"Of course we should be just," said Lady Susanna.

"She did not accept him," said Lady Sarah, "till he had agreed to comply with the Dean's wish that they should spend part of their time in London."

"He was very weak," said Lady Susanna.

"I wish it could have been otherwise," continued Lady Sarah; "but we can hardly suppose that the tastes of a young girl from Brotherton should be the same as ours. I can understand that Mary should find Manor Cross dull."

"Dull!" exclaimed Lady Susanna.

"Dull!" ejaculated Lady Amelia, constrained on this occasion to differ even from her eldest sister. "I can't understand that she should find Manor Cross dull, particularly while she has her husband with her."

"The bargain, at any rate, was made," said Lady Sarah, "before the engagement was settled; and as the money is hers, I do not think we have a right to complain. I am very sorry that it should be so. Her character is very far from being formed, and his tastes are so completely fixed that nothing will change them."

"And then there's that Mrs. Houghton!" said Lady Susanna. Mrs. Houghton had of course left Manor Cross long since; but she had left a most unsatisfactory feeling behind her in the minds of all the Manor Cross ladies. This arose not only from their personal dislike, but from a suspicion, a most agonising suspicion, that their brother was more fond than he should have been of the lady's society. It must be understood that Mary herself knew nothing of this, and was altogether free from such suspicion. But the three sisters, and the Marchioness under their tuition, had decided that it would be very much better that Lord George should see no more of Mrs. Houghton. He was not, they thought, infatuated in such a fashion that he would run to London after her; but, when in London, he would certainly be thrown into her society. "I cannot bear to think of it," continued Lady Susanna. Lady Amelia shook her head. "I think, Sarah, you ought to speak to him seriously. No man has higher ideas of duty than he has; and if he be made to think of it, he will avoid her."

"I have spoken," replied Lady Sarah, almost in a whisper.

"Well!"

"Well!"

"Was he angry?"

"How did he bear it?"

"He was not angry, but he did not bear it very well. He told me that he certainly found her to be attractive, but that he thought he had power enough to keep himself free from any such fault as that. I asked him to promise me not to see her; but he declined to make a promise which he said he might not be able to keep."

"She is a horrid woman, and Mary. I am afraid, likes her," said Lady Susanna. "I know that evil will come of it."

Sundry scenes counter to this were enacted at the deanery. Mary was in the habit of getting herself taken over to Brotherton more frequently than the ladies liked; but it was impossible that they should openly oppose her visits to her father. On one occasion, early in January, she had got her husband to ride over with her, and was closeted with the Dean while he was away in the city. "Papa," she said, "I almost think that I'll give up the house in Munster Court."

"Give it up! Look here, Mary; you'll have no happiness in life unless you can make up your mind not to allow those old ladies at Manor Cross to sit upon you."

"It is not for their sake. He does not like it, and I would do anything for him."

"That is all very well; and I would be the last to advise you to oppose his wishes if I did not see that the effect would be to make him subject to his sisters' dominion as well as you. Would you like him to be always under their thumb?"

"No, papa; I shouldn't like that."

"It was because I foresaw all this that I stipulated so expressly as I did that you should have a house of your own. Every woman, when she marries, should be emancipated from other domestic control than that of her husband. From the nature of Lord George's family this would have been impossible at Manor Cross, and therefore I insisted on a house in town. I could do this the more freely because the wherewithal was to come from us, and not from them. Do not disturb what I have done."

"I will not go against you, of course, papa."

"And remember always that this is to be done as much for his sake as for yours. His position has been very peculiar. He has no property of his own, and he has lived there with his mother and sisters till the feminine influences of the house have almost domineered him. It is your duty to assist in freeing him from this." Looking at the matter in the light now presented to her, Mary began to think that her father was right. "With a husband there should at any rate be only one feminine influence," he added, laughing.

"I shall not over rule him, and I shall not try," said Mary, smiling.

"At any rate, do not let other women rule him. By degrees he will learn to enjoy London society, and so will you. You will spend half the year at Manor Cross or the deanery, and by degrees both he and you will be emancipated. For myself, I can conceive nothing more melancholy than would be his slavery and yours if you were to live throughout the year with those old women." Then, too, he said something to her of the satisfaction which she herself would receive from living in London, and told her that, for her, life itself had hardly as yet been commenced. She received her lessons with thankfulness and gratitude, but with something of wonder that he should so openly recommend to her a manner of life which she had hitherto been taught to regard as worldly.

After that no further hint was given to her that the house in London might yet be abandoned. When riding back with her husband, she had been clever enough to speak of the thing as a fixed certainty; and he had then known that he also must regard it as fixed. "You had better not say anything more about it," he said one day almost angrily to Lady Susanna, and then nothing more had been said about it – to him.

There were other causes of confusion, – of terrible confusion, – at Manor Cross, of confusion so great that from day to day the Marchioness would declare herself unable to go through the troubles before her. The workmen were already in the big house preparing for the demolition and reconstruction of everything as soon as she should be gone; and other workmen were already demolishing and reconstructing Cross Hall. The sadness of all this and the weight on the old lady's mind were increased by the fact that no member of the family had received so much even as a message from the Marquis himself since it had been decided that his wishes should not be obeyed. Over and over again the dowager attempted to give way, and suggested that they should all depart and be out of sight. It seemed to her that when a marquis is a marquis he ought to have his own way, though it be never so unreasonable. Was he not the head of the family? But Lady Sarah was resolved, and carried her point. Were they all to be pitched down in some strange corner, where they would be no better than other women, incapable of doing good or exercising influence, by the wish of one man who had never done any good anywhere, or used his own influence legitimately? Lady Sarah was no coward, and Lady Sarah stuck to Cross Hall, though in doing so she had very much to endure. "I won't go out, my Lady," said Price, "not till the day when her Ladyship is ready to come in. I can put up with things, and I'll see as all is done as your Ladyship wishes." Price, though he was a sporting farmer, and though men were in the habit of drinking cherry brandy at his house, and though naughty things had been said about him, had in these days become Lady Sarah's prime minister at Cross Hall, and was quite prepared in that capacity to carry on war against the Marquis.

When the day came for the departure of Mary and her husband, a melancholy feeling pervaded the whole household. A cook had been sent up from Brotherton who had lived at Manor Cross many years previously. Lord George took a man who had waited on himself lately at the old

house, and Mary had her own maid who had come with her when she married. They had therefore been forced to look for but one strange servant. But this made the feeling the stronger that they would all be strange up in London. This was so strong with Lord George that it almost amounted to fear. He knew that he did not know how to live in London. He belonged to the Carlton, as became a conservative nobleman; but he very rarely entered it, and never felt himself at home when he was there. And Mary, though she had been quite resolved since the conversation with her father that she would be firm about her house, still was not without her own dread. She herself had no personal friends in town, – not one but Mrs. Houghton, as to whom she heard nothing but evil words from the ladies around her. There had been an attempt made to get one of the sisters to go up with them for the first month. Lady Sarah had positively refused, almost with indignation. Was it to be supposed that she would desert her mother at so trying a time? Lady Amelia was then asked, and with many regrets declined the invitation. She had not dared to use her own judgment, and Lady Sarah had not cordially advised her to go. Lady Sarah had thought that Lady Susanna would be the most useful. But Lady Susanna was not asked. There were a few words on the subject between Lord George and his wife. Mary, remembering her father's advice, had determined that she would not be sat upon, and had whispered to her husband that Susanna was always severe to her. When, therefore, the time came, they departed from Manor Cross without any protecting spirit.

There was something sad in this, even to Mary. She knew that she was taking her husband away from the life he liked, and that she, herself, was going to a life as to which she could not even guess, whether she would like it or not. But she had the satisfaction of feeling that she was at last going to begin to live as a married woman. Hitherto she had been treated as a child. If there was danger, there was, at any rate, the excitement which danger produces. "I am almost glad that we are going alone, George," she said. "It seems to me that we have never been alone yet."

He wished to be gracious and loving to her, and yet he was not disposed to admit anything which might seem to imply that he had become tired of living with his own family. "It is very nice, but –"

"But what, dear?"

"Of course I am anxious about my mother just at present."

"She is not to move for two months yet."

"No, – not to move; but there are so many things to be done."

"You can run down whenever you please?"

"That's expensive; but of course it must be done."

"Say that you'll like being with me alone." They had the compartment of the railway carriage all to themselves, and she, as she spoke, leaned against him, inviting him to caress her. "You don't think it a trouble, do you, having to come and live with me?" Of course he was conquered, and said, after his nature, what prettiest things he could to her, assuring her that he would sooner live with her than with any one in the world, and promising that he would always endeavour to make her happy. She knew that he was doing his best to be a loving husband, and she felt, therefore, that she was bound to be loyal in her endeavours to love him; but at the same time, at the very moment in which she was receiving his words with outward show of satisfied love, her imagination was picturing to her something else which would have been so immeasurably superior, if only it had been possible.

