Polybius
by
M. C.
Birchenough

TAUCHNITZ
EDITION

C. L. Nr Rothstock

Massel.

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Very readable, a story of the Potteries Staffordshire, with much local colour but still not too much to make it readable to outsiders.

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POTSHERDS. By MABEL C. BIRCHENOUGH.

IN ONE VOLUME.

POTSHERDS

BY

MABEL C. BIRCHENOUGH
(MRS. HENRY BIRCHENOUGH).

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
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POTSHERDS.

CHAPTER I.

"WHAT a successful man you are, William!" said his friend, the tall, fresh-coloured widow, with a little sigh, as she stood by his drawing-room window, putting on her gloves. "Have you ever yet failed to carry anything through that you set your mind upon?"

"Of course not. Don't I always get my own way? I suppose that is what you mean, isn't it?" replied the master of the pottery, smiling rather grimly, as he looked across the discoloured fields, dotted with forlorn trees, to the mass of dull brickwork beyond the canal, where his stout furnace chimneys were adding their share of smoke to the pall which rested over the town.

"Eh! you're just about right, Nell! He is successful, William is; but the best of it is he deserves it all, that tha' doos, lad!" ejaculated his elderly sister behind him, relapsing suddenly, as she was wont to do in moments of agitation, into the familiar Staffordshire talk, which had been her only language until her first youth was well over. Subsequent years of conscientious effort

to do credit to the position her brother had won for himself, had worn many lines in her lean, sallow face, but the veneer of acquired manners and speech so laboriously drawn over the surface of the rough clay was thin; often it cracked and showed the stout stuff of the working-woman underneath. Until she was twenty-eight years old, Alberta Handley had gone out to her work in the "fettling" rooms at the pottery across the canal, before six in the morning, all the year round, with a shawl over her head and clogs on her feet. Sometimes she was quite shocked now to find herself turning wistfully back to those old days of competent performance. Her present duties, light and easy as they might appear, were infinitely more difficult and tiring to Alberta, and her temper became infirm under the strain of trying to learn the business of being a lady of means and leisure.

The successful William had left the Potteries before he was seventeen, more than twenty years ago. Fortune had been very kind to him so far, and by a wonderful juggling trick had thrown the boy, who was running away from home to America, on the gangway of a big steamer at Liverpool, just as one of the kindest, clumsiest and most fearful of elderly gentlemen contrived to tumble into the water from the landing-stage. Anyone but Mr. Morris might have found it difficult to perform this feat, and, having accomplished it, he still further distinguished himself by missing the life-buoys and ropes thrown out to him in profusion, slipping off the stout hook which had grappled his coat, and coming quite near to drowning, until young Handley took a header in after him and contrived to land this unwieldy fish. Their passages were taken in different parts of the same ship, but

Mr. Morris speedily transferred his preserver to his own cabin.

When the boy's unusual ability and force of character displayed themselves, together with a certain native distinction of mind, the rich and lonely Jew with the soft heart, soon discovered that he had at last found an object in life. It was true that this joyful announcement had been made more than once to his friends already, but now his desire was at last fulfilled. The more he saw of William Handley, the more his interest in him and affection for him deepened. After some months spent together in the States, Mr. Morris brought home an adopted son, engaged tutors for him, with whom he made remarkably quick progress, took him abroad, took him everywhere that he went himself, and expanded year by year in the companionship of a young man of silent habits, surly manners, acknowledged powers, and very definite, if simple, ideas.

At three and twenty, William Handley refused to contemplate a Parliamentary career, and requested to be allowed to work for his living. The further unfolding of his wishes resulted in his return to his native place at Meeshaw with sufficient capital to purchase nearly half his old master's business at the Swan Works. A few years later Mr. Pentland died, bequeathing his share in the pottery to his widowed daughter. And so Mrs. Kirkham became the partner of the little boy to whom she used to give her old toys when she was allowed to pay a visit to the Works in old days; and he lived in the dark brick house on the country side of the canal, which had been her own home until she married.

And now she and William had had one of their

annual settling days, to which she looked forward through a great part of the year. To be admitted into the working of his plans, and to be associated with his labours officially in the place which had been her father's, brought with it the keenest satisfaction, as a rule, that Helena Kirkham's even, prosperous, monotonous days knew. And yet this afternoon, when the annual festival was barely over, there was a shade of pensive melancholy on her comely, sensible face.

"Yes," she said slowly, in answer to Miss Alberta's triumphant tribute to William's worth, "he deserves his success. The race is to the strong." She could not help it, a tendency to trite quotation and aphorisms suggestive of the birthday book was Mrs. Kirkham's besetting temptation. She was an admirable woman. "I hope Boney will be strong," she went on, after a moment's pause. "I am afraid he will never be like you though, William."

"It seems improbable, certainly," said Mr. Handley, smiling, for the idea of a family likeness between himself and the little Kirkham boy was decidedly fantastic. Some people might have thought it necessary to acknowledge the compliment, and qualify the answer with some amiable phrase or other; this, however, was not William's way. "Now, Nell, we have finished all our business together until next stock-taking. Don't put on your gloves, but take your bonnet off and stay to dinner. The inner woman must need refreshing after going through so many details and price-sheets. You have a remarkable head for business, partner; I tell you so oftener than once a year."

"You do, William," said Mrs. Kirkham, brightening

visibly; indeed, she actually blushed with pleasure, as if eighteen instead of thirty-eight summers (and winters, too, alas!) had passed over her fine shoulders. She was a largely-made woman, suggestive of sturdy muscular strength, rather than feminine grace or charm. Her thick, brown hair was fair enough not to show, as yet, how many grey threads were creeping up amongst it, but it grew awkwardly in peaks on her forehead, as hair will often do that has barely known two generations of careful tendance, and it did little to soften the high, marked cheek-bones. It was an honest, pleasant, capable face, giving an impression of reliability and good sense, though the round, blue eyes often looked as perplexed and earnest as a baby's. Mrs. Kirkham was, indeed, always very much in earnest. She was a woman of real business capacity and of misplaced intellectual aspirations. The desire of her life was to be literary and artistic, and her reverence for those happy mortals whom she understood to be endowed with such gifts was touching and entire. She generally took them on faith, and at their own valuation, excepting on the rare occasions when her native shrewdness and good sense suddenly rebelled against some peculiarly resounding windbag.

She lived on in the big white house at Oldcross, over the Cheshire border, where her dull husband had died some years ago, suitably mourned and decorously regretted. The cloud which rested upon Mrs. Kirkham's face to-day arose from the fact that for the first time she had failed to obtain a complete grasp of the details of the year's work, and of the bearing of all the figures and calculations laid before her. A new system of book-

keeping under the auspices of a young and superior cashier, who had lately supplanted the veteran friend of her childish days, had actually baffled Helena's quick and experienced eye for the true inwardness of a regiment of figures. Flushed and disconcerted at not being able to follow the new method from the outset, she ceased to ask for the repeated explanations that so strangely failed to clear away difficulties which had continually bewildered her. With silent mortification she fell back upon the final balance-sheet like any ordinary ignorant female. The sum total of the profits which fell to her share this year, including a fixed charge for rent of a certain portion of the building, which was her own property, amounted to about the same sum as she had received after last stock-taking. Yet William had remarked several times, with a distinctly worried expression, during the twelve months, that business was difficult and slack and that German rivals were beginning to possess themselves of the choicest portion of his export trade.

It was not in Helena Kirkham's nature to accept such a defeat tamely, and she was now turning over in her mind the possibility of asking Mr. Handley to allow her to come down to the counting-house and instruct herself at leisure, with the cashier's help, in this revolutionary system of book-keeping, with a view to studying the year's books again by the light of it. The request was a difficult and rather delicate one to make, and Helena was fully aware that she was not endowed with any fine allowance of tact. Moreover, William could not be called easy of approach. Her confidence in him was unbounded, in so far as her own interests

were concerned, but other considerations gave rise to some uneasiness, and one of them was a new arrangement he had just announced to her for gradually paying her capital out of the business altogether.

Turning away from the drawing-room window, she now settled herself in one of the formal armchairs and removed her gloves with sudden determination.

"I think I really will stay to dinner, and take the last train back to Oldcross, if you can do with me, Alberta."

"Eh! that I can, Nell; what need to say that?"

"William, there is one matter I want to refer to again. Why," in quite a pleading voice, "should you want to pay me out of the business? You make a much better interest than I could get elsewhere, and, besides all that, I can't bear to think of our firm being broken up. Do you want to get rid of me, William?" in a hurt tone.

"Not at present, but supposing I ever wanted to get rid of the thing myself? How could I, with your capital locked up in it?"

"Surely, William," with shocked amazement, "you cannot be dreaming of giving up the old place?"

Mr. Handley looked straight in front of him with a slight but perceptible deepening of the upright lines in his forehead.

"I don't want to give up anything, neither do I want to tie myself beyond recall for the rest of my life. I am over thirty-seven now, and I want to feel free either to give up the business or to stick to it, as may prove most convenient. So long as other people's money is in it, I am tied by the leg. Therefore I want

to begin paying you out in the course of this coming year. My co-trustee and I will look about for an investment for two thousand pounds for you. Have you any preference?"

Mrs. Kirkham suddenly rose and walked to the fireplace. Had her partner been in the habit of observing her at all, he might have noticed that she kept her face carefully turned away from him. But Mr. Handley never observed Helena: he simply accepted her as one of the most satisfactory institutions he knew—a woman with no nonsense about her, sensible, loyal and true, as good as a man for a friend, in some respects even better, if it were not for the occasional drawback of her taking some things in an unexpected way, a woman's way he supposed. As a matter of fact, he was more occupied with himself now than with her, as he sat opening and shutting a delicate china *bonbonnière* between his strong, flexible hands, the real craftsman's hands. It did not occur to him that he had given her a painful shock, nor was he aware how long it was before she answered him.

"The last thing I could wish would be to prove a drag upon your wheel. No doubt it was extremely stupid of me not to realise before that your having a partner might mean this. I grew up in the old place, and have foolishly taken for granted that things would always go on in the same way."

"It is certainly a mistake to take for granted that anything, least of all a business, will always go on in the same way."

"William," with a sudden change from hurt dignity to anxiety, "are you worried about the business? I am

afraid I have not thoroughly understood the sheets to-day. But the profits are entered at almost the same figure as last year."

"Is not that sufficient answer? Come, Nell," with a smile, "I did not think you were the sort of woman to take a panic because I explain to you that I want to have only my own capital in the works—to be my own master, in fact. So long as half the plant and machinery is yours, how can I feel free to be bankrupt if I like, or make a fortune by new ventures?"

"No, William," sadly; "I understand. I can only repeat I am sorry I did not do so before."

