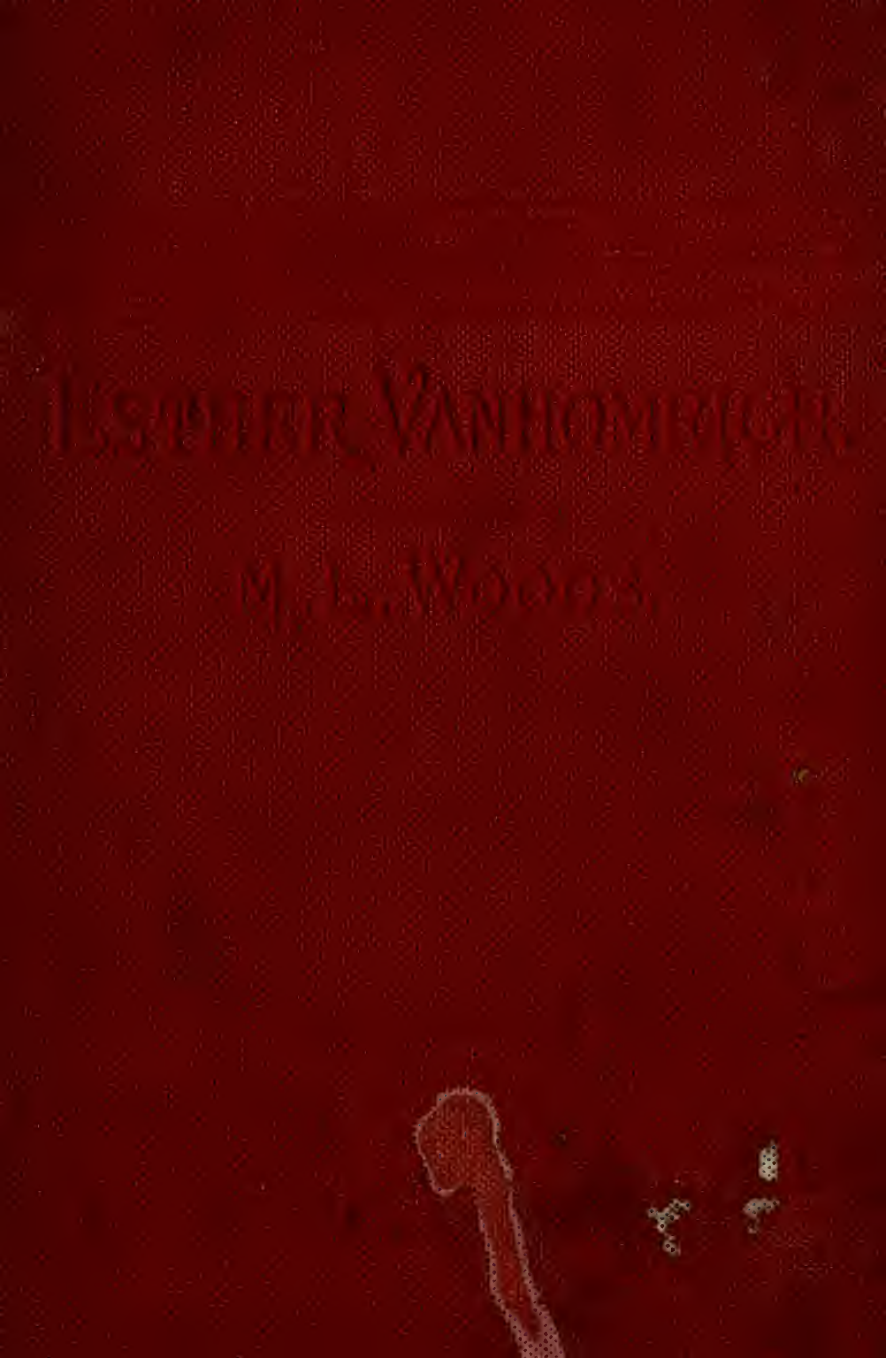

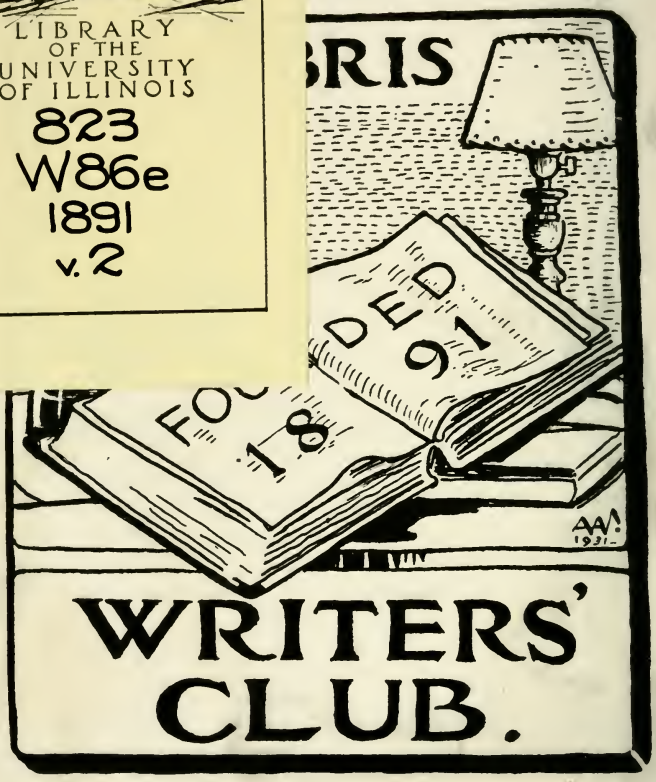

Please see
Rules Behind.

ESTHER VANHOMRIGH.

ESTHER VANHOMRIGH.

BY

MARGARET L. WOODS,

AUTHOR OF "A VILLAGE TRAGEDY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1891.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

PART I.

(Continued.)

ESTHER VANHOMRIGH.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was a thorough search made round the two parlours and on the stairs, but no paper was to be found. It was decided that the Dean must have dropped it between St. James' Street and Bury Street, and the party settled down as before, with the exception of Esther. When the search had proved in vain, she remembered seeing a folded piece of paper lying by the altar rails in church, close by where the Dean stood. Sending welcome injunctions to Patrick, the Dean's footman, to join the revels below stairs, she ran up for her hood and gloves and left the house as quickly and as quietly as she could. The dusty streets were beginning to be shady and were comparatively quiet, for it

was not much past five o'clock, and the fashionable world had not yet left its after-dinner wine for the coffee-house, the tavern or the Mall. Yet had they been noisier they would have seemed a haven of peace to Esther, a fugitive from the crowded stage of conventional merriment in which she had been playing her part for so many hours. She turned down by St. James' Palace into the Mall, where a certain number of people were already walking, and so past the milk fair at the corner to Spring Gardens. Thence she took a hackney coach to the Rectory, near the quiet church the Stones had chosen for the wedding. The Rector, whose dinner had been large, if not luxurious, sat over his empty bottle of Florence wine smoking a pipe of tobacco, and though he wondered much what Miss Vanhomrigh might want with the church key, he sent it down by the maid without exerting himself to formulate a question. So she went on to the church. The flower-seller had gone from the steps, and the costermonger's cart from below them. Some grimy children

were playing at marbles by the door, and interrupted in their game by the unexpected arrival, gathered round to stare at her, as she painfully turned the big key in the lock, with a faint exclamation of annoyance as she split the palm of her glove in the process. She had no sooner entered than a pale, inquisitive, snub-nosed little face, about on a level with the lock, was thrust in after her. She hastily withdrew the key and closed the door behind her. There was something strange and unnatural about the emptiness of the place, with the long rays of the afternoon sun streaming above its untenanted pews and bulging hassocks and cushions. The church smelt of dust, for it was not sufficiently fashionable to be open for those daily prayers which were wont to offer a convenient rendezvous for the beau and the fine lady. It had none of the dim impressiveness of a mediæval church, that seems reared with a view to Heaven rather than Earth, and whose arches, massive or soaring, neither gain nor lose by the accidental presence of ephemeral human creatures

below them. No—the building seemed to cry out for a congregation, and the mind's eye involuntarily peopled it with its Sunday complement of substantial citizens and their families.

Esther walked quickly up to the altar rails and looked over. There lay the folded paper, just as she remembered it. She fell on her knees on the long stool placed there for the convenience of communicants, not with an idea of reverence, for Esther was a philosopher after the fashion of the day but merely in order to reach the paper with greater ease. She snatched it up and glanced at it. Yes, it was undoubtedly the lost key. Tossing her head with a little "Ah!" of triumph and satisfaction, she put it away safely in her pocket. The prize was secured ; yet she lingered, ungloved her left hand, and touched a spot of ground just within the rails, pressing her warm palm and shapely fingers down upon the cold stone. Just there Swift had stood, so close to where she knelt that if he stood there now his robes would brush her as he moved. She hid her

face on the arm that lay on the communion-rails, and with a thrill of passionate adoration saw once more the impressive figure that she had seen that morning, and heard again the grave tones of his voice. The sensation of bustle attendant on a wedding, the near presence of the little crowd of relations, had robbed the scene of its emotional quality at the time, but now she was fully sensible of its significance. She was kneeling just where the bride had knelt, and for her the recollection of the stupid, vulgar girl, who had been round to St. James' so often lately with tiresome questions about millinery, faded before the realization of the woman's heart that she had seen beating a few hours ago, on the spot where her own beat now—not more full, surely not so full of love and pride in the man beloved, but blest in a completed joy that was not Esther's yet. Might it not one day be hers also? A minute or two only she continued kneeling, and then passed down the aisle and out on to the steps like a somnambulist, pale, with wide eyes and close-pressed brooding lips.

Another person so rapt might have forgotten to lock the door, or else to return the church key to its owner; but Esther's methodicalness, a natural quality cultivated in response to Swift's approval, never forsook her, and quite mechanically she struggled with the massive lock and left the key at the clergyman's house with a message of thanks.

As she called a coach she asked herself with a start whether she had done these things; then smiled and blushed at her own self-absorption. Up till now she had had no definite purpose beyond that of finding the lost paper, and having accomplished this, she was going home again. But now, smiling, she thought: "Patrick will be drunk by this time—at least, if he is not yet drunk he will not, in justice to himself, leave such a feast until he is. I had better take it myself."

It seemed a simple and natural thing to do, but though Swift received the Vanhomrighs at his lodgings as often as any other friends, that did not mean very often; and she knew he hated to be unexpectedly invaded by any one, most of all by ladies.

Yet to lose this opportunity of finding out the truth about his sudden departure would be too tantalising. It must be only one of those foolish mystifications by which he loved to throw dust in the eyes of his acquaintance, and to which she had become almost resigned. As she drove on the desire to see him, to ask him a thousand questions such as he would not answer before others, and to extract from him a promise to write, grew till it became a necessity. So she got down at the corner of Bury Street, and flew on to the well-known door. She did not observe Mr. Erasmus Lewis, who was passing through the street on the other side, but he observed her and her destination. On the door-step she paused, struck with sudden terror at finding herself entering uninvited that presence which could sometimes be so awe-inspiring. Then, with a touch of scorn at her own unreasoning vacillation, she resolutely raised the knocker. No one came in answer to her rap, but she found that the door was on the latch, and went in. The

doors of most of the rooms stood wide open, and there was a feeling of loneliness about the dull little house. She went upstairs and knocked timidly at Swift's parlour, but here too no one answered. The bedroom beside was obviously empty, and with an inconsequent sensation of relief she said to herself he must be gone out, and peeped carelessly into the parlour. It was a dreary room at the best of times, and now it bore all those marks of disorder and discomfort that attend a move, even from lodgings. A large wooden case half full of books stood near the door, the floor and the chairs were strewn with volumes and those shabby odds and ends which seem never to appear except on such occasions; while the hearthstone and empty grate were piled with an immense heap of papers, mostly torn up very small. The cloth had fallen off the heavy old oak table, which filled the middle of the room and was generally completely covered with books and pamphlets. It was quite bare now, except that the man who sat at one end on a high stool, had bowed his body on it

and lay face downwards on its polished surface, with arms and tightly-clenched hands stretched out before him. He was wrapped in a loose gown, and wore neither peruke nor cap, but his head, which must have been left unshaven for some time, was covered with a short thick growth of blue-black hair, dashed with glittering silver at the temples. As Esther stood by the door, amazed and undecided, a sound broke from him; a groan, ending in a long, low, sighing wail. It was a heart-broken sound; the cry of one worn out with some intolerable misery of mind or body. In an instant all hesitation disappeared, all fear or desire for herself; everything vanished except the consciousness of her adored friend's anguish. She moved forward quickly and silently, and falling on her knees by the table laid her hand on his arm. He made no sign, but again that muffled wail broke forth, like the lamentation of a damned spirit. Trembling excessively, she pulled him by the sleeve, and said in a voice so broken it was scarcely more than a whisper:

"Oh, sir! For pity's sake—for God's sake—!"

With an impatient movement he folded his arms round his head so as more completely to shield his face, and spoke hoarsely from beneath them: "You confounded rascal, I thought you knew better! Go—go—go, I say!"

The last words were spoken with increasing vehemence. But Esther, who had often been awe-struck before him, did not fear him now. He was suffering, how or why she knew not, and without her reverence for him being in any way impaired, he awoke her instinctive feeling of responsibility towards all suffering creatures. The first shock over, she was comparatively calm again, only thinking with painful intensity what she had better do. So for a minute or two they both remained in the same position, till he burst out again with greater violence than before:

"Knave! Beast! Idiot! Go, go!"

Then she touched his hand. "It is Hess," she said.

He lifted his head slowly and turned his face towards her, as though with reluctance. It was pale with the livid pallor of a dark skin no longer young, and the firm lines of mouth and cheek were slackened and hollowed. He looked a ghost, but hardly the ghost of himself. In a minute, as he realised Esther's presence, the life and individuality began to return to his face, but in no amiable form.

"So, madam," he said after a pause, with a grimace that did duty for a smile, "*You* are here! Ha! Charming! Pray, to what am I indebted, *et cætera?*"

Esther was too much shocked at his appearance to consider how he received her.

"I have brought the paper you lost," she returned hastily. "'Tis here. But no matter—you are ill. You must let me find your drops for you and send for Dr. Arbuthnot."

He sat upright, and clutching the edge of the stool on which he sat, with both hands, "I am not ill," he said with harsh impatience. "Leave me."

"You are either ill or in some great trouble," she replied, "in either case not fit to be alone. If you will not have my company, you must let me send you some other friend—though a truer one it cannot be. Patrick will only come home to sleep off his wine."

"Friend!" he cried, "Friend!"

And with a shriek of laughter he rocked himself to and fro on the stool. Esther was standing up now; she looked at him steadily, with a severity born rather of amazement than of any conscious criticism of his conduct, and he was calm again so instantaneously that she almost doubted whether it was he who had laughed. They were silent for a minute or two, looking at each other. He was apparently calm, but the singular blueness of his eyes had disappeared; they glittered under the heavy black eyebrows, each with a curious spark in it, not at all like the azure eyes so familiar to his friends. The change in them made his whole face look different; from having been pale, it had now flushed a dark red.

"You talk to me of friends, child," he resumed hoarsely, but in a more normal tone, leaning forward and smiling at her bitterly, both his hands still clutching the stool, "as though you expected *me* to believe in 'em, or to fancy *you* believed in 'em. No, no, Governor Huff has too much wit for that. Friends! Fellows that suck your brains, suck 'em dry, dry, and pay you with their damned promises; that when you've slaved and slaved and made a million enemies, and when they think you're done with, fling you out an Irish Deanery, as you might fling a stick into the sea for your dog—'Hi! Swim for it, sir!'" He paused a moment, moistened his dry lips, and drawing in his breath let it out again in a low fierce exclamation. "But 'tis not I, 'tis they who are done with—Oxford, Bolingbroke. Puppets! Pawns on the board! O when I am gone, they'll know themselves and whistle me back, when 'tis too late. And I shall come, ay, blundering fool that I am, I shall come. The moths—do you remember at Kensington, Hess?—they come back to

frizzle where they frizzled before, don't they?"

He laughed again the same sudden shrieking laugh. The perpendicular line was defining itself on Esther's white brow; a line which looked severe, but really indicated only anxiety or bewilderment.

"I esteem your political friends as little as you do," she replied, mentioning them disdainfully, "and thought I esteemed 'em less. But you have others—better ones—Mr. Gay, Mr. Pope——"

"Mr. Addison—Mr. Steele,"—he broke in with a mincing accent meant to imitate her feminine voice. "Was that what you was going to say, miss? Ha, ha, ha! Warm-hearted, generous Joseph! Steele, true as—thyself! Gay now, Gay's a charming fellow when one feels charmingly. As to Pope"—at that name he dropped his sneer and spoke with sombre earnestness—"as to Pope—never talk of him, Hesskin. He's a thing I believe in, I *will* believe in, I tell you, Brat—so don't let's think of him for fear—for fear—— Ah! Did you say he was crooked?"

"I said nothing, sir," she replied with dignity; "I would aim at no man's defects of person, least of all at Mr. Pope's. But if I cannot name a man friend but you'll mock him, I'll bring your women friends to your mind—the truest, the most attached of 'em." And she held her head higher. "There's Lady Betty Germayne, my mother, Molly and—myself. That's four."

"Women's friendship! Women's friendship! By the powers, she talks as though it were a thing to be calculated—four female friendships to one male. Pshaw! Weigh froth! Weigh moonshine! They're more weighable than the parcel of vanity and caprice called female friendship. Don't I know why Madam Van and you was all anxiety to know Mr. Gay before I left? Why, to be sure, she must have a poet in her ante-chamber like other women of quality; for Madam Van is as mad as old Newcastle, and thinks herself a duchess. And when that poor Dean that's been so useful is gone, why he's gone, and Hess must get another fellow to teach her how

to talk and make the wits in love with her. Ay, I know what your female friendship's worth."

Esther stood upright beside him. She made no visible motion while he spoke, but she held her head higher, the frown on her brow deepened, and she looked down at him with eyes, in which an angry light began to burn, and cheeks flushing with an indignant red. He tried to meet her gaze indifferently as he finished speaking, but his own sank beneath it, and before she made any answer he hung his head as one rebuked.

"You dare to say so!" she said at last sternly. "And to me!" Then after a pause—"Unworthy! Most unworthy!" she ejaculated.

Her words did not exactly represent her feeling. She was more moved by horror and surprise that he should speak in a way so unlike and so degrading to himself than at his preposterous reflections on herself and Mrs. Vanhomrigh. But whatever the precise proportion in which her emotions were mingled, she stood there the very image of

intense yet self-contained indignation, fixing upon him a steady look of stern reproof. She who had so often trembled before his least frown did not fear his fury now, in this feverish sickness of his soul. He was silent, looking at the table and drumming on it like a boy, half sullen, half ashamed. Then on a sudden, putting both hands to his head with a contortion of pain, "O my head! my head!" he cried. "O God—O God!"

And he rolled on the table in a paroxysm of anguish, moaning inarticulately either prayers or curses. Every physical pang that he endured created its mental counterpart in her, and her whole soul was concentrated in a passionate prayer, if a spiritual cry so vague in its direction could be called a prayer, for help for the body and mind of him, laid there in anguish and disarray.

At length the paroxysm subsided, almost as suddenly as it had come, but for a time he seemed unable to speak. Shading his brow with his hand, he looked at her from time to time with a faint, pleading, almost timid smile. This piteous smile, so unlike any

look she had ever seen or fancied on those haughty features, was more than Esther could bear. Her breath came quick, a strangling sob rose in her throat, and the hot tears blinded her eyes. But he had too often, quite mistakenly, praised her as above the female weakness of tears, and she had too often blushed to think of those tears of hers by the river at Windsor, and those in the Sluttery, to weep again in his company. No, she would rather choke than do it. So she could not answer that pleading look with a kind one, but faced him with drooped eyelids, lips severely close, flushed cheeks and heaving bosom. He spoke at last in a languid hesitating voice, but calm and like his own; no longer with the confused articulation or the fierce grinding tones which had shocked Esther when he was talking to her before.

"I beg your pardon, Essie, very humbly, yours and good Madam Van's as well. You'd grant me grace if you only knew what a bad head I have. O such a racking head, Hess! 'The pains of hell gat hold

upon me' last night when I came home from Parson's Green, and all because of the least bit of fruit from his glass-house the mad Peterborough would have me to eat. No, I'll not do it again—fruit always did give me a bad head. You've forgiven me, Brat, ha'n't you ?"

But Esther could not yet answer, or meet that anxious humble look of his.

"Essie!" he cried pleadingly, "Essie!" and stretched out his hand towards hers as though to touch it, yet without doing so.

"Hess!" he cried again. "What! You can't forgive your poor friend that hardly knows what he says when he cries aloud in his misery ? Can't you forgive me, little Hesskin ? Do—do now forgive me."

Esther was still kneeling like one in prayer, with her cheek leaned on her clasped hands, but now the colour had ebbed from it and left her very pale, and the resolute lines of her lips had softened. She lifted to his her great eyes, luminous with tears repressed and an irrepressible fire of passion, and he started as he met them.

"Forgive you?" she cried in a voice whose deep vibrating music thrilled him in spite of himself; and then the same words again, but set to some new harmony—"Forgive you? Why, I love you!"

The mental shock was sufficient to have thrust him back again into that Inferno from which he had just escaped, but it had the opposite effect. The weak, helpless feeling in the brain, that usually remained with him for long after such an attack, passed suddenly almost entirely away. Yes, it was a shock. For weeks a dim troubling something, to which he obstinately refused to give the shape of an idea, had been stirring in the depths of his mind; and he had kept it down there by main force. Now it sprang up before him, full-armed, like Minerva.

"I am obliged to you, Essie," he said. "I should have been sorry if I had offended you past your forgiveness. But now you talk as wildly as I did. Had we not been friends so long, I might misunderstand your meaning."

"Ah!" she cried, leaping to her feet, and tossing back her hood with a fierce impatient

gesture, "you wish to misunderstand it! You that have plagued me, tortured me with your questions, now you would fain not hear the answer to 'em all. You that have told me a thousand times to show you my heart, now you will not see it. But you know, you know what you are to me"—and a tearless sob strangled her voice.

"Your friend, Essie," he said gravely, flinching before this outburst of a passion it had been beyond his power to imagine.

"Friend!" she cried, "Friend!" and laughed, not bitterly, but with a kind of wild tenderness. "Could Adam call the God that shaped him out of dust his 'friend'? No, he must worship, he must adore Him. You shaped me. I was nothing, nothing, before you taught me how to think, how to feel, to love what you loved and despise what you despise. I am the creature of your hands—you made me and I am yours. You may be sorry for't, but 'tis too late now to help it."

Swift made an attempt to assume that awful air with which he was wont to cow the

boldest of his friends or foes, but he felt the attempt to be a failure.

"Hush, Essie!" he cried. "What you are saying is very wrong; 'tis rank blasphemy, and I will not hear it."

Esther turned from him and paced the room for a minute or two in a silence which Swift did not break, with her head thrown back, and biting her under-lip, as was her wont. Looking on the ground, not at him, who had once more shaded his face with one hand, she began again:

"We are neither of us enthusiasts, and I cannot pick my words. O that I could find one sharp enough to cut right through my breast and show you my heart! Once you said I should cease to be your friend on the day when I was afraid to pin my heart to my sleeve-ruffles. Yes, those were your very words — 'pin it to my sleeve-ruffles,' for your inspection. You forget, but I remember. Now you don't love to see it, but 'tis too late to go back. If I said I worshipped you as one worships God, I spoke wrongly. God is a long way off,

and we have never seen Him, but we know He cannot need us. But you"—she paused before him with clasped hands, like a worshipper before a shrine—"you are far indeed above other men, yet you are a man, and here among us, and you have often—— Ah! do not try to deny it—little, nothing as I am compared to you, you have often, often needed me! How can I choose but worship, adore,—love you?"

And as she ended, she fell on her knees once more, and bending over his hand, that still lay stretched out on the table, touched it with a swift hot kiss, and bowed her forehead on her folded arms.

There was a sharp tap at the door. Some one must have mounted the stairs unheard by either of them. Quick as lightning Esther sprang up and pulled her hood over her face. Swift made a dash for his peruke, which lay on a neighbouring chair, but he had not got his head well into it, when the door was flung open, and loudly announced by an invisible some one, Mr. Erasmus Lewis walked in.

CHAPTER X.

THE new Deanery at St. Patrick's was a spacious house altogether and had a spacious kitchen, proportioned to the lavish hospitality of the ex-Dean Sterne who had built it. Now the handful of fire penned up in a corner of the big grate seemed to blink ruefully at the very scanty supply of pots and pans that was stretched out in attenuated rows on the big dresser opposite. Time had been when the ruddy glow of a long bank of red coals was reflected from a whole battalion of copper vessels, jostling and mounting on each other for want of space, whilst great gaudy porcelain tureens standing beneath them, had suggested more immediate visions of company and good cheer. But the new arrangements were Mrs. Johnson's own, and their very scantiness

made them her pride. The Dean would have to allow that not a superfluous penny had been spent. Yet the bills were plaguey deep for all that, and he who was so particular about his expenditure, would expect a very exact account to be kept, and the correct balance to be handed over. Now Mrs. Johnson, being born of poor and careful parents and also in every respect the Dean's faithful pupil, was a severe economist, but cyphering was to her a very serious matter. So now while she was mixing a certain favourite cake in preparation for his expected return, she kept studying with an anxious brow a little pocket-account book, and occasionally the contents of a purse. For the balance was not right, and though a portion of her income came from the Dean, and she would willingly have sacrificed her last sixpence to him as a gift, she would not have defrauded herself of a penny in a matter of business, to gain him any earthly advantage; an idiosyncrasy of which he had no right to complain, as it was due to his own training, though in himself a stronger

reasoning faculty often intervened to traverse and control such follies. She had just received a letter from Swift written at Chester, and Dingley had gone round to the owners of the craft on board which his passage was taken, to know when it might be expected.

There was a sound of pattens in the passage, for though it was June the weather was rainy. Esther Johnson lifted her doughy hands out of the cake and hoped she would have time to run round to Ormond's Quay and change her dress before Pdfr. should arrive.

"Lud, my dear, 'tis terrible stormy weather!" cried Dingley, coming in without her pattens, but with the wreck of a big oilskin umbrella in her hand. "'Tis a wonder I an't blown away. For pity's sake look at your umbrella."

"Well, Dingley, well?"