That evening they dined together, alone; and it was the first time that they had ever done so, except at an inn. Never before had been imposed on her the duty of seeing that his dinner was prepared for him. There certainly was very little of duty to perform in the matter, for he was a man indifferent as to what he ate, or what he drank. The plainness of the table at Manor Cross had surprised Mary, after the comparative luxury of the deanery. All her lessons at Manor Cross had gone to show that eating was not a delectation to be held in high esteem. But still she was careful that everything around him should be nice. The furniture was new, the glasses and crockery were new. Few, if any, of the articles used, had ever been handled before. All her bridal presents

were there; and no doubt there was present to her mind the fact that everything in the house had in truth been given to him by her. If only she could make the things pleasant! If only he would allow himself to be taught that nice things are nice! She hovered around him, touching him every now and then with her light fingers, moving a lock of his hair, and then stooping over him and kissing his brow. It might still be that she would be able to galvanise him into that lover's vitality, of which she had dreamed. He never rebuffed her; he did not scorn her kisses, or fail to smile when his hair was moved; he answered every word she spoke to him carefully and courteously; he admired her pretty things when called upon to admire them. But through it all, she was quite aware that she had not galvanised him as yet.

Of course there were books. Every proper preparation had been made for rendering the little house pleasant. In the evening she took from her shelf a delicate little volume of poetry, something exquisitely bound, pretty to look at, and sweet to handle, and settled herself down to be happy in her own drawing-room. But she soon looked up from the troubles of Aurora Leigh to see what her husband was doing. He was comfortable in his chair, but was busy with the columns of the *Brothershire Herald*.

"Dear me, George, have you brought that musty old paper up here?"

"Why shouldn't I read the *Herald* here, as well as at Manor Cross?"

"Oh! yes, if you like it."

"Of course I want to know what is being done in the county." But when next she looked, the county had certainly faded from his mind, for he was fast asleep.

On that occasion she did not care very much for Aurora Leigh. Her mind was hardly tuned to poetry of that sort. The things around her were too important to allow her mind to indulge itself with foreign cares. And then she found herself looking at the watch. At Manor Cross ten o'clock every night brought all the servants into the drawing-room. First the butler would come and place the chairs, and then the maids, and then the coachman and footman would follow. Lord George read the prayers, and Mary had always thought them to be very tiring. But she now felt that it would almost be a relief if the butler would come in and place the chairs.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS MILDMAI AND JACK DE BARON

Lady George was not left long in her new house without visitors. Early on the day after her arrival, Mrs. Houghton came to her, and began at once, with great volubility, to explain how the land lay, and to suggest how it should be made to lie for the future. "I am so glad you have come. As soon, you know, as they positively forbade me to get on horseback again this winter, I made up my mind to come to town. What is there to keep me down there if I don't ride? I promised to obey if I was brought here, – and to disobey if I was left there. Mr. Houghton goes up and down, you know. It is hard upon him, poor old fellow. But then the other thing would be harder on me. He and papa are together somewhere now, arranging about the spring meetings. They have got their stables joined, and I know very well who will have the best of that. A man has to get up very early to see all round papa. But Mr. Houghton is so rich, it doesn't signify. And now, my dear, what are you going to do? and what is Lord George going to do? I am dying to see Lord George. I dare say you are getting a little tired of him by this time."

"Indeed, I'm not."

"You haven't picked up courage enough yet to say so; that's it, my dear. I've brought cards from Mr. Houghton, which means to say that though he is down somewhere at Newmarket in the flesh he is to be supposed to have called upon you and Lord George. And now we want you both to come and dine with us on Monday. I know Lord George is particular, and so I've brought a note. You can't have anything to do yet, and of course you'll come. Houghton will be back on Sunday, and goes down again on Tuesday morning. To hear him talk about it you'd think he was the keenest man in England across a country. Say that you'll come."

"I'll ask Lord George."

"Fiddle de dee. Lord George will be only too delighted to come and see me. I've got such a nice cousin to introduce to you; not one of the Germain sort, you know, who are all perhaps a little slow. This man is Jack De Baron, a nephew of papa's. He's in the Coldstreams, and I do think you'll like him. There's nothing on earth he can't do, from waltzing down to polo. And old Mildmay will be there, and Guss Mildmay, who is dying in love with Jack."

"And is Jack dying in love with Guss?"

"Oh! dear no; not a bit. You needn't be afraid. Jack De Baron has just £500 a year and his commission, and must, I should say, be over head and ears in debt. Miss Mildmay may perhaps have £5,000 for her fortune. Put this and that together, and you can hardly see anything comfortable in the way of matrimony, can you?"

"Then I fear your – Jack is mercenary."

"Mercenary; – of course he's mercenary. That is to say, he doesn't want to go to destruction quite at one leap. But he's awfully fond of falling in love, and when he is in love he'll do almost anything, – except marry."

"Then if I were you, I shouldn't ask – Guss to meet him."

"She can fight her own battles, and wouldn't thank me at all if I were to fight them for her after that fashion. There'll be nobody else except Houghton's sister, Hetta. You never met Hetta Houghton?"

"I've heard of her."

"I should think so. 'Not to know her,' – I forget the words; but if you don't know Hetta Houghton, you're just nowhere. She has lots of money, and lives all alone, and says whatever comes uppermost, and does what she pleases. She goes everywhere, and is up to everything. I always made up my mind I wouldn't be an old maid, but I declare I envy Hetta Houghton. But then she'd

be nothing unless she had money. There'll be eight of us, and at this time of the year we dine at half-past seven, sharp. Can I take you anywhere? The carriage can come back with you?"

"Thank you, no. I am going to pick Lord George up at the Carlton at four."

"How nice! I wonder how long you'll go on picking up Lord George at the Carlton."

She could only suppose, when her friend was gone, that this was the right kind of thing. No doubt Lady Susanna had warned her against Mrs. Houghton, but then she was not disposed to take Lady Susanna's warnings on any subject. Her father had known that she intended to know the woman; and her father, though he had cautioned her very often as to the old women at Manor Cross, as he called them, had never spoken a word of caution to her as to Mrs. Houghton. And her husband was well aware of the intended intimacy. She picked up her husband, and rather liked being kept waiting a few minutes at the club door in her brougham. Then they went together to look at a new picture, which was being exhibited by gas-light in Bond Street, and she began to feel that the pleasures of London were delightful. "Don't you think those two old priests are magnificent?" she said, pressing on his arm, in the obscurity of the darkened chamber. "I don't know that I care much about old priests," said Lord George.

"But the heads are so fine."

"I dare say. Sacerdotal pictures never please me. Didn't you say you wanted to go to Swann and Edgar's?" He would not sympathize with her about pictures, but perhaps she would be able to find out his taste at last.

He seemed quite well satisfied to dine with the Houghtons, and did, in fact, call at the house before that day came round. "I was in Berkeley Square this morning," he said one day, "but I didn't find any one."

"Nobody ever is at home, I suppose," she said. "Look here. There have been Lady Brabazon, and Mrs. Patmore Green, and Mrs. Montacute Jones. Who is Mrs. Montacute Jones?"

"I never heard of her."

"Dear me; how very odd. I dare say it was kind of her to come. And yesterday the Countess of Care called. Is not she some relative?"

"She is my mother's first cousin."

"And then there was dear old Miss Tallowax. And I wasn't at home to see one of them."

"No one I suppose ever is at home in London unless they fix a day for seeing people."

Lady George, having been specially asked to come "sharp" to her friend's dinner party, arrived with her husband exactly at the hour named, and found no one in the drawing-room. In a few minutes Mrs. Houghton hurried in, apologising. "It's all Mr. Houghton's fault indeed, Lord George. He was to have been in town yesterday, but would stay down and hunt to-day. Of course the train was late, and of course he was so tired that he couldn't dress without going to sleep first." As nobody else came for a quarter of an hour Mrs. Houghton had an opportunity of explaining some things. "Has Mrs. Montacute Jones called? I suppose you were out of your wits to find out who she was. She's a very old friend of papa's, and I asked her to call. She gives awfully swell parties, and has no end of money. She was one of the Montacutes of Montacute, and so she sticks her own name on to her husband's. He's alive, I believe, but he never shews. I think she keeps him somewhere down in Wales."

"How odd!"

"It is a little queer, but when you come to know her you'll find it will make no difference. She's the ugliest old woman in London, but I'd be as ugly as she is to have her diamonds."

"I wouldn't," said Mary.

"Your husband cares about your appearance," said Mrs. Houghton, turning her eyes upon Lord George. He simpered and looked pleased and did not seem to be at all disgusted by their friend's slang, and yet had she talked of "awfully swell" parties, he would, she was well aware, have rebuked her seriously.

Miss Houghton – Hetta Houghton – was the first to arrive, and she somewhat startled Mary by the gorgeous glories of her dress, though Mrs. Houghton afterwards averred that she wasn't "a patch upon Mrs. Montacute Jones." But Miss Houghton was a lady, and though over forty years of age, was still handsome.

"Been hunting to-day, has he?" she said. "Well, if he likes it, I shan't complain. But I thought he liked his ease too well to travel fifty miles up to town after riding about all day."

"Of course he's knocked up, and at his age it's quite absurd," said the young wife. "But Hetta, I want you to know my particular friend Lady George Germain. Lord George, if he'll allow me to say so, is a cousin, though I'm afraid we have to go back to Noah to make it out."