"No need for sorrow about a mere matter of business. There is the gong. Don't let us go on working overtime. Alberta, if you give Maria so many directions the soup will be cold. Surely you have confused her brains enough for one day."

They passed into the dining-room and sat down at a table whose cloth was a miracle of whiteness and smoothness, and whose silver and glass shone with flawless radiance. Miss Alberta had made a reputation in a country where "notable housewives" ought to be catalogued by the geography books along with other local products of repute. From attics to cellars, from the brilliant kitchen saucepans to William's treasured collection of old blue and white "Staffordshire pot" in the drawing-room, where she so seldom sat, rigid order and spotless cleanliness prevailed. At what cost of labour, time and temper, such a state of things was maintained in the heart of the Potteries district, with its furnace chimneys, ironworks and coal mines all arrayed against them, perhaps only the mistress of the house

and her servants could have estimated. But no doubt it was improving for the last, and what other suitable scope could Miss Alberta have found for her energies? For many years now, the keeping of William's house had been her pride, tribulation and joy. William, who loved order too, suffered much in its cause, with resignation if not with gladness.

The brilliant lamp, with its unshaded glass globe, shone pitilessly upon the three people sitting at the round table. The master of the house was the youngest of them, but no adjustment of light and shade affected his dark skin, large, strongly-marked features and straight black hair to any noticeable extent. William Handley was by no means tall, but his square shoulders and stiff build betokened his muscular strength. About this portion of north-western England, from Lancashire down to the Trent, there are still to be seen in considerable numbers specimens of a dark and swarthy race, whose ancestry has been dated back into a dim and unrecorded age of the earliest Britain of all. Whatever may be the theories of the learned, it is certain that this type abounds, and that it is very noticeable in any Lancashire, Cheshire or Staffordshire crowd of working people. The coarse swarthy skins, black eyes and hair have a curiously foreign look amongst the blond descendants of the Norsemen; their owners are generally rather short than tall, and they often share the surly, grudging manner and peculiar temperament which is one of the characteristics of the Northern Midland folk. What a gulf is fixed between one end and the other of a country geographically so small, mentally so huge, as England, can hardly be realised all at once: it needs

the experience of life in both regions to bring the contrast home! If you have it, you know when you speed on your way from the south to the north that that change of intonation, which introduces the jerk and the monotone into the voices of the crowd at Stoke or Stafford station, will also render it physically impossible for the native to say "Thank-you," except under dire necessity, or to smile for any of the ordinary reasons. His heart, you will be assured by those who know him, is in the right place, but it is not situated in the region where a south country person would expect to find it. His competence and his knowledge of all the practical departments of life are usually awesome and complete. His darkly concealed affections are few but strong.

William Handley certainly belonged in appearance to the dark race from whom a digression has led us afield. His short, self-contained, rather formal manner also suggested local colour with modifications; whether what the Germans call the *"Innerstes"* corresponded with these outward manifestations, only one or two people were perhaps qualified to say. His sister, who was a leaner, sharper, wizened, and quick-tongued edition of him, cherished a devoted affection for him, which she usually tempered with justice and that species of discipline which every female of spirit considers necessary to a greater or less extent for the proper conduct of daily life where her menkind are concerned.

During the first part of dinner their guest was unusually silent, and her face, which was inclined to grow a little too pink all over as the years went by, was hotly flushed to-night.

Miss Alberta failed to rouse her to any real interest

in a new polish with which she had lately been making cautious experiments upon the gleaming furniture. It was compounded from a recipe hereditary in a neighbouring family, or most certainly no such innovation would have been made in her household, but really she was bound to admit——

"William!" broke in her guest suddenly, oblivious of her usual almost over-careful politeness, "of course you are going to stand for Parliament next election? I know our people here have asked you to do so."

"I have been asked. I am not sure whether I shall do it or not though."

"You cannot really hesitate."

"Indeed I can. There are several weighty considerations to give me pause——"

He stopped short, a peculiar expression appeared upon his usually uncompromising countenance; the colour slightly thickened under his dark skin. Had it been any other man, it might have been said that William blushed, and even looked a little foolish.

His friend, however, was too much in earnest to notice trifling details.

"Besides," continued Mr. Handley, "what would become of my business if I spent half the year in London? After all, I must make a living."

"But you must find a good manager, and put him in possession when you have to be away."

"Well, I have a fancy I am the best manager I can find for the Works. Besides, though my fellow-townsmen may be kind enough to regard me as a shining local light I doubt if I should do any good in Parliament."

"I doubt they'd be glad enough to get you, William!" exclaimed his sister. "But there, I don't hold myself with a man giving over his own business to somebody else, and leaving his nice 'ome to go off to that black, dirty place down yonder. I've never seen a well-kept house in London myself, and William can't do with dirty ways. He wouldn't fancy his food out of greasy pans that are never scoured, but only slawmed over. They'd make him downright ill, so don't you go persuading him to try, Nell."

"A man in William's position has public as well as private obligations, though," urged the widow with mild-voiced persistence. Weaker vessels seldom cared to enter into an encounter with Miss Alberta; but Nell's gentle manner and careful speech were grafted on to a stout northern stock, and she was not so easily quelled.

Her hostess flew to arms, and an eager discussion followed, during which Mr. Handley continued to eat his dinner composedly, regardless of the shafts which his sister sent hurtling across the table.

"Nell," he said presently, "are you aware that your son came to interview me to-day in my official capacity as his guardian? Having reached the ripe age of seven, he considers it is time to put away childish things. Amongst them he mentioned lessons. He also spoke airily of matrimonial intentions. I should like to spare your blushes, Alberta, but it is my duty to warn Boney's mother that he proposed to take you back to the White House as her daughter-in-law."

"Eh! the darling!" cried Miss Alberta delightedly, the light of battle in her eye giving place to fond enthusiasm. Roland Kirkham considered Miss Alberta a

weak-minded, but amiable and indispensable person, who deserved to be treated as indulgently as the maintenance of discipline permitted. So much depends on the point of view in our estimates of one another.

"He begged me not to sell Alberta to anyone else until the funds secured in a money-box, which will not open, reach my price."

"He's a real beauty, Roland is!" exclaimed Roland's friend. The mother's face glowed with pleasure, and the atmosphere grew peaceful again.

"Did Boney come to you after school this morning, William?" she inquired.

"He did."

"That accounts for my Carlsbad plums, then!" exclaimed Miss Alberta.

"Did they need accounting for? Oh, yes, when conversation flagged I went to your cupboard to create a wholesome diversion!"

"Oh! not wholesome," murmured the mother. "I left Boney in bed at tea-time this afternoon."

"He's a picture, that lad is, and you ought to have one of him, Nell! Poppy is a dear little thing, but she does not come near the boy, to my thinking."

"No; I think Boney is much the prettiest of the two," said Mrs. Kirkham. "I was quite surprised when the artist who is coming down to paint the children admired Poppy's little white face, black eyes and red mop, more than my boy's lovely blue eyes and fair curls."

"So you are going to have a tame artist in the house now, are you, Nell?" remarked her partner.

"Oh, as to tame, William——" smiling. "But I won't spoil the effect beforehand. Miss Jordan is a

most attractive girl, and I am told she has made quite a name already, but she belongs to the new school of painters, and of young women too."

"Miss Jordan! surely you don't mean Phil Jordan?"

"You don't mean that you know her?"

"Why on earth should I not?" rather testily. "I certainly know Miss Philippa Jordan, the daughter of the man who writes the plays, and has done a lot of literary work besides."

"Oh! of course, I did not mean anything, except that the world is so strangely small. You have many friends in London, of course. But I never heard of her until I was up there in November, and went about a little with Mr. Ashley Duke. He stayed with me last summer, if you remember!"

"I remember the beast. But what about Miss Jordan?"

"Oh, William!" reproachfully. "He may not be your kind of man——

"That he certainly is not."

"I was going to say," continued the widow, with some dignity of manner, "that Mr. Duke was most kind in sparing a great deal of time to take me about to picture-galleries and studios."

"And to dining with you afterwards, no doubt. I beg your pardon, Nell," seeing that she was really becoming vexed. "I know my manners are very lacking, compared to Mr. Duke's. But the truth is, I can't stand a fellow with oily ways and a cooing voice who slates his friends' pictures anonymously in the press, after praising them to their faces, and lies by preference whenever he has the chance. Now don't get angry.

Was it he who introduced you to Miss Jordan? I believe she shares your sentiments about him."

"Yes, I asked Mr. Duke if he could find me some clever young artist who would come and paint the children for a resonable sum. He recommended Miss Jordan, as I naturally preferred having a lady in the house."

Mrs. Kirkham was one of those women in whom the spirit of the old maid, prim, self-conscious and timid, prevails from the cradle to the grave, absolutely untouched by matrimony, maternity, or any of the accidents of life.

"He told me she was a rising young artist who had made quite a reputation already. She belongs to the advanced impressionist school. Mr. Duke was only afraid she might be a little too advanced for me."

Mr. Handley gave a sudden short laugh like a bark, but checked himself again. His friend looked at him wonderingly, as she continued, "He said her work was so remarkably clever and strong, however, that he felt sure I should appreciate it, as——" She stopped short, with a sudden blush at the remembrance of Mr. Duke's flattering words about her fine natural taste and artistic perceptions. If the critic sometimes betrayed his friends, he also knew how to push them well, when it suited him to do so.

Mr. Handley checked another bark earlier in its career than the one before, for even he realised its incivility.

"So you are going to bring Phil Jordan down here," he said, smiling a little to himself, while he raised his

black eyebrows, and bent his head over the orange he was peeling.

"I hope this artist is a nice young lady," interposed Miss Alberta, admonishingly. "I don't always think much of the people you get down here from London, Nell. They often have very different ways from what we like."

"The ways of Miss Phil are certainly not as our ways," observed her brother, somewhere down in his collar. Then he looked up with the sudden smile that occasionally did such good service to his harsh-featured face. "Nell, I believe, as usual, you will show what much better sense you have than ordinary women. For once I share Mr. Duke's opinion, I think you will take to Miss Jordan."

For some reason or other, Mrs. Kirkham felt, in a vague but gratifying way, that William had paid her a handsome compliment. As he held open the door for them to pass out of the room, he chanced to notice that her face looked a great deal brighter than it had done when they sat down to dinner, an improvement which he ascribed to matter-of-fact and material reasons which, of course, had nothing whatever to do with it.

CHAPTER II.