"Sure, Hetty, I'm vastly concerned about it. But a scurvy puff of wind caught it as I came round the corner of Bride Street, and there it was turned round and staring me in the face as you might say."

"For God's sake never mind the umbrella, D.! When will he be here?"

"Oh, immediately almost, to-morrow evening at latest."

"*Immediately*, i' faith! Why, how comes the plaguey ship to be so behind?"

"Mr. Kinahan says on account of foul weather, and the *Royal Anne* being so deep in the water with her cargo aboard. Lud! I wish we may get him back safe and sound. Mr. Kinahan says there have been more ships cast away this year than he ever remembers at this season."

Evidently Mrs. Dingley and Mr. Kinahan had enjoyed a grand shaking of heads over the possible, if not probable, fate of the *Royal Anne* and her passengers. Mrs. Johnson was too cool-headed a woman to enjoy this sort of excitement under any circumstances.

"You're a fool, Dingley, with your Mr. Kinahan. Pdfr. is all prudence, and will not cross if there's danger. But 'tis mighty provoking we should have put that beef-pudding into the oven."

And she ran to take it out. There ensued a wrangle, for Mrs. Dingley, who had an excellent appetite, was in favour of leaving the pudding where it was. Having been worsted in the fray, she had time to say she had found a letter for Mrs. Johnson at Mr. Kinahan's, from London, but not addressed in Swift's handwriting. Who could it be from? Hetty, up to her elbows in dough, and full of her disappointment, bade Dingley take it away. It could be of no consequence, and she would read it some other time.

When the cake was made and put into the oven, and Mrs. Johnson was at the scullery pump washing those strong workaday hands and arms, which seemed out of harmony with her delicately beautiful face, there came a great knocking at the front door. It was the Stoytes and the Walls', with a crowd of little Stoytes and Walls' behind them, all come to see Mrs. Johnson's new arrangements at the Dean's lodgings, and to ask when he was expected. Mr. Stoyte was a merchant of the City and Dr. Walls

an Archdeacon. They were old Dublin acquaintances of Swift's, and with their wives and his predecessor, Dean Sterne, had been Mrs. Johnson's principal associates in his absence. For in spite of her beauty and other uncommon attractions, her social circle was small. The cause of this was twofold. People belonging to the upper classes grow up at the centre of such a web of acquaintanceships, that wherever they go, at least within the limits of their own country, they are sure to find some scattered threads of it still about them. But Esther was of too humble origin for this to be the case, at least in any way that could advantage her. Swift's sister, Mrs. Fenton, who had some connection with the Temples, either to revenge herself on her brother for the disgust he had evinced at her own marriage with a tradesman, or because she guessed what became of some of his income, had spread exaggerated reports of the menial position occupied by Mrs. Johnson in the Moor Park household. Besides the disadvantage of birth, graver in those days than in these,

there was undoubtedly an equivocalness about her relations to Swift that all the hampering precautions with which he surrounded their intercourse, could not entirely dissipate. She had followed him to Ireland, really at his own suggestion, but according to the common gossip of acquaintances, to force herself upon him in marriage; and for eleven years she had been his constant companion, never staying under his roof, but always lodging in his neighbourhood, whether at Dublin or at Laracor. It was true that their party was invariably three-cornered; Mrs. Dingley was always there. But it was not necessary for the scandal-mongers to believe that. The world's boasted sagacity even yet means chiefly a dull conviction that every one is like every one else, or if they are not, then they ought to be; that the average human being has low standards, and that one who is not average should be regarded with peculiar suspicion. The common standard was lower in most respects under the last of the Stuarts than it is to-day, and there was a proportionately greater difficulty

in believing that a higher one could exist. So all things considered, it reflected credit on the discretion and general character of the Dean and Mrs. Johnson that, so long as they were alive, the voice of censure, though not silent, spoke only in whispers.

The empty-sounding house now echoed to loud hearty voices with speech not innocent of brogue. Its walls, papered above the wainscotes, were bare except for the marks of Dean Sterne's pictures. Only a few rooms were furnished, and those scantily, with such furniture as could be immediately spared from the little vicarage at Laracor, and sundry plain second-hand articles. Mrs. Johnson was scrupulously clean and neat in her household ways, and could by incessant harrying make even an Irish servant so while under her supervision, but she had little taste, either natural or acquired, and even to the eye of a formal generation there was a dryness and primness, a want of homelike grace, about her domestic arrangements. However, the visitors, belonging as they did to the more good-natured side of St. George's

Channel, found plenty of pleasant things to say about the big dreary house : reserving such unpleasant things as could not but occur to them, since they had known it under a much more comfortable aspect, for their supper-party at the Archdeacon's.

The sky was dark with clouds and it was almost dusk, when, the inspection completed from garret to cellar, they all stood in the flagged hall, as those stand who "often take leave but seem loth to depart ;" and never in Dr. Sterne's most hospitable days had the sounds of merriment been heartier there. Mrs. Johnson, quite recovered from her disappointment, was the most animated of all, and would pay no attention to Dingley's ostentatious gloom and hints of the disappointment which might befall those who reckoned too much on the new Dean's arrival. She put them down to the poor woman's chagrin at being unable to impress her with a due sense of Pdfr.'s perils by sea. Mrs. Johnson was a capital mimic; she had just been reproducing for them Archbishop King, as he appeared coming

to ask her if Dean Swift was home yet, and if not, why not. "Then pray, Madam, am I to understand that *you* are in occupation of this Deanery?"—she had just asked herself in a voice of pompous horror, rolling her eyes severely and sucking her lips in so droll a caricature of the Archiepiscopal manner, that a roar of laughter drowned the noise of a modest knock at the front door. The performance was proceeding when the knock came again, this time the least bit louder. Mr. Stoyte opened the great mahogany door a little way, prepared to dismiss some importunate enquirer for the Dean. Then with an exclamation, he threw it wide. A tall figure in a great drugget overcoat and large clerical hat, stood there dripping with rain and black against the outer twilight. It was the friend they were all expecting, one of them eagerly expecting, to see in the course of a few hours; but for a minute they stood awkwardly silent, like riotous boys when the school-master appears. Swift too, crossing the threshold of his future home for the first

time, wet and weary from a toilsome journey, paused in surprise and some annoyance at finding himself in the midst of a large party; some old friends whom he could have spared at that moment, others children and young people grown out of knowledge. But he was the first to recover himself.

"Why, Goody," he said to Mrs. Stoyte who stood nearest to him, "where's your civility? You stare at me as though I were Banquo's ghost."

"Welcome, Mr. Dean, welcome home," cried the lady thus addressed, taking his proffered hand and offering her cheek for a friendly salute. "Sure, sir, you were something of a ghost in your manner of appearing, which must excuse us, but you're welcome indeed back to old Dublin."

Then followed immediately a great shaking of hands and some decorous kissing, as manners then permitted among friends, and a chorus of welcome back to his old friends and the new Deanery, and congratulations on his at length taking possession of his own.

The person whom his eyes had first sought

when he stood on the threshold was among the last whom he greeted. Mrs. Johnson, by nature calm and long accustomed to prudence in her relations with Swift, had no thought of rushing forward to greet him. After a few minutes, which seemed a long time, he came to her, took her hand and kissed her cheek in a manner studiously the same as that in which he had saluted the other ladies, though his smile brightened perceptibly. The moment had arrived of which she had dreamed every night before falling asleep for three years, and although she did not analyse her feelings she felt strangely blank and cold, and really vexed because she had not had time to change her dress before he saw her. She had dreamed of meeting in so many ways. Sometimes of waiting on the quay and watching the sail of his homeward-bound ship for a long while before he landed. Sometimes of waiting in her own parlour, or latterly at the Deanery, till he should come in and take both her hands and hold them tight in his, and begin at once to say a thousand silly

tender things in their own "little language." In her dreams even the eternal Dingley had somehow been got rid of for the moment. But in the reality, not only Dingley but a little crowd of more irksome spectators were present. The Stoytes and Walls', however, soon considerately left the tired, rain-soaked traveller to Mrs. Johnson's and Mrs. Dingley's kind care, and they and Bridget had enough to do to find dry clothes and prepare the supper.

Swift too was depressed and disappointed. He was conscious that his long absence in London had slackened the ties of tender intimacy that bound him to Hetty Johnson, but he honestly believed that he had but to meet her for all to be as before. Already a few days earlier he had gone forth in spirit to meet her, and had made his heart beat to the old tune, as he read her last letter alone on the walls of Chester. When Ppt. had begun to exchange journals with Pdfr. she had done a foolish thing, for not only was the life she had to record monotonous and already familiar to him, but also, though

thanks to him she could write better than many much finer ladies, her epistolary style was disappointing. The excitement of his approaching return had given freshness and feeling to her last letter. The place in which it had been read too had been favourable to it. As he paced the peaceful city walls which men yet living remembered as the scene of grim battle and bloodshed—behind him the grey towers of the Cathedral, silent except for the chiming bells, before him the wide green lowlands through which the river flows broadening to the sea—he realized for the first time that London was already far away, and that to-morrow England too would be left behind. Then with graver purpose he repeated to himself what he had cried out before to the Vanhomrighs; that when once he got to Ireland he meant to forget everything in England. He had sent off a lively letter from Chester to Mrs. Vanhomrigh, playfully directed, "At the sign of the Three Widows, St. James' Street," and studiously addressed to all three ladies. But a shorter, more personal note

had found its way to Essie from St. Albans. His indisposition had prevented his leaving London at the time he had intended, and his interview with Essie in Bury Street had not been the last.

Up to the time when he became aware that Esther loved him, he could not be reckoned very blameworthy in his conduct to her. He had always been something of a flirt, but a divine of five-and-forty seemed most unlikely to make a dangerous impression on the heart of a girl accustomed to see some of the best society in London. It was yet but early in that eighteenth century which so successfully cultivated the valuable Art of Friendship between men and women. Abroad indeed, where women enjoyed greater consideration, a Descartes and a Leibnitz had already given excellent examples of such friendships, and Swift himself had in early life owed much to his frank and pleasant intimacy with the daughters of Lord Berkeley. But born in an age of idle gallantry and intrigue, he may be pardoned for not having realized when he was sinning

against the unwritten rules of friendship; as he certainly did in his relations with Esther Vanhomrigh, both by the flatteries he constantly mingled with his apparent rough sincerity, and by his general want of openness. These faults, patent enough in his letters, were exaggerated in the verses he wrote, ostensibly in her honour, but really in his own. They were not only full of flattery and vanity; they were positively untruthful. How untruthful his habit of seeing life through a distorting medium made him probably unaware. But whatever his former or subsequent blindness to the errors of his own conduct, he could not but partially acknowledge them in those days following Esther's avowal, which he spent alone and confined to his lodgings. Shame, disappointment, grief, he felt most truly for himself and her. Political chagrins became for a time matters of minor importance, and he thought of little else but Esther and her strange unhappy passion. He did not confess to himself that there had been a moment some two months back, when it

had pleased him to make sure that no other man occupied a higher position in her heart than himself. He did confess that he could, if he would, have suspected his place there to be too high for her happiness. But no. He had refused to be a coxcomb, and his approaching departure had seemed a natural solution of the problem, if it existed. He was fond of saying to her that if ever she became the victim of love, she had only to apply to him for a cure, a certain cure in the case of one like herself possessed of a will and a reason. Now must he keep his promise; but, alas! the surgeon had a trembling hand. He who could so savagely carve his adversaries in public, could not bear to inflict the smallest wound in private, even on an indifferent person, much less on a friend. The good and the evil in him were alike to be fatal to Esther. Vanity was for the moment silenced, but he who disbelieved in romantic passion had become the object of such a passion. He was like a man who, having always scoffed at the supernatural, at length has seen a ghost;

behind his amazement and fear of the thing, there is a strange reluctant fascinated desire to see it again. The apparition could not have been real; he would like to touch it, to make sure it was a delusion. So on the third day Swift went round to St. James' Street to convince Esther Vanhomrigh and himself that her passion for him was a delusion.

Mrs. Vanhomrigh and Molly were out. Esther appeared alone, cold, haughty, pale; as different as possible from the flushed eloquent Esther of three days ago. Swift thought to put them both more at ease by chatting of his health and his journey, but she answered him with sombre monosyllables. He went on to tell her that his bad head had put everything out of his mind, and most of all any nonsense she might have talked last Saturday, which indeed he had never taken seriously. But she brushed his pretence of misunderstanding and forgetfulness on one side, and with a strange unnatural calmness told him that if she had forfeited his esteem, she would prefer at whatever cost to part

from him finally then and there. Yet if that were so, she could not but regard him as less perfectly just and reasonable than she had always believed, as in confessing to him the real state of her feelings she had only obeyed his own oft-repeated maxims. She had never pretended to agree with him in his contempt for love; a man to whom life was prodigal of interests might easily spare that, but she, confined in a miserable narrow feminine existence, could not afford to despise the one good thing it offered. Being a woman she must love, and being his pupil she could only love what he had taught her to prefer. Youth, fine clothes, rank, wealth he had taught her to hold cheap, and to value nothing but wit and worth. Where had she found these more than—so much as —in himself? And then she went on to speak of him as he had seemed to her, not as some women might have done, adorning him with a miscellany of gifts and virtues not his own, but painting a portrait so like, and yet so subtly flattered by the rich colouring of love, that Swift must have been

devoid of human vanity had he not looked on it with pleasure. This was what, in his happiest moments, he himself hoped he was. So from the confused protestations of inalterable esteem and affection with which at first he had interrupted her, he went on to tell her in a hundred different forms, what by some sophistry, he persuaded himself was true—that he had never been in love; and to add what was reasonable—that he was too old now to begin. And the magnetism of a character stronger and more decided in some directions than his own, and the old habit of sympathy and tenderness for Essie, and also flattered vanity, drew him on into protestations of a warm pre-eminent friendship for her, not far removed from love. Yet when Mrs. Vanhomrigh had returned, and he had bidden them all good-bye, was it in sober earnest or in irony that he cried out just before he closed the door behind him?—

"You'll forget me, madams, in spite of your fine speeches. No matter, for I purpose to forget you every one—statesmen, Churchmen, women, wits, I'll forget every

one of you, when once I'm safe across the Channel!"

And now he was across the Channel, but a thousand bitter thoughts bred in England pursued him still, and made his head and heart ache together. How empty and poverty-stricken looked the big house he must now call his home! His lodgings in London had been simple enough, but for three years he had been accustomed to frequent great houses sumptuously appointed; and a certain smaller house, how home-like it had been!

Yes, it was a pity Ppt. had not had time to make her toilette, for she was really not looking her best in her holland working dress and plain cap. So it appeared to him that she had lost some of her beauty in these three years, which was not really the case. But it was not the common spell of beauty that had drawn and bound him to Hetty Johnson, and he would not much have minded its diminution, if he had not been conscious too of a certain mental estrangement between them.

But Ppt. must not know how joyless was his home-coming. Arm in arm, though followed by the inevitable Dingley, they walked from room to room, Mrs. Hetty proudly pointing out her clever devices for saving expense, which she knew Pdfr. did not love, though sure no one was so generous to his friends. At every room they entered the chill of the large empty house, where he must live alone, struck deeper into his soul. But Hetty did not guess that for all her quick wit; he would not for the world have let her guess it. No; she was "dea' char' Ppt.," and fifty thousand times "dear li' dallah," and "diverting witch," and all the sweet familiar names; and as he acted bravely the old part, he hated himself for not being in truth the old Poor-dear-fond-rogue. By the time they had left the small supper-table in the big dining-parlour, Mrs. Hetty had quite got over her first disappointment in her friend's home-coming, and sat knitting and chatting in the great elbow-chair, as happy and pretty as possible. It was the old chair she had always sat in at Laracor, and she

had a long story to tell of how she had made that lazy impudent rascal Parvisol, the bailiff, see that all the geese's down was kept the whole time the Doctor was away, and how in consequence there had been no new feather-beds to buy for the Deanery; and besides she had fresh stuffed the cushions of this chair, and covered it all with her old chintz gown, the one with pink and red flowers on it, that Pdfr. used to like so much, did he remember?

"Faith, do I, Pt. On my conscience 'twas so smart it might have made Miss there pass for a handsome woman—in a small church or at a country fair, might it not, DD.?"

Here was an opportunity for Dingley, who had been trying all this while to make him see she was offended with him.

"Sure, Mr. Dean," she replied, pinching up her features, "there's many persons in Dublin, not to speak of the country, that still think Mrs. Johnson extreme handsome. I have heard our late excellent Dean protest in this very room, that there was ladies made toasts of in London that could not hold a

candle to her, and Dr. Tisdall, who knows the world, frequently protested that Mrs. Johnson was the most elegant woman of his acquaintance."

"Tisdall know the world!" exclaimed Swift snappishly. "Ay, Tisdall's world. I'd rather know my own back-yard."

"Pray now, you silly DD.," cried Hetty, laughing and blushing with pleasure at being complimented so before Pdfr., "when was it you was seen kissing the Blarney stone? As to you, Sir, you shall henceforth spare the poor Tisdall creature, who has not very long to live, for I hear he has fallen into a yaller-green sickness since he heard the news of your Deanship's promotion."

"What, doth he envy me?" asked Swift. "Tell me that again, little Pt. There's one that envies me! This is mighty diverting, and Lord knows I want diverting."

"To be sure he does, dear rogue, and there's plenty of others that thought no great things of the Vicar of Laracor, fit to burst with envy at seeing the grand place he's got. The Archbishop too must be

mightily disappointed, for he was so positive the Queen would never give you aught worth your taking."

"Who was it learned you to knit, pretty pet?" asked Swift, making no reply to her observation.

"Mrs. Walls," returned Hetty; "and now I can knit stockings without looking at 'em and talking all the while, as you may see."

"Confound Goody Walls!" he cried. "In London, you know, my dear, the ladies would think it uncivil to be knitting stockings when their gallants was courting 'em. Your click-clacking needles drive me distracted—or would, did they not remind the poor fond rogue that his dearest, sweetest friend, who has never been absent from his mind, never, so help him, all this while, sits beside him again in the flesh—and may she never let him go away from her again, to fall into Lord knows what follies and miseries!"

"Indeed, dearest rogue, if you was to settle in England, Dingley and I would not remain behind. Yet though I cannot help fancying you do not love to come back to

poor Ireland, I believe in the end you will be best satisfied to stay there. Yes, Pdfr. will end by loving Ireland better than England, like Ppt. 'Tis a freer place for man—which is you, and beast—which is me."

So the evening passed in affectionate trifling talk, in which if Hetty Johnson and her friend were often at cross-purposes, he alone was aware of it. And this was not owing to any dulness of perception on her part, but to his own self-control and careful tenderness. He would sooner have died than have returned after three long years to wound a kind and faithful heart.

It was past ten o'clock when Patrick lighted the lantern to escort the ladies back to those new lodgings on Ormond's Quay, which certainly Pdfr. must visit to-morrow. Mrs. Johnson still full of exhilaration, must needs go on laughing at and talking to Patrick, as he headed the procession of three which came out of the garden door of the Deanery. It had left off raining now, and up beyond the dark Cathedral tower, the

thin clouds showed a pale blur of light where the moon was trying to appear. From the moment the Deanery door closed behind them, Mrs. Dingley, who walked last, had been endeavouring to attract her friend's attention. As they reached the narrow entrance of St. Patrick Street, the moon burst out, lighting up on one side a long row of huddled gables nodding to their fall, and on the other showing the points and pinnacles of similar antique houses, mingled with the straight lines of some brand-new ones, in black relief against the sky.

"Now, my good Patrick," said Mrs. Dingley, "'tis plainly light enough for us to see the puddles on this side of the street, and as I have somewhat to say to Mrs. Johnson, I beg you will walk on the other."

"Lord, Dingley," laughed Mrs. Johnson, "what can you have to say to me? Nothing so pleasant, I'll be bound, as Patrick here, who has been playing a very great part in the world since we saw him last. He tells me his master was looked on as the greatest wit in London above stairs, but below stairs

where Pat was, it seems they knew of a better. Come now, Patrick, continue the story of your laced hat, which I can tell you I am in a prodigious hurry to see."

Mrs. Dingley, however, was in earnest, and Patrick diplomatically retired. She had now got a letter out of the big pocket that hung beneath her skirt. It had been burning a hole there for hours.

"Hetty child," she said solemnly, "I believe you have forgotten this letter. 'Tis from your mother, and alas! she has very ill news for you."

"I am concerned to hear it," replied Hetty. "The Dean had heard nothing on't before he left."

"The Dean had heard nothing on't!" snorted Mrs. Dingley, her wrath beginning to overflow; "no, no, why should any one tell him, since he would be the first to know the truth on't? Now prepare yourself, my poor child, for something very surprising."

"Plague take you, DD.," returned Hetty, not able to think of anything that would incurably distress her on this happiest of

evenings. "Be plain. You have always fifty words to one meaning."

"O 'tis indeed cruel, false, perfidious conduct! I never could have believed it of him."

Hetty snatched the open letter from Dingley's hand with an impatient exclamation.

"Indeed, Hetty, you need be in no such haste. But if you must know what your mother says, 'tis this. She hath it from a sure hand that the new Dean of St. Patrick's is shortly to be married, the lady young and a fortin."

Mrs. Johnson laughed a loud, somewhat startled, but incredulous laugh.

"Good God, Dingley!" she cried, "what silly stuff is this you talk? I thought my mother had more sense than to write me these paltry inventions the Temples ever love to spread about Doctor Swift."

"You're wrong there, Esther. 'Tis no invention at all, but your mother had it from Mr. Erasmus Lewis, who met her walking in the Park, and very right she did to tell you of it."

"Pooh! Mr. Lewis must be in his dotage. And let me tell you, DD., you take a great liberty in opening my letters. If you was let read Pdfr.'s, why, there were reasons for that. But now, madam, you will please leave the rest alone."

"Highty tighty, miss!" cried Dingley, and was silent a minute or so in indignation; then she resumed, "I always knew no good would come of these strange ways of his and yours. I was sure you had better have taken Tisdall, if Dr. Swift would not come forward honestly, and be married like any other woman. What right had he to get between a pretty young miss and her lover, and yet never to talk of marrying her himself? I have bade Mrs. Walls and Mrs. Stoyte take notice fifty times that I have said there was something odd and slippery about him, and harm would come of it, and now see how it's all fallen out, just as I foretold. O, the false villain!"

"Dingley," said Hetty with cold severity, "I will not hear you speak so unseemly of our great, our generous benefactor. If you

cannot constrain yourself to be silent before me alone, I will call Patrick. You will scarce, I believe, vilify him before his own footman."

But Dingley, whose terror of Swift had alone enabled her to keep silence for so long, was now not to be controlled. So Mrs. Johnson, thrusting the unlucky letter deep into her pocket to read by herself, left her, crossed the road, and walked home with Patrick. When she was retiring to rest she again addressed Mrs. Dingley, but only to say in a voice full of haughty firmness, that on no pretext whatever was she to hear any more of this nonsense about the Dean; who would be horrible angry with DD., if it should come to his ears.

But the grey dawn, that surprises the June night before it has well hushed the world, found a candle still burning in a certain upper room on Ormond's Quay, and a woman, very pale between the blackness of her loosened hair and the whiteness of her pillow, writing, writing in bed. The two letters she wrote were both short, and one,

that to her mother, simple; the other, to Mr. Erasmus Lewis, was diplomatic and took a great deal of thought. The ingenuous Mr. Ford had talked to her about these Vanhomrighs the last time that he was in Dublin, and in consequence she had asked about them next time she wrote to Pdfr.; but though it was plain her friend was constantly at their house, he had said nothing in reply, except that they moved in the best society. Now, under pretence of rebuking Mr. Lewis for putting materials for gossip about the Dean into the hands of any one, especially one like her mother, connected with the Temple family, she managed very cleverly to draw him on the subject of the Vanhomrighs. She had finished before it was broad daylight, but she could not sleep. She lay staring wide-awake, reflecting how frightfully she would look to-morrow after her unwonted vigil, and how foolish it was to think twice of this nonsense about her poor dearest fondest rogue. Yet still she thought not twice, but many times about it.

And the same dawn, creeping in at the

tall windows of the Deanery, found the large bed so carefully stuffed for the Dean with the feathers of those Laracor geese, empty and undisturbed. But as the grey light filtered through the thin curtains of the dining-parlour, and a dying candle flared up for a moment as though to meet it, there was visible the form of a man seated in the chintz-covered elbow-chair. His face was hidden, for he sat huddled up and bowed across the arm of the chair; and whether he slept, or merely lay quiescent in a dull stupor of misery, followed on some more active suffering or despair, no one could have said. But the next morning, when the neighbours hastened to pay their respects to the new Dean, the Dean was sick and would see no one, absolutely no one.

CHAPTER XI.

All the high red-cushioned pews in St. Patrick's were well occupied on the day when Dr. Swift was to be installed. It was principally harmless curiosity and love of assisting at whatever was going forward in the town that drew together this crowd of respectable people; but the curiosity of all could not be considered harmless. For Swift, whom Dublin was hereafter to deify, was at this time unpopular. The fact was accounted for partly by his secession from the Whig party which predominated there, partly by his marked individuality. It is said that some very humble and remote connections of ours all wag their tails the same way, and that if one appears who wags it in another direction, he is immediately torn to pieces by his fellows. Certainly

Swift, figuratively speaking, wagged his tail in quite the opposite way to most of his fellows. Besides, as plain Vicar of Laracor he had wrung from the Government by his personal influence a concession for the Irish Church which several of the bishops had failed to obtain. This naturally made him an object of suspicion to his superiors, nor did the lower clergy love him better.

Not only was the Cathedral full, but a group of idlers had assembled in the porch. Those who sat at the lower end of the church became aware that there was something of unusual interest passing out there. Every one seemed pressing round the large board on which parish notices usually figured ; there was a muttering, as of something being deciphered more or less slowly by various readers, and a hum of subdued talk and laughter. The crowd increased, and several gentlemen from within went to add themselves to it. A large sheet of manuscript had been pinned up to the board ; it was verse, and written in a somewhat crabbed hand, so that it could not easily be read.

But a man jumping up on a bench just below began to read fluently, in a voice more loud than decorous :

"To-day this temple gets a Dean,
Of parts and fame uncommon ;
Used both to pray and to profane,
To serve both God and Mammon.

"This place he got by wit and rhime
And many ways most odd ;
And might a bishop be in time,
Did he believe in God.

"For High-Churchmen and policy,
He swears, he prays most hearty ;
But would pray back again to be
A Dean of any party."