"Your great-grandmother was my great-grandmother's sister. That's not so very far off."

"When you get to grandmothers no fellow can understand it, can they, Mary?" Then came Mr. and Miss Mildmay. He was a gray-haired old gentleman, rather short and rather fat, and she looked to be just such another girl as Mrs. Houghton herself had been, though blessed with more regular beauty. She was certainly handsome, but she carried with her that wearied air of being nearly worn out by the toil of searching for a husband which comes upon some young women after the fourth or fifth year of their labours. Fortune had been very hard upon Augusta Mildmay. Early in her career she had fallen in love, while abroad, with an Italian nobleman, and had immediately been carried off home by her anxious parents. Then in London she had fallen in love again with an English nobleman, an eldest son, with wealth of his own. Nothing could be more proper, and the young man had fallen also in love with her. All her friends were beginning to hate her with virulence, so lucky had she been! When on a sudden, the young lord told her that the match would not please his father and mother, and that therefore there must be an end of it. What was there to be done! All London had talked of it; all London must know the utter failure. Nothing more cruel, more barefaced, more unjust had ever been perpetrated. A few years since all the Mildmays in England, one after another, would have had a shot at the young nobleman. But in these days there seems to be nothing for a girl to do but to bear it and try again. So Augusta Mildmay bore it and did try again; tried very often again. And now she was in love with Jack De Baron. The worst of Guss Mildmay was that, through it all, she had a heart and would like the young men, – would like them, or perhaps dislike them, equally to her disadvantage. Old gentlemen, such as was Mr. Houghton, had been willing to condone all her faults, and all her loves, and to take her as she was. But when the moment came, she would not have her Houghton, and then she was in the market again. Now a young woman entering the world cannot make a greater mistake than not to know her own line, or, knowing it, not to stick to it. Those who are thus weak are sure to fall between two stools. If a girl chooses to have a heart, let her marry the man of her heart, and take her mutton chops and bread and cheese, her stuff gown and her six children, as they may come. But if she can decide that such horrors are horrid to her, and that they must at any cost be avoided, then let her take her Houghton when he comes, and not hark back upon feelings and fancies, upon liking and loving, upon youth and age. If a girl has money and beauty too, of course she can pick and choose. Guss Mildmay had no money to speak of, but she had beauty enough to win either a working barrister or a rich old sinner. She was quite able to fall in love with the one and flirt with the other at the same time; but when the moment for decision came, she could not bring herself to put up with either. At present she was in real truth in love with Jack De Baron, and had brought herself to think that if Jack would ask her, she would risk everything. But were he to do so, which was not probable, she would immediately begin to calculate what could be done by Jack's moderate income and her own small fortune. She and Mrs. Houghton kissed each other affectionately, being at the present moment close in each other's confidences, and then she was introduced to Lady George. "Adelaide hasn't a chance," was Miss Mildmay's first thought as she looked at the young wife.

Then came Jack De Baron. Mary was much interested in seeing a man of whom she had heard so striking an account, and for the love of whom she had been told that a girl was almost

dying. Of course all that was to be taken with many grains of salt; but still the fact of the love and the attractive excellence of the man had been impressed upon her. She declared to herself at once that his appearance was very much in his favour, and a fancy passed across her mind that he was somewhat like that ideal man of whom she herself had dreamed, ever so many years ago as it seemed to her now, before she had made up her mind that she would change her ideal and accept Lord George Germain. He was about the middle height, light haired, broad shouldered, with a pleasant smiling mouth and well formed nose; but above all, he had about him that pleasure-loving look, that appearance of taking things jauntily and of enjoying life, which she in her young girlhood had regarded as being absolutely essential to a pleasant lover. There are men whose very eyes glance business, whose every word imports care, who step as though their shoulders were weighed with thoughtfulness, who breathe solicitude, and who seem to think that all the things of life are too serious for smiles. Lord George was such a man, though he had in truth very little business to do. And then there are men who are always playfellows with their friends, who – even should misfortune be upon them, – still smile and make the best of it, who come across one like sunbeams, and who, even when tears are falling, produce the tints of a rainbow. Such a one Mary Lovelace had perhaps seen in her childhood and had then dreamed of him. Such a one was Jack De Baron, at any rate to the eye.

And such a one in truth he was. Of course the world had spoiled him. He was in the Guards. He was fond of pleasure. He was fairly well off in regard to all his own wants, for his cousin had simply imagined those debts with which ladies are apt to believe that young men of pleasure must be overwhelmed. He had gradually taught himself to think that his own luxuries and his own comforts should in his own estimation be paramount to everything. He was not naturally selfish, but his life had almost necessarily engendered selfishness. Marrying had come to be looked upon as an evil, – as had old age; – not of course an unavoidable evil, but one into which a man will probably fall sooner or later. To put off marriage as long as possible, and when it could no longer be put off to marry money was a part of his creed. In the meantime the great delight of his life came from women's society. He neither gambled nor drank. He hunted and fished, and shot deer and grouse, and occasionally drove a coach to Windsor. But little love affairs, flirtation, and intrigues, which were never intended to be guilty, but which now and again had brought him into some trouble, gave its charm to his life. On such occasions he would too, at times, be very badly in love, assuring himself sometimes with absolute heroism that he would never again see this married woman, or declaring to himself in moments of self-sacrificial grandness that he would at once marry that unmarried girl. And then, when he had escaped from some especial trouble, he would take to his regiment for a month, swearing to himself that for the next year he would see no women besides his aunts and his grandmother. When making this resolution he might have added his cousin Adelaide. They were close friends, but between them there had never been the slightest spark of a flirtation.

In spite of all his little troubles Captain De Baron was a very popular man. There was a theory abroad about him that he always behaved like a gentleman, and that his troubles were misfortunes rather than faults. Ladies always liked him, and his society was agreeable to men because he was neither selfish nor loud. He talked only a little, but still enough not to be thought dull. He never bragged or bullied or bounced. He didn't want to shoot more deer or catch more salmon than another man. He never cut a fellow down in the hunting-field. He never borrowed money, but would sometimes lend it when a reason was given. He was probably as ignorant as an owl of anything really pertaining to literature, but he did not display his ignorance. He was regarded by all who knew him as one of the most fortunate of men. He regarded himself as being very far from blessed, knowing that there must come a speedy end to the things which he only half enjoyed, and feeling partly ashamed of himself in that he had found for himself no better part.

"Jack," said Mrs. Houghton, "I can't blow you up for being late, because Mr. Houghton has not yet condescended to shew himself. Let me introduce you to Lady George Germain." Then he

smiled in his peculiar way, and Mary thought his face the most beautiful she had ever seen. "Lord George Germain, – who allows me to call him my cousin, though he isn't as near as you are. My sister-in-law, you know." Jack shook hands with the old lady in his most cordial manner. "I think you have seen Mr. Mildmay before, and Miss Mildmay." Mary could not but look at the greeting between the two, and she saw that Miss Mildmay almost turned up her nose at him. She was quite sure that Mrs. Houghton had been wrong about the love. There had surely only been a pretence of love. But Mrs. Houghton had been right, and Mary had not yet learned to read correctly the signs which men and women hang out.

At last Mr. Houghton came down. "Upon my word," said his wife, "I wonder you ain't ashamed to shew yourself."

"Who says I'm not ashamed? I'm very much ashamed. But how can I help it if the trains won't keep their time? We were hunting all day to-day, – nothing very good, Lord George, but on the trot from eleven to four. That tires a fellow, you know. And the worst of it is I've got to do it again on Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday."

"Is there a necessity?" asked Lord George.

"When a man begins that kind of thing he must go through with it. Hunting is like women. It's a jealous sport. Lady George, may I take you down to dinner? I am so sorry to have kept you waiting."

CHAPTER XIII. MORE NEWS FROM ITALY

Mr. Houghton took Lady George down to dinner; but Jack De Baron sat on his left hand. Next to him was Augusta Mildmay, who had been consigned to his care. Then came Lord George sitting opposite to his host at a round table, with Mrs. Houghton at his right hand. Mrs. Mildmay and Miss Hetta Houghton filled up the vacant places. To all this a great deal of attention had been given by the hostess. She had not wished to throw her cousin Jack and Miss Mildmay together. She would probably have said to a confidential friend that "there had been enough of all that." In her way she liked Guss Mildmay; but Guss was not good enough to marry her cousin. Guss herself must know that such a marriage was impossible. She had on an occasion said a word or two to Guss upon the subject. She had thought that a little flirtation between Jack and her other friend Lady George might put things right; and she had thought, too, – or perhaps felt rather than thought, – that Lord George had emancipated himself from the thralldom of his late love rather too quickly. Mary was a dear girl. She was quite prepared to make Mary her friend, being in truth somewhat sick of the ill-humours and disappointments of Guss Mildmay; but it might be as well that Mary should be a little checked in her triumph. She herself had been obliged to put up with old Mr. Houghton. She never for a moment told herself that she had done wrong; but of course she required compensation. When she was manœuvring she never lost sight of her manœuvres. She had had all this in her mind when she made up her little dinner-party. She had had it all in her mind when she arranged the seats. She didn't want to sit next to Jack herself, because Jack would have talked to her to the exclusion of Lord George, so she placed herself between Lord George and Mr. Mildmay. It had been necessary that Mr. Mildmay should take Miss Houghton down to dinner, and therefore she could not separate Guss from Jack De Baron. Anybody who understands dinner-parties will see it all at a glance. But she was convinced that Jack would devote himself to Lady George at his left hand; and so he did.