Now that the arduous, and, in all probability depressing, task of stock-taking was over, Mr. Handley felt himself entitled to a short holiday. In the workshops of the world, all creation throughout the year moves towards this annual crisis. When the time for it is close at hand in a manufactory, the strain of suspense to know what result will be shown for the twelve months' labour, the extra stress of entering and pricing the goods, and all the other unusual work involved, spreads an atmosphere of excitement which filters its way throughout the ranks of those employed about the place, from the exalted sphere of the counting-house, which holds the issues, downwards to the packers and errand-boys. All are eager to know whether the masters have gained or lost, by the sentence of that momentous balance-sheet which is being prepared under the auspices of the head clerks, and the great man, the consulting accountant. The first glance at a completed balance-sheet has been known to require as much courage as any other of those walks up to the cannon's mouth, which life's soldiers have to take from time to time.

However, the excitement of the year was over now at the Swan pottery, yet nobody outside the innermost sanctum of the counting-house appeared to know any-

thing whatever about the results it proclaimed. The usual routine of work was resumed, and a feeling of flatness rested upon everything. The master himself breathed a deep sigh of relief as he lit his cigar while the express train to London glided out of Meeshaw station, and he prepared to leave all local cares and preoccupations behind him for a time.

That night he was going to dine in Mr. Jordan's house on the further side of Campden Hill. The master of it had made his reputation years ago in the literary and journalistic world, and had lately spread it a great deal further appearing in a new *rôle,* as a successful playwright. His two ventures had each been received with enthusiasm, all sorts of advantages had attended their introduction to the world, and his third, a comedy which was now on the point of appearing, was looked forward to by numbers of people outside the very large circle of his personal acquaintances. Hitherto Mr. Jordan had not succeeeded in making an income at all in proportion to his reputation, and though matters had improved in this respect since his dramatic *début,* his expenses had followed their usual mysterious habit of going up by themselves simultaneously, and almost the same scarcity of ready money and abundance of unpaid accounts prevailed as before in the little brown house behind the trees in the quiet road.

To tell the truth, Mr. and Mrs. Jordan and their only child were all dreadfully heedless and incompetent people in everyday life. Mr. Jordan was fond of dwelling upon the extreme simplicity of his tastes and needs, but there is a kind of simplicity which involves a great deal of expense and skilled labour to produce, and it

is generally this sort which alone brings comfort to a dyspeptic and hardworking literary man with artistic susceptibilities about all things, including, of course, those which appeal to the outward as well as to the inward sense. At twenty-one he had married his landlady's daughter, a silly and empty-headed young girl, whose loveliness soon faded under the stress of life. As his reputation grew she had fallen further and further behind in all matters by which she might really have remained his companion and friend. The poor, common little woman fell into bad health and became more fretful than ever after the death of her firstborn son twenty years ago. She had never been able at all to forgive her husband for his evident relief at the cutting short of a career which had never been anything but a source of disappointment, annoyance, and, latterly, disgrace to him, as the father of a feeble, vicious youth.

After his birth, Mrs. Jordan had lost other babies who had scarcely lived; then, after a long interval, came Philippa, who alone had survived, and now at the age of twenty-two was supposed to have finished her artistic education in Paris studios, and to have entered upon her career in earnest. She and her mother had very little in common, for Philippa, badly brought up as she had been, possessed remarkable intelligence and a refinement of her own, which had only suffered to the bare inevitable extent by her three years of independent life with a girl friend in Paris, where their days were spent in painting in the usual mixed company which draws towards the magic studios from all over the world. Philippa's ways were often astonish-

ing and her talk at times alarming, but some people who admired none of her extravagances, cared enough for her to perceive other things below the surface of frothy nonsense, of high-spirited and badly-trained youthfulness. Wherever Philippa went it was impossible to help noticing her, and she certainly occupied the minds both of her friends and of her enemies oftener than was quite accountable from a superficial and strictly impartial point of view.

On Friday evenings the Jordans made a point of staying at home, unless some irresistible attraction led them elsewhere at the last moment. All kinds of people made their way, with the usual invariable grumbles at the distance, to this sequestered corner, where the trees grow about even in the roads, and you have to get out at garden gates and walk up dripping paths unless the weather favours you.

Besides the artists, men of letters, and all the usual run of upper middle-class London society, and more or less polite Bohemia also, some quite "smart" people had discovered Mr. Jordan since the appearance of his plays. One or two aristocratic ladies with an enterprising taste for social exploration, not content with inviting him often to their houses, even sought him out in his own. Mr. Jordan received all their attentions with his usual bland and magnificent manner, accepted their invitations to visit them on a bachelor footing, and welcomed them under his own roof with very nearly the same kind of fine cordiality that he extended to his Grub Street followers. The only daughter of the dowager Marchioness of South Molton, Lady Victoria Glendower, whose emancipated habits were the despair

of her rigidly orthodox mother's life, was one of Mr. Jordan's warmest admirers. She said she was very much interested in studying different social types, and her restless curiosity now carried her often to the strange little household on Campden Hill, where she flattered the master of the house, patronised his womenfolk, asked them impertinent questions, and was astonished to find herself unmistakably detested by Phil, in whom she took an inquisitive but most benevolent interest. Lady Victoria's dogged kindliness was only equalled by her dense stupidity about other people's feelings or susceptibilities. To do her justice, her own were not in the least vulnerable, and she bore no malice after a sound snubbing, but it continued to surprise her and to startle her a little, too. She was thirty-three, plain and bony, but she rode to hounds in a fashion scarcely a dozen other women in the shires could equal.

It was very wet on this Friday evening in January when Mr. Handley stalked up the streaming flagged path which led across the little lawn to Mr. Jordan's front door. His face, even on fine days, however, nearly always assumed this set and forbidding expression when he advanced from the garden gate to ring the bell. It was a habit it had, when a quite different aspect might perhaps have represented the feelings of its owner. But as he paused to raise the knocker the light above the door gleamed upon an object which was lying at his feet, and caused the muscles of his mouth to relax as he picked it up on the point of his umbrella for inspection. Still holding it in front of him, he leaned against one of the pillars of the open porch and laughed out loud at the sight of a wet and

muddy woman's walking shoe, adorned with a pretty old silver buckle.

At the same moment the door was partly opened and a head came through it, with a pair of very bright eyes peering out from under a wavy mass of fine black hair. Like a flash of lightning a hand followed it and snatched the shoe off the point of the umbrella, then the door was slammed to again.

"Don't!" called Mr. Handley, rapping on it with the handle of the weapon in question. "Why mayn't I come in? I wasn't going to walk off with it."

"Aren't you an interviewer, then?" cried a gay, clear voice inside. "If not, I will let you in as soon as I've put my shoe on. Oh, bother! it's getting stiff already. Ow! ow!" Sounds of stamping and scuffling mingled with further displeased ejaculations, followed from within.

"It's very wet out here," observed the umbrella on the doorstep mildly.

The next instant he was admitted by a small figure with a charming odd face, the owner of the brilliant onyx eyes and black locks. A flickering light from an old Venetian lantern revealed a darkly panelled hall and a gaily painted Italian cassone, on which Philippa Jordan subsided again to wrestle with her shoe afresh.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Handley! I have been defending the house with my body for days against interviewers, who come to ask questions about father's new play. I ran out this afernoon in such a hurry I was obliged to put mother's shoes on, because I could not find my own. They are always too big for me. I brought back such a lot of paint-brushes and things in my arms from the

studio, I could not pick this one up when it dropped off just outside. You are not accustomed to meeting shoes on your doorstep, are you?"

"Not habitually, but my nerves are very strong, you know."

"Yes, I know they are, or you would hardly be here now. I am sure you have never seen anything like us before, have you?"

"Never!" he replied with emphasis, standing with his black eyes fixed on the bright mobile face, and his hands clasped behind him.

Philippa broke out into an irresistible laugh. "I know exactly the sort of house you ought to live in. I used to draw it on my slate with a ruler when I was six; it was quite square and straight, the inside was supposed to be square and straight, too. Is it really like that, your house?"

"Come and see," he replied, without moving a muscle.

"I will. Should you not be surprised, though, if I came and thumped at your front door with an umbrella, one of these days?"

"No. I should be too pleased to think about being surprised."

"I don't believe," in a vexed voice, "it is possible to make you feel the smallest emotion about anything."

"How well I must dissemble!"

At this moment a voice was heard screaming from the upper regions:

"Phil, what *entrées* have you brought with you? Go and dress, it is nearly dinner-time now. Were there any cutlets in aspic left? Did you order the ice cream? Have they sent the chickens?"

"Heavens and earth!" ejaculated Miss Jordan faintly, putting both hands to her head. "I knew I had forgotten something important. I went out on purpose to get the dinner; we none of us realised it was Friday until this afternoon, and then our cook collapsed, with one of her attacks. Just as I was passing my studio door in Aubrey Walk, a sudden idea struck me about that thing I was making such a mess of. I thought I would run in and touch it up—and here I am," collapsing in a limp heap on the stairs, and resting her chin on her hands.

At this moment the door-bell rang. "There's the first arrival," groaned Phil.

"I tell you what, Miss Phil, I will go and get the dinner. I know a place—you leave it to me: I will be back either with a loaded charger, or on it."

"No, no," cried Phil; "that will never do. You are not to——" but he had vanished already into the night, and as Mr. Ashley Duke, the well-known critic, stepped into the hall she flew upstairs to change her dress, without stopping to take any notice of him, but not before he had observed who had opened the door and passed out as he entered.

"Well, what is the *entrée?*" called her mother's thin, reedy voice, as she passed by a half-open bedroom door.

"I will tell you presently," called Philippa, as she ran on to her own room—— "when I know," she added to herself.

It was considerably more than an hour later before the dozen people, who had dropped in one by one during this time, sat down to dinner. How Mr. Handley

had spent the interval, by what threats, persuasions and bribes of a more substantial kind he had arrived at a splendid result, nobody ever knew. What was certain was his arrival with a gallop and a clatter, such as only London hansoms can produce, exactly twenty minutes before dinner was announced. He was seen to extricate himself with caution from beneath a heterogeneous collection of oddly-shaped, long, brown hampers, clasping open baskets of fruit in his arms. Another cab accompanied him, from which descended two men in round white caps and long aprons, who excavated one another from beneath a still more peculiar assortment of objects, amongst which a good deal of gleaming copper was distinctly visible.

Mr. Jordan's guests were accustomed to look upon dinner as an episode governed by no fixed laws in Worcester Gardens, therefore nobody was surprised at having to wait even longer than usual before it was announced. Phil, in a white dress, was standing talking gaily, and with every appearance of unconcern, to Mr. Morris, when his adopted son was announced, with all due ceremony, as a newly-arrived guest. She only opened her mysterious eyes a little wider as she half turned towards him with that suggestion of a smile which had inspired so many verses and pictures, both above and below the average. She showed no sort of interest in his arrival, nor did she attempt to do more than greet him with a cursory nod while continuing the conversation in which she was engaged.