At about this point there was a flutter among the people at his back, who became aware that the new Dean, preceded by his vergers, had arrived unobserved, and was waiting for a passage to be made through them. The crowd shrunk back on each side as quickly as their number and the narrow space permitted, but the reader continued with some yet more scurrilous lines, though several pulled the skirts of his coat. Then

one of the vergers touched him with his mace, enjoining silence.

"Nay, nay, we'll hear the last verse," he cried impudently, and turning round repeated full in Swift's face:

> "Look down, St. Patrick, look, we pray
> On thine own church and steeple;
> Convert thy Dean on this great day,
> Or else God help the people!"

But as he ended his voice faltered, for Swift's eye caught his.

"Reach down yonder paper," said the new Dean, in a subdued but imperious tone, pointing to the notice-board.

The man slowly removed the intrusive document.

"Tear it up," said the Dean.

It was done.

"Smaller," he commanded.

The man quailed and obeyed. When it was strewn on the ground in fragments:

"Go!" thundered the Dean.

He passed on, while the reader of the lampoon, jumping hastily down, took to his heels and fled away down St. Patrick Street faster than the hunted hare.

The Dean afterwards wrote to Esther Vanhomrigh: "I thought I should have died of discontent, and was horribly melancholy while they were installing me." But this profound disgust and depression were not visible on his calm and dignified countenance as he walked up the aisle; though Mrs. Johnson, who saw him now for the first time since the evening of his arrival, was distressed to observe that it bore only too strong witness to the genuineness of the illness which had confined him to his room for some days. To her the position he was to fill was far from appearing so contemptible as it did to his London friends, and it was with a thrill of pride that she watched his stately figure pass up the aisle, and finally take possession of the official stall. Swift too, looking down on the confused crowd of faces, which he believed more definitely hostile than for the most part they were, was glad to catch sight of a certain familiar pair of velvet-brown eyes, shining there as true and kind as ever.

No sooner was the Dean installed than he began to feel again the enmity of Archbishop

King, who had already threatened to have him deprived for his delay in taking possession of his office. His predecessor, Dr. Sterne, who had been his friend, but was like most people, easily affected by the popular likes and dislikes, took no trouble to smooth his way with his subordinates; nor did he assist Swift with the pecuniary burden of the debt on the large Deanery which he had built, and which was totally unsuited to the tastes and requirements of the new Dean. Swift's Chapter made no secret of their intention to put themselves in opposition to him. Such a state of things has been successfully faced by many men, and was so later by Swift himself, but in that summer of 1713 he had no heart for it, and literally fled. Early in July he wrote to Essie from Laracor: "I staid but a fortnight in Dublin, very sick, and returned not one visit of a hundred that were made me; but all to the Dean and none to the Doctor. I am riding here for life, and I think I am somewhat better. I hate the thoughts of Dublin, and prefer a field-bed and an earthen floor before the great house

there, which they say is mine." Yes, he was very sick—sick not merely of disappointed ambition and friendship, but sick of the frustration of nobler, wider hopes. He had ideals of patriotism and incorruptibility, which though commonplace enough to a later generation, seemed Utopian to his contemporaries. When he joined the Tory party, he, the keen dissector of human nature, was deceived by his own hopes and the mouthings of a Bolingbroke, into mistaking that intriguing mountebank and his colleagues for statesmen and patriots. The awakening had been bitter; yet he had remained personally loyal to them. Even his disappointment at the unwillingness or inability of his friends to promote him in the Church was justifiable. He had slaved for them as a journalist and as an unrecognised member of the Government, and as he had declined money-gifts and all that savoured of corruption and dependence, he had received nothing for his services. His character was high, his piety was sincere, and if it was somewhat cold, why, the Christianity of the day was

everywhere aspiring to transform itself from a religion into a philosophy: so that there was no reasonable objection to giving him the sort of promotion he desired. Yet he had got nothing but exile.

All these things had been a severe strain upon his health, and first at Dublin and afterwards at Laracor he suffered from repeated attacks of his usual illness—"a bad head." At such times he would see no one, not even Ppt. But in spite of the gloom that overshadowed him, the whole cause of which was known only to himself, he made touching efforts to be cheerful in her company, and to treat her with the old tenderness. Nor did he ever rebuke her now, in the tremendous way she had been accustomed to from her childhood. She flitted between Trim and Dublin, where she superintended the practical details of his affairs. Hetty Johnson had a quick intelligence, but the very malleability of her mind, which had enabled it to take the stamp of Swift's, had made her also susceptible to the influences of the last few years, which

had been spent with companions of a very different calibre. She had never followed the course of politics, having been brought up by Swift in his less political days, and having perhaps taken too seriously his theoretical dislike to political ladies. So the harassed politician, devouring his London budgets, could not turn to her for the intelligent sympathy and discussion to which another had accustomed him. But this division, which time had made, time could have remedied and that quickly, had it not been for a deeper cause of estrangement between them. Hetty had too much penetration to be wholly deceived by his studied tenderness. If she was all to him that she had once been, he could not be so inconsolable on returning to her society, under whatever circumstances. Was Ambition her only rival? Swift was, as she well knew, more than cautious, he was secretive about his correspondence, but once on riding over unusually early from Trim to Laracor, she had found his library empty and a letter slipped from his writing-desk on to the floor.

It was a long letter in a bold hand that she had not supposed a woman's, but as she replaced it on the desk, she could not help seeing the large clear signature: *Esther Vanhomrigh, Junr.* For a moment she felt a temptation to read it—but no; if she could not have his heart she could at any rate be worthy of it. She blushed to find herself on the verge of really acting that part of the jealous woman that Swift had years ago most unjustly accused her of acting. After this she made a timid and vain attempt to extract some statement about the Vanhomrighs from him. Mr. Erasmus Lewis delayed awhile to answer her letter. The lawyer and the friend of Swift strove in his bosom with the loyal and chivalrous admirer of Mrs. Johnson. At length he wrote in a somewhat vague and unsatisfactory style, admitting that he had informed her mother of a certain report about the Dean of St. Patrick's, the truth of which he was far from vouching for, and that he personally knew the good Dean to be on terms of great intimacy with the lady mentioned, but—then followed a great many buts.

Finally he adjured Mrs. Johnson on her honour not to mention the matter to her friend. It was to be hoped that next year, when his circumstances were easier, the enviable Dean would lead a certain fair lady of Dublin to the altar, and then these foolish little scandals would be forgotten. Strange to say, Hetty felt no inclination to mention it to the Dean. She was excessively reserved and not at all impulsive, and her affection for Swift did not preclude a certain awe of him. It would have been an effort to her alike to express her feelings and to face his anger. She had long ago given him her word to leave him absolutely unannoyed by claims of hers to marriage, or to any control over his actions and associates; and her word, as he had often pleased her by observing, was inviolable. Yet for all that she did not meekly accept his conduct towards her. At best he had been guilty of deception, for while professing to take her frankly behind the scenes of his London life, he had kept secret from her an important passage in it. She read over several of his journals, and

replaced them in her desk with a bitter smile. She who was over-quick to criticise others had never before criticised her Great Man, whom she was used to honour before the world had recognised him as such. So while she said nothing, the iron was entering into her soul, and she became less and less responsive to Swift's playful or melancholy tenderness. In the state of dull melancholia into which he had fallen, it was an effort to him to show a personal interest in any human creature, and he felt naturally aggrieved when his efforts did not seem appreciated. It never occurred to him to suppose that Hetty suspected his intimacy with Esther Vanhomrigh. He would have said that to be angry and say nothing, especially on such a subject, was not within the power of a female. He did not doubt her love, but he blamed the coldness of her disposition. And sometimes alone in the evening, when his melancholy deepened with the shadows, when he roamed among his willows in a weary emptiness of thought, while the moon's silver sickle or ruddy sphere floated dim through the purple

of the summer twilight, — sometimes he seemed to hear the passionate music of a rich young voice, crying again and again, "I worship, I adore, I love you," and to feel as it were the warmth of a kiss flitting over his hand. Who else had ever loved him like that?

All this time his political friends in England were clamouring for his return. They might be a little weary of his predominance when he was there, but now he was gone they were scattered before their enemies as sheep having no shepherd. The internal quarrels of the Ministry had passed all bounds. One morning early in October, at least half-a-dozen letters arrived by the same post, adjuring him by every tie of patriotism, honour, friendship, to take ship immediately for England. Most important among them was a letter from Bolingbroke, in which he distinctly promised to break the Ministry, unless Swift returned at once to chain up the Dragon, as they called Lord Oxford.

By five o'clock that evening he was on board the old *Royal Anne*, and alive again after months of suspended animation. "The

Archbishop will burst with rage when he hears on't," he thought, and smiled grimly. Only a few more days, and he would be in the thick of the fight again, more powerful, more feared, more sought after than ever, the champion of his friends, the terror of his foes, What a change from standing on the moral pillory of Dublin, where any one was free to throw a rotten egg at him, because his position forbade retaliation! The last time he had sailed from that shore he had felt as though his heart-strings were fastened to it, to one spot on it, where a beautiful woman stood smiling bravely and waving a handkerchief; and as the ship dropped out with the tide, they had seemed to strain almost to breaking-point. Now, when he had leisure to think of her it would be with a mingled pang of remorse and injured affection; but for the moment he could only watch with feelings of unmixed joy, the twinkling lights and mountain shores of Ireland fading against the fading sunset, and delight to feel the first bound of the ship, that announced she had slipped into the Channel out of the quiet waters of the bay.

CHAPTER XII.

"*JUSTE CIEL*, madam; you'd not have me miss a chance. 'Tis so important and secret a matter I dare not entrust it to females, but if some that shall be nameless enjoy their own again, some of us may be the better for't, if we have wit to know in time which side our bread's buttered. And you'd keep me in England on so poor a pretext as that I must dance at a ball! Enfeeble me, madam! I am surprised at your *bêtise!*"

"Pray now, my dear son, be not unkind to your poor mamma," pleaded Mrs. Vanhomrigh. "If 'twere only a ball like another 'twould be of no consequence, but I would not for the world that Molly should miss it."

Mrs. Vanhomrigh, who looked very worn and ill, was drinking her chocolate in bed. It was not early, but it was early for Ginckel

to have made his appearance, especially as instead of the brocaded night-gown and cap that commonly formed his attire on first rising, he wore a riding-dress. He shrugged his shoulders.

"*Mon Dieu!* mamma, why should she? You must go yourself. 'Twould be very *peu convenable* for my sisters to be seen in public places without you."

"There's some sense in that, Ginckel," observed Essie, coming in from her mother's dressing-room. "But I beg you will not persuade our mamma to go, for I believe I have just persuaded her to the contrary. I shall think it no loss if we all stay at home."

"I'll wager you won't, miss," replied Ginckel, studying the back of his coat by the aid of his mother's hand-mirror. "You'd be damnably vexed to see your sister get a fine husband, while you can't catch so much as a parson. But I'll allow you the excuse that our mamma hath very little wit in the matter of marrying her daughters. *You* are past praying for, but I have hopes of Moll, who hath a little more confidence in a brother

that knows the world and is willing to serve her, if you women do not hinder him too much with your vapours and your strivings."

"I will go, my dear son, indeed I will!" cried Madam Van, and added nervously—"But remember, 'tis Moll's twenty-first birthday in six weeks, and you must be back here to see to her business."

"Mr. Lewis and Mr. Barber protest I am an excellent lawyer, mamma," said Essie, "so if Ginckel will give me the power, I can manage that matter for him. I hope, however, when he gets to France he will continue to keep out of prison, for he put you in a sad fright last time. And as to money, Ginckel, I tell you plainly you shall not have so much as a brass token if I can hinder you. You would have brought our poor mamma to a sponging-house long ago, if she had only her own fortune to depend on."

Ginckel had changed colour for some reason, while Mrs. Vanhomrigh was speaking, but made some appropriate repartee to Essie, and then recovering himself entered into a lengthy discourse on his adventures in Paris

last year, from which it appeared that the tradesman at whose suit he had been imprisoned would not have ventured on such an audacious course, had he not been instigated to it by a certain person of very great quality, who had the *mauvais goût* to be jealous of his lady. But as the Colonel had now made up his mind to pay his addresses seriously to a young and wealthy widow, his Highness need no longer be under any apprehension. So kissing his fingers to his mother and sister, and promising that should they fail in securing a good match for Molly in London, he would marry her in France when his own affairs were concluded, he set out for Dover.

But though Madam Van's dress came home punctually—a dove-coloured and red silk, the petticoat branched with large trees, very fine—and she could not deny herself the pleasure of trying it on, she did not go to the ball. She was so ill that she was obliged to notice the fact, though hitherto her enjoying temperament and power of overlooking all the disagreeables of life, had

enabled her to conceal from herself and others the rapid progress of what was in fact a mortal malady, though she did not know it. For she and her daughters were agreed in a well-founded distrust of doctors, and called none in to administer their miscellaneous rubbish that did duty as medicine, and to ply the fatal lancet, that was answerable for more deaths in that generation than the sword of the *Grand Monarque*. Now it happened that young Mrs. Harris was also invited to the great ball, to which Ginckel had got his mother and sisters invitations. This was an unprecedented event for her, and arose from the fact that Mr. Peter Ponsonby's step-mother, who gave it, was a City heiress connected with the Harris family. Molly then could go with her; an arrangement that Esther objected to in vain and just to satisfy her conscience, as she objected to everything that threw her sister with the Mordaunt set. But she had nothing definite to allege against them except her own dislike, as Molly could truthfully say when they discussed the matter; which

was as seldom as possible because it hurt them both too much when they fell into a dispute. The Mordaunt set consisted chiefly of youths of fashion, who had begun their career as such at sixteen; which they could easily do, because it was a career in which not one manly thought or feeling or even accomplishment, except fencing, was required of them. Such gregarious creatures, each incapable of occupying or amusing himself, readily collected round any woman who, like Molly, had been elevated to the rank of a toast. And in this case besides the gratification it afforded their juvenile vanity to be seen with ladies of fashion, as the Vanhomrighs had somehow come to be considered, Madam Van and Molly's lively talk was of a kind that attracted and amused all sorts and conditions of men. But discernment is not the gift of youth, and very young people, whether they inhabit the poet's Dreamland or the worldliest of worlds, are equally subject to illusions. The illusions differ in their nature according to temperament and surroundings, and the beautiful

ones have happily as a rule more relation to the important truths of life than the ugly and cynical ones. The particular illusion of the Mordaunt set consisted in a belief that society divided itself into persons like themselves and grave severe folks with claims to be considered more virtuous, which claims need not, however, be always admitted, because no one could frequent the theatre of the day without learning that virtue is usually but a hypocritical affectation. The grave religious man of the comedy was sure to turn out a greater villain than the dissipated hero, only not so successful. So these young gentlemen, while they paid Miss Vanhomrigh, who treated them with frank contempt, the tribute of a respectful dislike, were not so respectful in their liking for her mother and younger sister. That women should be gay, pleasure-loving, fond of fine clothes and fine names, foolishly frolicsome and tolerant, all that and more, and yet as pure and kind and in their way as simple as sisters of charity ; that between such women as the two Vanhomrighs and themselves, in

spite of some superficial likeness, there was a great gulf fixed of feeling and belief and all fundamental things,—this the Mordaunt set could not be expected to understand, any more than Molly and Mrs. Vanhomrigh could understand the situation from their point of view. Madam Van had preserved through all her experiences, and they had not been few, the mind as well as the heart of a child. Even Esther, although she vaguely distrusted her brother's companions, could never have believed that the young men who about six o'clock adjourned noisily from her mother's too hospitable table to White's or the Fountain tavern, there out of mere exhilaration, were wont to cast very serious imputations on the character of their hostess and her younger daughter. But it is certain that while Mrs. Vanhomrigh was whispering to her friends that Lord Mordaunt would marry her Molly to-morrow were it not for his fear of the Earl of Peterborough, which would probably not restrain him long now he had come to his majority; while she was both saying and believing this,

a less flattering piece of gossip about the fair Vanhomrigh had somehow found its way into society.

Meantime Esther had only too many opportunities for comparing her Dean favourably with the rest of mankind, as represented by the youth of fashion. She had never been like another Esther, blind to all his faults, but she justly conceived that even in these his nature showed itself composed of superior elements to theirs. Intellectually he of course played the part of Gulliver among the Lilliputians, only he was more outspokenly satirical than his hero. The idea of *Gulliver's Travels* had long been present with him, and at Laracor he had begun to write the work. When he had returned to London in October, political exigencies had interrupted it, and he used to say that only himself and Esther and Pope and Gay would ever make the acquaintance of the much-travelled Captain and his friends. To Swift and Esther the personages and circumstances of *Gulliver* became so familiar a part of their lives, that

they seemed to have almost a joint property in it. From which it may be inferred that any resolutions the Dean may have formed in Ireland on the subject of Miss Essie, had been reconsidered in London; a result for which his belief in his own theories of life was as much to blame as some natural and amiable weaknesses of character. Did he throw her off entirely, he had grounds for thinking it possible she might fall a victim to the snares of certain hungry fortune-hunters, who had become very assiduous since Cousin Purvis had declared her intentions. For Esther had been spending the summer and part of the autumn at Twittenham with Cousin Purvis, who was so pleased with her good nursing and kind ways, that she had at last made a will, and had therein constituted Esther Vanhomrigh Junior her principal legatee. And of this the old lady had made no secret, for she thought if it were known her favourite might make the better match for it.

On first returning to London Swift had taken a lodging at a distance from St. James'

Street, but it was uncomfortable, and the old one was empty, so he went back there. At this time Esther was still away at Twittenham, and he wrote with a certain sense of virtue, to tell Ppt. that he was dining every three days with neighbour Van, whose eldest daughter was away from home. He did not add that he missed the said eldest daughter very much, especially as the first flush of triumph at returning to political life had passed off, and before long he had found himself in the situation of some powerful spirit men conjure up to mock by the imposition of impossible tasks. Weaving ropes of sand would have been a profitable industry compared to the attempt to weld together a party disintegrated by petty feuds and ambitions, as well as by inevitable circumstances; for the Queen could not live much longer, and after her death there would be no place for a Tory party as it then existed. The Tories must either resign themselves to the absolute triumph of the Whigs on the accession of George of Hanover, or they must turn Jacobites.

There was no longer any room for a convenient, if illogical, compromise between rival theories of Monarchy. In after years some people liked to say that Swift had never been in the confidence of the Ministry which he professed to manage; and it was true that Bolingbroke and others had at this time relations with the Stuarts at St. Germains which they dared not disclose to him. He had no knowledge of their vacillating intrigues, but he saw well enough that something was being concealed from him.

Esther allowed herself to be detained by Mrs. Purvis, because in spite of her restless longing to go back to London, she was also afraid to go; not so much reasonably afraid of her own feelings as unreasonably afraid of their object. All those quiet summer days and nights at Twittenham she had been feeding her passion with dreams, and she had still sense enough to know that the reality would not resemble them. She feared that she could not meet her divinity without in some way manifesting her adoration, nor support without sickening anguish some

awful look or bitter jest of his. But one golden day, late in October, the dreams and the fears alike came to an end at the touch of reality. It was literally a golden day, for there had been no wind to strip the trees of their leaves, and the single trees of garden and hedgerow and the sloping woods over the Thames, were all burning from summit to base in different shades of gold. The big chestnut in Mrs. Purvis' garden that stretched its arms into the river, threw golden reflections deep down into the water, and yet had prodigally carpeted the paths with gold. The Michaelmas daisies and even the marigolds and bushy fuchsias were still bright in the borders, and the noonday sunshine made the sheltered garden almost hot, as Essie walked there with her mother and Molly and the Dean of St. Patrick's. Soon after she returned to London.

Volumes of analysis would scarcely suffice to set forth what is yet one of the world's commonest common-places; namely the process by which upright and intelligent people can by imperceptible degrees slide

into positions which any one but themselves can see to be morally, and it may be practically, untenable. If the relations between Esther and Swift were extraordinary, there was nothing extraordinary in the process by which they arrived at them. The intimacy to which they were accustomed, the right to her absolute confidence that Swift as Mentor had early assumed to himself, soon made it appear natural to both that he should know her secret, although it related to himself. Her passionate adoring love seemed to be crystallised, to have gained a greater strength and definiteness, from having been permitted expression, and though at this time never again directly expressed, it coloured their whole intercourse,—it not merely filled, but was, her life. It must have been a strange and thrilling thing for a sensitive, imaginative man, and one arrived at an age when he might be supposed to be beyond the reach of new emotional experiences, to be suddenly as it were enveloped in the warm atmosphere of a love, the like of which he had never received or experienced, and

that at a time when all the world about him seemed especially cold and unsatisfactory. He himself had sighed for Miss Waring in youthful folly, and had known the tender and the jealous agitation of a lover in his long attachment to Hetty Johnson. Hetty on her side had always loved him with a calm and deep affection in accordance with her own character and the education he had given her; but neither of the pair had been capable of such passion, such complete devotion as Esther Vanhomrigh's. Swift was at bottom very faithful in his friendships even to women, but he was superficially capricious and easily chilled and offended by any one. Ppt. it must be confessed had been cold, even sarcastic to him of late; a fact which did not help him to resist the magnetism of this wonderful, incomprehensible passion, that sometimes drew him into its warm folds, sometimes vexed and repelled him, but was never long absent from his thoughts. There was a fascination too, a sense of power in ruling so strong a nature, that itself delighted to rule. Hetty's

submission to him, a thing much older than her womanhood, was too complete and too much a matter of course to affect him in the same way. Then there was the sympathy and quick understanding he found with Essie during the last desperate struggles of the Tory party in the year 1713–14; and the flattery to his vanity—that vanity which his pride could conceal but not destroy—when he heard Esther and her fortune flattered. All these things helped him to drop easily into a position which was like, but not the same as the old friendly intimacy. He continued to say before her how he laughed at men who fell in love and pitied men who married, and further relieved his conscience by reflecting that time and circumstance must inevitably destroy Essie's absurd passion for himself. Meantime why make two innocent people superfluously unhappy and uncomfortable?

Thus had matters progressed—for such matters can only apparently stand still—through the autumn and winter. Now it was May, and after a stormy interview with

the two leaders of the Ministry, Lord Oxford and Lord Bolingbroke, who every day hated each other worse, he called at the Vanhomrighs' on his way home. The excitement of the fray was still in his blood, and he would have liked to act the interview all over again to Essie, and get her either to confirm his wavering intention to shake the dust of London off his feet, or to lend him good reasons for staying. To his disappointment, he found she had been called away to Twittenham by the sudden illness of Mrs. Purvis. After a few pre-occupied words with Madam Van and Molly, he went slowly home and sat down to read. He held a book in his hand—his favourite *History of the Civil Wars* —but he did not read more than a paragraph, and in his rambling thoughts it was not Oxford and Bolingbroke that most persistently held a place. He was not long left to his meditations, for presently Mr. Erasmus Lewis climbed his two pair of stairs, full of concern at the hopeless position of political affairs. Mr. Lewis was the safest of confidants, and Swift found some relief in telling

him all that had passed between the two Ministers and himself, though on their side it had been nothing but violent recriminations, while he, after vain attempts at reconciliation and a few angry sarcasms, had, as he said, bitten up paper and tugged at his wig for the rest of the two full hours.

"And pray, Dean, is this true that's about the town, that you'll be married before you go home to Dublin?" asked Mr. Lewis, with an indifference that was only assumed; for at the bottom of his legal soul there blossomed some strange, incongruous little flowers of chivalry and kind feeling.

The Dean started.

"A plague upon their nasty tattle!" he cried. "Who told you so, Lewis?"

"O, half-a-dozen persons."

"Half-a-dozen liars!" and Swift began to bite a letter he held in his hand.

"Then 'tis false, Dean?"

"False as hell or the *Review*."

"I'm glad on't," replied Mr. Lewis shortly. "But if I had heard you was to be married in Dublin—faith now, I should wish 'twas true."

"Married!" sniffed the Dean. "Lord love thee, man! Art gotten an old woman, with thy head full of weddings and funerals? You'll see me buried, I warrant, but married —h'm."

"Have you had good news of Mrs. Johnson lately?" asked Mr. Lewis. "She was but sadly three weeks since."

Swift changed colour.

"Who told you so?" he asked.

"Her sister; I met her at Lady Giffard's Tuesday se'n-night."

"I knew nothing on't," returned Swift. "Pray Heaven she may be better! Poor, poor—Mrs. Johnson!"

Mr. Lewis having said his say, took leave. But his visit had thrown a gleam of daylight from without on Swift's position. Such a gleam would be lost on some, but on him it was not. His mind, half conventional, half casuistic, might deny it, but his heart owned the paramount claim of Ppt. upon his life. Now for these many months her image had been little, ever less and less, with him. She had been suffering, and he had not even

known it! In deep remorse he penned her a letter full of tenderness and commiseration. He thanked Heaven there was no chance of her hearing this report about his marriage; but it made an added reason for his retirement from London, and, in spite of the remonstrances of his political and private friends, he left it suddenly towards the end of May. He betook himself to a country village—a little solitary place, hidden in a wooded fold of the Berkshire downs. Before leaving town he sent one of his brief notes, so guarded they make the reader ask his reason for such caution, to Esther at Twittenham; but she had left before it arrived, Cousin Purvis being out of danger from her stroke, though still hardly in her senses, and Mrs. Vanhomrigh unwell.

CHAPTER XIII.

When Molly was waiting for her chair to go to the ball, she remarked that Essie looked pale, which was only natural, seeing she had already had a week of severe sick-nursing at Twittenham. Essie, like many people before and since the generation that regarded weakliness as a charm, was somewhat conceited on the score of her good health. She flatly denied being pale, and taking out her own Turkish shawl, that her godfather had brought her from Adrianople, she wrapped it about her sister's white rounded throat and bosom, cautiously, so as not to crumple the laces and ribbons.

"Take care of your own health, miss," she said, "and leave mine to take care of itself. It can do very well, I dare assure you." And while she stood there wrapping Molly up, it

struck her that she had never seen her sister look so pretty as to-night. It gave her pleasure to see that, but also it filled her with a vague unreasonable anxiety.

"Pray now be good, Moll," she said, "and not a madcap, and be not too hugely diverted, nor come back with a great cold, but be good."

"I will answer thee, Hess, 'sad face and true maid,'" replied Molly, with her little smile that had in it a touch of satiric humour. "Know then, Governor Huff, I shall divert myself to the top of my bent this day, next day, and some two thousand days after, and be as mad as a colt in clover, and all this out of pure kindness to a certain sobersided Mrs. Moll you shall one day make acquaintance with, that she may know the world's a snare and live discreetly."