"Just come up to town, haven't you?" said Jack.

"Only last week."

"This is the nicest time in the year for London, unless you do a deal of hunting; then it's a grind."

"I never hunt at all; Lord George won't let me."

"I wish some one wouldn't let me. It would save me a deal of money, and a great deal of misery. It's all a delusion and a snare. You never get a run nowadays."

"Do you think so? I'd rather hunt than do anything."

"That's because you are not let to do it; the perversity of human nature, you know! The only thing I'm not allowed to do is to marry, and it's the only thing I care for."

"Who prevents it, Captain de Baron?"

"There's a new order come out from the Horse Guards yesterday. No one under a field officer is to marry unless he has got £2,000 a year."

"Marrying is cheaper than hunting."

"Of course, Lady George, you may buy your horses cheap or dear, and you may do the same with your wives. You may have a cheap wife who doesn't care for dress, and likes to sit at home and read good books."

"That's just what I do."

"But then they're apt to go wrong and get out of order."

"How do you mean? I shan't get out of order, I hope."

"The wheels become rusty, don't you think? and then they won't go as they ought. They scold and turn up their noses. What I want to find is perfect beauty, devoted affection, and £50,000."

"How modest you are."

In all this badinage there was not much to make a rival angry; but Miss Mildmay, who heard a word or two now and then, was angry. He was talking to a pretty woman about marriage and money, and of course that amounted to flirtation. Lord George, on her other hand, now and then said a word to her; but he was never given to saying many words, and his attention was nearly monopolised by his hostess. She had heard the last sentence, and determined to join the conversation.

"If you had the £50,000, Captain De Baron," she said, "I think you would manage to do without the beauty and the devoted affection."

"That's ill-natured, Miss Mildmay, though it may be true. Beggars can't be choosers. But you've known me a long time, and I think it's unkind that you should run me down with a new acquaintance. Suppose I was to say something bad of you."

"You can say whatever you please, Captain De Baron."

"There is nothing bad to say, of course, except that you are always down on a poor fellow in distress. Don't you think it's a grand thing to be good-natured, Lady George?"

"Indeed I do. It's almost better than being virtuous."

"Ten to one. I don't see the good of virtue myself. It always makes people stingy and cross and ill-mannered. I think one should always promise to do everything that is asked. Nobody would be fool enough to expect you to keep your word afterwards, and you'd give a lot of pleasure."

"I think promises ought to be kept, Captain De Baron."

"I can't agree to that. That's bondage, and it puts an embargo on the pleasant way of living that I like. I hate all kind of strictness, and duty, and self-denying, and that kind of thing. It's rubbish. Don't you think so?"

"I suppose one has to do one's duty."

"I don't see it. I never do mine."

"Suppose there were a battle to fight."

"I should get invalided at once. I made up my mind to that long ago. Fancy the trouble of it. And when they shoot you they don't shoot you dead, but knock half your face away, or something of that sort. Luckily we live in an island, and haven't much fighting to do. If we hadn't lived in an island I should never have gone into the army."

This was not flirting certainly. It was all sheer nonsense, – words without any meaning in them. But Mary liked it. She decidedly would not have liked it had it ever occurred to her that the man was flirting with her. It was the very childishness of the thing that pleased her, – the contrast to conversation at Manor Cross, where no childish word was ever spoken. And though she was by no means prepared to flirt with Captain De Baron, still she found in him something of the realisation of her dreams. There was the combination of manliness, playfulness, good looks, and good humour which she had pictured to herself. To sit well-dressed in a well-lighted room and have nonsense talked to her suited her better than a petticoat conclave. And she knew of no harm in it. Her father encouraged her to be gay, and altogether discouraged petticoat conclaves. So she smiled her sweetest on Captain De Baron, and replied to his nonsense with other nonsense, and was satisfied.

But Guss Mildmay was very much dissatisfied, both as to the amusement of the present moment and as to the conduct of Captain De Baron generally. She knew London life well, whereas Lady George did not know it at all; and she considered that this was flirtation. She may have been right in any accusation which she made in her heart against the man, but she was quite wrong in considering Lady George to be a flirt. She had, however, grievances of her own – great grievances. It was not only that the man was attentive to some one else, but that he was not attentive to her. He and she had had many passages in life together, and he owed it to her at any rate not to appear to neglect her. And then what a stick was that other man on the other side of her, – that young woman's husband! During the greater part of dinner she was sitting speechless, – not only loverless,

but manless. It is not what one suffers that kills one, but what one knows that other people see that one suffers.

There was not very much conversation between Lord George and Mrs. Houghton at dinner. Perhaps she spoke as much to Mr. Mildmay as to him; for she was a good hostess, understanding and performing her duty. But what she did say to him she said very graciously, making allusions to further intimacy between herself and Mary, flattering his vanity by little speeches as to Manor Cross, always seeming to imply that she felt hourly the misfortune of having been forced to decline the honour of such an alliance as had been offered to her. He was, in truth, as innocent as his wife, except in this, that he would not have wished her to hear all that Mrs. Houghton said to him, whereas Mary would have had not the slightest objection to his hearing all the nonsense between her and Captain De Baron.

The ladies sat a long time after dinner, and when they went Mrs. Houghton asked her husband to come up in ten minutes. They did not remain much longer, but during those ten minutes Guss Mildmay said something of her wrongs to her friend, and Lady George heard some news from Miss Houghton. Miss Houghton had got Lady George on to a sofa, and was talking to her about Brotherton and Manor Cross. "So the Marquis is coming," she said. "I knew the Marquis years ago, when we used to be staying with the De Barons, – Adelaide's father and mother. She was alive then, and the Marquis used to come over there. So he has married?"

"Yes; an Italian."

"I did not think he would ever marry. It makes a difference to you; – does it not?"

"I don't think of such things."

"You will not like him, for he is the very opposite to Lord George."

"I don't know that I shall ever even see him. I don't think he wants to see any of us."

"I dare say not. He used to be very handsome, and very fond of ladies' society, – but, I think, the most selfish human being I ever knew in my life. That is a complaint that years do not cure. He and I were great friends once."

"Did you quarrel?"

"Oh, dear no. I had rather a large fortune of my own, and there was a time in which he was, perhaps, a little in want of money. But they had to build a town on his property in Staffordshire, and you see that did instead."

"Did instead!" said Lady George, altogether in the dark.

"There was suddenly a great increase to his income, and, of course, that altered his view. I am bound to say that he was very explicit. He could be so without suffering himself, or understanding that any one else would suffer. I tell you because you are one of the family, and would, no doubt, hear it all some day through Adelaide. I had a great escape."

"And he a great misfortune," said Mary civilly.

"I think he had, to tell you the truth. I am good-tempered, long-suffering, and have a certain grain of sagacity that might have been useful to him. Have you heard about this Italian lady?"

"Only that she is an Italian lady."

"He is about my age. If I remember rightly there is hardly a month or two between us. She is three or four years older."

"You knew her then?"

"I knew of her. I have been curious enough to enquire, which is, I dare say, more than any body has done at Manor Cross."

"And is she so old?"

"And a widow. They have been married, you know, over twelve months; nearly two years, I believe."

"Surely not; we heard of it only since our own marriage."

"Exactly; but the Marquis was always fond of a little mystery. It was the news of your marriage that made him hint at the possibility of such a thing; and he did not tell the fact till he had made up his mind to come home. I do not know that he has told all now."

"What else is there?"

"She has a baby, – a boy." Mary felt that the colour flew to her cheeks; but she knew that it did so, not from any disappointment of her own, not because these tidings were in truth a blow to her, but because others, – this lady, for instance, – would think that she suffered. "I am afraid it is so," said Miss Houghton.

"She may have twenty, for what I care," said Mary, recovering herself.

"I think Lord George ought to know."

"Of course I shall tell him what you told me. I am sorry that he is not nice, that's all. I should have liked a brother-in-law that I could have loved. And I wish he had married an English woman. I think English women are best for English men."

"I think so too. I am afraid you will none of you like the lady. She cannot speak a word of English. Of course you will use my name in telling Lord George. I heard it all from a friend of mine who is married to one of the Secretaries at the Embassy." Then the gentlemen came in, and Mary began to be in a hurry to get away that she might tell this news to her husband.

In the meantime Guss Mildmay made her complaints, deep but not loud. She and Mrs. Houghton had been very intimate as girls, knew each other's secrets, and understood each other's characters. "Why did you have him to such a party as this?" said Guss.

"I told you he was coming."

"But you didn't tell me about that young woman. You put him next to her on purpose to annoy me."