Mrs. Jordan, with a much-frizzed head, rouged cheeks, and even more wrinkles than her fifty-nine years necessarily entitled her to, came forward to greet him in

her most youthful and sprightly manner, after she had ascertained his identity with some difficulty through her long-handled *pince-nez* at short range. Mr. Handley's boasted nerves must have had a weak place somewhere, for Mrs. Jordan never failed to grate upon them. His face always assumed its most dour and set expression when he shook hands with her, and his answers were even shorter than usual, but this she hardly noticed. Indeed, it was a peculiarity she was always ready to overlook.

"How do, Handley? How are the pots?" said his host affably, striking across the torrent of his wife's conversation. Mr. Jordan's genial urbanity was generally admired by his friends, but with certain people it was so marked as to become almost offensive; it was so now.

Mr. Handley turned away from him after shaking hands to answer a volume of greetings and inquiries from his adopted father. Mr. Morris was now over sixty; he had an immense, unwieldy person, and a fine Jewish head, which was losing the former beauty of its outlines as his features thickened a little under the burden of advancing years. His hair and beard had turned grey and contrasted well with the tragic mournfulness of his great black eyes. The lost heritage of Israel is so often to be read in eyes which are almost accidental to their possessors, or at anyrate express depths which may be quite alien to some childlike and happy nature. When Mr. Morris was not actually smiling, the unfathomable pathos of a dumb animal, or a nation fallen from its high estate, would speak from his face and obtain for him from imaginative people an

amount of sympathetic interest quite in excess of the requirements of some such preoccupation as whether he had or had not left his umbrella behind at the club. But interest and sympathy were the breath of life to this most childlike and sweet-natured of men, who bestowed them lavishly in his turn on all about him.

"Will! my dear boy, when did you come up? Why didn't I know? Of course you are staying with me. Was I out when you came? You havn't written for a fortnight. What have you been doing all this time?"

"Making pots, of course," said Mr. Handley, shooting a glance that was scarcely amiable at his host, who was standing over them with a benevolent air of superintending their conversation. He now joined in with one of his brilliant smiles and a wave of the hand.

"Delightful! Don't we all envy him, all we poor effete scribblers and toilers wearing ourselves out in the pursuit of vanities here in this Babylon! Why don't we all go and make pots, like Handley?"

"Er, yes," said the person in question. "Should think you'd enjoy it immensely."

Mr. Morris laughed happily. He possessed one of the softest toned and most charming of speaking voices; it was one of the things that attracted people to him first of all.

"How like you, Jordan! Can't you lend him a potter's wheel and a lump of clay, Will?"

"He shall have my own," growled his adopted son, who undoubtedly had a good deal still to learn as to suavity of manners and the management of a peculiar temper.

Phil turned round at this point; she had been talk-

ing to Mr. Ashley Duke. He was a short, plump man, with a pale, hairless face, a sleek mouse-coloured head, faded eyes and an unwholesome complexion. He wore extremely well-cut clothes and used a single eyeglass effectively. His air of overwhelming assurance was not always redeemed from impertinence by a soft and insidious manner which was particularly noticeable when he was talking to women.

"Who is that man, and what's he doin' here again?" asked Lady Victoria, with her usual suddenness, of Mr. Duke, who chanced to be standing beside her chair. They were both looking at Mr. Handley, who was talking to Philippa.

"Oh! that fellow? He's a potter or a coal-heaver, or something of that kind from the North Country, or the Black Country, or somewhere, I believe," answered her companion with his most supercilious drawl. "As to what he's 'doin'' here, Lady Victoria, that is more than I can tell you. I suppose he's pursuing his own object, whatever it may be."

"Oh! I thought he might be pursuin' other people's," jerked out Lady Victoria, who did not greatly love Mr. Duke. She had the rare satisfaction of seeing a faint tinge of colour pass over his face for a moment; but he did not remove his pale eyes from hers as he answered carelessly, "Perhaps he is trying to unbend his mind in the intervals of application to commercial arithmetic."

"I don't know whether it's amusement or instruction he's after, but I should fancy he's gettin' more of both than is good for him. He seems a nice man, and I'm sorry for him. Why don't you like him, Mr. Duke?" The question darted out suddenly, her face, with its

long thin nose, rather glassy blue eyes, and tightly arranged sandy hair, was turned up to his at the same moment. Lady Victoria's ways were always a little abrupt, and, as she talked, she often squared her elbows with a movement as though she were humouring a pulling horse with a tender mouth. She was peculiarly aggressive to Mr. Duke, to whom she was fond of administering small shocks whenever occasion offered, and she lived in the hope of some day startling him out of his bland composure for a moment. But she had not done so yet.

"My dear lady, why this uncalled for attack upon me? I have the greatest admiration for friend Handley," answered Mr. Duke, with a slight raising of his eyebrows and an indulgent smile as he put up his eyeglass again. "I never could make either mud-pies or money myself, and he can do both. He is a most estimable and fortunate person. May I ask why you consider him an object for sympathy?"

But Lady Victoria perceived a movement at the other end of the room. "Oh, well," she replied, a little vaguely, as she straightened her long back and shut up her fan, "why, of course, don't you know? Thank goodness that's dinner! I'm starvin'," as Mr. Jordan approached with outstretched arm.

Mr. Duke followed her with his eyeglass as she was marched away. "It is surprising how many varieties of the feline family one meets," he said to himself; "a fine specimen that. Good Lord! what a length of back! Her waist is like the neck of a hock bottle."

CHAPTER III.

THE dinner was a success in more respects even than was usual at the odd little house under the trees. Mr. Jordan remarked carelessly, as he unfolded his serviette, that he believed their prospects of food still lay in the lap of the gods, as influenza was stalking abroad in the kitchen regions.

"However, I know how tolerant you all are by this time," he said, launching a brilliant smile at the table generally. As it turned out, he had no need on this occasion to ask for indulgence to be extended to the material portion of the feast; a series of admirable dishes, mostly cold, followed a clear soup beyond reproach. "My wife is certainly a woman of resource," he observed happily, to Lady Victoria in confidence, later on, while he consumed a stuffed quail in aspic jelly. "I was told, only this afternoon, that our commissariat arrangements had broken down hopelessly."

At the other end of the table, the hostess, for her part, had one or two unwonted flashes of silence; the conviction grew that Philippa must have been indulging in a fit of reckless extravagance that day. Miss Jordan meanwhile talked and laughed with delightful spirit and gaiety. There was at times a kind of intoxicating infection about this young woman's bright moods; like

Mephistopheles, she would draw sparkling spirits from a block of wood, and to-night she could scarcely complain of having much inductile material to work upon. Those who sat near her were all impelled to be brilliant even beyond what they expected of themselves, and the fullest satisfaction accordingly prevailed amongst the greater number of the guests.

Lady Victoria stared at Phil several times through her *pince-nez;* she had never seen her look so attractive as to-night, and, though she had heard her say plenty of strange, sharp things during their acquaintance, she had never been aware of quite this overmastering quality in her vivacity before. Lady Victoria was puzzled.

She thought she had taken this girl's measure long ago, she had docketed her with the proper ticket, and put her away in one of her mental pigeon-holes after her usual fashion. She began to think she should have to take out that packet and consider it again. This process may be interesting, but it is aggravating too. Did not a great man of science say that to put people to the trouble of readjusting their convictions is an unpardonable—or, at anyrate, generally unpardoned —offence?

Philippa, who seemed to have the use of more eyes and ears than most people, understood Lady Victoria's sensations to a nicety. She knew all about those pigeon-holes, and was perfectly acquainted with the label on the one selected for her.

But somebody sitting at Miss Jordan's left hand remained unsatisfied with his entertainment. She continued, in some mysterious way, to ignore him, though

nobody perceived it. She addressed her remarks to so many people, and yet she airily passed him over every time, though Mr. Morris, on the other side of her, received plenty of individual attention. Quick-witted young girls have mercilessly ingenious methods of their own for inflicting refined excesses of discomfiture on their victims at will, without giving any tangible ground for open protest and complaint. Mr. Handley's ignorance of the ways of women, however, prevented him from being as docile a sufferer as a more sophisticated man of the world might have proved. Dinner was about half over, and Phil had not addressed a single remark to him, while his own observations had each time been, so to speak, left on his hands. Now this was hardly fair. He turned on her doggedly when she at last dropped out of a conversation which had suddenly veered to her father's new play.

"Well?" he said inquiringly.

"Well?" she repeated coldly, fixing the large brown and grey eyes, suddenly divested of all expression, on his face.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing that I know of. I was about to say my grace for a good dinner," looking now straight at a picture on the opposite wall, "but I don't find it a pleasant process."

"Then why do it?"

"I shall not," she replied, turning away from him again.

Mr. Handley studied his plate with an air of profound reflection.

Someone began talking enthusiastically about North

country football playing, the great national sport of the counties north of the Trent. After the fashion of sedentary people with active imaginations, who love to dwell upon the achievements of sheer muscular force and physical courage most alien to their habits and experience, the conversation became general, dogmatic and eager.

"Ah!" said Mr. Morris in his soft voice, "you none of you know what football is unless you have seen it played in Staffordshire or Lancashire. There it ceases to be a boys' game, it is the Berserker sport of full-grown Norsemen. Great brawny fellows from the collieries or the potteries go about in companies on a half-holiday from one neighbouring town to another, while the whole countryside turns out to see, and every spectator is a connoisseur, who appreciates each turn of the game and movement of the players. It is a fine spectacle, and must surely be a great popular educator in fair play, muscular activity and self-control."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Mr. Duke in the bland falsetto tone which he usually employed when quenching any signs of rising enthusiasm in his neighbourhood. "And I understand too that the gambling attendant on the godlike sports of these heroes is on a suitably colossal scale; so educating, as you say, for the popular mind, isn't it? Wonderful children of Nature! I was told up there last summer that quite elementary and primeval passions are called into play very easily over these local pastimes. If a football gang gets into a railway carriage in which you are travelling, the best course open to a puny Londoner is to get under the seat

directly if possible, and should this prove an impossible feat, the only other alternative is to avoid any form of discussion with heroes flushed with victory and stimulants. They are quick at a certain form of repartee, it is quite uncompromising, and a good many of them wear clogs. Now, clogs are, I believe, unanswerable arguments. But, there is Handley, a master mind, fresh from his native heather. What do you say, Handley—doesn't a good deal of kicking go on outside the limits of the game?"

The potter slightly raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders: the subject did not appear to possess quite the same fascination for him as for the South country talkers.

"Perhaps. Staffordshire and Lancashire hands are often a rough lot."

"Well, but you must know," persisted Ashley Duke, perceiving that Mr. Handley was not anxious to pursue the subject. "I know your own men have a famous team. Have you ever played with them yourself?"