The chairman's knock resounded through the house, and tapping her elder sister delicately on the nose with her fan, Miss Molly tripped downstairs.

Esther was already undressed, and when she had settled her mother for the night, she

threw herself into her bed with a sigh of contentment and fell fast asleep. She slept sound, for she was young and healthy, and it was many nights since she had had her natural rest. She must have slept for several hours when she became aware of some one talking in the adjoining room, the partition-wall of which was thin. She lay still for a little between sleeping and waking, hearing the voice but attaching no ideas to it, till suddenly she realised that this querulous moaning voice was her mother's, and that it came from Ginckel's room which should have been empty. In a moment she was out of bed and in the passage, with only her thin night-rail and bare feet. The door of Ginckel's room was open, and the moonlight was shining in at the uncurtained window as bright as day. To her surprise she saw that Mrs. Vanhomrigh was dressed in her new ball-dress, and had a lace commode on her head and a diamond necklace not fastened, but hanging loose among the trimmings of her bodice. She was pulling her son's numerous clothes out of the drawers and

closets, and rummaging in the pockets, talking to herself all the time like a person who is very much worried about something. When she had finished searching each garment she threw it from her blindly, and the fine silks and satins and gold and silver brocade of Ginckel's wardrobe lay tossed about on the floor, glittering in the moonlight. Essie came softly and took hold of her mother to lead her back to bed, concluding her to be walking in her sleep, though her eyes were open.

"Yes," said Mrs. Vanhomrigh, answering the touch, "I'm coming. But what is the use without the paper?"

"It is of no consequence, mamma," returned Esther.

"But it is, it is, I tell you," replied Mrs. Vanhomrigh, with a pettish sob. "They cannot be married without it. There is six months' notice required, and then the clerks will do nothing without the paper. Oh dear! oh dear! Whatever shall we do?"

And she went on lamenting incoherently to herself, beginning words and not finishing

them. Esther again tried to draw her away, but in vain.

"I will find it, mamma," she said, "if you will tell me what it is."

Mrs. Vanhomrigh sat down on the end of the dismantled bed; her eyes had lost their fixed stare, and glittered feverishly. She looked ghastly ill and aged as she sat there in the moonlight in her ball-dress, shaking her head with a smile half-sprightly half-knowing.

"Tell Essie!" she said, as though to herself. "No, no, that would never do; Essie must not know a word about it. How surprised she will be, to be sure! Essie, salute her ladyship——" and she began to laugh, swaying herself about and exclaiming in her amusement as incoherently as she had lamented. It came on Essie with a shock that her mother was not merely sleep-walking, but delirious; and also that there was some secret, probably an unpleasant one, on her mind. Her first impulse was to fetch old Ann, but she reflected that she was no longer a child to run to her nurse in every

difficulty, and that if any disclosures were to be made, it was as well she should be alone to hear them. No longer afraid of awaking her mother, she put her strong arm round Mrs. Vanhomrigh and spoke authoritatively to her. Mrs. Vanhomrigh yielded, and went down to her own bedroom in silence. But when her daughter began trying to take off her dress, which in spite of its elaborateness she had laced and arranged without any mistake, it seemed to suggest to her again the idea of making her toilette. She flew to seat herself before her pretty heart-shaped mirror, and called hurriedly for more lights.

"My necklace!" she cried, putting her hand to her throat, "I'll not go without it. Lady Peterbrow herself will not have such stones, and Moll will be glad to show the fine jew'ls are not all on one side of the house. Make haste—my patch-box, you slut—the rouge! Sure I look frightfully. Ah, well—once I was the gayest, handsomest young miss in Dublin, and sighing won't bring it back. But the paper—don't

let them go to church without that cursed paper."

Esther was cutting the lace of her smart be-ribboned stays, and undressing her again as quickly as possible. Then with an effort she lifted her mother's wasted form—how terribly light she had grown!—laid her in bed and stood by to see that she did not again rise. Esther remained half standing, half leaning on the bed, for more than an hour, during which her mother rambled intermittently in a manner that doubly alarmed her, both because it showed Mrs. Vanhomrigh to be more seriously ill than she had thought, and also because of the mysterious trouble to which she alluded in her wanderings. The names of Lord Mordaunt and Molly, mingled with confused talk about Ginckel and papers and money, were perpetually recurring. But Mrs. Vanhomrigh's wanderings became more and more intermittent, and by the time it grew light she was sleeping. Esther called old Ann and went herself, not to sleep, but to dress. The vague anxiety with which she had seen

Molly go out had returned upon her more strongly than ever, and she wondered why her sister did not return. The moonlight night had turned into a grey morning, and it was chill with the chill of dawn ; but when she was dressed she opened one of the front-parlour windows, and leaned out into the little iron balcony. St. James' Street was at the centre of the fashionable world, and the traffic had not yet ceased in it. A group of sedan-chairs came down it just as she looked out, but some turned off towards St. James' Square and the rest in other directions. When the street was quite empty except for a few belated foot-passengers, a chaise came round the corner of Piccadilly. Esther had good eyes and she recognised the liveries, the horse and the vehicle itself at once. There were two servants on the box-seat, and one of them had a shawl thrown carelessly round his neck over his livery, presumably to protect him from the morning air. Esther observed that it was extremely like her own, the like of which she had never seen in all London. The coachman,

half asleep or intoxicated, was driving carelessly, and just as the equipage passed the Vanhomrighs' house the horse stumbled badly, bringing his knees within a hair's-breadth of the stones, but recovering himself. The footman with the shawl threw it off on the top of the chaise and jumped down to see if the animal had scraped his knees. Esther looked straight down on the shawl and saw it to be not only identical in colour and pattern with her own, but to have the identical large brown stain at one corner which hers had always had, and which Ann had often tried vainly to remove. The sight of the shawl her sister had been wearing on Lord Mordaunt's chaise gave her a shock; by an irresistible impulse she rushed down to the front door to see who was in the carriage, but by the time she had unbolted and opened it, the equipage was rattling down the street and away in the direction of Chelsea. She went upstairs to her sister's room, locked the door and took away the key. All was quiet in the street below. There was nothing more to be done

at present, but wandering about the house like an unquiet spirit, she met Ann just outside her mother's door, and she could not help saying :—

"Ann, Miss Molly has not come home yet."

Her haggard eyes met Ann's as she spoke, and the old woman turned a shade more ash-coloured than she already was looking, less at the speech than at the manner of it.

"Lord love us, Miss Essie!" she cried, and then after a pause : "Maybe she went back along of Mrs. Harris."

"Why should she?" returned Esther, with the impatience of a person in pain. "Mrs. Harris is lodging in Park Place—'tis scarce three minutes' walk from here."

"Let me run and see, Miss Essie," said Ann.

Esther shook her head.

"I would not have them know she is not returned. I will go round myself as soon as I can decently rouse them, on pretence of asking my cousin to direct me to a good physician for the Mistress."

"May the Lord heal and preserve her!" replied the old woman solemnly. "I'll go pray. 'Tis all I can do, and it seems little use; and yet I warrant 'tis more use than a shop-full of pothecary's stuff."

So Esther roused her cousin, insisting on a personal interview with her at an unreasonable early hour. Mrs. Harris came in yawning in a bed-gown, and heard how her aunt had been taken ill in the night, and how, much as Mrs. Vanhomrigh disliked doctors, one must certainly be called. And all the time Essie's anxious eyes were fixed on her cousin, in hopes that she would begin to explain that Molly was under her roof. Something indeed she said about Molly presently.

"Sure then, 'tis all the more reason Cousin Moll had better have left the ball in my company last night, and as a married woman, my dear, I must needs inform ye I thought it vastly strange conduct her letting this young Lord Mordaunt drive her home in his chay."

"Did she so?" asked Essie, with trem-

bling lips. "I—I—have scarce had time to enquire. She is sleeping very sound; she will not wake before noon, or after. 'Twas an indiscretion; but you must understand a message reached her, and she thought to get home the faster. Pray accept my excuses, Cousin Harris, and my thanks, and—good-bye."

When Essie left her cousin's lodgings, she turned at once and walked in the direction of Bury Street. She was only a girl of three-and-twenty, and the anxiety and responsibility of the situation seemed more than she could bear alone. Meanwhile a note which had been sent to Twittenham was finding its way in the postman's bag to St. James' Street, to tell her Swift was gone. At the moment when she stood on the threshold of his lodgings, he was riding slowly out of the Angel Inn at Oxford on the last stage of his Berkshire journey. The news of his departure was a great blow; she had not indeed time or attention to spare for herself in the character of the forsaken lover, but she felt that this desertion threw her

back entirely on her own resources in a situation so critical for others.

With a sensation of vague anger against Swift and the whole world, she turned away from his abandoned lodgings — an anger that was unreasonable enough, but served the useful purpose of bracing her to meet her difficulties. Mrs. Vanhomrigh was still asleep when she got home again, and she could think of nothing better to do than to go up to Molly's room and ransack it for anything that might throw some light on her relations with Lord Mordaunt, or the money matters which in Mrs. Vanhomrigh's wandering talk had been connected with these. She found a sheaf of notes from Mordaunt, remarkable only for a certain disagreeable self-confidence, and for being better written and spelt than the *billets-doux* of most of Molly's fashionable admirers. She glanced through them, and through a packet of borrowed verses in various hands, and variously inscribed, *To Chlöe, To Clarinda, To Phillida;* but none of them showed signs of coming from Mordaunt. Indeed

they had all been laughed over in the family circle before now, when they had arrived by the threepenny post, or been slipped into Molly's muff. Baffled here, she next marched into Ginckel's room, with the determination that nothing there should be sacred from her search. The wardrobe had been turned out the night before. There was, however, a small standing desk in the room with an upright cupboard on the top; the cupboard was open and had papers in it; bills, recipes for cosmetics, and *billets-doux* in feminine hands, even worse spelt than those in Molly's desk, were mixed in careless confusion. The desk part was locked, and the same key did not fit it, nor did any on her own bunch. There then, if anywhere, must be something of importance. She pulled at the lid and shook it with all her might, but in vain, and, furious with rage at the strength of the lock and her own incapacity, looked round for some instrument wherewith to force it. One or two rapiers hung on the wall, and among them a short sword. At a bound she was on the table above which

it hung, had snatched it from the wall, and, leaping down again, was at the desk once more. For a minute or two the tight-fitting lid refused to admit the blade, but at length the point got a grip of it. She thrust the sword in and out on the other side with the energy of rage, and, bringing her strength to bear on the blade, endeavoured to turn it. For a moment the blade bent, and then, with a crackling sound and a splintering of wood, the desk flew open, disclosing its hoard of documents, and, throwing the sword down clanging on to the boards, she hastily turned over the papers. Almost on the top lay a folded one, sealed with the Mordaunt arms. She opened it, and read in Ginckel's handwriting :—

"*I, Ginckel Vanhomrigh, Colonel in Her Majesty's service, do hereby promise to pay Thomas Mordaunt, Viscount Mordaunt, four thousand pounds, to be paid one thousand at a time on each quarter-day from this present date, September the 8th, 1712; and I also promise to ask no interest for the said money, on the conditions agreed to by the said Thomas Mordaunt.*"

This appeared to be only a copy of some document, but within was another paper, signed, sealed, and formally witnessed. It ran thus:—

"*I, Thomas Lord Mordaunt, promise to repay the said four thousand pounds within three months of my coming of age, or, in the event of my not doing so, to marry Miss Mary Vanhomrigh, sister of the above Ginckel Vanhomrigh, within the same time.*"

Esther stared at the strange document for a few minutes, the line on her forehead deepening as she stared; then with a cry of anger and disgust she threw the paper from her, and it fluttered to the ground by the side of the sword.

Had Ginckel paid the money, and if so where had he got it? The first question was soon answered, for Lord Mordaunt's receipts were there, and the answer to the other Esther guessed only too easily, before the letters lying before her had made it clear. It was more difficult to say why Ginckel had kept these letters. It may have been to remind himself of certain details concerning

the family funds which they incidentally noted; it may have been merely for the same mysterious no-reason that often induces people to keep incriminating correspondence. He had for some years been sole trustee of his youngest sister's property, his brother who had shared the trust with him having died abroad. It was invested in the business of the flourishing mercantile house to which his father and brother had belonged. From that business nothing could be withdrawn at less than three months' notice, and it was so arranged that one-third only of the capital could be withdrawn at any one time, an interval of six months having to elapse between the withdrawal of each portion. The whole sum amounted to six thousand pounds; a much more considerable fortune then than it would be now, especially at the high rate of interest it was earning. How Ginckel had raised the thousand pounds immediately required on September 29, 1712, Esther did not understand, but about Christmas, 1712, he had, after due notice given, withdrawn two thousand of Molly's capital.

In the end of June, 1713, he had been detained in a French prison, and had been obliged to empower his mother to receive and pay the remaining sum due, not indeed informing her of the precise terms of the bargain, but persuading her that by laying Lord Mordaunt under this obligation, she was greatly facilitating that match of Molly's she had so much at heart. With Mrs. Vanhomrigh to desire a thing very much meant to consider it as good as obtained, and so she had long regarded Mordaunt as virtually her son in-law. Consequently she had at the time felt little scruple in obeying her son's behest, though she had sufficient delicacy not to tell Molly about it. Esther she was of course forbidden to tell. But as the months went on, and Mordaunt came of age, and yet even to her sanguine eyes, appeared not in a "coming-on disposition," she became very uneasy. She had never kept a secret before, and never before in all her gay thoughtless life done anything really wrong. Now she was conscious that she had helped her young son to rob her younger

daughter, and though it had been done by both entirely in Molly's interest, the anxiety she suffered lest the money thus taken should be gone without return, had done much to hasten the progress of her malady.

The details of the business were of course not all to be found in the letters which Esther looked through, but there was quite enough to give her a pretty clear idea of what had occurred. She saw Ginckel, ever the most foolish and futile of schemers, baiting the hook, her mother standing by, impetuous, prompt as usual to share his self-complacent view of himself and his projects; saw only too clearly the shrewd young object of their attention making the most out of their fatuity, with many a private or, worse still, public sneer at it. "Good God," she thought, "he has the right to despise us." And if Mordaunt could become more hateful to her than he was before, he became so.

She closed the desk again, but it was so damaged that, had she wished, she could not have concealed her raid upon it. She looked

at it with a bitter smile, and pressing down an ugly splinter with her finger—

"He will protest 'twas most dishonourable conduct," she said to herself. "Female treachery—that is what he will call it," and she laughed aloud. It was a strange brief burst of laughter that startled herself, and made her jump up from the chair by the desk, and turn to flee from the room.

The sword still lying on the floor caught her eye. She took it up, and feverishly handling the blade, "O that I were a man!" she thought; "I would kill him, kill him without mercy." Then she threw it away from her again, for it was only by feminine weapons that she could hope to make her way into Peterborough House. She dressed herself very carefully in a new blue damask dress, and her best lace Steinkirk; tried on a Leghorn hat, and discarded it in favour of a hood which was more stylish and becoming. All this, not with the pleasure of a girl adorning herself, but with the stern care of a duellist preparing his weapons. The fatigue she had felt the

evening before had entirely disappeared in the excitement of the succeeding hours; she was pale indeed, but not haggard, as a person of less perfectly robust *physique* must have been after such a vigil, and the look of defiant determination that she wore became her face more than the soft bloom it had lost.

As she came downstairs she saw a fat man with a colossal peruke and a big cane standing on the lower landing to get his breath. It was the doctor come to see Mrs. Vanhomrigh, and she must stay her impetuous course, which seemed about to take her at one bound across St. James' Park to Peterborough House, in order to answer and ask questions. Mrs. Vanhomrigh had slept, and was much better for the time. The doctor's practised eye saw on her face the look of one mortally stricken, but the science of the day did not enable him to name her malady and pronounce her doom. He talked a long time to conceal his helplessness, prescribed nauseous physic, and went. Mrs. Vanhomrigh called Esther back as the two left the

room. Her indomitable spirits had risen again, in spite of illness and anxiety.

"My love," she said, "I'm surprised at your impudence in bringing that creature to see me. When I'm inside a hearse, you may put him outside of it for an ornament, if he's to your taste, but I swear he shall not come near me again while I live."

"O, mamma, do try his physic before you are so determined against him."

"Faith, I'll try it. There's poor old puppy sadly wants putting out of his misery, but I knew not how to accomplish his end; this physic comes most fortunately. But tell me now, Hess, how did Molly divert herself last evening?"

"I cannot tell, mamma. She is not awake."

"The lazy hussy! I warrant then things went well, if she slumbers so soundly. She has pleasant dreams, no doubt. What will you wager me, miss, that all is not settled between her and Mordaunt? Now, never look cross for it—I believe that match is made in Heaven, and will be, and a prettier

young couple you'll not find in all England and Ireland too."

"Pray, mamma, sup up this; 'tis good chicken broth, such as I know you love."

"It has an ill taste to-day, my dear, and I will none of it. I am all impatience to see Moll; send her to me as soon as she wakes."

"Mamma, I entreat you to keep quiet and not agitate yourself. Old Ann shall come to you, for I am forced to go out on business."

The word startled Mrs. Vanhomrigh.

"What business?" she asked sharply.

"Mr. Lewis has heard of a tenant for the house at Cellbridge," returned Esther, prevaricating with unusual glibness.

Her mother turned uneasily on her pillow.

"Ah!" she moaned, halt to herself; "I wish Ginckel had not gone away."

"So do I, mamma," replied Esther significantly; and leaving the patient in charge of Ann, she called a hackney-coach and drove off in the direction of Peterborough House, more calmly and despondently than she would have done had she started an hour

earlier in the first flush of her wrath. When she caught sight of its high surrounding walls, she could not but think how she and Molly and Swift had passed and commented on them merrily more than once, when they used to "hobble," as he called it, to Chelsea and back that summer he had lodged there, and had been ill and wanted a great deal of nursing and cheering. But it was a passing thought, for the iron gates opened and the business of the moment again absorbed her.

CHAPTER XIV.

Lord Peterborough, though an early riser, was not yet fully dressed. He sat over his dish of chocolate in his velvet bed-gown and night-cap, relaxing his mind with a new Comedy. He was in particularly good spirits, as he had just received a letter informing him that Her Majesty was better again, and if only she would last through the summer, he believed he and Bolingbroke and the rest of them would certainly be able to bring in James III. Not that he cared a pin about the Stuarts and Divine Right, but he did care whether his own party or the opposite one finally triumphed. His money matters too were more flourishing than usual, in spite of Lady Peterborough having insisted on the payment of a long out-standing debt to her, in order that she might save her son from the

consequences of his own folly and extravagance. So being in no particular dread of duns, he considered the matter when Adriano, his Italian valet, told him there was a lady below demanding a private audience.

"Is she young, Adriano, very young?" he asked in Italian. "Thou know'st my taste; I would have no woman but the Queen live past five-and-twenty. Is she young and tolerably pretty?"

"*Già*, Excellence, the lady is young and beautiful. But most beautiful!" And Adriano, who was a fresh importation, fell into an attitude of rapture.

Peterborough looked at him doubtfully.

"The dog takes every carroty miss for a beauty," he muttered, finishing his chocolate and meditatively folding up a fine fringed napkin.

"Well, Adriano," he resumed at last, "thou canst show her across the vestibule into the Venetian parlour. In that way I shall see enough of her to decide the matter."

So as Esther paused in the middle of the large marble-paved entrance hall, while

Adriano was tying his shoe-ribbon, her keen young eyes caught sight of a small elderly face peering from behind the balusters, surmounted by a velvet night-cap. She smiled ironically to herself, recognising it as Lord Peterborough's and guessing his object.

Twenty minutes after, when she was ushered upstairs, he looked as she had seen him do in the Mall and at Assemblies; an alert upright little figure well dressed in brown and buff, with a pair of blue eyes still lively and piercing, and a once-handsome face, whose wrinkles were half concealed by touches of paint and the shadow of a flowing flaxen peruke. He bowed with his jewelled hand on his heart as she came in, and she returned the bow with as fine a curtsey as ever he saw in his life. Adriano discreetly retired.

"This is indeed an unexpected happiness, madam," he said, handing her to a chair. "The stars indeed smile upon me this morning."

She was evidently a lady, well-bred, well-dressed, young and handsome too. Was she

a petitioner for his interest with some Minister for a place, a fair Jacobite, or—pleasing thought — a romantic miss, enamoured of his reputation?

"My Lord," she replied, "my name and person cannot be known to you as yours are to me, although we have acquaintance in common." An instinctive, unreasoning pride made her avoid using the name of Swift, with whom Lord Peterborough was intimate. "I must then present myself to your Lordship—Mrs. Esther Vanhomrigh, Junior."

She spoke calmly and with dignity, but Peterborough's quick eye noted the nervous quiver of her lip and the knitting of her brow, and he hastily concluded himself to be what the French call in good fortune. He bowed again, looked at her critically, and saw one or two quite remarkably fine points about her.

"Vanhomrigh," he repeated, smiling, and thinking of her appearance more than of what he said. "Now where have I heard that name? Believe me, madam, had I ever set eyes on you, I could not have

forgotten the least circumstance that concerned you."

"I trust that is encouraging enough," he thought; "Gad, I shall be in love in five minutes more by the clock."

"My Lord," she said, after a pause, "my business is of a nature so serious to me, though I am aware it may appear trifling to you, that—that—I scarce know how to open it to your Lordship."

Lord Peterborough, confirmed in his impression, would have liked to fall on his bended knee, and kiss the hand that was clasping and unclasping the arm of her chair, but fearing he could no longer do so conveniently or gracefully, he sat down and taking it delicately in his own, touched it with his lips.

She withdrew her hand hastily, and speaking with determination continued:

"'Tis as master of this house, I appeal to you, for I must beg you to have it searched. 'Tis my unhappy belief that your son has my sister somewhere concealed on these premises."

Lord Peterborough jumped up again, a little mortified to find himself not, as he had supposed, the object of a romantic passion on the part of this fine young woman, but not despairing of some success with her all the same.

"If the lady resemble you, madam," he replied, "my son is indeed enviable. But I believe Heaven doth not make these fine creatures in pairs."

"My Lord," she asked, with a sudden, disconcertingly direct look, "do you know if my sister is here?"

Peterborough, who was never still for long together, walked a few steps and took snuff.

"Confound the woman!" he thought. "What's her sister to me or Mordaunt either?"

He pretended to consider.

"Hath she a pair of eyes with all the charming softness of the blue, and all the vivacity of the black? Hath she a white skin and lips of the most inviting red? Can she—O no, surely she cannot—boast a hand and arm as finely formed, as white, as

soft, as that I had the honour but now to kiss ?"

In Esther's eyes there was none of that glamour surrounding the Hero of Barcelona, the Tribune of the Coffee-houses, which had inspired Francis Earle with awe when he stood before him in that same room. She saw in him nothing but what in fact he was to her—a heartless old fribble. She knew that her best chance was to remain calm and trade upon his vanity, but she also knew that her indignant impatience was fast getting the better of her diplomacy. So far, however, it showed itself only in the alternate paling and flushing of her cheeks.

"My Lord, you do so much honour to my poor charms, that 'tis plain you know nothing of my sister's. Yet I believe her to be in your house, detained there by your son."

Lord Peterborough shrugged his shoulders and smiled; he really could not understand why she should come complaining to him of his son's peccadilloes, but as she was rather attractive, he did not object to her doing so.

"*Que voulez-vous,* my dear miss ? I am

told our English fine ladies now-a-days divide themselves into the opposing factions of prudes and coquettes as openly as we men into those of Whigs and Tories. It cannot be that *you* have had the cruelty to join the prudes. I can assure you, child, that though people of fashion may censure your fair sister for form's sake, they have in general too much sense to be severe on the amiable weaknesses of a charming young female. Consider—'Tis Love, 'tis Love that makes the world go round.' For myself, apart from war and politics, I have thought every moment ill-spent that was not devoted to the fair, and believe me a few years more or less cannot cool the warmth of a heart such as this, or make me less entirely the humble servant of the ladies." And laying his hand on his heart as he alluded to it, he ended with a killing look at Esther.

"Have the goodness to send for Lord Mordaunt, my Lord. If my sister be here, as I feel too well assured she is," returned Esther, in a voice tremulous with indignation, "she is here against her will."

Lord Peterborough's temper began also to be ruffled. This young woman would end by being a nuisance with her eternal sister. After all she was not a great beauty. He laughed and tapped his snuff-box.

"Charming! Your fair sister is fortunate. She has got a lover who is a nobleman and a handsome fellow (for I am told the ladies find Mordaunt vastly handsome), and—he has carried her off against her will. That is the climax of good fortune, but more often boasted of than enjoyed. I will summon Mordaunt, though I warrant he will keep you waiting, for 'tis the laziest, most unpunctual dog in the universe."

But contrary to expectation Mordaunt appeared almost immediately, though sulky enough at being summoned by his father, when he had business of his own to attend to. He had changed a little since that autumn day at Windsor. He wore a Bolingbroke—that is, his own brown hair in curls, tied with a ribbon after the manner of the elegant and philosophic Secretary of State, and his face, though not less beautiful in its

refined perfection of feature, was thinner and yet more pallid than before. Directly he came in he caught sight of Esther, and the sulkiness of his expression visibly increased. He saluted his father with respectful civility, but took no notice of her.

"You have the honour of Miss Van—Vanbrugh's acquaintance, I presume?" interrogated Lord Peterborough, impatient to hand the business over to his son, since it promised no amusement.

"I have, my Lord," replied Mordaunt, bowing ungraciously.

"Then why the devil can't you be civil? You're a charming gay good-tempered gallant for a pretty woman, to be sure, and I'm half disposed to think 'tis true you have run away with one against her inclination."

"I don't know what your Lordship is pleased to talk about," returned Mordaunt, "but I think you should recognise the name of this—lady. Lady Peterborough told me you had been informed of the Vanhomrigh affair."

"Eh? What? Vanhomrigh? Yes, of

course—I knew I had heard the name, but I could not for the life of me think where. Yes, now I remember. The woman that thought to buy the heir of Peterborough for a son-in-law with her paltry four thousand pounds."

Lord Peterborough was doubly mortified, first by finding his admiration so little appreciated by its object, then by his own stupidity in mistaking this City miss—Mordaunt had somewhat exaggerated the middling position of the family in his account of the Vanhomrighs—for a woman of quality.