"That's nonsense. You know as well as I do that nothing can come of it. You must drop it, and you'd better do it at once. You don't want to be known as the girl who is dying for the love of a man she can't marry. That's not your métier."

"That's my own affair. If I choose to stick to him you, at least, ought not to cross me."

"But he won't stick to you. Of course he's my cousin, and I don't see why he's to be supposed never to say a word to anyone else, when it's quite understood that you're not going to have one another. What's the good of being a dog in the manger?"

"Adelaide, you never had any heart!"

"Of course not; – or, if I had, I knew how to get the better of so troublesome an appendage. I hate hearing about hearts. If he'd take you to-morrow you wouldn't marry him?"

"Yes, I would."

"I don't believe it. I don't think you'd be so wicked. Where would you live, and how? How long would it be before you hated each other? Hearts! As if hearts weren't just like anything else which either you can or you cannot afford yourself. Do you think I couldn't go and fall in love to-morrow, and think it the best fun in the world? Of course it's nice to have a fellow like Jack always ready to spoon, and sending one things, and riding with one, and all that. I don't know any young woman in London would like it better than I should. But I can't afford it, my dear, and so I don't do it."

"It seems to me you are going to do it with your old lover?"

"Dear Lord George! I swear it's only to bring Mary down a peg, because she is so proud of her nobleman. And then he is handsome! But, my dear, I've pleased myself. I have got a house over my head, and a carriage to sit in, and servants to wait on me, and I've settled myself. Do you do likewise, and you shall have your Lord George, or Jack De Baron, if he pleases; – only don't go too far with him."

"Adelaide," said the other, "I'm not good, but you're downright bad." Mrs. Houghton only laughed, as she got up from her seat to welcome the gentlemen as they entered the room.

Mary, as soon as the door of the brougham had been closed upon her, and her husband, began to tell her story. "What do you think Miss Houghton has told me?" Lord George, of course, could have no thoughts about it, and did not at first very much care what the story might have been. "She says that your brother was married ever so long ago!"

"I don't believe it," said Lord George, suddenly and angrily.

"A year before we were married, I mean."

"I don't believe it."

"And she says that they have a son."

"What!"

"That there is a baby, – a boy. She has heard it all from some friend of hers at Rome."

"It can't be true."

"She said that I had better tell you. Does it make you unhappy, George?" To this he made no immediate answer. "What can it matter whether he was married two months ago or two years? It does not make me unhappy;" as she said this, she locked herself close into his arm.

"Why should he deceive us? That would make me unhappy. If he had married in a proper way and had a family, here in England, of course I should have been glad. I should have been loyal to him as I am to the others. But if this be true, of course, it will make me unhappy. I do not believe it. It is some gossip."

"I could not but tell you."

"It is some jealousy. There was a time when they said that Brotherton meant to marry her."

"What difference could it make to her? Of course we all know that he is married. I hope it won't make you unhappy, George." But Lord George was unhappy, or at any rate, was moody, and would talk no more then on that subject, or any other. But in truth the matter rested on his mind all the night.

CHAPTER XIV. "ARE WE TO CALL HIM POPENJOY?"

The news which he had heard did afflict Lord George very much. A day or two after the dinner-party in Berkeley Square he found Mr. Knox, his brother's agent, and learned from him that Miss Houghton's story was substantially true. The Marquis had informed his man of business that an heir had been born to him, but had not communicated the fact to any one of the family! This omission, in such a family, was, to Lord George's thinking, so great a crime on the part of his brother, as to make him doubt whether he could ever again have fraternal relations with a man who so little knew his duty. When Mr. Knox showed him the letter his brow became very black. He did not often forget himself, – was not often so carried away by any feeling as to be in danger of doing so. But on this occasion even he was so moved as to be unable to control his words. "An Italian brat? Who is to say how it was born?"

"The Marquis, my Lord, would not do anything like that," said Mr. Knox, very seriously.

Then Lord George was ashamed of himself, and blushed up to the roots of his hair. He had hardly himself known what he had meant. But he mistrusted an Italian widow, because she was an Italian, and because she was a widow, and he mistrusted the whole connexion, because there had been in it none of that honourable openness which should, he thought, characterise all family doings in such a family as that of the Germaines. "I don't know of what kind you mean," he said, shuffling, and knowing that he shuffled. "I don't suppose my brother would do anything really wrong. But it's a blot to the family – a terrible blot."

"She is a lady of good family, – a Marchese," said Mr. Knox.

"An Italian Marchese!" said Lord George, with that infinite contempt which an English nobleman has for foreign nobility not of the highest order.

He had learnt that Miss Houghton's story was true, and was certainly very unhappy. It was not at all that he had pictured to himself the glory of being himself the Marquis of Brotherton after his brother's death; nor was it only the disappointment which he felt as to any possible son of his own, though on that side he did feel the blow. The reflection which perplexed him most was the consciousness that he must quarrel with his brother, and that after such a quarrel he would become nobody in the world. And then, added to this, was the sense of family disgrace. He would have been quite content with his position had he been left master of the house at Manor Cross, even without any of his brother's income wherewith to maintain the house. But now he would only be his wife's husband, the Dean's son-in-law, living on their money, and compelled by circumstances to adapt himself to them. He almost thought that had he known that he would be turned out of Manor Cross, he would not have married. And then, in spite of his disclaimer to Mr. Knox, he was already suspicious of some foul practise. An heir to the title and property, to all the family honours of the Germaines, had suddenly burst upon him, twelve months, – for aught that he knew, two or three years, – after the child's birth! Nobody had been informed when the child was born, or in what circumstances, – except that the mother was an Italian widow! What evidence on which an Englishman might rely could possibly be forthcoming from such a country as Italy! Poor Lord George, who was himself as honest as the sun, was prepared to believe all evil things of people of whom he knew nothing! Should his brother die, – and his brother's health was bad, – what steps should he take? Would it be for him to accept this Italian brat as the heir to everything, or must he ruin himself by a pernicious lawsuit? Looking forward he saw nothing but family misery and disgrace, and he saw, also, inevitable difficulties with which he knew himself to be incapable to cope. "It is true," he said to his wife very gloomily, when he first met her after his interview with Mr. Knox.

"What Miss Houghton said? I felt sure it was true, directly she told me."

"I don't know why you should have felt sure, merely on her word, as to a thing so monstrous as this is. You don't seem to see that it concerns yourself."

"No; I don't. It doesn't concern me at all, except as it makes you unhappy." Then there was a pause for a moment, during which she crept close up to him, in a manner that had now become usual with her. "Why do you think I married you?" she said. He was too unhappy to answer her pleasantly, – too much touched by her sweetness to answer her unpleasantly; and so he said nothing. "Certainly not with any hope that I might become Marchioness of Brotherton. Whatever may have made me do such a thing, I can assure you that that had nothing to do with it."

"Can't you look forward? Don't you suppose that you may have a son?" Then she buried her face upon his shoulder. "And if so, would it not be better that a child so born should be the heir, than some Italian baby, of whom no one knows anything?"

"If you are unhappy, George, I shall be unhappy. But for myself I will not affect to care anything. I don't want to be a Marchioness. I only want to see you without a frown on your brow. To tell the truth, if you didn't mind it, I should care nothing about your brother and his doings. I would make a joke of this Marchese, who, Miss Houghton says, is a puckered-faced old woman. Miss Houghton seems to care a great deal more about it than I do."

"It cannot be a subject for a joke." He was almost angry at the idea of the wife of the head of the family being made a matter of laughter. That she should be reprobated, hated, – cursed, if necessary, – was within the limits of family dignity; but not that she should become a joke to those with whom she had unfortunately connected herself. When he had finished speaking to her she could not but feel that he was displeased, and could not but feel also the injustice of such displeasure. Of course she had her own little share in the general disappointments. But she had striven before him to make nothing of it, in order that he might be quite sure that she had married him – not with any idea of rank or wealth, but for himself alone. She had made light of the family misfortune, in order that he might be relieved. And yet he was angry with her! This was unreasonable. How much had she done for him! Was she not striving every hour of her life to love him, and, at any rate, to comfort him with the conviction that he was loved? Was she not constant in her assurance to herself that her whole life should be devoted to him? And yet he was surly to her simply because his brother had disgraced himself! When she was left alone she sat down and cried, and then consoled herself by remembering that her father was coming to her.

It had been arranged that the last days of February should be spent by Lord George with his mother and sisters at Cross Hall, and that the Dean should run up to town for a week. Lord George went down to Brotherton by a morning train, and the Dean came up on the same afternoon. But the going and coming were so fixed that the two men met at the deanery. Lord George had determined that he would speak fully to the Dean respecting his brother. He was always conscious of the Dean's low birth, remembering, with some slight discomfort, the stable-keeper and the tallow-chandler; and he was a little inclined to resent what he thought to be a disposition on the part of the Dean to domineer. But still the Dean was a practical, sagacious man, in whom he could trust; and the assistance of such a friend was necessary to him. Circumstances had bound him to the Dean, and he was a man not prone to bind himself to many men. He wanted and yet feared the confidence of friendship. He lunched with the Dean, and then told his story. "You know," he said, "that my brother is married?"

"Of course, we all heard that."