"No. And I have never been kicked either," said the potter, looking across the table with an expression of countenance which was certainly suggestive.

"More's the pity; might have done the brute some good," muttered Mr. Duke aside in the ear of his neighbour, a successful portrait-painter with a pleasant face and a genial manner.

"Well, don't you try it on, or you might not get the best of it, Duke," answered the artist, under cover of more general talk on the same subject. "By Jove! what an interesting head and shoulders it is. I mean to

paint him some day. Wasn't he the usual legend from the pit's mouth or the pottery's tail, discovered in the crude state by Morris? I shouldn't have minded discovering him myself as a model. Strong lines, suggestive pattern, and the devil of a temper somewhere, I should think."

"An ugly brute like that?"

"Oh, as for ugliness, that is a question of attitude. You roused a look that wasn't pretty. These men don't always like to be reminded of the ranks they sprang from; but I shouldn't have thought Handley possesssed that kind of snobbishness. Perhaps he has done some kicking at large himself in earlier days."

A sudden pause in the conversation left a portion of this remark fairly audible.

"Keep quiet, can't you?" exclaimed Ashley quite nervously, looking across the table. "My dear fellow, you always forget what a powerful organ you have, your murmurs are apt to carry far. I may have to walk home alone presently."

But Ashley Duke had not finished baiting his bear yet, for he had a weakness said to be feminine: he liked having the last word.

"Handley!" he called again with an air of exaggerated politeness, screwing his eyeglass into position; "forgive me for being a bore, but we're all people of imagination here, and there is nothing we love more than a tale of violence and crime. Have you ever actually known a case of a man being kicked to death in your parts?"

Everybody stopped to listen. The North country man

slowly picked one or two grapes from their stem as he answered in his deliberate accents—

"I am sorry I am not better up in our local police news. I have not been a magistrate very long, and I have never occupied any other position in the court. I daresay, though, I could rake up some stories of drunken brutalities in the pottery towns which would satisfy you. But do you think they would amuse the ladies?"

He turned to Phil with that air of formal and rather self-conscious politeness which sometimes recalled to her mind the fact that his familiarity with society had not been a matter of habit from his early youth.

"Oh, don't mind us!" exclaimed that young lady airily, "but have some regard for Mr. Duke's nerves. He is not as strong as he looks. See, he is turning pale already."

And across the table they exchanged glances, not for the first time, which might almost have been interpreted as threats.

"Well, I should think I knew the pottery towns as well as anybody, seein' I was brought up not far from Meeshaw myself," broke in Lady Victoria. "Mr. Handley, you must come over and look us up at the Wynch next time I go to stay with my brother, South Molton, down there. But, as I was sayin' about the Potteries, Mr. Jordan, you never saw such a God-forsaken wilderness of chimneys and refuse heaps in your life. Between blast furnaces and smoking ovens, and about a mile of tombstones, the place is a valley of desolation, a regular Inferno, don't y'r know. Mr. Jordan, you must come

and see Meeshaw as an experience—a piece of realism, you'd call it, wouldn't you?"

Mr. Jordan had been quite silent during the whole of the foregoing conversation. He leaned back in his chair, and continued to play with the twisted stem of his Venetian wineglass as he said, without looking up: "I was there once."

"Were you, father? Not in my time, surely?" exclaimed his daughter with interest and surprise, for she had never heard him mention the fact, although they had known Mr. Handley for quite a long time now.

He did not answer, and Mrs. Jordan abruptly gave the signal for retreat.

"Can't you talk about something else?" she said, turning to her daughter almost fiercely in the hall, while Lady Victoria stalked on before. Phil looked with astonishment at the poor cheap face working under the rouge, and the wrinkles, and the frizzle of dyed fringe. She followed her mother upstairs, with a thoughtful countenance, gathering by the way the fan, handkerchief, and various jingling adornments, which Mrs. Jordan let fall one by one after her usual fashion, without any protests at all.

CHAPTER IV.

It was late when the last guests left Mr. Jordan's house that evening. Two of them stayed some time after everybody else had departed, and each was apparently determined not to be the first to rise. This rather ludicrous rivalry, however, could not last for ever, and Mr. Duke and Mr. Handley accordingly found themselves standing together on the wet doorstep, looking out into the rainy night which had been made hideous by whistles long and loud for cabs which seldom haunt Worcester Gardens in the night watches.

"It is no good," exclaimed Mr. Duke piteously at last, after a glance at his shining shoes; "we must swim. Come along, Handley, I shall hold on to you. You are a bolder spirit than I, you are accustomed to braving a northern clime. Just wait till the maid brings me an umbrella. *Apropos* of the North, I am coming up your way again before long, to visit your friend Mrs. Kirkham —a nice person, if she didn't try so dreadfully hard to be intelligent. It is exhausting to look on at. Then you can tell me some more about those local manners and customs I was inquiring about at dinner. Ah! here is our host. Now we can start. Good-night, Jordan. Good luck for Saturday night! You've done a real fine thing again this time, and I look forward to saying so in print directly. Come on, Handley. By Jove!" (looking round), "he's gone."

The garden gate squeaked on its hinges, and the hat of his fellow-guest was alone visible as he passed along the tall railings up the road.

"Unmannerly, unlicked boor! It is a rotten state of things when such fellows as this are allowed to rub shoulders with gentlemen!"

Mr. Duke, by the way, professed the most advanced Radical opinions, and was even now seeking an invitation from some constituency which would guarantee his expenses, to find a new field for his varied talents and ambitions as the representative of an enlightened democracy. Indeed, he began to think he saw his way already to an opening of the kind.

For all that, he was still uttering maledictions on social innovations as he stopped for a moment under a sheltering tree to tie his pocket-handkerchief inside his coat collar round his neck, before taking the final plunge into the night. As he pushed the garden gate open, he was startled by the sudden movement of a figure which had been leaning against it on the other side. The street lamps close by disclosed a long man, looking like a tramp, in soiled clothes, with his head bent down, and his hands in his pockets. He began to slouch slowly away under the shadow of the walls, in the wake of Mr. Handley, whom another distant lamp showed to be now vanishing round the farthest corner of the solitary road.

The glimpse of this unprepossessing night-bird was not altogether reassuring to a person so nervously constituted as Mr. Duke. He hesitated again, peering through the blackness of the shadow along the path and listened for the wayfarer's footsteps. No sound, however, was to

be heard above the rushing of the wind in the trees, the drip of the rain, and the dull, distant roar of the city's surge. Wait, though—yes! A shuffle and a rolling stone not far off, betrayed that the tramp was dawdling, too. No, he was going on; there, near the second lamp, he perceived something moving. At the same moment he heard an upper window of the house he had just left opened, and Phil's clear laugh struck across the night.

"Bah! how sopping! Ashley Duke will get his poor little feet wet, father. I ought to have lent him my goloshes and waterproof cloak, oughtn't I?"

The subject of her benevolent suggestions sped away up the road without any further dallying, and with another exclamation expressive of sinful temper on his lips. As he, too, turned the corner of the road he stopped short. Under the next lamp-post, a few yards in front of him, stood Mr. Handley talking to the tramp —a most disreputable and ragged tramp he was now seen to be, with a big stick, a loud, sing-song voice, and a long ragged beard. Mr. Duke paused a moment, and then some impulse caused him to step sideways behind a projecting porch close at hand. One of the speakers was distinctly audible.

"Eh! 'appen ahm but a pore clemmed mon noo, William 'Andley, and tha's floorishin' like ony green bay tree, but a' war a good frien' to tha New Year's neet coom twenty year. If a' 'adn't perilled ma soul leein' for tha then, tha'd a' been scorchin' in 'ell, as tha owt aw' this time, i'sted o' carryin' on grand doin's."

The indistinguishable bass of the potter's voice broke in here, but the other's higher note soon burst forth again.

"William, th' Lord's vengeance is long, but hoo's sure. 'Ow did a' coom 'ere? A' landed las' week and a' coom to Lunnon, and saw tha coom out o' Morris's 'ouse, so a' followed and a' waited; and a' will wait too, William, for th' Lord's time. Nay, a'll not go back to 'Meriky no more, lad, but it's brass a' want noo, ahm clemmed."

More indistinct remarks from the other, then:

"Nay, William 'Andley, a've followed tha 'ere and given up thy weekly wage to do th' Lord's bidding on a vessel o' wrath; a'll not loose thee noo till the reckonin's paid. A've found peace, William, a've saved ma soul and ahm only bidin' th' Lord's time to do 's work. Tha'd best repent before tha burns."

In answer to further observations from the potter the tramp assumed a melancholy whine, and his remarks became somewhat incoherent.

"Ahm fain to see th' owd place again, Mester. A've got a feelin' 'art, not like tha, and a've got a boozzin' and a pain i' th' 'ead, William, but a' munna die afore a've done th' Lord's work. A' mun die there i' th' owd place."

Mr. Handley had turned. He spoke in a louder voice now, perhaps from anger or perhaps with a wish to carry understanding to a clouded brain.

"Die where you like, so long as you don't live where you would be a nuisance. Eli, you've lived a dissolute, idle life, and I've only maintained you for the sake of old days. You've drowned what little brains you had in drink long ago, and I won't have you about my place. Keep away, and the money shall be paid anywhere that you like to go to the devil; but not one

farthing so long as you stay in England. Do you understand?"

"Mester," said the wavering voice, with a slightly staccato dignity, "tha'rt a domned godless mon. But a've found peace, ahm a Salvationist, a' war converted las' month, and a'll do th' Lord's errand if a' clem for it; nay, if a' swing for 't." His tone waxed louder with excitement.

"Eli, here is the money. Unless you leave England it is the last farthing you will receive from me. Now be off, and if I see or hear any more of you I will have you shut up in the lunatic asylum, where you ought to be now. If you venture to annoy me again, I will hand you over to the police."

"As t' p'lice, William, a'd 'ave soommat to say on tha count, mebbe."

Only a sound of steady footsteps crunching away over loose gravel followed.

Mr. Duke emerged from his recess. The scarecrow was standing still, talking to himself: "Eh! but he's a bad 'un! A' reckon though the Lord's instrument 's noan so easy to get without. A' can bide ma time; but tha's not doon wi' owd Eli yet, Mester!"

He began to shamble on. Mr. Duke stepped briskly forward. "Wet night," he observed genially as he caught him up.

"Ay, but there's flames as winna be squenched."

"Are you out of work, my man?" with extreme affability. The sunken eyes darted a suspicious look at his face, then came a sing-song again:

"Ahm welly clemmed, Mester!"

"Oh, come! come! I saw a gentleman I know give

you something very generous just now. I suppose he's known you a long time."