Esther rose to her feet. She appeared not to notice Lord Peterborough's observation, but advanced a few steps towards Lord Mordaunt and paused. There was a minute's silence which no one broke by a movement; then in a low but imperious voice she said:

"Lord Mordaunt, where is my sister?"

"Your sister!" cried he, and swore an oath or two.

"Yes, my sister," she continued when he

had done. "She left Lady Ponsonby's in your chaise last night—I have proof of it—and now I demand to know what you have done with her."

The young man looked at her for a minute in sullen disgust, and then: "Madam," he said, "on my honour, I don't catch your meaning. 'Tis none of my doing, if Miss Molly has escaped from your watch and ward."

"Do you expect me to believe you, my Lord?" she asked, holding on to the back of a tall chair that happened to be near. "The circumstances forbid it. Where is she, if not with you?"

"With some one else, I presume, madam. Miss Molly's admirers are so numerous that for my part I cannot venture to be positive."

"Thou infamous creature!" she cried. "None better than you know her to be all honour, except in so far as yourself may by some devilish device have deluded her."

In proportion as Esther's indignation overcame her, her antagonist's coolness became more settled, while Lord Peterborough did

not conceal his contemptuous amusement at the scene.

"I assure you, madam," sneered Mordaunt, "I have not wit enough to do't. Your sister is vastly too well trained to spoil a bargain by an indiscreet kindness. Let me do a Christian deed, and return blessing for cursing, by telling you I consider it a deuced deal more likely that, finding your humble servant not to be had at her price, she has carried off some gallant of fortune to the Fleet, than that she has been carried off by him to some more agreeable *villeggiatura*."

A Fleet wedding was not so uncommon an affair but that Esther might have believed him, if she had not been too well convinced that Mordaunt was the only man who could have persuaded Molly to such a step. She was silent a minute, looking on the ground and endeavouring to calm her excitement.

"My Lord Peterborough," she said, "'tis impossible for me to accept this young man's denial, seeing I have such good reason to believe that my sister left Lady Ponsonby's in his company. Will you, as master of this

house, have the goodness to procure me the certainty whether she is or is not in it?"

Now a miracle had lately happened. Lord Peterborough and his lady and his son had found a subject on which they were all at one. This was the subject of the Vanhomrighs, whom they not unnaturally regarded as having attempted to catch the heir to an earldom by the stupidest and most barefaced of devices. Besides, it would have been Peterborough's natural inclination to take a man's part against a woman in any case; this humble servant of the ladies habitually regarding them as players on the opposite side in a game where there were no rules of honour.

"I vow, madam, you have a great deal of assurance," he replied. "Your money, that is your mother's, has been paid down, and you have no more grounds for extortion. I tell you all this pother about a trifling amour concerns me not, and I beg you will not continue to besiege and annoy me."

"Rest assured, my Lord, I shall besiege and annoy you by every means in my

power," returned Esther. "I know the law gives us women the least possible justice, yet my sister is a minor, and it cannot be that you can forcibly detain her without punishment."

Lord Peterborough laughed disdainfully.

"'Tis a very tender force, I warrant, has been necessary to detain the pretty creature. Madam, your conduct is ridiculous. I wish you a very good morning."

"Farewell, Miss Vanhomrigh," added Lord Mordaunt, with a cynical smile. "I desire that our acquaintance may cease. Present my adieux to the fair, the chaste Miss Molly, when next you meet her."

Father and son were looking in her direction, but their eyes seemed simultaneously attracted to some object beyond her.

"Coward!" said Esther in a low voice. "You can insult her with impunity. Oh, that I were a man, or had at least a man by my side!"

The moment of silence, during which she slowly loosed her hand from the carved

chair, was to her a long pause of despair. Then a voice behind her said—

"Essie!"

Peterborough and Mordaunt had already perceived that a door, which appeared to form part of a bookshelf in the back of the room had opened, and a young man in a travelling dress was standing in the doorway. As Esther finished speaking he advanced a few steps towards her. It was he who had said, "Essie."

Esther turned and looked at him in bewilderment. Then — "Francis! Cousin Francis!"—and she ran to him and clung to his outstretched arm like a drowning creature. "Oh, by what miracle?"

"By luck, Hess, very good luck, if I can be of service to you. My Lord Peterborough, there's some mistake here. This gentlewoman is my cousin, and I cannot submit to see her used with disrespect, even by your Lordship. As to Lord Mordaunt, I see no reason why I should submit to anything from him."

Francis Earle's habitually cold and almost

nonchalant way of speaking made it possible for Lord Mordaunt to overlook anything provocative there might be in his concluding remark.

Lord Peterborough hastened forward rubbing his hands and laughing, partly in slight embarrassment, partly in pleasurable surprise.

"Faith, my dear boy, I'm very pleased to see you, and sorry you should find us and your cousin engaged in a trifling dispute. I own we should have been more patient of a lady's tongue. 'Tis the privilege of the fair to use it, and I make Miss Vanhomrigh my very humble excuses."

He took Francis by the shoulders and embraced him on both cheeks in the foreign fashion; a mode of salutation to which the young man submitted but awkwardly.

"How cam'st here, lad? I scarce expected you would reach Dover till last evening, nor London till this."

"I came over yesterday with a favourable wind, my Lord, and rode hither straight. Joseph let me in about six o'clock this morning, but I would on no account disturb

your Lordship. He showed me into the closet yonder, and I fell asleep on the bed there."

This was not the first meeting between father and son since they had made each other's acquaintance. They had again met in Germany, where his Lordship had heard a most gratifying account of the young man's courage and conduct as a soldier.

"On my honour," said Lord Peterborough, smiling with pleasure at Francis's account of his journey, "I myself could hardly have used greater expedition."

"My Lord," replied Francis, "'tis enough for me to have satisfied you. But I have here a private concern to which you must allow the *pas;* for this young gentlewoman is the daughter of the lady who reared me up, as I have told you, and to whom you must therefore be sensible I am very much beholden."

"Oh, ay, no doubt," returned his Lordship good-naturedly, "I believe I remember some such matter;" and he was back at the fire-place, taking snuff. Francis had said little,

and he had remembered less of the boy's earlier circumstances.

"Essie," said Francis, taking his cousin's hands, but looking at Lord Mordaunt with a look that had more meaning in it than his tone, "I heard you wish for a man at your side, and here is one you have every right to command, if you will do him the honour. Tell me, what should you do, if you were a man?"

Essie had all this time been standing close to him, scarcely raising her eyes from his coat-sleeve, somewhat bowed, and at once weakened and comforted by his presence. At this question she straightened herself suddenly, and turned about almost with a bound in the direction of Mordaunt.

"I would kill him," she cried, and pointed at Mordaunt with her fan.

"What—for a word, Essie?"

"For word and for deed, Francis. 'Tis proven that he took our Moll from a ball last night in his chaise, on some excuse he would take her home, but she never reached home. You know Moll—all honour—all virtue;"

and leaning her elbow on a high shelf of the bookcase, she covered her face with her hand and began to weep. "God knows where she is," she whispered.

Francis looked down and bit his lip a moment, but showed no other sign of emotion. It was perhaps for this reason that Mordaunt thought him but a half-hearted, as well as an insignificant antagonist.

"My Lord," he said, speaking deliberately, but addressing Peterborough, "I could wish this business had fallen to some other man, but you see how I am situated. My Lord Mordaunt, 'tis far from my desire to push matters to an extremity, but I must ask you for some explanation of this circumstance. My cousin is naturally agitated, and may have been hasty in her accusation."

Mordaunt from the vantage of his great height looked down at Mr. Earle very coldly from under his full drooping eyelids.

"Who is this, my Lord?" he asked of his father, indicating the young man by a nod.

Peterborough, who was weary of the

matter, and had betaken himself to his tooth-pick for occupation, at this point showed more interest.

"'Tis a friend of mine, a young gentleman on whom I set a value," he replied sharply.

"Friend?" repeated his son, looking steadily at Francis. "I thought he had been something nearer."

"I care not to deny it," returned Peterborough.

"I heard as much from Germany. He certainly favours brother John, who, poor dog, was not the beauty of the family."

"If you must talk of me, let it be to me, my Lord," interrupted Earle. "But no matter. What I ask you is, if there is any truth in this accusation concerning Miss Mary Vanhomrigh."

Mordaunt looked at him again with a cold but bitter anger which Esther's attack had not been able to provoke in him.

"Damn the fellow," he said. "I am not here to answer his impertinent questions, and I shall not. If my father chooses to let his base-born brats eat up his fortune, I must

suffer for't in mine; but I'm not forced to submit to an acquaintance with 'em."

"You'll not answer my question?" asked Francis very deliberately again. Then after a silence — stepping up to him — "No? Well, I'll open your mouth—or close it for you;" and he struck Mordaunt on the mouth with his open hand.

"Francis!" cried Peterborough, half in enjoyment, half in deprecation of his conduct.

Mordaunt was livid with rage.

"He shall fight me, my Lord, indeed he shall!" cried Francis, stamping his foot.

Mordaunt, who had a cane at his wrist, raised it and struck suddenly and savagely with it. Francis leaped back, and received the blow on his lifted hand instead of on his face, at which it was aimed.

"My Lord," said Mordaunt, taking up his hat and digging his cane into the carpet, "I suppose I need not expect you to bid your servants turn out this insolent fellow. I wish you a good morning. I am for Windsor."

"What? Mordaunt, I say! My God,

sir! You'll not accept a blow?" cried Peterborough, scandalised.

"I have returned it, my Lord," replied Mordaunt.

"I must have satisfaction for Miss Vanhomrigh and for myself," said Francis, placing himself between Mordaunt and the door.

"Ay, certainly; 'tis a matter for honourable satisfaction," announced Peterborough gravely, coming forward to act as umpire in the interesting game. "I regret it" (the regret was not very visible in his manner), "but there is certainly no choice. Mr. Earle is a soldier and a gentleman, Mordaunt, and you cannot refuse him."

"*Cannot* refuse him?" repeated Mordaunt, haughtily. "Ay, but I can, and mean to. Why should the heir of Peterborough pit his life against a foundling's? The stakes are not equal, gentlemen."

"H'm! The swords are," retorted Francis, and pulled out his blade, flashing it in his enemy's face. Peterborough gave a cry of genuine emotion, not at the appearance of

the naked sword, but at the expression that passed over Mordaunt's face as he started back.

"Good God!" he cried. "Are you a coward, sir? And a son of mine? Oh, 'tis too much!" and he struck the air violently with his clenched right hand, in a passion of mortification.

Mordaunt recovered himself immediately, but the look of fear had been unmistakable. That he was a coward was not to be counted among his vices; it was his physical misfortune, as much as the trick of swooning that had grown upon him of late, and probably proceeded from the same weakness of nerves and circulation. In a way his cowardice was almost a source of virtue in him, for it was the one defect of which he felt ashamed. To cure or at least to conceal it, he had often enough coerced and controlled that dear self that otherwise he existed but to pamper and respect. But in vain; an ironic fate ordained that he to whom his personal dignity was so sacred a thing, should be conscious that any moment

might expose him to the contempt of his equals—of those whom, not superiority, but overweening self-importance made him despise. Heretofore he had wonderfully concealed his weakness, which indeed seemed not proper to one so proud. It galled him to the quick to have let out the secret in a moment, he hardly knew how, to his father and to this fellow whom he despised and also hated, as a person to whom his father probably gave away money. However, he carried it off.

"Sure, your Lordship is a truly amiable parent," he said, holding his head high. "You will be pleased to observe you are hounding on two of your sons to fly at each other's throats, as though they were a couple of butcher's dogs."

Peterborough laughed loud, but not cheerfully.

"'Tis touching to hear such a fine domestic homily from Mordaunt," he cried; yet he could not but blush a little for himself. Then—"Mr. Earle, let him pass. 'Tis true, he is your brother and my son."

Francis obeyed, and Lord Mordaunt went out, without closing the door behind him. After a moment's hesitation Francis slipped out after him. Mordaunt was walking slowly down the wide magnificent staircase, which began with a short flight of stairs and then branched off into two longer but equally broad flights on each side of a landing. Francis spoke his name, but he took no notice. Then, going down one step and leaning forward, with one hand on the broad polished oak rail of the balustrade, Francis spoke quickly and low to his back.

"You'll understand, my Lord, 'tis only my gratitude to Lord Peterborough that forbids my straight proceeding to the extremity. I care not a jot for our kinship. If you have played the villain to my cousin, why, I'll kill you if I can. Whatever the event, I lose either my life or my good hopes of fortune by it; so never say the stakes are not heavy enough."

As he finished speaking, Mordaunt reached the landing. He went at the same pace a little way down the left-hand flight of stairs,

without making any sign that he had heard his antagonist's words; then he did not so much look at Francis, as turn his face somewhat in his direction and show on it a smile of quiet haughty mockery and immovable contempt.

CHAPTER XV.

MORDAUNT'S speculation had turned out singularly successful in the matter of the money which Ginckel Vanhomrigh had advanced to him. In the autumn of 1712 he had had heavy gambling losses. That evening at the Manor, when he and Ginckel had lost a considerable sum to Ponsonby and Raikes, had left him penniless and indebted; the next evening, when he played with Ginckel in hopes of retrieving something of his fortune, he lost again. He knew not where to turn, for the money-lenders between Peterborough and himself were tired of the name of Mordaunt, and it would also be the worse for him if his father should find him following too closely in his own steps. Ginckel on the contrary was unusually flush, for he had had some great strokes of luck, and had

also received an old debt due to the late Mr. Vanhomrigh. So it came about that after long talking round the subject, Mordaunt made a half-jesting attempt to borrow money from Ginckel, and Ginckel, also as it were in jest, declared himself to know too much of his Lordship's affairs to believe in repayment, unless some extraordinary penalty could be devised to induce it; such for instance as a written promise to marry—well, say, their old nurse in default. And somehow his sister presently took the place of the nurse. Mordaunt, whose mind moved quickly when he pleased, saw here a double opportunity. He knew that his mother, stubborn as she had recently shown herself, would produce any sum at whatever cost rather than submit to his mis-allying himself. And he could talk to *her* about his honour, and she would believe in it. Meantime the young lady would be certain to hear of the matter from her brother, and he himself could allude mysteriously to a certain arrangement made in jest, which yet might turn to earnest; and in this way his pursuit

of Miss Molly, in which he was just then beginning to take a surprising interest, would as he hoped be greatly furthered. As to Ginckel, being an exceedingly foolish person, especially when he thought to be a sharp dealer, he really believed that this written promise would have some binding effect on Mordaunt, who might come to consider marrying a toast preferable to raising the money. If the worst came to the worst, he thought, an action would lie for breach of promise of marriage. Mordaunt had a shrewd suspicion that this would not be the case, as the promise had been made only to a third party. It was not wonderful that Ginckel should have no scruple in taking some of his sister's money for the purpose of securing her so fine a match—for the heir of Peterborough was a personage, and Ginckel did not know his pecuniary affairs so well as he had said he did. He had honestly intended to re-invest the money for her, should it be repaid. However when the moment of repayment came, hardly a week after the chance news of the Parisian lady's

widowhood, the spirit of the gambler overcame him. He re-invested his sister's money indeed, but in his own matrimonial venture.

Mordaunt's speculation had succeeded perfectly so far as his mother was concerned. She had paid. But in another respect it had failed. He had taken more pains for Miss Molly than he had ever intended to take for any woman, and he was sure she was in love with him; yet after more than eighteen months of troublesome courtship, he found himself no further than at the beginning. His comrades began to see through his enigmatic silences on the subject and to taunt him with being either ridiculously backward or less beloved by the fair Vanhomrigh than he had hinted. If it had not been for the lively interest Ponsonby and Raikes succeeded in keeping up in his love-affair, he would have dropped it much earlier. His passion, if so it might be called, for Miss Molly had cooled; but this little rub she had innocently given his vanity must be atoned for, though with her heart's blood. It was therefore understood between him and Pon-

sonby and Raikes, that at Lady Ponsonby's ball he was to engage Miss Molly in an elopement to Windsor. If the trouble of arranging the details of the elopement had fallen on him, it is possible he might have preferred losing some *prestige* to exerting himself so far. But this was undertaken by the others, who threw themselves into the business with boyish energy and enjoyment, undisturbed by any sense of their own villainy; which indeed was due mainly to their want of intelligence, that would have led them to accept any standard of conduct which was accepted in the world to which they belonged. And in this world of some hundred and eighty years since, a world where women had attained to quite an ideal state of ignorance, of straitened activities and helpless dependence on men, somehow that chivalry to which such a state of things is supposed mightily to conduce, was conspicuous by its absence.

When Mordaunt, languid but very handsome in his own hair and a white brocaded suit with gold embroidery, stepped out of

his chair at Lady Ponsonby's, he was a good deal bored by the prospect of the elopement; all the more perhaps because of Ponsonby's garrulous excitement on the subject. By the time he had secured Miss Molly as his partner for the evening, however, his interest in the matter began to revive. She was looking so exceedingly pretty, and attracted so much attention, as he walked a minuet with her. The town would talk when it heard he had run away with the fair Vanhomrigh.

A ball in those days meant only a modicum of dancing for the individual, and even in Lady Ponsonby's long ball-room, comparatively few couples could go through their minuet at the same time. There was much conversation and walking about the reception-rooms and the marble terrace, which ran along the garden-front of the house, and on to which the ball-room opened by glass doors. It was a large handsome room, painted in fresco by an Italian artist with a jumble of architectural decorations and dishevelled gods and goddesses; and being

all done with a facile, somewhat vulgar Italian cleverness, and being something foreign and new in decoration, it was the object of much admiration and comment. The front of the house was illuminated, and the terrace set with small tables of refreshments. Such of the company as pleased walked and sat there, and looked in at the dancers through the long windows of the ball-room. A few years later, when the great world went habitually to Ranelagh and Vauxhall, there would have been nothing very novel in the arrangement, but just then it was novel, and consequently delighted some of the guests and shocked others. Mrs. Harris was one of those whom it shocked, and she endeavoured to prevent Molly from going out on the terrace, alleging that she would catch a great cold though the night was still warm. Mr. Ponsonby flew at once to find Miss Vanhomrigh's shawl. Mrs. Harris meantime whispered in her ear that it was highly unbecoming for a young woman to walk out with gentlemen at that hour, and she trusted Molly meant to

behave herself. Molly, who would not be corrected by Cousin Harris, answered out loud :

" Pooh, my good cousin, do you think decorum resides in the ceiling ? " and she bestowed a smile of thanks on Ponsonby, who arrived with the shawl, but left Mordaunt to put it round her.

So Mrs. Harris, considerably huffed, remained indoors while Molly and a little party of other young people, of whom she was the centre, ate iced syllabubs on the terrace ; which being lighted both by lamps and the moon, and having the walls of the house on three sides, was certainly not a very dark and dangerous wilderness for Lady Ponsonby's flock to wander in. Below it was a trim parterre freshly laid out with statues and flower-beds, and bounded on the other side by a square piece of water with four fountains in it. The fountains were new, but the water had formed part of the ornamental grounds of an older house, and down the sides of it ran pleached walks of fruit-trees. It was intended to have a

display of fireworks on the terrace, but this was kept to the last so that the moon might not interfere with their effect. Now Molly was very anxious to stay for the fireworks, and also for the country-dances which were to wind up the ball. Indeed, she would willingly have prolonged to any extent this delightful evening. She was too natural and too coquettish not to enjoy thoroughly all the flattery and attention which fell to her share ; but it was not that in itself which made her at the height of enjoyment. It was the altered behaviour of Mordaunt, who, from having been cold and neglectful of late, had suddenly more than resumed his former lover-like bearing. To any but a blinded eye his love-making must have seemed a poor thing at best ; but with enough good-will, there is no coldness that may not be construed to mean modesty, no silence that may not be supposed to cover tender thoughts.

Mrs. Harris, after the first half-hour of gratified curiosity and wonder at the fine people and things about her, began to feel

her isolation in this world to which she did not belong. Her companion presented her to acquaintances, but as she had neither wit, beauty, easy manners, nor the small personal interests in common with her interlocutors which usually go further than all three, they quickly passed on and left her as before. There are persons who find some entertainment in wandering about a crowd, practically invisible because unknown and unobserved, but Mrs. Harris was not one of these. She began to think she had a headache, and did not regret that she had so faithfully promised her husband to be home by midnight. Molly was of course unwilling to leave before the country-dances had begun or the fireworks been let off, and there was again a difference of opinion between the two young women, each of whom mentally pronounced the other exceedingly selfish for sticking to her own point of view. Mrs. Harris, however, had the advantage, since she was in authority; but when she came to look for her charge she could not find her. Mr. Ponsonby was very forward in calling her chair and in

helping her to seek, whereby he succeeded in preventing her from finding, the delinquent. Then Lord Mordaunt came up with Molly's shawl over his arm, and in his slowest manner informed her it would be positive cruelty to the company to remove her fair cousin at this heathenish hour; that since Mrs. Harris was promised to go, Miss Vanhomrigh would not for the world detain her, but that the young lady had so far honoured him as to consent to take a seat in his chaise for her return home, as his Lordship would be passing St. James' Street on his way back to Peterborough House. At this Mrs. Harris, who naturally did not guess this stately young nobleman to be lying, waited not for confirmation of his tale, but bounced into her chair and back to her lodgings, to pour her indignation into the sleepy and quite unelectrified ear of her Mr. Harris.

After the minuets and the figure dances and the supper, the country-dances were to begin. These were to Molly, as to most other young people, by far the most delightful

of all, in spite of the fact that Mordaunt never danced them. A man of quality owed it to himself to perform respectably in a minuet, just as he must be able when necessary to take off his hat in a manner that should show his court breeding. But a country-dance was unnecessary; Mordaunt did not like it, and therefore pronounced it contemptible. To Molly's surprise, however, this evening, instead of handing her over to some more willing and active partner, he evidently meant to stand up with her.

"What, my Lord!" she cried with a triumphant smile, "recollect yourself! Here's a dance you have constantly declared to be meant for bumpkins at a country wake, or 'prentices at Barthelmy Fair. You'll repent this before you are an hour older."

"No, no. I believe I shall be too happy," he replied with a smile. "You shall tell me how to do't. Only with your leave we will not lead off. Hark! the fiddles are beginning. Is it the Barley Mow or the French Rigadoon? I vow I can't tell the difference."

So they took their places, and all at once

the two long gaily coloured lines of men and women, ranged in opposite rows, swayed forward like flowers in a wind, all bending together in the slow grace of the preliminary bow and curtsey. Up they stood again with a clink of swords and a rustle of silks, the first couples began to turn, and presently under the painted goddesses and the countless wax-lights, there was a long shifting maze of brightness and colour; of fair arching arms and jewelled hands, that rose and clasped and fell to the music; of young heads blonde and brown, bright with flowers or starred with gems, winding and turning, crossing and re-crossing among the long soft flaxen perukes, dear to the heart of beaux. Innumerable diamonds flashed from white breasts or cloudy lace with the movement of the dance and the merry gestures of the wearers; painted fans fluttered joyously, and rich petticoats passed billowing in and out amongst the stiffer lines of coat-skirts as rich. And as it went on, the fiddles could not drown an occasional ripple of laughter, mixed with the ceaseless tapping of little

heels and the murmur of broken talk. Molly, to whom usually the motion and the music of the dance were in themselves too delightful to allow of her greatly regarding her partner, did not lose to-night the happy sense that Mordaunt was there opposite. They danced several different dances. At last it happened, though scarcely by chance, that just as she and Mordaunt came to the end of the room near the glass doors, there was an explosion immediately outside them.

"The fireworks!" cried Mordaunt. "Deuce take the dancing!" and seizing her by the hand, he positively ran out of the window and down the terrace steps, snatching her shawl from Ponsonby as he went, and throwing it round her shoulders. Molly ran by his side, laughing and feeling as if this were only a new figure in the dance. In the parterre there was already a crowd assembled waiting to see the fireworks. Still holding Molly firmly by the hand, he passed through the edge of it and a little way down the pleached walk, before he dropped into a walk.

"Nay, miss, I'll not let you desert me," he said, as she showed signs of stopping; "I have a mind to see the fireworks across the water. They'll look finely. Pray now, dear Miss Molly, do not be cruel, but come and see 'em too."

Molly, excited, bewildered, and above all charmed by this swift impulsiveness so unlike his usual manner, gave a hasty assent. She had no sooner given it and was walking in silence by his side, then she felt curiously sobered. The rays of the setting moon gleamed on the spring foliage overhead, the air was sweet with the odour of the last hawthorn blossoms, and the sound of music, softened by distance, floated to them from the open windows of the ball-room. Had she ever pictured herself in a day-dream walking hand in hand with Mordaunt under such romantic circumstances, it would have seemed a thing too delightful to come true. But it was real, and far from enjoying the situation she was bitterly annoyed with herself for having consented to it, and yet ashamed to go back on her consent. It

would have been easy at first to make an excuse for returning towards the terrace, but now at every step she took it seemed harder. She could only make up her mind not to stay long, and hope no one had recognised them as they passed through the dark parterre. As they turned the corner out of the pleached walk, which was not continued on the side of the water opposite the house, she thought she heard a cracking of twigs among the bushes.

"Oh," she cried, in a low voice, "is there any one there? Or—or do you think 'tis an animal?"

"Pretty trembler!" returned Mordaunt. "Dost think there be lions in Marylebone? Nay, if thou art to be devoured, it shall be this way."

And putting his arm round her waist he kissed her several times. Now a kiss taken civilly, if no longer the common form of salutation, was still not held matter for offence; but there was a careless freedom in Lord Mordaunt's manner and conduct, which greatly displeased Molly.

"Fie, my Lord!" she said.

Just at this moment they were aware of a banging and crackling and a dozen jets of multitudinous flames leaping up from the length of the terrace. They could hear the long-drawn "Oh!" of the crowd in the parterre. Molly started back out of the glare that came across the water into the shadow of a great thorn-bush just behind them. He followed her, nothing loth, since he had an uneasy suspicion that Tom Raikes, in spite of his promise to depart as soon as he had done his work, might be eavesdropping in the bushes by the path.

"Dear timorous charmer!" he said, "I protest 'tis lucky we were no nearer the fireworks, else you had been frightened to death. Come now, these arms shall protect thee." And he again put his arm around her. Molly started away pettishly.

"Tilly vally, my Lord! I mind not the fireworks a brass token—that is by comparison. But you must be sensible that I—that you—that we should be—be thought singular in fine, were we observed here."

It never occurred to Lord Mordaunt to suppose that Molly really disliked being there with him, but she was coyer than he had expected. Meantime there was his chaise waiting on the other side of the paddock, and perhaps Raikes in the bushes, ready to die with laughter should he be discomfited. This thought made him speak low and gave an earnestness to his wooing that it might otherwise have lacked.