"He was married more than twelve months before he informed us that he was going to be married."

"No!"

"It was so."

"Do you mean, then, that he told you a falsehood?"

"His letter to me was very strange, though I did not think much of it at the time. He said, 'I am to be married' – naming no day."

"That certainly was – a falsehood, as, at that time, he was married."

"I do not know that harsh words will do any good."

"Nor I. But it is best, George, that you and I should be quite plain in our words to each other. Placed as he was, and as you were, he was bound to tell you of his marriage as soon as he knew it himself. You had waited till he was between forty and fifty, and, of course, he must feel that what you would do would depend materially upon what he did."

"It didn't at all."

"And then, having omitted to do his duty, he screens his fault by a – positive misstatement, when his intended return home makes further concealment impossible."

"All that, however, is of little moment," said Lord George, who could not but see that the Dean was already complaining that he had been left without information which he ought to have possessed when he was giving his daughter to a probable heir to the title. "There is more than that."

"What more?"

"He had a son born more than twelve months since."

"Who says so?" exclaimed the Dean, jumping up from his chair.

"I heard it first, – or rather Mary did, – in common conversation, from an old friend. I then learned the truth from Knox. Though he had told none of us, he had told Knox."

"And Knox has known it all through?"

"No, only lately. But he knows it now. Knox supposes that they are coming home so that the people about may be reconciled to the idea of his having an heir. There will be less trouble, he thinks, if the boy comes now, than if he were never heard of till he was ten or fifteen years old, – or perhaps till after my brother's death."

"There may be trouble enough still," said the Dean, almost with a gasp.

The Dean, it was clear, did not believe in the boy. Lord George remembered that he himself had expressed disbelief, and that Mr. Knox had almost rebuked him. "I have now told you all the facts," said Lord George, "and have told them as soon as I knew them."

"You are as true as the sun," said the Dean, putting his hand on his son-in-law's shoulder. "You will be honest. But you must not trust in the honesty of others. Poor Mary!"

"She does not feel it in the least; – will not even interest herself about it."

"She will feel it some day. She is no more than a child now. I feel it, George; – I feel it; and you ought to feel it."

"I feel his ill-treatment of myself."

"What – in not telling you? That is probably no more than a small part of a wide scheme. We must find out the truth of all this."

"I don't know what there is to find out," said Lord George, hoarsely.

"Nor do I; but I do feel that there must be something. Think of your brother's position and standing, – of his past life and his present character! This is no time now for being mealy-mouthed. When such a man as he appears suddenly with a foreign woman and a foreign child, and announces one as his wife and the other as his heir, having never reported the existence of one or of the other, it is time that some enquiry should be made. I, at any rate, shall make enquiry. I shall think myself bound to do so on behalf of Mary." Then they parted as confidential friends do part, but each with some feeling antagonistic to the other. The Dean, though he had from his heart acknowledged that Lord George was as honest as the sun, still felt himself to be aggrieved by the Germain family, and doubted whether his son-in-law would be urgent enough and constant in hostility to his own brother. He feared that Lord George would be weak, feeling; as regarded himself, that he would fight till he had spent his last penny, as long as there was a chance that, by fighting, a grandson of his own might be made Marquis of Brotherton. He, at any rate, understood his own heart in

the matter, and knew what it was that he wanted. But Lord George, though he had found himself compelled to tell everything to the Dean, still dreaded the Dean. It was not in accordance with his principles that he should be leagued against his brother with such a man as Dean Lovelace, and he could see that the Dean was thinking of his own possible grandchildren, whereas he himself was thinking only of the family of Germain.

He found his mother and sister at the small house, – the house at which Farmer Price was living only a month or two since. No doubt it was the recognised dower house, but nevertheless there was still about it a flavour of Farmer Price. A considerable sum of money had been spent upon it, which had come from a sacrifice of a small part of the capital belonging to the three sisters, with an understanding that it should be repaid out of the old lady's income. But no one, except the old lady herself, anticipated such repayment. All this had created trouble and grief, and the family, which was never gay, was now more sombre than ever. When the further news was told to Lady Sarah it almost crushed her. "A child!" she said in a horror-stricken whisper, turning quite pale, and looking as though the crack of doom were coming at once. "Do you believe it?" Then her brother explained the grounds he had for believing it. "And that it was born in wedlock twelve months before the fact was announced to us."

"It has never been announced to us," said Lord George.

"What are we to do? is my mother to be told? She ought to know at once; and yet how can we tell her? What shall you do about the Dean?"

"He knows."

"You told him?"

"Yes; I thought it best."

"Well, – perhaps. And yet it is terrible that any man so distant from us should have our secrets in his keeping."

"As Mary's father, I thought it right that he should know."

"I have always liked the Dean personally," said Lady Sarah. "There is a manliness about him which has recommended him, and having a full hand he knows how to open it. But he isn't – ; he isn't quite – "

"No; he isn't quite – ," said Lord George, also hesitating to pronounce the word which was understood by both of them.

"You must tell my mother, or I must. It will be wrong to withhold it. If you like, I will tell Susanna and Amelia."

"I think you had better tell my mother," said Lord George; "she will take it more easily from you. And then, if she breaks down, you can control her better." That Lady Sarah should have the doing of any difficult piece of work was almost a matter of course. She did tell the tale to her mother, and her mother did break down. The Marchioness, when she found that an Italian baby had been born twelve months before the time which she had been made to believe was the date of the marriage, took at once to her bed. What a mass of horrors was coming on them! Was she to go and see a woman who had had a baby under such circumstances? Or was her own eldest son, the very, very Marquis of Brotherton, to be there with his wife, and was she not to go and see them? Through it all her indignation against her son had not been hot as had been theirs against their brother. He was her eldest son, – the very Marquis, – and ought to be allowed to do almost anything he pleased. Had it not been impossible for her to rebel against Lady Sarah she would have obeyed her son in that matter of the house. And, even now, it was not against her son that her heart was bitter, but against the woman, who, being an Italian, and having been married, if married, without the knowledge of the family, presumed to say that her child was legitimate. Had her eldest son brought over with him to the halls of his ancestors an Italian mistress that would, of course, have been very bad, but it would not have been so bad as this. Nothing could be so bad as this. "Are we to call him Popenjoy?" she asked with a gurgling voice from amidst the bed clothes. Now the eldest son of the

Marquis of Brotherton would, as a matter of course, be Lord Popenjoy, if legitimate. "Certainly we must," said Lady Sarah, authoritatively, "unless the marriage should be disproved."

"Poor dear little thing," said the Marchioness, beginning to feel some pity for the odious stranger as soon as she was told that he really was to be called Popenjoy. Then the Ladies Susanna and Amelia were informed, and the feeling became general throughout the household that the world must be near its end. What were they all to do when he should come? That was the great question. He had begun by declaring that he did not want to see any of them. He had endeavoured to drive them away from the neighbourhood, and had declared that neither his mother nor his sisters would "get on" with his wife. All the ladies at Cross Hall had a very strong opinion that this would turn out to be true, but still they could not bear to think that they should be living as it were next door to the head of the family, and never see him. A feeling began to creep over all of them, except Lady Sarah, that it would have been better for them to have obeyed the head of the family and gone elsewhere. But it was too late now. The decision had been made, and they must remain.

Lady Sarah, however, never gave way for a minute. "George," she said very solemnly, "I have thought a great deal about this, and I do not mean to let him trample upon us."

"It is all very sad," said Lord George.

"Yes, indeed. If I know myself, I think I should be the last person to attribute evil motives to my elder brother, or to stand in his way in aught that he might wish to do in regard to the family. I know all that is due to him. But there is a point beyond which even that feeling cannot carry me. He has disgraced himself." Lord George shook his head. "And he is doing all he can to bring disgrace upon us. It has always been my wish that he should marry."

"Of course, of course."

"It is always desirable that the eldest son should marry. The heir to the property then knows that he is the heir, and is brought up to understand his duties. Though he had married a foreigner, much as I should regret it, I should be prepared to receive her as a sister; it is for him to please himself; but in marrying a foreigner he is more specially bound to let it be known to all the world, and to have everything substantiated, than if he had married an English girl in her own parish church. As it is, we must call on her, because he says that she is his wife. But I shall tell him that he is acting very wrongly by us all, especially by you, and most especially by his own child, if he does not take care that such evidence of his marriage is forthcoming as shall satisfy all the world."

"He won't listen to you."

"I think I can make him, as far as that goes; at any rate I do not mean to be afraid of him. Nor must you."

"I hardly know whether I will even see him."

"Yes; you must see him. If we are to be expelled from the family house, let it be his doing, and not ours. We have to take care, George, that we do not make a single false step. We must be courteous to him, but above all we must not be afraid of him."

In the meantime the Dean went up to London, meaning to spend a week with his daughter in her new house. They had both intended that this should be a period of great joy to them. Plans had been made as to the theatres and one or two parties, which were almost as exciting to the Dean as to his daughter. It was quite understood by both of them that the Dean up in London was to be a man of pleasure, rather than a clergyman. He had no purpose of preaching either at St. Paul's or the Abbey. He was going to attend no Curates' Aid Society or Sons of the Clergy. He intended to forget Mr. Groschut, to ignore Dr. Pountney, and have a good time. That had been his intention, at least till he saw Lord George at the deanery. But now there were serious thoughts in his mind. When he arrived Mary had for the time got nearly rid of the incubus of the Italian Marchioness with her baby. She was all smiles as she kissed him. But he could not keep himself from the great subject.