Eli marched silently beside his companion, shaking his head from side to side for some seconds before he spoke, then—

"Ay! 'e knows Eli, ower well for 'is likin', mebbe. But a'll follow 'im down to th' owd plaäce for all that; 'tis th' Lord's will, and a' mun go. But 'tis a long way, and ahm far, far from 'ome!"—he broke into a kind of droning hymn tune.

"Don't!" said his companion, "you must not make that noise. It is a long way to Meeshaw, certainly. Do you mean that?"

"'Appen a' do mean that!" defiantly.

"Well, here's something for you, and if you will tell me your name and a place where you are to be found, perhaps I could get you some employment from a lady I know down there."

"Eli Grimwade's ma name, an' a'll go back to th' owd white cottage-'ouse on Drake's Edge, just above Owdcross. But dunna tha get tellin' William 'Andley," with sudden, almost threatening, eagerness.

Mr. Duke hastened to assure him that he did not intend to mention the matter to Mr. Handley.

"I'll wait my own time, or suitable providential arrangements, for that, anyway," he said to himself, as he hurried away from his companion. "I wonder whether everyone loses their mental balance in that peculiar household as I do? For, really, what is the object of talking in the rain at one in the morning to a ranting lunatic because he might know something to that fellow's disadvantage? However, if we're likely to be matched

against one another in more ways than one, it is as well not to throw any chance away of getting a trump card. Most likely, though, the tramp is only a poor relation with a grudge against a rich one. I should not care to claim kinship with Mr. Eli Grimwade myself. Shall I tell Phil about him? Well, not just at present, anyway."

CHAPTER V.

DURING the next week or two Phil was a prickly person to live with. Her temper, which was usually sweet beneath all her variable and wayward moods, became really infirm. Mrs. Jordan complained of it a good deal. She told her husband that nobody knew what the strain upon her patience had been of late. He may have been in a position to conjecture, but he had long ceased to make much response to his wife's frequent and comprehensive lamentations. It was one of her grievances. Nine times out of ten, she declared, he did not even hear what she said; some of his friends mentally added it to the score of Mr. Jordan's many virtues. To cry aloud and spare not over the thousand rubs of life, was this poor lady's habit to an extent that made it difficult to believe there could be any trouble left which she did not openly bewail. The people amongst whom she moved would certainly have been incredulous had they been told that there was any secret grief—past, present or foreseen—to feed on her renovated cheek.

After the dinner-party there had been repeated agitations over the reckless extravagance of the orders Phil was supposed to have given, and dark anticipations as to the coming bills; the sight of the remnants of the feast moved her to tears.

"How could you go and order such a quantity of expensive things, Phil!" she exclaimed for the hundredth time several days afterwards.

"I didn't," confessed her daughter at last, with a gloomy air.

"What!" cried Mrs. Jordan, starting up from the sofa on which she was extended, all the little jingling ornaments attached to her waist, wrists, and ears set going together. "You didn't? Do you mean to say it was your father, then? Oh! how deceitful men are!"

"They are; but it was not father this time."

"Then who could it have been?" demanded Mrs. Jordan, her mourning suddenly turned into pleasurable excitement in face of such a mystery. Presently she looked very arch, and her head inclined to one side as she waved a thin finger at her daughter: "Ah! Phil, you naughty girl; I am sure you know, and I believe I can guess."

"I suppose you think it is a new and charming development of modern courtship for the hero to offer cutlets and *pâtés,* instead of bouquets and garlands, to the object of his choice. Rather carnal, isn't it? After all, I believe I should have adorned the keepsake. My sentiments are surprisingly correct; I like the old vegetable plan best. This one seems a little clumsy—perfectly hateful indeed!" with a sudden flash.

"Phil! you tiresome girl, do tell me at once. How unkind of you to let me worry myself ill all the week for nothing!"

"But, Mama, I have worried too, and it wasn't for nothing."

"Oh, dear, dear! do you mean we shall have to pay, after all, for those expensive dishes? Those quails in aspic were turned out by some first-rate *chef,* and green peas in January too! Oh, goodness gracious! what shall we do? We have overdrawn to such an extent that the bank refuses to honour any more cheques until some more money is paid in, and that won't be till next month. Whatever——"

"Calm yourself, Mama. I think I am the only person whose account has been overdrawn for this affair."

"You tiresome child! What are you making such a mystery about? You have no consideration for a mother's feelings, and you don't know how much I suffer when my nerves are upset; it is very hard!" She brought out her handkerchief with trembling fingers.

Phil, seeing that she was bringing on herself one of the hysterical scenes so much dreaded by everybody in the house, hastily decided upon the course she had been avoiding all the week.

"Listen, Mama! you need not trouble yourself any more about that dinner. The whole of it was brought here by Mr. Handley, who only makes excuses when I ask him to let me have the bills."

Her cheeks flushed pink while she spoke, and she frowned as she beat a little tattoo on the ground with the point of her shoe.

"Philippa!" Mrs. Jordan's handkerchief vanished in the twinkling of an eye, and she spoke in a radiant staccato. "My darling child! what delicate kindness and consideration!"

"Isn't it?" said Phil ironically, as she tossed the book in her hand noisily on to the table.

Her mother looked at her a little askance, feeling that she still trod upon uncertain ground, but unable to banish the light of joyful expectation from her eye.

"Well, my dear, I am sure it was a great pleasure to him. As for the cost, it would be nothing to a rich, self-made man like that."

"I took him for a gentleman!" cried foolish and reckless Phil in her anger.

"My dear, so he is; it was a most gentlemanly thing to do. How you do exaggerate trifles; just like your poor father. Indeed, I think to make so much fuss about a few pounds, which mean nothing to a man like that, is hardly ladylike. And, after all, think what an advantage it must be to him to come here and meet the people we know!"

"Do you suppose he goes nowhere else? Mr. Morris knows much nicer people than we do, and Mr. Handley is quite a well-known man himself since he was placed on that Commission," exclaimed Phil with one of her sudden, lightning changes of attitude.

"All the same," she went on, her face becoming darkly tragic again, "if it is an affair of advantage to one side or the other, I suppose Mr. Handley will——" She stopped and darted out of the room with flushed cheeks and eyes shining with crossness, amongst other and more mixed emotions.

Her mother lay back amongst the cushions again and took a sniff at her salts bottle. "I am not so sure whether *all* the advantages will be on his side, after

all," she said to herself meditatively; "the dear girl is really very difficult at times."

Then a sudden thought caused her to rise and trip hurriedly to the door, calling, "Phil, my dear! Phil!" in her high, fatigued voice.

"Well!" came in the soft, vibrating tone, which was one of Miss Jordan's most potent attractions; there was a rustling and crackling of paper on the landing meanwhile.

"Phil, my pet, I don't think it will be necessary to worry your dear father about such a trifle, do you?"

There was the sound of a laugh.

"You know," cried her mother, "how absurdly fidgety he sometimes is about little matters of that kind."

Another laugh and more crackling of noisy paper.

"I think he may perhaps be spared the knowledge that Mr. Handley was not only allowed to come here and be patronised by his betters, but that he also had the privilege of entertaining them too, including his hosts. All right, Mama, I won't tell him unless he makes it necessary."

"Makes it necessary? What do you mean? Oh! do stop that dreadful noise, it is impossible to hear oneself speak."

"I've just done. I am packing up my painting things to take to Oldcross to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Oldcross! Where and what is Oldcross? It is very hard that your mother is always the last person to hear of your plans! You might consider me a little, in my state of health, too!"

"Mama!" cried Phil, hastily advancing at the note

of warning in the raised voice, a bundle of brushes in one hand and a bottle of turpentine in the other. "For weeks past I have done nothing but talk about this visit to Mrs. Kirkham, that amiable widow-woman whom you liked. She has commissioned me, you know, to go down and paint her children. She lives at this place called Oldcross, in Cheshire or Staffordshire—I forget which."

Mrs. Jordan stood quite still, not a jingle was heard for a whole minute.

"Phil!" she exclaimed in an odd, excited voice; "won't you be near that place Meeshaw?"

"Quite near, I believe; that is, a good many miles off. Two or three stations down the line, perhaps a little more, but not much."

Her mother came near, looked round as if to see whether anyone was within hearing and then laid her hand on Phil's arm.

"You must go and look at the grave," she almost whispered, "and see whether it is properly cared for. I paid for the stone without his knowing—your father, I mean. I took the piece of Capo di Monte out of the cabinet and told him it had been broken to fragments while he was abroad. He had refused to do anything. He preferred that Cuthbert's name should be wiped off the face of the earth, he said. I have only been able to go and see it once in all these years, and then I could not bear it. I had an illness afterwards. It is a terrible place. But I send a little money whenever I can to the sexton to take care of it. You must go and see if it is properly looked after. But mind, not a word to

your father, Phil! He never will allow Bertie's name to be mentioned."

"Mama," said Phil with great gentleness, "you have never told me anything about Bertie. Of course I can't remember him at all, I was so little when he died. Was he like those photographs in your room?"

Mrs. Jordan did not answer; on coming close to her, Philippa found that she was trembling all over. The one passion of her poor flimsy life had been for the worthless lad whom nature had stamped with his mother's image and superscription. It had struck its roots deeper down into her than anyone would have believed possible. She sank on to the sofa again and leaned her forehead on her hands.

"No; I suppose you can't remember him," she said slowly, "and nobody else can or will either, except me. It all happened a long while ago, and yet it seems like yesterday too; but then again it doesn't, for it has been an endless time to get through without him." The tears were falling fast through her fingers, but she spoke quite quietly.

"If he had only known me when I got to him, I feel as if I could have borne it, but he didn't. There wasn't a look even to show he knew I was there."

"How did he die?" asked Philippa, sitting down beside her and putting her arm round the thin shaking shoulders. "Neither you nor father have ever told me anything about him."

"Your father wouldn't!" cried her mother, the shrill bitterness returning into her voice; "all he thought about was the disgrace to himself. He was disappointed from the beginning because he didn't think Bertie was clever

or the sort of boy he would have liked to have. He took after me and my family," continued poor Barley, wiping her eyes, with a little complacency. Her father had been Mr. Jordan's landlord when he lived in some not very luxurious chambers as a poor and solitary young journalist.

"Your father always expected Bertie to be a failure, he never had a chance. When he was sent away from school under a cloud—most unjustly I am sure, Bertie never could have done anything really wrong—your father said it was no good trying to send him to the University, even if he could raise the money. So he packed him off to a Manchester office to learn business, and then—and then Bertie got into bad company; and he was always so delicate in the chest too," quavered poor Barley, "and bills came in, and terrible letters from his employer, and the end of it was Bertie disappeared suddenly. There was supposed to be money missing too from the office; but, of course, it could not have been my boy. They said it was though, and your father believed it, and went down there and thanked the man for not prosecuting him. We heard nothing more of him for two years, except a line, without name or address, just to tell me he was alive and I was not to worry. The next thing was a summons to the hospital where he was dying at Meeshaw."