"What! must Love be bound by the cold rules of the censorious?" he asked. "By Heaven, my lovely charmer, 'tis impossible!" And the distant light from the terrace, falling through the scattered leaves and blossoms of the old thorn, showed him sighing with his hand in his bosom. It was a becoming light, and he thought he had never seen Miss Molly look so pretty as she did now, standing there by the tree, half in shadow, with her serious half-doubtful face and shining eyes lifted to his. He seized her hands and laid them on his bosom.

"Cruel, cruel fair! Is't possible thou hast no pity on this heart, that suffers all the

torments and flames of Love? But yet 'tis you, enchanting creature, that inflict 'em. Do you not love me, charming Miss Molly? —Oh, I am sure you do."

As he ended the fireworks went out, leaving black darkness behind them.

"Yes, yes, I do," murmured Molly, after a little pause, and he felt her hands were trembling. This time she did not resent his kiss; but somehow the declaration which she had so often sighed for, did not thrill her with bliss. The lover of her dreams, although he wore the name and face of Mordaunt, was a creature of the imagination, and the real man had he been better than he was, would have suffered by the comparison.

"I am yours—Oh yes," she returned, in answer to a tender enquiry murmured in her ear. "But let us go back, pray let us go back now."

The fireworks broke out again on the terrace, and slipping from his arms she ran towards the pleached walk, followed more leisurely by Mordaunt. There was an iron railing across the end of the walk, with a gate

in it, which had been open when they came through. Indeed, owing to the darkness, Molly had not observed it. Now the gate was closed. She pushed it with all her might, but it was evidently locked.

"Come, come quick, my Lord!" she cried, stamping her little high-heeled shoe impatiently. "Pray open this gate for me."

"Why, dear miss, 'tis locked," returned he, trying it. "This is very strange, but 'tis a spring-lock, and must have shut to behind us."

"Quick! Let us try the other side," she said, and was starting off, but he caught hold of her.

"My charmer, 'tis useless," he replied. "I believe 'tis years since the opposite gate was opened."

"O my Lord, can you not climb it?" asked Molly earnestly.

Lord Mordaunt could not forbear laughing.

"Do you take me for a baboon, Miss Molly?" he asked. Then — "But what matter, my angel? You must not go. You must not leave me now, in this happy

moment; 'twould break my heart. Sure you cannot love me if you will not stay an instant to hear me swear again I love you."

"O my dear Lord, think of my reputation," cried she anxiously.

"Reputation!—Distracting girl! I can think, I will think of nought but love. A kind fate has separated us from the crowd, but there's a way out yonder at the end of the paddock, and we'll fly together."

"Pray let us go that way and steal into the house again as softly as we may," returned Molly eagerly.

"'Tis this way," replied Mordaunt, pointing down a path in the opposite direction to the house; and following her close as she immediately hurried along it, he continued, laying his hand on her arm: "But if you contrive to slip in at the great door, and that in the plight you will be in when you get there, unobserved by half the footmen in London, why, the devil's in it. Besides though we now are near the house, the shortest road to it is a long way round and

by a dirty foot-path, and you will be missed before you can possibly reach it."

Molly stopped.

"O Lord Mordaunt, I shall go distracted! Let us return and call for assistance; some one will certainly hear us."

"Dear miss, I thought you was so careful. What could give greater scandal than to discover yourself here?"

"Then let us go on," returned Molly, starting off again; "'tis plain we must go somewhere. Even you, my dear Lord, will hardly propose that we should wait in the paddock till morning, to be let out when the cows are let in."

They walked on in silence for a few minutes, he with his hand slipped under her elbow and sighing like a man desperate. And it was not every bit of it pretence, for he had really got interested in his part, which perhaps caused him to miss an opportunity. They now turned a corner and saw a bright speck of light, which he knew to be the lamp of his own chaise, showing a gate at the end of the path. He

had not the least intention of carrying off Miss Vanhomrigh by force. The surburban roads round the house would just now be full of coaches and chairs and linkmen, and so troublesome an affair was not to his taste. But could he have plausibly explained the position of the chaise, and persuaded her she would reach the house again quickest by jumping into it, he could have taken her far in this neighbourhood, which was strange to her, before she would have discovered the deception. But when they were approaching the gate, it seemed to him to be necessary to bring matters to a crisis.

"Ah!" she cried, "how glad I am to see the gate! But can it be locked?"

"'Tis open," he replied. "But, my sweetest girl," and he here took her hands and stood before her in such a way as to stop her passage, "my adored Miss Molly, you will gain nothing by this except the death of a devoted lover. For I assure you,"—and all the time he was kissing her hands—"I have determined not to survive it, if you refuse to be mine. No, I will not leave this place

without you. You love me, I know it; and I love you, dear charming creature, to distraction. Fly with me, fly with me immediately."

Mordaunt was surprised at his own fervour, and Molly at the coldness with which she listened to him. She did not take his proposal seriously, but supposed it to be a mere piece of boyish impetuosity and lover's raving.

"Fie, my Lord!" she said. "You know not what you say. I'll marry you to-morrow if you please, and anywhere you please, but not without my mother's knowledge. This is foolishness. Pray, pray let us go on." And she pressed forward.

"Heavens, child!" he cried, still keeping close to her. "Do you not see these cold scruples come too late? They will seek for you in vain, and your return will be observed. Believe me, 'tis too late."

"I am surprised you should say so, my Lord," she returned warmly. "If my reputation should be lost, I have still my honour to consider."

"Honour, child!" he said, in the tone of one who smiles indulgently. "Why, you talk like a country wench. Yet you have lived in the world, and know that 'honour' is but a word it cheats fools with, and marriage— Ye gods! How Love trembles and flies before the word! Leave talking of it, till thou'rt weary of me, and hast leisure to bargain with me for pin-money. Let's name nothing but Love. I find matter in it now for more discourses than ever I thought to make in a life-time."

"Then, my Lord," she replied, in a steady tone of voice, the import of which he did not perceive, "I am to understand that your love for me is such that you propose I should fly with you impromptu, and leave talking of marriage till some more convenient time."

"Even so, my sweetest creature. I shall not keep my senses, I swear I shall not, if you refuse me. But sure, you'll never be so cruel. You see the light yonder? Look! 'tis the torch of Love to light us on our road."

"What I see appears more like the lamp

of a chaise," she returned, with a sudden little tremulous laugh — for they had now got near the gate. "But no matter. Whether should it light us?"

"To Windsor, child," he cried triumphantly, and put his arm round her.

"How comes the chaise there, my Lord?" she asked, in a voice again steadied by such an effort that it sounded indifferent. "Whose is it?"

"'Tis yours, my angel, yours; that and everything else I possess."

So quick is thought that in the moment that he stooped his tall head to bring it close above hers, it passed through his mind that the game was won; at the expense no doubt of a confounded deal of talking, but somehow the eloquence had flowed with much less trouble than he would have supposed. As his curls brushed the fading flowers in Molly's hair, right in his face, fierce and direct as a blow, came the words—

"Liar! Base, treacherous creature! I detest thee!"

And as at a blow a man's wrath will blaze

up to the height instantaneously, so at these words Mordaunt started away from her in a passion of bitter anger.

"Why, madam," he cried, "how long is it since you swore you loved me—loved me with all your dear little heart? Is't ten minutes or fifteen? Not twenty, I'll take my oath. You know you said you loved me, and I advise you for your own sake to stand by your words. If you don't, pray what excuse have you for being here? Answer me that, Miss Molly."

Molly, after that one burst of uncontrollable indignation, had regained an external calmness. "'Tis true, my lord, I loved you; but you have very completely cured me of that folly."

"I perceive, Miss Molly. You loved the name of Lady Mordaunt, you loved the charming idea of figuring at a Birthday in the Peterborough pearls, and making the women die with envy of your fine match—one indeed that I admire you should pretend to."

"You have so insulted me by your con-

duct, my Lord, that your words are of small importance. Pray, has your Lordship's footman orders to lay hands on me, if I should pass the gate yonder?"

"Be easy, madam. I would put no force on a lady, save such as might give her an excuse for following her inclinations. I never imagined you was one to require that excuse. Indeed, madam, 'twill vastly surprise the gallants of your acquaintance to hear of your virtuous behaviour; you that was so diverting, so free, so obliging a young woman. Had you been a prude now, or a country hoyden, I had respected your innocence, but for you that know the world and jest at it, to affect surprise at my design —ha! ha! 'tis very ridiculous."

"I have seen wicked men, my Lord, as I have seen the lions at the Tower, but I no more feared to find 'em among my private friends than I feared to meet a lion in St. James'. Oh, how have I injured you that you should use me thus shamefully? I own 'twas my folly to love you, but it deserved not this punishment."

"'Tis a lady's privilege to play the victim," returned Mordaunt, relapsing into his more usual sulkiness; and he continued, quite believing his own contention: "I have a better right than you, Miss Molly, to complain of deception. You encourage my love to the utmost, and when its violence makes me take the shortest way to win you, you affect horror and surprise at it. I might believe you merely a finished coquette, were it not for that matter of the money; but that discovers your design."

"What money?" asked Molly. "What do you mean?"

"Swear you know nought of it, madam. That's writ in your part. But you know enough to understand me when I say there's no victim in the case. You had your design on me, I mine on you. Neither of us has succeeded, and we are quits. But I will be generous and drive you back to Lady Ponsonby's, that you may make your curtsey at the last, and contradict any report that may have got abroad there to your disadvantage."

"I will accept nothing of you, perfidious

man," returned she. "You may again deceive me. I will return, I will return at once, but not with you. Oh, I am mad to delay here!"

And before he had fully realised her intention, she had rushed forward, slipped through the iron gate, which was ajar, and disappeared into the darkness of the lane beyond.

When Mordaunt had so suddenly removed his arm from Molly's shoulder, her shawl had come off, having caught in the gold embroidery of his coat, and all the time he had been talking in this very unwonted state of excitement, he had been grasping it mechanically. He scarcely realized he had it till she had gone. He came to the gate and called her name once, but there was no response. He stood there a minute or so staring into the darkness; then the footman got down and opened the door of the chaise. Lord Mordaunt flung him the shawl with a curse, got into the chaise and pulling his hat over his eyes, ordered the coachman to drive to a genteel gaming-house, which, late as it was, he had some hopes of finding open.

CHAPTER XVI.

ESTHER'S expedition to Peterborough House ended more satisfactorily than it had promised to do. That is, the house was thoroughly searched, though without any result beyond the verification of the fact that Molly's shawl had been brought back there by Lord Mordaunt's chaise. She was now anxious to get back to St. James' Street, and Lord Peterborough, who out of complacency towards Francis was now all courtesy, sent a footman to show her the shortest path across Tuthill Fields to the Park. Francis accompanied her a part of the way, but was to return to Peterborough House, as he and his Lordship had certain matters of importance to talk over. The door in the high garden-wall of Peterborough House opened into a thick coppice of hazels overshadowed by taller

trees, and the footpath wound for a little through a wilderness of nettles and briars, and such coarse grass as will grow under trees. But very soon it ran into one of the common walks of Tuthill Fields, and here the cousins parted.

While they were walking so far together, Essie had had time to hear how naturally the apparent miracle of Francis' appearance in Peterborough House had occurred. Francis had, with that superfluous discretion that was his foible, respected a wish which Lord Peterborough had expressed early in their acquaintance, and which his Lordship himself had long ago forgotten. In obedience to it he had told the very few friends whom he had left behind him in England no more of his circumstances than that, owing to the unexpected patronage of a nobleman, he had been sent abroad to serve under Prince Eugene, in accordance with his own wishes. As to the nature of his business in England now, and the reason for so sudden and secret an arrival, that he did not at this time confide to Essie. The truth was he was employed

as a trusty messenger to bring the last news from St. Germains to Peterborough, who purposed to find him employment in this way so long as the Queen lived, and afterwards to buy him a regiment in England. There was only one other person whose arrival on the scene could have been a greater comfort to Essie, and he was in Berkshire. The twenty months that had passed since Francis Earle left England had transformed him from a somewhat waspish, discontented youth into a man. Essie had had neither sufficient time nor calmness of mind to dwell on the alteration in him, but she felt it. Though the situation was really unchanged, it was with a lightened heart that she walked across the Park and turned up St. James' Street. In her absence Mrs. Harris had been to enquire after Mrs. Vanhomrigh, had gone all over the house to find her cousins, and now came to meet Esther with an ominous face.

"I am pleased to find my Aunt Vanhomrigh better, Cousin Essie; I felt sure Dr. Barker would do her a vast deal of good.

I wish I could feel as easy about Cousin Molly; but I have rapped at her door till my knuckles ache, I have shaken it till I was tired, and not a sign has she made."

"Oh, Molly will sleep like the dead," returned Esther, "and very certainly I shall not waken her."

"I have looked through the keyhole," continued the inexorable Mrs. Harris, "and —well, there's a feeling about the room. Believe me, my dear cousin," and here her eyes got very round and her voice very low and emphatic, "believe me, that room is empty."

"It is, Cousin Harris. Here is the key," replied Esther, taking the key out of her pocket. "Now, perhaps, having gratified your curiosity, you will have the goodness to hold your tongue for the honour of the family, or to say that my sister was seized with a sudden indisposition at the ball last night."

Mrs. Harris, conscious of having said something quite different to several people already, became somewhat red.

"I doubt 'twill be useless. Plenty must have seen the unfortunate creature go off with Lord Mordaunt."

"Did you see her go?" asked Essie. "How do you know she went?"

"How do I know? Lord ha' mercy, cousin, d'ye think I speak without book? Why, his Lordship told me himself. 'Miss Vanhomrigh will so far honour me as to ride home with me,' says he."

"He may not have spoken the truth," replied Essie; "Oh, I wish I knew the truth!"

"I'm very much concerned for you and Aunt Vanhomrigh, and pity you from my soul," said Mrs. Harris, and she spoke sincerely; "but that your little baggage of a sister has run off with the young lord is as plain, as plain as——"

She paused for a comparison, and a voice from behind the door supplied it. "As a prophecy in Mr. Partridge's Almanack; and confound the scurvy event that proves it otherwise."

A voice from the grave could hardly have startled Mrs. Harris more. For all reply

she turned round and fell into an attitude of astonishment. For Molly walked in, wrapped in a long shapeless frieze cloak with a hood which covered her head and half her face.

"Molly!" cried Esther, "oh, where have you been?"

"I have had the foolishest adventure, my dear," replied Molly. "I have been knocked over by a hackney coach, and am scarce in my senses yet I believe." And she threw off her cloak and showed a torn muddy dress, a very pale face with a bright red spot on each cheek and a cut on one, and a bruise on her temple. One arm too was bound up.

"O Moll!" and Essie flew across the room and laid her hands on her sister's shoulders. "Thank Heaven I see thee safe! And I have been to Peterborough House for thee this morning."

"So you thought I had gone away with Lord Mordaunt!" exclaimed Molly. "And you cried me over Peterborough House! I'll never forgive you."

And she turned and fled upstairs, leaving Esther to get rid of Mrs. Harris. This she did speedily, but whether the lady considered Molly's strange reappearance as a convincing proof of her innocence in the matter of Lord Mordaunt, is exceedingly doubtful. The question was how a young lady who was, or should have been, in a sedan-chair, got run over by a hackney coach, and that unobserved by her friends. The circumstance was suspicious, yet it grew quite naturally out of Molly's adventure with Lord Mordaunt. The way round to the front of the Ponsonbys' house from the back lane was, as he had said, much longer and more intricate than it seemed likely to be. When Molly hurried away in the darkness, feeling very nervous and quite ignorant of the neighbourhood, she missed the footpath that would have taken her round to the house. She fled on and on along the high boundary walls of surburban properties, where here and there an oil-lamp over a gateway showed her the miry way she was treading, but never any turning in the desired direction

nor any nocturnal wayfarer of whom she might ask her way. She continued walking and running, sometimes stopping to thrust her little silk-stockinged feet further into her shoes, which were limp with mud and the drizzling rain which was beginning to fall, or to draw her petticoats up closer round her, and becoming more and more frightened at the position in which she found herself. At last she reached a high-road, which she knew must be some distance from the Ponsonbys', and along which chaises, coaches, and chairs were passing at no long intervals. She had now determined to go home as best she could, as even if she could find her way back to the ball, she was not fit to appear there; so she walked along the road in what she took to be the direction of London. Meantime she kept a sharp look-out on the vehicles that passed her, and was at last sure she recognized the liveries of a friend on a passing chariot. She ran after it, calling in vain to the coachman to stop, and it was then that she was knocked down and run over by a hackney coach. The driver, who

was returning home and had no fare, picked her up, bleeding and insensible, and drove her to a small tavern in the neighbourhood kept by a relation of his own. Molly remained there at first in a state of insensibility, and afterwards unable, owing to her injuries and the lack of hired vehicles, to return home. There was no great alacrity shown by her host or his neighbours to serve the guest so strangely thrown among them, and it was not till a carrier's cart came past the door on its way to the *Belle Sauvage* in Ludgate, that she was able to start on her homeward journey. So it happened that it was past eleven o'clock before she arrived in St. James' Street. Essie got from her only the barest statement of what had occurred. Now that the anger and excitement which had supported her through the adventures of the night had worn off, she was overwhelmed with shame and with misery of mind and body. She lay face downwards on the bed, and after answering shortly the first questions, would make no further response even to

Essie's indignant denunciations of Lord Mordaunt, except to cry out that she wished she might never hear his name again, for 'twas Hell to her to hear it. Essie perceiving that she had, though very innocently, offended her sister, called Ann to undress her, and herself set off again to Peterborough House to inform Lord Peterborough and Francis of Molly's return. She would not stay with Mrs. Vanhomrigh, whose questions and gay chatter about Moll would, she felt, even now be intolerable; for though Molly was safe at home again, the insult and the injury that she had received, and the scandal most likely to result from the adventure, prevented Esther from enjoying any ease of mind when she thought of her. She might well have waited till Francis arrived, which he had promised to do as soon as possible; but she was glad to find herself an excuse to escape from the house, and was in a hurry to tell him what had happened.

She walked quickly across the park, fearing to be caught in the rain, for the sky

was extraordinarily dark; but this darkness, though partly caused by low heavy clouds, also arose partly from the direction of the wind, which was slowly bringing westward a vast deal of black smoke from the chimneys of the City, that something in the upper strata of the air prevented from rising higher and dissipating itself. Londoners were not then used to living in the atmosphere of Hades, and this deepening gloom in the very height of the day seemed strange, almost startling, to Esther. When she turned into the hazel coppice behind Peterborough House, the shadow of the foliage, which was thicker than usual at that season, made a kind of dark-green twilight all about her. The way was short from thence to the garden-door, and the path ran straight till it came to a kind of small clearing, such as commonly occurs in coppices. That is, it was a clearing below, where there were some dozen square yards of bare brown earth, but above it was almost roofed in by the hazels and the meeting boughs of two large ilex trees. Just at this point the path

took a turn round a great straggling bush before crossing the open space. Walking fast and absorbed in her own thoughts, Esther was close to the bush before she perceived with a start that there was something unusual passing in the open space beyond it. The day was very still, and as she quickly and silently drew nearer and peeped through the leaves, she could not only see but hear the struggle that was proceeding; yet it was in a sense a silent one. There was neither word nor cry audible, only the loud irregular breathing of men wrestling hard for the mastery, the slip or stamp of heavy feet on the sticky earth, and the occasional sound of a severe blow delivered with a heavy hunting-crop. The victim of these blows was Francis Earle. As he came out of the narrow path into the open space, two men had leaped on him from the thicket, and seizing him on either side without giving him the least chance to pull out his sword, held him fast in spite of a desperate resistance. The one on his left, who appeared to be a groom, brought

his heavy whip down on the head and shoulders of the young man as hard and as often as he could do so without running the risk of being tripped up, while a powerful negro in a silver collar held him fast on his right. Passively fronting the group, and leaning on his walking-cane with his back to Esther, stood a tall graceful figure which she recognised at once as that of Mordaunt. The negro, though going through all the pantomime of strenuous exertion, was perhaps not altogether in earnest; for Francis at one moment succeeded in getting his hand almost to the hilt of his sword. But Mordaunt stepped forward, snatched Francis' rapier out of the scabbard, and with a curse, dug the point into the negro's leg, deep enough to make a clean cut in the stocking and cause the blood to flow down into his shoe.

"Hold on, thou black dog," he said, "till I bid thee leave go, or thine own back shall smart for't, I warrant thee."

Then he threw Francis' weapon on the ground behind him, and returned again to

the passive contemplation of his enemy's chastisement and unavailing struggles. Esther had now pressed very close behind him through the straggling bush, though still sufficiently hidden by a veil of trailing foliage with which it was overgrown, to escape notice. She had paused in horror and uncertainty what to do, as owing to the morning hour and the threatening weather, Tuthill Fields were deserted, and Peterborough House stood so far back behind its walls and trees that she might have screamed for a long time without attracting the attention of any one there. But when Lord Mordaunt threw away Francis' rapier, it fell at a very little distance from her. Quickly and cautiously Esther took hold of as many of the twigs and trailers before her as she could take at once, so as to pass through them as freely as possible; yet as she sprang through it was with a sound of the cracking of twigs and rending of garments. Fortunately, however, Mordaunt stood too close to her for this noise to warn him in time of her entrance on the

scene. Before he could lift a hand to prevent her, she had snatched the fallen rapier from the ground, and rushing on the negro, by the impetus and unexpectedness of her attack caused him to loose his hold of Francis, into whose right hand she immediately thrust his sword. Then was there something like a reversal of fortune in the battle, for Francis, whose quickness of eye and hand made him an excellent swordsman, began to lay about him with such fury that the two servants very soon thought more of escaping unhurt than of obeying orders, and leaping in among the brushwood, disappeared, leaving their master to fight his own battles. If long and successful study of the art of fencing could fit a man to do that, Lord Mordaunt should have been able to do so. He had practised it with real perseverance; but when the bright steel without any button on it began to fly this way and that, he did not do more than draw and make a distant ineffectual thrust or two, shouting angrily to his servants to disarm the rascal. When the groom and the negro

had been put to flight, Francis, infuriated, thirsting for revenge and heedless of the consequences, rushed straight upon their master with a deadly look, and Mordaunt felt for the first time the shock of swords crossed in good earnest. Then with the desperate consciousness that his only hope lay in making a cool defence, came the power to make it. That assistance would come before long was more than probable, and meantime pale as death, with head thrown back and dilated eyes intent to follow the fierce, varied, lightning-quick attacks with which his adversary pursued him, he retreated step by step across the little clearing. But just as he had almost touched its extreme limit he gave a low but exceeding bitter cry, his sword sprung to the ground, and as he threw forward his left hand and arm to catch at Francis' weapon and shield his body from the coming thrust, a spurt of blood crimsoned his lace cravatte. His cry was scarcely over when it was echoed by a much louder one from the lips of Esther.

"Oh! Don't kill him!" she shrieked, catching Francis' arm.

So for a few seconds the three stood motionless together, Mordaunt with his bloody hand still clutching his opponent's blade, and staring at Francis' frowning face with the horror of death fixed on his own. Then quite suddenly the tension of his nerves and muscles relaxed, his head fell back, he staggered a minute and fell heavily backwards among the hazels.

Esther took hold of him, as though to lift him out of the bushes.

"O Heavens! Do you think he is dead?" she asked.

Francis wiped his brow with a handkerchief and dropped his sword back into its sheath.

"Not he," he replied, and at first he was so hoarse that he could scarcely speak. "I've spoiled his fine hand for him, that's all. Why the devil must he try that old trick with the left?"

And he proceeded very unceremoniously to drag his fallen foe out by the legs and leave him lying on his back on the sticky

earth. Esther looked in horror at the gashed left hand and arm.

"'Twas a mercy you did not kill him," she said.

Francis made a face, with a kind of shudder.

"'Twould have been downright murder. I have killed men, as soldiers must, but to kill such a coward wretch as that would be butcher's work. Yet, being so blind with anger, I might not have stayed my hand in time, had you not caught it; so you have my thanks, Hess, if not his—and thanks too, Essie, for your coming in the nick—you was always quick-witted. You couldn't save me a beating, but you have helped me to my revenge for't—and I won't pretend to be so good a Christian as not to value that extremely."

"O Frank, 'twas a shameful, cowardly deed! See, your coat is split, and your forehead terribly marked."

"No matter, Hess. *He*'ll not go boast of my bruises," returned he, with a grim smile at the prostrate figure before him.

Esther kneeling on the ground, began to raise Mordaunt's head and undo his cravatte, but Francis pulled her up impatiently.

"Here's no wound worth naming," he said; "'tis a pretty deep swoon he is in; no more than that. Run now to Peterborough House, and bid his own people come to his assistance, and I will go and find a hackney to take us to St. James', for I believe I am no figure to walk with a lady. Make haste—it begins to rain."

The black cloud overhead was lower than before, and as he spoke there was a tossing and whispering in the tree-tops, and even through the sheltering foliage a heavy drop fell on his up-turned face. Esther hurried away to the house, and he, after picking up and giving a knock or two to his hat, which had suffered in the encounter, walked off in the direction of Tuthill Fields.