"This is terrible news, my darling," he said at once.

"Do you think so, papa?"

"Certainly I do."

"I don't see why Lord Brotherton should not have a son and heir as well as anybody else."

"He is quite entitled to have a son and heir, – one may almost say more entitled than anyone else, seeing that he has got so much to leave to him, – but on that very account he is more bound than anyone else to let all the world feel sure that his declared son and heir is absolutely his son and heir."

"He couldn't be so vile as that, papa!"

"God forbid that I should say that he could. It may be that he considers himself married, though the marriage would not be valid here. Maybe he is married, and that yet the child is not legitimate." Mary could not but blush as her father spoke to her thus plainly. "All we do know is that he wrote to his own brother declaring that he was about to be married twelve months after the birth of the child whom he now expects us to recognise as the heir to the title. I for one am not prepared to accept his word without evidence, and I shall have no scruple in letting him know that such evidence will be wanted."

CHAPTER XV. "DROP IT."

For ten or twelve days after the little dinner in Berkeley Square Guss Mildmay bore her misfortunes without further spoken complaint. During all that time, though they were both in London, she never saw Jack De Baron, and she knew that in not seeing her he was neglecting her. But for so long she bore it. It is generally supposed that young ladies have to bear such sorrow without loud complaint; but Guss was more thoroughly emancipated than are some young ladies, and when moved was wont to speak her mind. At last, when she herself was only on foot with her father, she saw Jack De Baron riding with Lady George. It is quite true that she also saw, riding behind them, her perfidious friend, Mrs. Houghton, and a gentleman whom at that time she did not know to be Lady George's father. This was early in March, when equestrians in the park are not numerous. Guss stood for a moment looking at them, and Jack De Baron took off his hat. But Jack did not stop, and went on talking with that pleasant vivacity which she, poor girl, knew so well and valued so highly. Lady George liked it too, though she could hardly have given any reason for liking it, for, to tell the truth, there was not often much pith in Jack's conversation.

On the following morning Captain De Baron, who had lodgings in Charles Street close to the Guards' Club, had a letter brought to him before he was out of bed. The letter was from Guss Mildmay, and he knew the handwriting well. He had received many notes from her, though none so interesting on the whole as was this letter. Miss Mildmay's letter to Jack was as follows. It was written, certainly, with a swift pen, and, but that he knew her writing well, would in parts have been hardly legible.

"I think you are treating me very badly. I tell you openly and fairly. It is neither gentlemanlike or high spirited, as you know that I have no one to take my part but myself. If you mean to cut me, say so, and let me understand it at once. You have taken up now with that young married woman just because you know it will make me angry. I don't believe for a moment that you really care for such a baby-faced chit as that. I have met her too, and I know that she hasn't a word to say for herself. Do you mean to come and see me? I expect to hear from you, letting me know when you will come. I do not intend to be thrown over for her or anyone. I believe it is mostly Adelaide's doing, who doesn't like to think that you should really care for anyone. You know very well what my feelings are, and what sacrifice I am ready to make. And you know what you have told me of yourself. I shall be at home all this afternoon. Papa, of course, will go to his club at three. Aunt Julia has an afternoon meeting at the Institute for the distribution of prizes among the Rights-of-Women young men, and I have told her positively that I won't go. Nobody else will be admitted. Do come and at any rate let us have it out. This state of things will kill me, – though, of course, you don't mind that.

"G.

"I shall think you a coward if you don't come. Oh, Jack, do come."

She had begun like a lion, but had ended like a lamb; and such was the nature of every thought she had respecting him. She was full of indignation. She assured herself hourly that such treachery as his deserved death. She longed for a return of the old times, – thirty years since, – and for some old-fashioned brother, so that Jack might be shot at and have a pistol bullet in his heart. And yet she told herself as often that she could not live without him. Where should she find another Jack after her recklessness in letting all the world know that this man was her Jack? She hardly wanted

to marry him, knowing full well the nature of the life which would then be before her. Jack had told her often that if forced to do that he must give up the army and go and live in – , he had named Dantzic as having the least alluring sound of any place he knew. To her it would be best that things should go on just as they were now till something should turn up. But that she should be enthralled and Jack free was not to be borne! She begrudged him no other pleasure. She was willing that he should hunt, gamble, eat, drink, smoke, and be ever so wicked, if that were his taste; but not that he should be seen making himself agreeable to another young woman. It might be that their position was unfortunate, but of that misfortune she had by far the heavier share. She could not eat, drink, smoke, gamble, hunt, and be generally wicked. Surely he might bear it if she could.

Jack, when he had read the letter, tossed it on to the counterpane, and rolled himself again in bed. It was not as yet much after nine, and he need not decide for an hour or two whether he would accept the invitation or not. But the letter bothered him and he could not sleep. She told him that if he did not come he would be a coward, and he felt that she had told him the truth. He did not want to see her, – not because he was tired of her, for in her softer humours she was always pleasant to him, – but because he had a clear insight into the misery of the whole connection. When the idea of marrying her suggested itself, he always regarded it as being tantamount to suicide. Were he to be persuaded to such a step he would simply be blowing his own brains out because someone else asked him to do so. He had explained all this to her at various times when suggesting Dantzic, and she had agreed with him. Then, at that point, his common sense had been better than hers, and his feeling really higher. "That being so," he had said, "it is certainly for your advantage that we should part." But this to her had been as though he were striving to break his own chains and was indifferent as to her misery. "I can take care of myself," she had answered him. But he knew that she could not take care of herself. Had she not been most unwise, most imprudent, she would have seen the wisdom of letting the intimacy of their acquaintance drop without any further explanation. But she was most unwise. Nevertheless, when she accused him of cowardice, must he not go?

He breakfasted uncomfortably, trying to put off the consideration, and then uncomfortably sauntered down to the Guard House, at St. James's. He had no intention of writing, and was therefore not compelled to make up his mind till the hour named for the appointment should actually have come. He thought for a while that he would write her a long letter, full of good sense; explaining to her that it was impossible that they should be useful to each other, and that he found himself compelled, by his regard for her, to recommend that their peculiar intimacy should be brought to an end. But he knew that such a letter would go for nothing with her, – that she would regard it simply as an excuse on his part. They two had tacitly agreed not to be bound by common sense, – not to be wise. Such tacit agreements are common enough between men, between women, and between men and women. What! a sermon from you! No indeed; not that. Jack felt all this, – felt that he could not preach without laying himself open to ridicule. When the time came he made up his mind that he must go. Of course it was very bad for her. The servants would all know it. Everybody would know it. She was throwing away every chance she had of doing well for herself. But what was he to do? She told him that he would be a coward, and he at any rate could not bear that.

Mr. Mildmay lived in a small house in Green Street, very near the Park, but still a modest, unassuming, cheap little house. Jack De Baron knew the way to it well, and was there not above a quarter-of-an-hour after the appointed time. "So aunt Ju has gone to the Rights of Women, has she?" he said, after his first greeting. He might have kissed her if he would, but he didn't. He had made up his mind about that. And so had she. She was ready for him, whether he should kiss her or not, – ready to accept either greeting, as though it was just that which she had expected.

"Oh, yes; she is going to make a speech herself."

"But why do they give prizes to young men?"

"Because the young men have stood up for the old women. Why don't you go and get a prize?"

"I had to be here instead."

"Had to be here, sir!"

"Yes, Guss; had to be here! Isn't that about it? When you tell me to come, and tell me that I am a coward if I don't come, of course I am here."

"And now you are here, what have you got to say for yourself?" This she attempted to say easily and jauntily.

"Not a word."

"Then I don't see what is the use of coming?"

"Nor I, either. What would you have me say?"

"I would have you, – I would have you – " And then there was something like a sob. It was quite real. "I would have you tell me – that you – love me."

"Have I not told you so a score of times; and what has come of it?"

"But is it true?"

"Come, Guss, this is simple folly. You know it is true; and you know, also, that there is no good whatever to be got from such truth."

"If you loved me, you would like – to – see me."

"No, I shouldn't; – no, I don't; – unless it could lead to something. There was a little fun to be had when we could spoon together, – when I hardly knew how to ask for it, and you hardly knew how to grant it; when it was a little shooting bud, and had to be nursed by smiles and pretty speeches. But there are only three things it can come to now. Two are impossible, and therefore there is the other."

"What are the three?"

"We might get married."

"Well?"

"One of the three I shall not tell you. And we might – make up our minds to forget it all. Do what the people call, part. That is what I suggest."

"So that you may spend your time in riding about with Lady George Germain."

"That is nonsense, Guss. Lady George Germain I have seen three times, and she talks only about her husband; a pretty little woman more absolutely in love I never came across."

"Pretty little fool!"

"Very likely. I have nothing to say against that. Only, when you have no heavier stone to throw against me than Lady George Germain, really you are badly off for weapons."