Phil let her sob for a few minutes undisturbed; the living presence of this bitter, unassuaged grief came as a revelation to her. It must have filled her mother's life during nearly all the years of her own, yet she had never suspected it, seldom realised that this unknown brother

had ever really existed: he had always seemed to belong to the dead past of other generations.

For the first time she came face to face with one of the earthquake forces of life below its surface. She softly caressed the poor trembling hand with a tenderness she had never hitherto found it possible to feel for the mother who weighed so light in the scales, and who grated on so many susceptibilities. All the pity of an ardently imaginative and sympathetic nature overwhelmed her, but close upon its heels came that continual despair which lies behind so many of the permanent situations in life, the impossibility of making pity serviceable owing to the almost physical, involuntary, unconquerable alienation of two temperaments, overriding the will, producing repulsion in moments when tenderness has been determined upon. For poor Barley presently broke out into her accustomed vein of wholly egotistical and feeble complaint, dwelling on the likeness to herself of the lost boy, of her grievances over the disappointments of his early career, and on her own vulgar ambitions for him. His father's trouble was wholly ignored, denied, by her long cankering resentment of his attitude toward Cuthbert, and absorption in her own emotions.

Phil could not help it, she dropped her mother's hand and drew slightly away. "What did Bertie die of?" she interrupted, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"He worked in a pottery; the dust or something got into his lungs, and he went into consumption. They told me he had hardly any lungs left; but he had been out in all weathers, and fell down some high bank just before he died and broke a blood vessel after the shock of the fall. The doctor talked about drink, which could

not have been true, of course. Everyone seemed to join against poor Bertie; and tales were brought to your father about all sorts of things, a scandal about a common work-girl—oh! dreadful tales about my poor, poor Bertie, who never had a chance."

She wept again, this time with a less quiet and controlled emotion than before, but the wailing voice stopped short as a shadow fell across the carpet from the open door, and Mr. Jordan said with grave and unusual authority:

"My dear, I beg you that you will go and lie down at once, and not agitate yourself any further in this painful and useless manner."

Barley gathered herself up from the sofa, and turned upon her husband as though about to discharge a flood of eloquence at him, but thought better of it and took flight past him with a sweep of skirts and jingles, and a storm of sobs.

Mr. Jordan took several turns up and down the room in silence, his hands clasped behind him, lines of care and trouble showing themselves clearly upon his fine, clean-shaven face with its well-cut features surmounted by scanty but crisply-curling grey hair.

"So, Phil," he said at last, his eyes fixed on the carpet, "you are going to stay at that place near Meeshaw."

"Yes father. I never knew, when I accepted Mrs. Kirkham's commission, that you had such painful associations there. I am sorry now I did."

"It is nothing to me," declared Mr. Jordan, raising his head and challenging her eyes. "Women never know how to take life. Because certain events, which

should be forgotten, happened to take place at a particular spot, it is irrational weakness to insist upon wiping out that portion of one's map for ever afterwards. I do not. I have not mentioned your brother" (the words were spoken with peculiar firmness) "to you before, I do not mean to refer to him again if I can help it. The slate must be wiped clean of shameful failures; he was one. I forget, I choose to forget, the disgrace and pain he brought upon us. As regards yourself, my child, he never existed. He had left home before you could remember; he never did concern you in any way, and is certainly never likely to now."

"Mother can't forget, though," said Phil, looking at him with wonder and perhaps a little reproach, after the passion of grief she had just witnessed.

Mr. Jordan shrugged his shoulders as slightly as a Frenchman would have done, raised his eyebrows and frowned as he played with his *pince-nez*.

"Women are still given to fetish worship; they adore creations of their own brain instead of the real human being. She never saw him as he really was even when he was alive, far less afterwards. It is a pity. Such obstinate infatuation is only a source of misery. The fact remains that the whole affair is over and done with, as completely as if he had never existed."

Philippa looked at her father as she had sometimes done before, realising with that sudden, complete detachment from personal relationship which was one of her peculiarities, that this was the man who was considered to be one of the most subtle interpreters of emotional intricacies of his day. Face to face with an actual situation, this was all he could make of it! After all, Phil

was only a young female creature; she had not yet learnt how many different ways there are in life.

"What a queer world it is!" she said with an odd little smile and a sigh at the same time.

Her father cleared his throat and his face too, as though he were visibly closing the chapter.

"Does not our potter friend live at Meeshaw?" he asked, returning to a mellow and patronising tone.

"Yes."

"An excellent fellow, no doubt, Phil; a sterling character, and quite a success too, I am told, along his own lines. But—ah well!—does he really amuse you, now?"

"Why not?"

"My dear, I only ask for information. And if you find him good company I have no complaint to make, more especially as I am going to Spain very shortly, and shall therefore not have many opportunities of conversing with him for some time to come. I confess I do not find him altogether entertaining."

A pause. Phil remained doggedly silent.

"Do tell me," said her father, descending from his grand manner to one that betrayed a quite human curiosity not unmixed with irritation, "what interests you in that fellow? I know Lady Victoria likes him too. To me it is a mystery what people, who have been accustomed to hearing some of the best talk in London, can find to listen to in that morose earthenware barbarian."

His daughter jumped to her feet impetuously. "I don't know what you mean by the "best talk"; what I hear seems to me very monotonous and very poor stuff.

I like people who can do things as well as talk neatly about them. As for the painters and poets, and all that crew, they seem to me the worst talkers and the dullest dogs in creation. They only want to hold forth about their own shop, with pauses for compliments to be thrown in by the audience. If I had a daughter," cried Phil ardently, with shining eyes and a pale carnation glow on her clear cheeks, "she should never talk to painters and men of letters, if she showed signs of possessing any intelligence or originality."

Mr. Jordan replied to his daughter's outburst by one of those irritating little laughs which goad women to do many foolish and even wicked things.

"Very good, my dear, bring her up in a pottery, then, as that seems to be the real centre of light and leading."

But he wisely retreated from the room; for he was aware of having lost his temper and behaved with what an indulgent friend might call indiscretion.

"Ouf!" he exclaimed, with a face of disgust, as he closed his study door behind him, and made use of some other short exclamations too, to relieve his overcharged feelings, "to bring up one's best thing, one's daughter, for this! A bear, an arrogant lout, and after all the opportunities she has had, and the people she has seen! Are women ever governed by any other motive than downright sheer contrariness? Is there any other law of their being? Is there one a rational man could live with comfortably? And Phil, too! Amazing! infernal!"

The distinguished dramatist started on his Spanish tour in a depressed frame of mind, though he did not

allow his gloom to accompany him far beyond the Channel. Phil, he said to himself on the steamer, was all he had, and he had centred many hopes in her. Now she bade fair to do something as disastrously stupid and perverse as the feeblest of her sex. It was painful, very painful. Mr. Jordan fortunately possessed a capacity for finding the world a pleasant place in spite of all its drawbacks. Even his financial embarrassments had never been allowed to occupy an unduly prominent place in his existence. But until now it had always been a great pleasure to think about his daughter; her fascinating little face, her grace, her lovely changing voice, her quick intelligence, her imagination, her merry tongue, had all contributed immensely and distinctly to his pleasure in life. He interested himself in her work, her frocks, and her successes of all sorts; he made efforts to see things from her point of view, to keep young for her sake. There could be no doubt about his great affection for her; but Mr. Jordan was not one of those unfortunate people upon whose affections depends all that makes life desirable or of any meaning.

CHAPTER VI.

"YAH!" exclaimed Phil, tossing aside her brushes when the first gong sounded for lunch, and her small sitters sprang from their positions with alacrity. "I certainly was not made to lead this dreadfully respectable existence and take all my meals reg'lar every day. How do you bear it all the year round, Mrs. Kirkham?"

Her hostess glanced nervously at the improvised dais on which her little daughter's long black legs were performing a war-dance of delight at release from stillness, while the virtuous Boney carefully put a mark in the book out of which he had been reading aloud in a slow, dolorous voice to relieve her martyrdom.

"Mercy!" sighed Phil, half to herself, "I suppose I'm corrupting the small innocents now as well as the big ones. Be off, you squorks! or I'll paint you green, and varnish you from top to toe!"

"Oh, do!" they cried, jumping down in a state of delightful excitement. In spite of the torment of sitting for their portraits they had both fallen in love with Philippa. Their mother dismissed them summarily to be washed and brushed, before lunch.

"You do say such strange things sometimes," she said, turning to her visitor with a slightly careworn air. "I don't mind them in the least, you know, because it's

you, my dear, and I understand. But you can't complain if other people—strangers—do really misunderstand you at times."

"I don't complain; but perhaps they do—do they? Oh, I am so sorry! Mrs. Kirkham, was it the Vicaress at dinner last night, or the apostolic cookery teacher, or your Miss Alberta? I love Alberta to madness; she is grand."

"My dear, need you have talked quite as you did? You see they are not used to your ways. You never seem to take anything seriously; they don't understand it!"

"Good heavens! fancy taking them seriously at dinner, and the first time that you meet them! If one had to breakfast and lunch with them too, I should admit the situation might become grave. But really, Mrs. Kirkham, does everyone in the North country gird up their loins every morning and prepare to testify seriously and solemnly all about their opinions, great and small, in answer to each idle remark?"

"Well, it has often struck me in London that people's object seems to be to conceal their real thoughts, as if they were ashamed of having any convictions."

"They are certainly shy of taking for granted that their private prejudices can provide either amusement or instruction for the world in general. We cockneys are accustomed to being only one of a heterogeneous crowd where motley is the only wear. Seriously, for I am catching the deadly infection, it is the only wear for men and women of the world. The provincial attitude seems to a cockney so naïvely self-assertive as to be a little—well, wanting in reserve. Plenty of people take

themselves very seriously, but if they live in a crowd, they learn to draw some sort of veil over the fact. Heavens! I shall be talking soul directly! Well, there really are some people here I want to see, for I am sure they are fifty times more interesting than these excellent bourgeois bores."

Mrs. Kirkham winced slightly; she was secretly sensitive with regard to the class for whom her visitor had so little appreciation.

"Whom do you mean?"

"Oh, the workpeople, who make the things in the mills and potteries, and who talk such a queer language. They, I am sure, are interesting."

"You only think so because you don't know them."

Philippa looked at her quickly; somebody else had said very much the same thing the day before.