Now Lord Mordaunt lay there alone; but not really alone. No sooner had Francis and Esther gone their several ways than the black head of Tully the negro appeared, raised cautiously from behind a bush. When

he saw his master stretched out on the ground before him, he stole out and stared at the prostrate figure, and some secret fascination drew him nearer and nearer to it. A negro face is apt to seem an inexpressive thing to an unaccustomed eye, but as Tully looked at Lord Mordaunt the growing ferocity of his gaze was unmistakable. He passed his hand up and down his own leg, where Mordaunt had stabbed it. His mind was filling itself with vengeful memories of other blows, of countless curses and degrading words which had fallen to his lot since Mordaunt owned him. Tully had been kindly brought up in his West Indian home, whence he had been sent as a present to Peterborough's son. His father had been born in the forests of Africa, and a generation of slavery and semi-civilization had not tamed the fierce blood that he inherited from naked warriors, whose sport was the death of their foes. There was a strange look of the wild beast about him as he crouched at Mordaunt's side, peering in his face with low guttural noises and hissing whispers. His eyes rolled and

glittered as, showing his strong clenched teeth in a grin of rage and hate, he seized a fallen sword, which lay on the ground close to his hand; it was his master's weapon, a strong two-edged rapier. Laying his left hand on the young man's thick, brown hair, Tully drew the sharp edge of the blade lightly across his bared throat. At the touch of the cold steel Lord Mordaunt opened his eyes. For an instant those eyes must have looked at the black face hanging over them, threatening, distorted with mingled passions of hate and terror and revenge, and at the green overshadowing boughs beyond it. Then Tully again drew the blade across his throat, this time in savage earnest. Whether the impulse that caused the negro to kill his master originated most in his hate or in his terror at suddenly seeing Mordaunt's eyes open, the deed was done before he could realise the consequences of his act. He remained a minute or two beside the inanimate or almost inanimate body, staring at it in unfeigned horror; his face turned a yellowish colour and his knees

knocked together with fear. He did not consider his chances of escaping suspicion; flight was all he thought of. Throwing the blood-stained sword away from him, he felt with trembling fingers in his master's pocket, found his purse, emptied it into his own pouch, then slipped in among the bushes, and vanished again more noiselessly and completely than before. Within ten minutes of the time that Francis and Esther had gone their several ways, Lord Mordaunt was again lying alone. So quickly and silently had all this passed, so little altered the position of the body, that had there been a hidden spectator of the drama, he would almost have supposed it had been a dream; a vision such as some monkish painter might have imagined, showing the foul unlovely spirit that had its habitation in that beautiful form, hanging over it like an emanation before it vanished for ever from the earth and departed to its own place.

The first person who came that way was Francis, who had found a hackney coach at no great distance and driven back in it to

Tuthill Fields, where it was waiting. He came leisurely along the path, while the rain pattered on the leaves overhead, and every now and then a large slow drop dripped down on to him. When he came to the bush through which Esther had made her way to his assistance, he saw her tracks, the broken twigs and scattered leaves and a bit of torn sleeve-ruffle hanging on a briar.

He smiled, and declared to himself that any other woman in the world would have done nothing under such circumstances except scream and faint. So looking through the branches, but full of his own thoughts, it was a minute or two before he noticed that Mordaunt was lying where he had left him. It cannot be said that the fact caused him keen anxiety, but he thought this swoon was lasting a long time and wondered no one had arrived from the house. When he came round the bush into the clearing he saw what had happened.

Meantime Esther had reached Peterborough House and briefly told Lord Peter-

borough of the fight and its origin. For a nobleman to employ others to beat a man he chose to consider unworthy of his sword, was not so unprecedented a thing that every one would have been equally shocked at it. Lord Peterborough, however, with all his faults was a brave man, and so cowardly a form of retaliation would never have commended itself to him. Now, when the victim was one to whom he was really attached, his indignation was extreme. But that which roused it most of all was that Mordaunt should swoon like a girl at the sight of his own blood, and in general show the white feather. He would not send any one else, but determined to come himself and let his son know his opinion of him, while Adriano was dressing his wound. And all the way as he walked beside Esther, followed by Adriano bearing a bandage and other necessaries, he was calling Heaven to witness how horribly undeserved a thing it was that he should have a chicken-hearted poltroon for his son and for heir to his distinguished name.

The path from the garden-gate ran straight to the clearing, so that while yet a little way off it they could see Francis standing by the side of the body, somewhat turned away from them, with his head sunk on his breast and his arms hanging straight by his side. Esther called to him, and looking round with a start he hurried towards them, holding up his hand to warn them from approaching nearer. He was very much agitated, and this in one who so seldom betrayed agitation, alarmed Esther.

"Stop, Essie," he said, as he came up to them; "this is no place for you."

Then, turning to Peterborough:

"My Lord, your son—your son is—is——"

"Is dead?" asked Peterborough.

Francis made an affirmative sign.

There was a pause, and even in the shadow of the trees the aging face showed a yellow pallor round the patches of paint that Adriano had so cunningly put on.

"Well," he resumed at last, "I have lost other and better sons. I did not suppose

the loss of this one would have touched me so nearly—but my race dies with him. Let us proceed."

"No, my Lord," said Francis, laying his hand on Peterborough's arm; "do not go further, do not look at him—at least not yet."

"Pshaw, boy!" cried Peterborough impatiently, pushing on; "what stuff is this you talk to an old soldier that has seen more dead men than you have seen live ones?"

"I know not how he came by his death; there has been foul play, but believe me I do not know," said Francis very earnestly, following him.

Lord Peterborough made no answer, for he was not listening. When he came near enough to see for himself the nature of his son's mortal wound, he started visibly, and going up to the body kneeled down by it, though it was plain that nothing could be done. Then turning his head to look at Francis with an awful sternness, and pointing to the wound:

"How's this, young man?" he asked. "This was never done in honourable fight."

"O my Lord," cried Francis; "before Heaven I cannot tell you. I swear to you that I gave him no greater hurt than that cut across the hand. I left him in a swoon and returning but now, I found him so."

Esther, in spite of Francis' prohibition, now came up, followed by Adriano. The Italian, who had been in a nobleman's household in his own country before taking service with Lord Peterborough, was used to seeing strange, sometimes frightful things without comment, and stood discreetly aside without any expression of emotion. Esther gave an exclamation of horror and clapped her hands to her eyes. Then, turning to Francis:

"Oh, 'tis too horrible! In God's name, Frank, how could this happen?"

"I know no more than you," he answered, with the kind of impatience that comes from pain of body or mind. His eyes sought the

face of Lord Peterborough, who had risen to his feet and was staring gloomily into the bushes straight before him.

"My Lord Peterborough," cried Francis, "do you believe me an assassin? Before Heaven I know no more than the babe unborn how this unhappy man came by his death."

"I cannot tell what to think," returned Peterborough without looking at him; "all men are liars—but if 'twas your hand that did it, then was it a foolish and ungrateful as well as a dishonourable deed."

Francis said nothing but made a gesture of despair strangely passionate for one so self-contained.

"My Lord, my Lord," cried Essie, wringing her hands, "you must believe him; indeed he is no liar and never was one. And I saw with my own eyes how he had Lord Mordaunt at his mercy and could have killed him fairly. He spared him then, in hot blood. Can you think he would slaughter him in cold? If you do not know him better than to think so, I do. Pray, my

Lord, listen to him, for he speaks nothing but the truth."

Esther in her excitement had forgotten her horror of the dead man, and had actually fallen on her knees at Lord Peterborough's side and taken hold of him to enforce her plea. He turned his head and looked at Francis, and his face softened.

"I *will* believe you, child," he said gravely; "'twould give me too much pain to do otherwise. No—that deed is not yours, but have you no guess who is the assassin?"

Francis kissed the hand that Lord Peterborough stretched out to him, and mournfully shook his head. He then repeated in greater detail the story that Esther had before told, of the assault on himself and the fight with Lord Mordaunt. When Francis had finished:

"I trust this day's work may not cost me yet another son," said Lord Peterborough. "But it seems but too likely that when the servants yonder luckless boy employed against you find he is dead, they will accuse you. Since the Duke of Hamilton's death

the magistrates have been waiting to make an example of some gentleman who has been unlucky enough to kill his adversary, and has not too powerful friends at his back. And, alas! child, with what decency could I publicly protect you in this matter?—Besides, if it be enquired into, we cannot pass it off as a duel, it having happened without witnesses, except this lady—especially the wound being as it is."

All this and more had passed through Francis' mind in the short interval that had elapsed between his finding the body and the arrival of Peterborough and Esther.

"If you'll but believe me innocent, my Lord," he replied, "I'll bear the rest. But what had I best do?"

Peterborough thought a minute.

"Go home with Miss Vanhomrigh; my people will have no clue to your whereabouts. If it appears that I cannot hush the matter up, then I will so contrive it that you leave England this night."

Calling Adriano in Italian to bind up and conceal the dead man's wound as much as

was practicable, Peterborough drew Francis away in the direction of Tuthill Fields. When they got into the fields, they found that the rain was finer than when it first began to fall, but thicker and more penetrating. It was not possible to see very far, and there was no one in sight when they reached the hackney coach. Lord Peterborough himself gave the orders to the coachman, and with a consoling observation to the effect that Adriano could not speak English comprehensibly and could hold his tongue in Italian, he sent Esther and Francis rolling off to St. James' Street.

About half-past eight o'clock in the evening Lord Peterborough arrived there himself, wrapped in a great frieze Joseph and wearing a hat and wig as unlike his usual ones as possible. He told them that of the two servants employed to beat Francis one, a negro slave, had taken the opportunity to run away, and his Lordship thought it more prudent under the circumstances to bear the loss than to advertise for him, especially if Miss Vanhomrigh thought it probable he had

recognised her. The groom had stated that he would not know the lady again who had so suddenly interfered in Francis' favour, but was positive he would know the young man himself, and that there was no doubt 'twas he had killed Lord Mordaunt, whether by accident or by intention. A footman, who had been standing under the grand staircase when Mordaunt passed down it from Lord Peterborough's apartments, although he had not heard all that Francis had then said to Mordaunt, had distinctly caught the words—"I'll kill you if I can," pronounced, as he affirmed, in a very threatening manner. Moreover, in spite of Adriano's careful bandaging, it was rumoured in the household that Mordaunt's death-wound was not such as could possibly have been given in the course of an honourable encounter. It was plain there had been foul play. Lord Peterborough was now sure that Francis must leave England at once and for a long time, if not for ever. He gave him the choice between sailing that night for France, where he might wait for the return of

James III. or take service in a foreign army, or getting on board a ship in which Peterborough had a share, which was sailing before morning for the American Plantations. The captain was an old and tried adherent of Peterborough's, and his Lordship had an estate in the American Plantations, where he believed that he could very handsomely provide for Francis—whom he desired to pass under the name of Mordaunt—and himself reap some benefit from his presence there. Yet Lord Peterborough was very loth to part with him. The young man had but a few minutes in which to decide his future, and somewhat to his Lordship's surprise he chose America. For though he was a soldier he was something else besides, and if he could not serve in the English army, he would not serve in another. Perhaps a soldier's life had not proved so satisfactory as he had expected, perhaps he had seen something of adventurers serving in foreign armies, and after his critical manner thought meanly both of them and of their career. As to James III., though his loyalty and

gratitude to Lord Peterborough made him willing, as he would have said, to act as special messenger to the devil for that nobleman, if so desired, he would have been sorry and surprised to see the return of the injured Monarch. But it must be admitted that before deciding, he asked his Lordship if there was not sometimes soldiering to be done out in the Plantations, and hearing that the Indians and the French were often very troublesome, made up his mind to go there; yet without any eagerness, for he was greatly depressed both at the part he had innocently taken in the death of Lord Peterborough's heir, and at his own sudden and indefinite banishment from England. He would gladly have stayed awhile, not merely for his own sake, but because he perceived, from what Essie told him, that the Vanhomrigh ladies were socially and pecuniarily in straits, and that if he could not materially help them, his presence would be a comfort and relief to them, especially to her. She had tried to dissuade him from seeing Mrs. Vanhomrigh,

declaring that her mother was not well enough to hear the story of his encounter with Mordaunt or its cause, and could not safely be trusted with a secret. But he insisted upon it that he could not be in Cousin Vanhomrigh's house without seeing her, and made her promise with some pride to maintain secrecy on the subject of his visit, because he was in town on a political mission. It perhaps somewhat reconciled him to leaving England to learn that Swift was there, and frequenting the family as usual, though in the country for a moment. Mrs. Vanhomrigh knew fifty good reasons why the Dean had so long postponed formally proposing for the hand of Esther, and could almost fix the exact date when he would do so. Francis, who had heard all this of old, put no particular faith in it, but he knew that if things were still in the same position as before, he would have to content himself with taking a subordinate place in Essie's regard, and suffer again the old repressed hatred of the Doctor ; a hatred which was partly jealousy and partly a natural

aversion which he would have felt under any circumstances. He had found it distinctly pleasanter to be far away, and too fully interested and occupied to be very sensible of his own loves and hates. Yet for a little while he might have been happy with them, his oldest, almost his only friends in the world, and serviceable to them, had it not been for his misadventure of that morning.

The three, Peterborough, Esther and Francis, were mostly silent as they walked along the deserted dripping Mall in the dusk of the summer evening in the direction of Westminster stairs. At the top of the stairs was a bench where a number of watermen sat, some dozing, some smoking, and some playing cards by the light of a lantern; villainous-looking men, mostly wearing loose blouses, the skirts of which hung down beneath their waistcoats, no coats, and caps on their unkempt locks. A fare on such an evening was a strange and welcome sight, and there was a commotion among them, some dozen men jumping up at once

and shouting, "Oars, Sir?"—"Sculls, your honour?"—"Sculls or oars, gentlemen?" Peterborough bespoke a couple of oars, and while a dirty-looking and foul-mouthed waterman was hailing his boat and the comrade who shared it with him, Francis and Esther stood together on the bank.

"It is very hard to lose you thus, Francis," said she. "It was a wonderful comfort to me to see you this morning."

He sighed, and made no answer.

"All this will pass over; Lord Peterborough is set on hushing it up. Meanwhile, you must write us how you do. I do not love to think you are going to so savage a country."

"I shall return," he replied; "I will return. You have but to send for me when I can be of service, and I will certainly come. Mordaunt will soon be forgotten and I yet sooner."

"I trust it may be so," she said. "In any case, dear generous cousin, we shall not forget you—nor cease to be sorry that you suffer through us, for it is through us."

"No, Hess; do not continue to say that," he cried impatiently. "'Tis a mere cursed trick of the jade Fortune. I care not—I will be even with her somehow, and you shall see me return.—That is, if you wish to see me."

"Come, child," Peterborough called out; "the oars are ready. Make your adieux as tenderly as you will, but briefly. I'll not count the kisses."

"My service to Cousin Vanhomrigh and Moll, and I trust they will soon be in health," said Francis, and raised Esther's hand to his lips. She kissed him hastily on the forehead, both gentlemen paused and made their bows to her at the top of the stairs, then by the flickering light of the boatman's lantern, she saw Peterborough push Francis into the boat before him, throw money to a man who was holding it up to the landing-place with a hook, and sign to him to let go. In less than a minute the dark boat disappeared in the darker shadow of the bridge; its lantern gleamed there for a moment, and was gone. Old

Ann had followed the party at a little distance and now joined Esther, who went home to St. James' Street as quickly as she could, oppressed with a sense of desertion, and very melancholy.

CHAPTER XVII.

JUNE and July went by, and still Swift was in Berkshire. Not far from Wantage a bosky cluster of elm-trees fills up a fold of the downs. Passing along the ancient grassy road called the Ridge Way, you look down on it, and see a church tower and perhaps a red gable or two and a wreath of blue smoke rising above the heavy summer foliage, sole signs of the village of Letcombe Bassett. In this quiet spot, that hears scarcely any sound except the noise of water and the rushing of the great down winds in the tree-tops, here in the house of a silent eccentric parson of small means, he boarded himself out and let the busy world go its way. It was not in any spirit of cheerful philosophy that he thus threw aside the tangled skein of

his affairs, public and private, nor did he consciously go to Nature for consolation. But she, although she could not give him cheerfulness, did unasked deliver him from the storms of bitter anger, the thousand agitations, the "fever of the soul" that mined his being in London and in Dublin, and bestow upon him a certain calm, as it were the calm of a lowering autumn day. The long internecine struggle between his friends Bolingbroke and the Lord Treasurer had ended in the overthrow of the latter; and Swift, who had been maddened by his obstinacy and stupidity in the days of his prosperity, stood by him with loyal affection in his disgrace. Now Queen Anne was dead, his own hopes of advancement dead with her, and his friends, as it was rumoured, likely to be accused of high treason. He hardly knew why he lingered; perhaps partly because he shrank from returning to Dublin, partly because he loved, however uselessly, to stand by his friends when they were in trouble. Even had he known how far Bolingbroke and Peterborough and

Atterbury had gone in those intrigues with St. Germains which had so little of his sympathy, he could not have borne to forsake them. His own political career was over, and with it he thought all that was worth calling his life.

"Few and evil have been my days," he murmured to himself, and bowed his head on his breast, as he came along the Ridge Way, returning from one of those long rides which were at once a diversion to him and a cure for his bodily ailments. Five-and-thirty years of servitude had been his, yet five of comparative obscurity, some three or four of power and fame and strenuous life, when, like a swimmer borne shorewards on the summit of a wave, he had rejoiced in his strength and made sure of reaching his goal; but the wave was spent, and again he was engulfed in the trough of the sea, this time as it seemed never to re-emerge. Nor was his ambition or his disappointment all of a petty and personal kind. Faults he had as a politician and as a man; he was imperious and prejudiced in a generation in which his

freedom from many prejudices was more remarkable than his slavery to some. But he had strong sense, a far-seeing mind, and above all a public spirit, a love of justice, an inflexible uprightness almost unique in the petty venal herd which was soon to be priced and bought by Walpole. He was fitted to serve his country, he had overcome as no man before had overcome the difficulties of poverty and want of powerful connections, and had sat as an equal at the Councils of Ministers, by that equality doing more to affirm the dignity of the Church than any Bishop in the House of Lords. A turn of the wheel, and not only was his every achievement rendered null and void, but the party on whom he fondly imagined the prosperity of England to depend, was not so much deprived of power as annihilated. Over these public misfortunes, over the misfortunes and difficulties of his private life, he brooded ceaselessly, sitting with a book before him in the little wainscoted parlour at Letcombe Bassett or roaming through the lanes and fields. It

was his folly, his weakness, perhaps his inevitable curse to be unable to refrain hi thoughts from wandering again and again in the same well-trodden weary unprofitable ways. The oftener they returned thither, the greater, the more intolerable appeared the wrongs he had suffered from Nature, from Fortune, from his fellow-men. Nothing but hard galloping on horseback seemed able to shake the brooding demon from his soul, and that but for a little. Happily his friend Mr. Harley had made him a present of a powerful horse that carried his weight easily. Often in the gathering dusk, or when the wild gusts of rain were driving over the open downs, the lonely shepherd, standing in the doorway of his wheeled hut, would be startled by the quick heavy thud of hoofs coming along the Ridge Way, and see a great iron-grey horse pass by at a gallop, sometimes with every sinew stretched to the utmost, foam flying from the bit and blood on the rider's spur. At other times, when the hour was earlier and the day fairer, the grim-looking rider would draw rein and

exchange some simple talk with the shepherd about the weather and his flock; on which subject, in spite of, or perhaps in consequence of his deferentially proffered questions and opinions, the shepherd pronounced him to be a very knowing gentleman, though he could not go so far as to altogether contradict the Letcombe folk, who held the poor gentleman to be weak in his intellects, and for this reason placed by his friends under the care of Parson Gery. Swift was no enthusiast for Nature; a well-planted orchard and a trim willow-walk gave him more definite pleasure than the wide prospect from the Ridge Way, which probably affected him little more than it had done the Roman legionaries that had passed along it before him. Yet he climbed the steep way thither again and again, out of love for the light fresh airs that stream across the downs, the feel and the scent of their fine springy turf, and the freedom of the long galloping ground, rolling itself out interminably before him under the immensity of the sky.

One day early in August, the weather

being fine but not hot—for there was a light breeze blowing and fleecy clouds drifting across the blue—he started for his ride earlier than usual, and about four o'clock in the afternoon dismounted from his heated horse in the stable yard of the parsonage.

"Rub him down well, boy," he said to the lad who took charge of him. "Look ye now, boy, as long as I am over you, never call a horse dry till you have rubbed yourself into a sweat over him, nor oblige him with the water-pail till he is too cool to be anxious for 't. How you may treat your next master's cattle is none of my concern, but be sure you'll never see the colour of my money, beyond what the law obliges, unless you use my beast handsomely. Methinks the oats were lower in the sack this morning than they should have been. Look to that now as you love my money!"

The lad, who heard pretty much this discourse every day and never knew whether to grin or to be sulky at it, to-day resented the innuendo about the oats.

"Lor' bless your honour, how 'a do talk,

and yer honour knowin' no more nor the babe unbarn o' beästs and vittles and thik loike! I tell 'ee this 'ere harse do eat a power o' wuts, that 'a do, and small shame to 'un, poor beäst, says I."

"Well, well, I'll pass it this once; but never think to deceive me, boy, or you'll find it's yourself that's mightily deceived. I shall find you out; faith, I shall."

And somewhat stimulated and cheered by his ride and his little encounter with the stable-boy, he walked into the house and opened the door of the wainscoted parlour which was dedicated to his own use. It had a low casement window, on which the oblique rays of the afternoon sun were just beginning to strike, making a certain dimness and dazzle in the room. Through this he distinguished, to his amazement, the figure of a lady in very deep mourning, seated with her back to the light. He paused a moment on the threshold, inwardly cursing the stupidity of the maid-servant, who must have shown some visitor of his host's into his sanctum. But the idea had scarcely time

to occur to him before the lady sprang to her feet and threw back her veil.

"Hess!" he cried in incredulity mingled with something like horror. "Good God! Can it be you?"

The trembling anxiety with which she had watched him enter the house grew to trembling fear.

"Don't be angry with me," she pleaded, "I could not help it. 'Twas too tantalising to pass through Wantage and not see you. Didn't you want to see me, Cadenus?"

"Yes—No, I mean. Why could you not send for me if you must be coming to Wantage?"

"I had no time, dear sir," she answered.

"Why the devil should you come by Wantage?" he continued. "Whither are you posting that you come this road rather than by Oxford?"

"To Witney, sir; and besides, sir," she went on, still anxiously excusing herself, "I had a desire to thank you for your kindness in the matter of the money. I dare assure you your signing the bond shall be but a

form, yet it helped me mightily with Barber, who without it would I believe have looked very shyly on the loan."

"Oh, I hate to be thanked, miss, more especially for nothing! Pray, where is your discretion? You used to boast that you had abundance. You showed none in coming hither to set Mrs. Gery tattling."

The passionate annoyance that betrayed itself in his tone, and in the working of his heavy eyebrows, seemed far greater than the occasion warranted. If he had said his whole mind he would have cried: "I want to forget you; I was succeeding in a measure, and here you come to undo my work. I do not know if I love you, but I do know that I hate the tangle you have made in my life."

If she had known the truth, Esther might not have felt so much surprise and indignation at her reception as now overcame her fear, causing her to flash one look upon him, and then, throwing her heavy veil once more over her face, walk out of the room and the house without a single word, or so much as

seeing Mrs. Gery on the stairs in her best gown and cap. Mrs. Gery, who having but few incidents in her life was obliged to make the most of those that came in her way, had already held a little consultation with the servant on the subject of this mysterious lady, evidently young and fine in spite of her veil and her mourning, who had come to see the Dean and had excused herself from taking a dish of tea in the best parlour. Her rapid disappearance was disappointing, but increased the mystery of her appearance, and Mrs. Gery so plied the Dean with her questions and officious offers of entertainment, that it was some minutes before he could sneak out of the house and down the road after Esther. He followed her at a little distance, not wishing her to return to the parsonage. As she went down the steep hollow lane overarched by trees, she thought she heard the well-known footstep behind her, but would not turn. When she came to the bridge over the long pool formed by the millstreams, she paused a moment and leaned on the parapet, as though to

look at a water-lily that was still in bloom, floating over its own reflection in the dark still water, and then she caught a glimpse of Swift following her; but still she continued to walk on up the Letcombe Regis road. Swift came up with her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"I ask your pardon, Governor Huff. I meant not to be unkind. I was vexed more for your sake than my own."

"I care not for your reasons," returned she, without looking at him. "Who'd think of 'em in the moment of a *joyful* surprise? No—I was used to have a friend, but now it seems I have only a benefactor."

"Governor Huff will always be chiding because Cadenus is a sober old Doctor that can't forget his reasons. Yet sure that makes him the better friend for a young woman that is sometimes—Oh, only sometimes, I allow!—no wiser than others of her sex and age."

"A feeling friend would out of mere compassion have given me a kinder welcome, seeing the many uneasinesses I have to suffer.

You do not know all, yet enough to have affected you with pity, had you been capable of it: my poor mamma dying while Moll was yet between life and death, a confusion in our affairs such as 'twould take a better lawyer than I to unravel, such a wretch of a brother as you cannot imagine, and the fear every day to fall alone, two unprotected young women, into the hands of the bailiffs. 'Twas for this reason we fled from London on Sunday, though Moll is most unfit to travel, and mean to lodge with a cousin at Witney till we get some money from my Irish estate. I cannot tell how far I am liable for these debts. O Cadenus, you are indeed heartless to add your displeasure, your most undeserved displeasure, to all my other afflictions!"

"Poor Bratikin!" he said. "How canst thou say I did not pity thee, when I did from my soul, and helped thee so far as in me lay?"

"Yes, I was mad and most ungrateful to say so," she returned, sighing and throwing back her veil once more, as she pressed her

hand to her forehead. "Well, 'tis a wonder I am not in Bedlam by this. You do pity me, that's certain; but 'tis not just that I want of you. I want you to feel with me, Cadenus, you that know better than any man alive how to feel with your friends in their misfortunes. But I am very exacting to expect it, when indeed you do not know half mine, for I was afraid to commit them to the post, for fear all your letters should be read."

"I am truly grieved for 'em before knowing 'em, little Hess. Could you not go to Lewis for counsel?"

"No, sir, not very conveniently. He had some disagreement with my dear mamma, which I do not well understand, but she was mightily huffed with him, for her, who was, as you must be sensible, the best-natured creature that ever breathed. He knew so much of our affairs too, that I feared he might require to know more, and 'tis the worst of our troubles that some of 'em might be termed disgraces."

Swift's eager sympathies, his friendship

and regret for poor "neighbour Van," and the true affection for Esther herself that underlay those other conflicting feelings of his towards her; all combined to break down the barrier between them which he had mentally erected. There was not a soul to be met on the pleasant country road, which ran on accompanied for a time by a babbling stream and broadened by irregular stretches of turf, dotted here and there with forest trees. As they walked on, Esther told him bit by bit, with many comments from both sides, the family history of the last two months. He had forbidden any of his friends to send him a newspaper, but he had heard of the mysterious death of Lord Peterborough's son, as to whom it was currently reported that he had been killed in a duel under circumstances in some way discreditable to him. This accounted for the fact that though Lord Peterborough could not prevent an inquest being held upon him, and a verdict of murder being returned against his adversary, he had yet taken no steps to procure evidence or to

pursue the murderer, who had somehow immediately disappeared; for which neglect his Lordship was much blamed in certain quarters. This was all that had reached Swift of what had been for a week the talk of the town, and Esther was thankful to find it was so, for it showed there were some persons at least who could mention Mordaunt without mentioning Mrs. Mary Vanhomrigh. She had fancied, as people do fancy who either gossip or are gossiped about, that "every one" was talking of the story in which she herself was interested.