"I have stones enough, if I chose to throw them. Oh, Jack!"

"What more is there to be said?"

"Have you had enough of me already, Jack?"

"I should not have had half enough of you if either you or I had fifty thousand pounds."

"If I had them I would give them all to you."

"And I to you. That goes without telling. But as neither of us have got the money, what are we to do? I know what we had better not do. We had better not make each other unhappy by what people call recriminations."

"I don't suppose that anything I say can affect your happiness."

"Yes, it does; very much. It makes me think of deep rivers, and high columns; of express trains and prussic acid. Well as we have known each other, you have never found out how unfortunately soft I am."

"Very soft!"

"I am. This troubles me so that I ride over awfully big places, thinking that I might perhaps be lucky enough to break my neck."

"What must I feel, who have no way of amusing myself at all?"

"Drop it. I know it is a hard thing for me to say. I know it will sound heartless. But I am bound to say so. It is for your sake. I can't hurt myself. It does me no harm that everybody knows

that I am philandering after you; but it is the very deuce for you." She was silent for a moment. Then he said again emphatically, "Drop it."

"I can't drop it," she said, through her tears.

"Then what are we to do?" As he asked this question, he approached her and put his arm round her waist. This he did in momentary vacillating mercy, – not because of the charm of the thing to himself, but through his own inability not to give her some token of affection.

"Marry," she said, in a whisper.

"And go and live at Dantzic for the rest of our lives!" He did not speak these words, but such was the exclamation which he at once made internally to himself. If he had resolved on anything, he had resolved that he would not marry her. One might sacrifice one's self, he had said to himself, if one could do her any good; but what's the use of sacrificing both. He withdrew his arm from her, and stood a yard apart from her, looking into her face.

"That would be so horrible to you!" she said.

"It would be horrible to have nothing to eat."

"We should have seven hundred and fifty pounds a year," said Guss, who had made her calculations very narrowly.

"Well, yes; and no doubt we could get enough to eat at such a place as Dantzic."

"Dantzic! you always laugh at me when I speak seriously."

"Or Lubeck, if you like it better; or Leipsig. I shouldn't care the least in the world where we went. I know a chap who lives in Minorca because he has not got any money. We might go to Minorca, only the mosquitoes would eat you up."

"Will you do it? I will if you will." They were standing now three yards apart, and Guss was looking terrible things. She did not endeavour to be soft, but had made up her mind as to the one step that must be taken. She would not lose him. They need not be married immediately. Something might turn up before any date was fixed for their marriage. If she could only bind him by an absolute promise that he would marry her some day! "I will, if you will," she said again, after waiting a second or two for his answer. Then he shook his head. "You will not, after all that you have said to me?" He shook his head again. "Then, Jack De Baron, you are perjured, and no gentleman."

"Dear Guss, I can bear that. It is not true, you know, as I have never made you any promise which I am not ready to keep; but still I can bear it."

"No promise! Have you not sworn that you loved me?"

"A thousand times."

"And what does that mean from a gentleman to a lady?"

"It ought to mean matrimony and all that kind of thing, but it never did mean it with us. You know how it all began."

"I know what it has come to, and that you owe it to me as a gentleman to let me decide whether I am able to encounter such a life or not. Though it were absolute destruction, you ought to face it if I bid you."

"If it were destruction for myself only – perhaps, yes. But though you have so little regard for my happiness, I still have some for yours. It is not to be done. You and I have had our little game, as I said before, and now we had better put the rackets down and go and rest ourselves."

"What rest? Oh, Jack, – what rest is there?"

"Try somebody else."

"Can you tell me to do that!"

"Certainly I can. Look at my cousin Adelaide."

"Your cousin Adelaide never cared for any human being in her life except herself. She had no punishment to suffer as I have. Oh, Jack! I do so love you." Then she rushed at him, and fell upon his bosom, and wept.

He knew that this would come, and he felt that, upon the whole, this was the worst part of the performance. He could bear her anger or her sullenness with fortitude, but her lachrymose caresses were insupportable. He held her, however, in his arms, and gazed at himself in the pier glass most uncomfortably over her shoulder. "Oh, Jack," she said, "oh, Jack, – what is to come next?" His face became somewhat more lugubrious than before, but he said not a word. "I cannot lose you altogether. There is no one else in the wide world that I care for. Papa thinks of nothing but his whist. Aunt Ju, with her 'Rights of Women,' is an old fool."

"Just so," said Jack, still holding her, and still looking very wretched.

"What shall I do if you leave me?"

"Pick up some one that has a little money. I know it sounds bad and mercenary, and all that, but in our way of life there is nothing else to be done. We can't marry like the ploughboy and milkmaid?"

"I could."

"And would be the first to find out your mistake afterwards. It's all very well saying that Adelaide hasn't got a heart. I dare say she has as much heart as you or me."

"As you; – as you."

"Very well. Of course you have a sort of pleasure in abusing me. But she has known what she could do, and what she could not. Every year as she grows older she will become more comfortable. Houghton is very good to her, and she has lots of money to spend. If that's heartlessness there's a good deal to be said for it." Then he gently disengaged himself of her arms, and placed her on a sofa.

"And this is to be the end?"

"Well, – I think so really." She thumped her hand upon the head of the sofa as a sign of her anger. "Of course we shall always be friends?"

"Never," she almost screamed.

"We'd better. People will talk less about it, you know."

"I don't care what people talk. If they knew the truth, no one would ever speak to you again."

"Good bye, Guss." She shook her head, as he had shaken his before. "Say a word to a fellow." Again she shook her head. He attempted to take her hand, but she withdrew it. Then he stood for perhaps a minute looking at her, but she did not move. "Good bye, Guss," he said again, and then he left the room.

When he got into the street he congratulated himself. He had undergone many such scenes before, but none which seemed so likely to bring the matter to an end. He was rather proud of his own conduct, thinking that he had been at the same time both tender and wise. He had not given way in the least, and had yet been explicit in assuring her of his affection. He felt now that he would go and hunt on the morrow without any desire to break his neck over the baron's fences. Surely the thing was done now for ever and ever! Then he thought how it would have been with him at this moment had he in any transient weakness told her that he would marry her. But he had been firm, and could now walk along with a light heart.

She, as soon as he had left her, got up, and taking the cushion off the sofa, threw it to the further end of the room. Having so relieved herself, she walked up to her own chamber.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL IS FISH THAT COMES TO HIS NET

The Dean's week up in London during the absence of Lord George was gay enough; but through it all and over it all there was that cloud of seriousness which had been produced by the last news from Italy. He rode with his daughter, dined out in great state at Mrs. Montacute Jones's, talked to Mr. Houghton about Newmarket and the next Derby, had a little flirtation of his own with Hetta Houghton, – into which he contrived to introduce a few serious words about the Marquis, – and was merry enough; but, to his daughter's surprise, he never for a moment ceased to be impressed with the importance of the Italian woman and her baby. "What does it signify, papa?" she said.

"Not signify!"

"Of course it was to be expected that the Marquis should marry. Why should he not marry as well as his younger brother?"

"In the first place, he is very much older."

"As to that, men marry at any age. Look at Mr. Houghton." The Dean only smiled. "Do you know, papa, I don't think one ought to trouble about such things."

"That's nonsense, my dear. Men, and women too, ought to look after their own interests. It is the only way in which progress can be made in the world. Of course you are not to covet what belongs to others. You will make yourself very unhappy if you do. If Lord Brotherton's marriage were all fair and above board, nobody would say a word; but, as it has not been so, it will be our duty to find out the truth. If you should have a son, do not you think that you would turn every stone before you would have him defrauded of his rights?"

"I shouldn't think any one would defraud him."

"But if this child be – anything else than what he pretends to be, there will be fraud. The Germains, though they think as I do, are frightened and superstitious. They are afraid of this imbecile who is coming over; but they shall find that if they do not move in the matter, I will. I want nothing that belongs to another; but while I have a hand and tongue with which to protect myself, or a purse, – which is better than either, – no one shall take from me what belongs to me." All this seemed to Mary to be pagan teaching, and it surprised her much as coming from her father. But she was beginning to find out that she, as a married woman, was supposed to be now fit for other teaching than had been administered to her as a child. She had been cautioned in her father's house against the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and could remember the paternal, almost divine expression of the Dean's face as the lesson was taught. But now it seemed to her that the pomps and vanities were spoken of in a very different way. The divine expression was altogether gone, and that which remained, though in looking at her it was always pleasant, was hardly paternal.

Miss Mildmay, – Aunt Ju as she was called, – and Guss Mildmay came and called, and as it happened the Dean was in the drawing-room when they came. They were known to be friends of Mrs. Houghton's who had been in Brothershire, and were therefore in some degree connected even with the Dean. Guss began at once about the new Marchioness and the baby; and the Dean, though he did not of course speak to Guss Mildmay as he had done to his own daughter, still sneered at the mother and her child. In the meantime Aunt Ju was enlisting poor Mary. "I should be so proud if you would come with me to the Institute, Lady George."

"I am sure I should be delighted. But what Institute?"

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