So in familiar talk that gradually obliterated the traces of their stormy meeting and of the last two months of separation, they walked on through Letcombe Regis and took the field way to Wantage. In the wide corn-land through which it first passes, the blue-stockinged reapers were cutting the corn, and the women were binding it in sheaves. The afternoon sunshine lay on the plain with its golden wealth of harvest, its clusters and lines of heavy-foliaged elms, and its red-roofed homesteads; but fleecy

clouds were still piled up on the horizon, and from time to time a silent procession of shadows moved along the line of the downs. Swift exchanged greetings with the country folk, who all with bob-curtsey or uplifted hat did that reverence to "the quality" which they consider less a matter of courtesy than a duty enjoined upon them at their baptism.

When they had reached a pleasant meadow, across which a chalk-stream from the downs ran sparkling and clear:

"Let us sit here awhile," said Swift; "I know you love to be romantic, and here's a purling stream, and yonder are willows enough. If I was you, when I had rested a bit, I would choose a handsome tree, take out my pocket-knife, and carve in the bark of it an 'F.' and an 'E.,' twined round with a hempen rope tied in a true lovers' knot."

Esther, awaking from a reverie, stared at him.

"What's this you're talking of?" she asked.

"Why, Silly, if you're not in love with this cousin of yours, this slashing swain,

this Mordantino, 'tis mighty ungrateful of you."

"I am above answering your banter," returned Esther, tossing her chin and blushing deeply.

"I hope he is really indifferent to you, Hesskin," he continued, "for it is very unlikely you'll ever set eyes on him again. Yet it is certain he behaved very handsomely —though, when I come to think of it, it was for his own skin he was fighting, not yours, and he would without doubt have been forced to take his beating had you not intervened. Well, well! These are the scurvy tricks that noble lords love to play us commonalty, and I wonder not if, on thinking the matter over, your Mordantino repented him of his generosity and could not forbear letting out the villain's life."

"For shame, Cadenus!" cried Esther. "You never loved poor Frank, but this passes everything. He is incapable of such a deed; and besides he strongly denied it, and I would stake my life upon his word."

"Peace, peace be with us, Missessy. I ask you a thousand pardons. I said it of purpose to provoke you—and must confess that when I hear how hotly you defend your spark, I am no longer surprised that Molly was of the opinion you was in love with him. Faith, she may be more right than either of us, for she's a wise girl in other folk's concerns, is poor Moll. They say, you know, that little misses can't read their own hearts."

There fell an ominous silence; Esther was pulling up blades of grass by the root and tearing them to shreds.

"Cruel! Hateful!" she cried, in a low voice. "Oh, that I had never read mine, or let you read it! Yet, I must have died else. Died! If any one else could see into my heart, they'd wonder that I live, for you alone make my life insupportable, without considering the thousand other uneasinesses I must suffer. Why should I sit struggling with misfortunes, when not all the wealth of the Indies can promise me satisfaction? Why do I live? I know

not, indeed I know not. Sometimes I am resolved to die."

"Hush, hush, Essie!" said Swift, not without agitation. "These are very wild words, and I could better excuse them in Moll, whose misfortunes have been much greater than yours."

"Poor Molly!" returned Esther, gloomily. "'Tis partly for her sake I continue to live. Yet I am not so good a Christian as to find satisfaction in living only for another. I know not how long I shall be able to endure it. Her misfortunes are part of my own; but I deny them to be greater than my private griefs."

"'Tis human nature to do that, Essie. There are few things we are so unwilling to admit about others as that their luck has been worse than our own. Yet you cannot pretend to have lost at one blow the better half both of your fortune and your reputation, to say nothing of a lover who has come to a miserable end, though not more miserable than he deserved. You have your health. These troubles consequent

upon poor Madam Van's death will pass over with a little management, and you will find yourself the mistress of a good fortune. Believe me, however the romantic may talk, health and wealth form two large parts of happiness, and sincere friendship the rest. As for these other fancies you will still be maundering about, no reasonable being can for an instant regard them."

"I am sick of your Reason and your Reasonable Beings," said she. "Pray, what does it all mean? Were I confined by some spell to this meadow and forbidden to get food from elsewhere, I should protest I starved, and doubtless the sheep would find me mighty ridiculous. Yes, yonder grave old ram would be positive I could not starve among all this good rich grass You judge me after his manner, Cadenus, when you declare I have everything to make me happy."

"Happy?" repeated Swift, with a sombre look. "Who is happy? Happiness is a word the devil learned in Paradise to mock us with, lest we should find content. I do

not say you are happy, foolish child, but I say you have much less reason to be unhappy than Moll; and I also say that you have not half her philosophy, who appears to have cured herself at once of her infatuation for her spark, when 'twas clear it could cause her nothing but uneasiness."

"Moll again! You can compare a thing so paltry as her flame for that poor wretch to the inexpressible love I bear—O Heavens! Why was I born with such feelings as sure no other creature in this dull age is cursed with, and all, all to be squandered on a block — a stone! 'Twould have been too much to hope that I should find a being whose heart was as capable of love as my own, yet I need not have chanced on one that knows not the very alphabet of it, and will not and cannot learn. Oh, I see well enough 'tis Hebrew, 'tis Chinese to you—no need to tell me you have never loved, for could you give the least guess at what you make me suffer, you'd be a monster to inflict it."

Swift was seated on a knoll of grass, and

his hands, clasped across his raised knees, were twisting and playing with his cane. As Esther spoke the blood ebbed from his face, leaving it ashy pale, and when she ended he did not raise his eyes from the point of the cane, which he kept digging into the ground. At length he spoke, but still without looking up.

"D'ye think I don't know what it means to suffer, Hess?"

"Not as I do, Cadenus."

He dropped his forehead on his clasped hands and began a laugh, which broke and turned to a long low moaning exclamation. Esther hearing it was seized with terror and remorse. She took him by the arm.

"O sir, pray don't! Cadenus — dearest, I beg and pray your forgiveness a thousand million times. O Heavens, that I should cause you the least uneasiness! Wretch that I am, unworthy of your friendship, how indeed should you love me? 'Tis madness to dream it. Forgive me this once, and I'll try to be content, indeed I'll try not to complain.—Cadenus!"

Swift raised himself from his bowed posture.

"Let us be calm," he said; "both of us if we can. I forgive you, unhappy child, and hope you'll forgive me as freely. Very likely you think you have more to forgive, yet if you knew all, you'd see it is not so. We are both the victims of Fate, and it is of no avail to struggle. But there's one particular, Hess, of which, seeing your esteem and friendship for me, I warn you, and it is this. My constitution—it is a secret, remember—is unsound. One of these days your upbraidings, if you continue them, will undoubtedly drive me out of——I mean, bring me to my end."

He spoke so solemnly that the warning could not be regarded as a mere attempt to frighten his friend into self-restraint. Esther shuddered and looked at him with wide eyes.

"Is it possible, sir, you have any malady that endangers your life? This is horrible."

"Horrible!" cried Swift, with energy. "'Tis hellish!" and he gripped her shoulder. "Look, Missessy, can you keep a secret?

Yes, though a woman, I believe you can. You have told me your secret, I'll pay you in your own money and tell you mine—one I never whispered before to any living creature."

He hesitated; then, pointing to a great isolated elm, the topmost branches of which stood out lightning-seared and naked above its lower greenery, said:

"Look at that tree. 'Tis what I shall be, what I'm fast becoming—dead at the top. Think, Hess,—alive, but dead at the top." And he touched his forehead significantly. "There's some woman in a play—trust you to know all about it—raves like the very devil because she must be shut up in a vault with the bones of her ancestors. What's that to knowing yourself condemned to drag your own bones, your own hideous rotten contemptible corpse about the world, to be a mock, a scorn, a horror, alike to your friends and to your enemies? And that's the fate I see before me, have seen before me for years, but always getting nearer, till I seem to touch it, to feel it—Hush! Don't

let's talk of that any more, it's too frightful and shocking to speak of—and yet 'twill be."

Esther locked her hands tightly together, but otherwise she was calm.

"Dear Cadenus," she said earnestly, "I am very glad you told me of it. 'Tis most horrible, a nightmare fancy; but there's no truth in it. Such false terrors will appear to us in the solitude of our own thoughts, as horrid shapes appear to children in the dark —but there's no substance in 'em. That you of all men living should fear to lose your powers of mind is indeed singular. My opinion of the matter is scarce worth your taking, but I beg of you to confide in Mr. Pope, or Dr. Arbuthnot, or some other whose judgment you value. I am confident they would tell you that for the greatest genius, the brightest wit that has adorned this age, to torment himself with the fear that his intellects are failing him, is the most preposterous fancy that ever was engendered by the spleen."

"Ay, Hesskin, ay, that they would," he

answered nodding his head gloomily; "so well have I kept my counsel. But look you, Missessy," and again he gripped her shoulder and positively shook her, "now I've told you my secret, I'll not have you treat it as the megrims of a sick girl, d'ye hear? Do you believe me such a fool as to plague and martyr myself, to refrain from pretty near everything that's sweet in life, and for years and years, the best part of a lifetime, to continue like that, and all for the sake of a fancy? By Heavens, then, you shall hear the whole truth, you shall see the bottom of the matter, since your cursed female curiosity drives you to it! Yes, I fear I shall end a madman.—Why?—Why? Because I am a madman already."

His hand dropped from Esther's shoulder on to the grass. The throbbing of her pulses visibly stirred the heavy crape kerchief that covered her throat and bosom; she did not look at him at once, but bit her under-lip and knit her brow as she stared at the grass, and Swift, who usually sharply rebuked this and any other facial trick, took

no notice of it. Then regarding him steadily and severely:

"I suppose, sir," she said, "you'll be angry if I tell you you certainly talk like one. Compose yourself, I beg, and tell me what just cause you have for thinking yourself—you that's reason personified—to have lost your reason."

Swift's gaze fell before hers; the set muscles of his frowning face relaxed, he seemed to calm himself by a mighty effort, and when he spoke again it was in his usual tone.

"'Except I thrust my hand into the wounds'—Eh? O Didymus, Didymus!—I will then describe to you the cause and effect of my malady, as exactly as though you were a physician much wiser than any that ever yet was calved. For look you—but don't tell it to my good Arbuthnot, Hess—with their Galen and their Pharmacopœia, and their palatial wigs, these poor fellows smother up the little light of reason that Nature gave 'em. A bumpkin squire that asks the pedigree of a horse or hound before he buys

it, hath a better empiric judgement of things than they. I've fooled the doctor and myself so long with that tale of the surfeit of fruit I ate when I was young, and how since then I have been subject to this vomiting and giddiness in the head, that I hardly know what is the truth of the matter. But this I know,—my father's brother in Dublin, he that used me so ill when I was a lad, was subject to this same affection, and he was drivelling, raving mad for years before he died. Ay, ay, haven't I seen the crazy old villain scrambling about his fine house and beating the furniture for rage? And I used to laugh at the poor old wretch, Hess. Besides, my mother's family was said to have this curse on it: that one in every generation must drop down dead or lose his senses. Well, well! This kind of estate will not keep itself in the male line. My mother's brother killed in a fit of madness a wife he valued more than most men value theirs. Consider, Hess—to pass through a hell like that, and when you'd struggled back into the world, and lay there all faint and torn by the

devils that had left you, and when you missed the woman that should have been watching at your bedside—think of it, Hess."

"Most sad and terrible, sir, yet not your case. And to consider the matter so nearly, and your own chances of being in such a case, is to invite the madness which you fear, and of which up to this present you show not the least threatening sign, but very much the contrary."

"Ah, Hess, there's where you err." And he lowered his voice. "You know I never see any creature but Patrick when my head's bad. This is why I keep Patrick, though he's the greatest slut that wears breeches. He's very stupid and very good-natured, and he'll not observe or resent anything I may do; and moreover, should he talk on't, he's so notorious a liar that even his fellow-footmen won't trouble to report what he tells 'em. But the truth is I am always strangely dull and cross after these bouts with my head, and sometimes, Missessy, sometimes—well, the words won't come. I know well enough what I want, but I can't find 'em, or

I find 'em wrong. And if any one asks me the least question, as, Where is my watch? or, What is the name of my doctor? 'tis not merely that I cannot answer him, but I could kill him for anger at being asked. Yes, the least trifling word or touch may prove sufficient to transport me with rage, and though I thank the Almighty I have never yet lost control over my words or actions, He only knows when and what the end of the matter may be."

"Dear sir," she said, rather tremulously, and placing her hand on his, which lay on the grass, "He certainly sent you a mercy in disguise when he removed you from public affairs."

"No, Hess!" cried Swift with animation. "There's nothing invigorates the mind like affairs of state. My cursed luck has lain in this, that I have had to act with men that had neither common-sense nor resolution. And yet you are right, for who can deal with public affairs except through public men? And are not these altogether vanity?" He sighed dejectedly and said after a pause:

"You'll despise me now, Missessy, you'll sneer when I talk of reason.'

Esther half rose, and it happened that in doing so she kneeled.

"I? I, Cadenus?" she asked with clasped hands: "Dear honoured—" and she raised to him the dewy brightness of her eyes and the smile of her mouth, pathetic, triumphant.

Swift looked at her kneeling so before him with a deep melancholy, through which an underlying tenderness was more perceptible than he guessed. His character was essentially secretive, and everything in his life had tended to strengthen its natural bent. Doubtless there would be subsequent moments when he would bitterly regret having entrusted his secret to any one, but just at this moment he felt only a sense of absolute rest, of relief from a long strain. Humiliation there was none in having confessed his weakness to one whose devotion to him was inalterable, but on the contrary some indirect gratification to his self-esteem; for it is only the dull who think

it more flattering to be loved for what they are fancied to be than for what they really are. The charm, the fascination of that great love which had so strangely invaded his life, came over him more strongly than ever before, and more definitely than ever before he paused to listen to the voice of the enchantress Might-have-been, whose habitation is not far from that of Giant Despair.

"Essie," he said, "do not think me insensible to your—your great affection. Oh, what a brute beast should I be, were it so! There are moments when I would give much to be young again, and able to forget reason and duty. They are hard masters, Hesskin, that give us nothing for our service but the need to serve 'em. Had I met such a one as you twenty years since—well, I might have been madder and more miserable and happier too, and pleaded my youth as an excuse for the wretchedness I have caused to myself and others. But now —though I should curse the hour that ever I laid on my neck the yoke of this Reason

and this Duty,—which yet I am bold to say are of a nobler sort than your common church-mouse wots of—now I could not be free of it, I could not endure to kick against the pricks."

Esther, who was seated lower on the bank than himself, was now resting her elbows on the grass and leaning her head on her clasped hands in such a way that he could not see her face ; only a black veil and an aureole of hair, golden in the sun.

"Cadenus," she said in a low submissive voice, "tell me—I only wish to understand, Why did reason and duty forbid you to marry, which is, I suppose, what you mean ?"

"There, Hess," he returned somewhat sharply, "there you are—the voice of the world, that thinks there's no case of conscience outside the Articles and the Ten Commandments. I tell you I was poor, sick, ambitious, ill-tempered and mad ; and I am now a little less poor, much less ambitious, but sick, ill-tempered, and a great deal more mad, besides being old. Had I married I should

now be in Bedlam, and my wife a beggar as my own mother was, and my children a pack of miserable beggars such as I was, and with the same curse on them. I know not whether the folly or the crime of it would have been the greater."

"But, sir," she resumed more pleadingly, "'twould sure be much better for you to have a woman to tend you, when you were sick, than a rough footman, whom you your self say is dull."

"A woman, Hess? What woman? A wife, d'ye mean, to pry and gaze upon me, and go whisper of the poor Doctor and his fits with the dear goodies her neighbours? You think she wouldn't? I tell you this, Missessy, I know no woman of sense or spirit who'd bear to be used as I use Patrick at times, without resentment; 'twould not be in human nature that she should. She'd grow to detest and despise her husband, and she'd always be watching him to see if the fit was coming on. I promise you, when we had a difference of opinion, she'd remember my wits were not always as clear as they

should be. Why, the very thought of it would be enough to drive me stark staring mad."

There was silence, and then he resumed in a very gentle voice, that markedly contrasted with the sharpness of his preceding tone.

"I confess, Essie, that you dealt with me, you tamed me better than I could have thought possible, the only time you ever saw me in my sickness. Yet 'twas but a touch of it, a threatening, that day—you know when I mean don't you?—in Bury Street, on your cousin's wedding-day. I'm glad 'twas no worse. I could not have borne you to see me worse. You'd hate and despise me if you did. Yet little Hesskin, I have often thought of it since when I've had a bad fit, and been fool enough to fancy you'd have tended me when I was roaring with pain more cleverly than Patrick, and set me down too when I got angry—just made me remember myself, and keep quiet. I never thought a woman could have set me down when I needed it as you do, Essie, and I not resent it."

The cup of Esther's emotion was already brimming, and at this acknowledgment it overflowed. In another moment she was fallen across his feet, clinging to them, crushing her soft arms and bosom and fine crape against them, not indeed shedding tears, but sobbing passionately between her almost inaudible words.

"Then why mayn't I serve you? I only want to serve you. You say I do it better than Patrick, and yet you won't let me. Why? I see no reason. It would be kinder to let me come, and if you killed me—if you should kill some one, it had better be me, for I should not care—it would not hurt me half so much as your killing, killing words and your sending me away. How can you dream that anything on earth could alter you to me—make you one whit less loved, less honoured? You've cut me to the soul in telling me of your affliction, and you ought to let me share it. I have a right to share it."

Swift drew her gently up till she was kneeling again, but this time nearer to him,

and as he laid his hand on her two clasped hands, her eyes were but little below his own. It was a long, a deeply agitated and melancholy look, that he allowed himself into those pleading eyes. It was all that and more. Esther's violent sobs had ceased, though her lips still trembled.

"Impossible," he said at length.

There was one obstacle to the accomplishment of Esther's desires which he did not mention, and which might not have seemed to every one, as it did to him, the most insuperable.

Those other obstacles between him and marriage he had always before found enough, yet now it is possible that they might have been swept away by the onrush of a stronger tide than any they had yet to resist, had it not been for this hidden barrier.

That was firmly fixed in his mind, and moreover could he have brought himself to discover it to Essie, she also would have recognised its inflexible nature. The tender blameless ties which had bound him for so many years to Esther Johnson, did not

imply marriage with her, but they forbade marriage with another. He was too upright to plead before the tribunal of his conscience the absence of any agreement between them, yet he could not bring himself to allow her claims to another, to acknowledge in so many words that he was not a free man. It was only since his relations to Esther Vanhomrigh had become disquieting that he had put these claims before himself, and it was against his nature, his feeling at the moment and all the traditions of his life, to explain them to Essie. He pretended to himself that the secret was Esther Johnson's more than his own, and therefore he could not honourably divulge it to any one, least of all to another woman, who would no doubt take a conventional view of the matter and refuse to regard him as bound by ties so singular and so informal. Probably she would make imputations on Mrs. Johnson's character, if she knew that Pdfr. shared his income with Ppt.; and without telling that, the whole of his obligations in the matter would not

be clear. It was not now that these thoughts came into his mind in any sequence; he had had but too much occasion for them before, and the sum of them was already there, both for good and for evil.

"Impossible," he said; loyal with all the strength of his will and his judgment to Esther Johnson, and a long past that was his own and hers, even while his arm was round that other Esther, who had grown too dear to him, and whose face was lifted to his so childlike soft and fair, so beautifully transparent in the light of a passion that was as innocent as it was measureless. The colour which had returned to Esther's cheek beneath that long look ebbed again. She withdrew her hands and sat down a little way off him.

"If you do not love me," she said, "why do you tell me your secrets?"

"Good God, Essie!" cried Swift, and took his hat off his head and dashed it on to the ground; "what in Heaven's name can I say to you?"

Then he edged up nearer to her, and lay-

ing his hand once more on her two clasped ones :

" Hess," he said solemnly, " you are dearer to me than any living creature ; you are of all women her whom I most esteem and adore. For God's sake be content with this, and cease to torture one that loves you but too sincerely. My resolution is taken, and has been taken for as many years as you have been in this unhappy world. Either we part for ever here and now, or you pledge me your word—I know 'tis sacred—that you will, without further questioning of my reasons, accept my inalterable determination. If in poetry Cadenus has spoken less plainly, has appeared to vacillate in this matter, why, Vanessa knows better than any one that poets play strange tricks with the truth, even when they pretend to tell it. The Dean says plainly to his dear, dearest friend, that her lover he has not been, nor will be ; her husband he cannot, nor ever can be ; her friend he has been, is, and will be to the end of his miserable days. Do you promise, Missessy ? "

Esther was silent a little; then in a low deliberate voice:

"I cannot promise to be content," she answered.

Swift rose to his feet. He dared not look down at Esther; he looked through the tall hedge-row elms away to the downs.

"Then farewell, child, farewell!" he said hastily; "and God bless you!" Esther seized his coat.

"Stop!" she cried, she too springing to her feet, "I did not mean that. Wait till I tell you what I mean. I wish to say that I do not see how any mortal can promise what they will feel or think. Alas! Who would invite their own thoughts and feelings could they foresee them?"

"Who, indeed!" groaned Swift.

"And I cannot promise not to reproach you, should you behave ill to me, for I could not avoid doing so."

Swift smiled a grim, melancholy smile.

"No, Governor Huff, on my conscience I do not believe you could. You speak the

truth as usual, Missessy, and having been so honest as to tell me what you cannot promise, pray now tell me if there is anything you can?"

Esther paused, and then spoke with her eyes on the ground.

"I promise to restrain my feelings as much as lies in my power, and I also promise never again to—to—" she hesitated, then looking him in the face, she continued in a clear steady voice, "never to attempt by word or deed to make you alter your determination."

"Well said! Well said, child!" he cried. "I applaud your resolution. Believe me, by restraining an inclination we get completely the better of it in time." And smiling somewhat ironically: "I once loved figs, you know, and now can see 'em without the least desire to taste 'em."

"Have you promised me anything in return?" asked Esther gravely, without noticing this philosophical reflection, which its author had perhaps addressed more to himself than to her.

"Yes," he returned as gravely; "give me your hand." She did so. "I promise you, Essie," he said, "a most tender and devoted and constant friendship, from this day to the day of my death, which I pray the Almighty may not be a very great way off. Amen."

He held her hand a moment longer. Then:

"Let us go on," he said. "Moll will be expecting us."

The silence which followed as they walked side by side in the direction of Wantage was instinct with calm happiness to Esther. Whatever she might feel in the future about the compact into which they had entered and the manner in which Swift fulfilled his part of it, just now it seemed very sweet and sacred. For Swift that silence was full of inward debate.

"I have surely sacrificed this poor child and my own inclinations sufficiently," he protested to himself. "A man is not bound to be the friend of one woman only, as he is bound to be the husband of one wife only."

And yet a voice went on repeating with a monotonous cuckoo-cry: "Pdfr. does not love Ppt. Poor Ppt!" And all love and all affection, and the very bond into which he had just entered, seemed to him dust and ashes, mocked as they were by this *memento mori*, this haunting ghost of things that had once been so sweet, and were now so manifestly dead.

They walked thus in silence for awhile, and then Swift began once more to discuss the tangled business affairs of the Vanhomrigh family. Ginckel was still in Paris, alleging fifty reasons why his successful courtship of the rich widow could not be brought to a crisis. Meantime he was indignant at his appropriation of Molly's money being called anything but a loan to which he had a right.

"Why do you not apply to Cousin Purvis?" asked Swift.

"The poor lady has had a stroke of the palsy, and has lost her senses for the present," replied Esther. "Besides, our poor mamma applied to her so often that I believe I should have been ashamed to."

"And Ford? How did Ford behave?" asked he. Esther shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, like other people—shabbily."

"I am sorry to hear it," returned he. "Before I left town I thought him sincerely attached to Mollkin."

"He left a formal condolence at the door. 'Tis all we have heard of him these two months."

"Shabby, very shabby," repeated Swift. "Yet I think myself exceedingly foolish in continuing to be surprised at the baseness of mankind."

"To do him justice, I do not think it was the ill report of our money matters kept him away. But I wish there were some sumptuary law, whereby the common mob of sentiments should be forbid to wear names that are too fine for 'em. No matter. We have had the pleasure of proving that we possess two or three friends; and those that never knew misfortune or calumny cannot swear to so many."

"Very justly said, miss! Ah! 'Tis an ill world."

Esther smiled.

"I thought it so, sir, some hours back, but find it now wonderfully changed for the better."

When they had arrived at the Bear Inn, had passed up the stairs, and stood at the Miss Vamhomrighs' parlour door, Esther paused.

"Pray do not remark on Molly's sick looks," she said anxiously.

"Hath she never a jest left in her composition?" asked Swift.

"Some folks can jest on the rack," returned Esther. "But I doubt their jests are but a more courageous kind of groan, and they give me no pleasure to hear?"

When they opened the door the first thing they saw was a crooked little gentleman huddled up in the corner of a large chair. He rose as they entered, and advancing upon the Dean with open arms, embraced him as heartily as their respective heights allowed.

"Pope!" cried Swift, half pleased, half

vexed. "You here! I never thought to see you till Friday."

Then he turned to Molly, and with difficulty repressed an expression of pain and surprise, so terribly changed and thin did she look in her heavy mourning.

Mr. Pope, who was staying at Stanton Harcourt, was to spend two days with Swift at Letcombe Bassett, and the chaise was being got ready; so very soon the two gentlemen took their leave. Essie stood at the foot of the stairs, looking out into the inn-yard to see them depart. They had made their adieux, and Mr. Pope was already in the chaise, when Swift came up to her again, hat in hand.

"Good-bye, Hess," he said. "'Tis very uncertain when we shall meet again, but I will write to you when the occasion offers. I go to Ireland shortly. When do you return to London?"

"I do not know," replied Esther hesitatingly. "Seeing how our affairs stand there and in Dublin, 'tis more likely we also shall go to Ireland."

He stood silent; then clapping his hat on his head:

"You should not for the world have come here," he cried. "No, indeed you should not!"

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON. PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

PIONEER AND WRITERS' CLUB.

12, CAVENDISH PLACE,
LONDON, W.1.

1. The name of every book taken out of the Club must be entered in the Register with the borrower's Name and the date. Twopence must be put in the box and recorded in the Register.

2. Returned books should be put into the box provided for that purpose and the date of return entered in the Register. THE BORROWER WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BOOK IF THIS IS NOT DONE.