"Well, at anyrate I should like to know them—they are picturesque, and they are, as you say, new. By the way, speaking of pictures, how I should like to paint that strong, queer face of old Alberta's. I am sure it is a type direct from the Staffordshire clay. But I don't suppose she'll let me, as yet anyway; she has mixed me up with the scarlet lady on the Seven Hills, I believe; at anyrate, I am a daughter of Babylon at present. But I have met another type. Dear Mrs. Kirkham"—in a wheedling voice, subsiding on to the floor at Helena's feet, and looking up entreatingly into the troubled blue eyes set in the broad, sensible face above her—"I've got something to confess. What will you say?"

"What have you done now?" asked her hostess, looking down at her with alarm.

"I met such a beautiful scarecrow up on the hill-

side yesterday. I do want it so badly. I couldn't help it. I have never seen such a good one before. You are such a dear, you know; you won't mind! It is coming here to be painted to-morrow. It wasn't very dirty."

"But what is it, who is it? Oh, Phil, is it some horrid tramp?"

Mrs. Kirkham looked round the pretty room with an anguish which had gradually grown during the fortnight that the artist had spent under her roof. She sighed at the chaos in the library, which had been turned into a studio on account of its north light; never had the spotless neatness of her surroundings suffered such an eclipse. Disorder seemed to follow in Phil's train; to Helena it almost obscured the sun. She spent her days in picking up paint-brushes, or messy little tubes, in removing rainbow stains with turpentine, in wheeling chairs back into position, in replacing books on the shelves, in sending worried chair-backs to be ironed. The attempt to keep pace with Phil's dilapidations was a daily trial. And all the while her guest was quite oppressed by her own recurrent, spasmodic efforts, pathetic in their futility, to keep her feet from straying out of the orderly ways and systematic punctuality of this appallingly well-organised establishment.

Each bore her own trials with heroism, however. Mrs. Kirkham, for her part, was greatly sustained by the simple faith that Phil's untidy habits were the inevitable manifestations of high intellectual and artistic endowments. So she grew resigned again, while listening to the artist's description of her mysterious, but inspiring model.

"It is a long, lean, mad old man; his eyes are so splendidly mad, and he is weather-beaten and tanned to such a fine colour. He has the face of an enthusiast, of one crying in the wilderness, and he really seems to be consumed with the sort of religious fanaticism of the Anabaptist, or some other primitive species. But his spiritual zeal does not prevent him from being filled with an elemental human hatred against somebody or other; he seems to have a kind of divine mission to carry out on some vessel of wrath. I am glad I am not that vessel of wrath, for he really is mad enough for anything. Perhaps it is all a delusion, but you should just see the glare that comes into his eyes when he talks about this sinner. I nearly ran away."

"What is the lunatic's name?" asked her hostess, without enthusiasm.

"An excellent name, quite in keeping; it is Eli—Eli Grimwade."

"Eli Grimwade! You don't mean to say he has come back here again? He used to look after the furnaces, in my father's days, at the pottery, and I was so fond of him when I was a child. William Handley worked under Eli when he first came into the pottery as a boy. He and Eli disappeared at the same time, quite suddenly. William came back here many years afterwards as master of the old place. He told me Eli had lost his wits, and that he had provided for him in a comfortable home somewhere out there."

"How interesting! That accounts for what Eli asked me then. I didn't understand. He said, was it true that the old master's lass lived at Oldcross?"

"Poor old Eli! How glad I shall be to see him again. Do you think he is in want of anything? Is he really mad?"

"He looks like an old starving dog, and he is certainly in rags. Oh yes, as mad as mad can be, but quite harmless, I should think, unless you happened to turn into that vessel of wrath."

"Yet I am sure William provided for him. He must have escaped, and been lost sight of."

Mrs. Kirkham began to devise plans for finding her father's old servant some light work about her back-yards and wood-sheds. She had no intention of offering him direct charity, she understood the race too well, from which she also sprang.

"I don't think you ought to wander alone about the hills, child. There are such rough people about in this district, tramping from the Potteries to Manchester."

"Bless you! I am not afraid of anything on two legs. I admit I was badly scared by some wild beasts of dogs which came tearing out of a cottage—Eli's cottage—across a field after me. I was so frightened I bounded over a rickety stone wall, and landed almost on the top of a thing which rose up with an unearthly yell. That was Eli. He had gone to sleep under the wall, and I frightened him and he frightened the dogs, so we made friends. Those hills are wonderful, I shall have to go up there often, and I'll take Eli to keep off the dogs and the vessels of wrath. What sweeps of green and grey, sky and hillside and stone walls; it is all green and grey, and such distances——"

She stopped short as somebody walked past the window to the front door. Mrs. Kirkham saw who it

was and glanced quickly at her. Neither woman spoke until Mr. Handley walked into the room.

"When are you coming over to stir up mutiny amongst my hands, Miss Jordan?" he asked, when they sat down to lunch. "You said you meant to see a great deal of the workpeople, and you have only been to the pottery once, as yet."

"Oh, I am coming! But I do not want to go about with you next time. I want to see the people without their master. I am not a bloated capitalist grinding the poor, like you and Mrs. Kirkham."

"You need hardly include me under that head," said her hostess quickly, with a sudden flush on her cheeks.

"But you and Mr. Handley are partners, are you not?"

"We are, but one of us is retiring from business," said the male member of the firm.

Mrs. Kirkham's eyes were fastened on her plate. There was an uncomfortable silence for a minute or two.

"I must be off presently, to catch the three o'clock train back to Meeshaw," said Mr. Handley, as they rose from the table. "I am very busy just at present."

"Must you? Surely you have shipped the American orders by now? This used to be always a slack month," said Helena.

"There are no slack months now."

"Times have improved then, I hope. I am glad you are doing so much business!"

There was something in Mrs. Kirkham's voice which made Philippa feel sure the apparently harmless remark

was armed with a sting. It certainly brought a flush to Mr. Handley's cheeks as he answered:

"I am more tied than I was, because I have taken a good deal more of the work into my own hands than I did before."

"But why, when you have such a good man in Craddock?"

"Craddock is gone."

"Have you anyone in view to fill his place?"

He pointed to himself with a smile.

"Oh, William, why load yourself so unnecessarily? You will be dreadfully overworked."

"Not a bit; I enjoy it, and it is really a satisfaction to find I can do it better than he did. But now, Miss Jordan, this is a dull, cold afternoon, what do you say to coming over to the Works, the wind is too high for walking?"

Phil looked up with a half-absent expression in her strange, clear eyes.

"Yes, I want to go to Meeshaw," she said briefly.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Handley, who had acquired a habit of watching her closely in an unobtrusive fashion. He wished if possible to be preserved from making blunders with this wayward, wonderful creature, who was as simple and direct as a boy at one moment, and mysteriously enigmatic the next. But whatever her mood, it always appeared to be an enchanting one to Mr. Handley, however perplexed he might be as to how to steer his boat between unknown rocks of offence and stones of stumbling.

Mrs. Kirkham's forehead contracted again as he left

the room to fetch his cigars; she looked quite worried and vexed.

"Well, madam?" said Phil, smiling at her interrogatively.

"Do you really want to go to the Works to-day?"

"I do want to go to Meeshaw to-day, and I should like to play about a little in the pottery if there is no objection. Is there any?"

Mrs. Kirkham fidgeted about a little, running her clean handkerchief with a preoccupied air along a high shelf and then mechanically turning it up to see if it was dusty.

"To tell the truth, Phil, I somehow find it foolishly difficult to bring myself to set foot inside the old place now that it is passing away from me altogether."

"But why should you, Nell?"

"How can you go about alone with William? People talk so, and Alberta is not there this time."

Phil could not suppress a peal of laughter. "Is that all? Good gracious! After having lived in Paris and gone about alone amongst the studios for three long years, on and off, to think I should want chaperoning with 'William.' How delightful!"

Her gay laugh was still in the air when he opened the door, and the sound of it smoothed out the harsh lines in his face, as it always did, except when she was tormenting him wilfully.

"Poor William," said Mrs. Kirkham to herself as she watched them walk away down the drive. Then she took up an instructive book from the table and read it upside down with profound absorption for some minutes.

But the book was presently restored to its place again with an impatient sigh, and going in search of a large apron, Mrs. Kirkham retreated upstairs to find solace for an unquiet mind in turning out and dusting a cupboard which had been unaccountably overlooked at the last "cleaning down."

CHAPTER VII.

PHIL and her companion were borne quickly away under the fine line of bare hills where three counties meet, and in a short time reached the advance guard of furnace chimneys and smoking rubbish heaps which straggle out to discolour the green pastures. They passed under Mowcop with its fantastic crown of masonry, and stopped at one of the earlier stations, before the army of pottery ovens and smelting works had gathered into their thickest array; but the blight and desolation over everything, the banks of refuse, squalid streets and vista of crowded chimneys belching out flames and thick smoke stretching away in the distance, made Miss Jordan shudder.

"What an appalling place, and how ghastly to think of human creatures spending their lives here!"

"There are many worse, and at night the flames and red-hot banks look well. Besides people who are used to it like the Potteries and come back home here from all over the world."

"More shocking still! Pray, should you say you are used to it?"

"I must confess that I am," he said smiling. "I was born and brought up in this shocking place. I worked at the Swan Pottery, which is now my own, as a rough young lad, and my father was there too; he made basins and cups on the wheel. I was an absolute barbarian

until Mr. Morris found me, Miss Jordan, as rough as those," pointing to some boys with clogs on their feet, who were running and shouting along the cobbled way of the narrow street they were walking through.

"What made you what you are?" inquired his companion, looking up at him with an unwonted expression in her face. It moved her companion strangely, and their conversation took a turn of unusual seriousness and intimacy as they climbed the hill.

"Think what my adopted father did for me. I owe it all to him," he said, with more feeling in his voice than most people credited him with possessing.

"Not all," exclaimed Phil softly, "or he could not have done it."

He looked at her with quick gratitude.

"Tell me more," she said.

"Ah! the history of a rough cub of a working lad with a violent temper, who had certain uninteresting ambitions, and by the most extraordinary good luck, fell into the hands of the kindest and best man in the world, is really not amusing. And it is so hard to yarn about oneself," he said stumblingly.

Philippa smiled a little. It was not a very common difficulty she reflected to herself with most men or women.

"Can't you tell me about your boyish days here? They must be so different from most people's experiences."

"I don't think I can. I was such a young savage. I would rather talk about Morris. Have you any idea how good he has been to me? I should like you to know."

"I know! I know!" she said, rather hastily; "he is the dearest and best of men. But were you really ever so different from what you are now, as you say?"

"I was. Miss Phil, I have, at anyrate, one strong belief or conviction; if I had not, I could not be here now. It is, that a man may really be, as the old Bible phrase runs, 'born again.' I believe there is in human beings so extraordinary a power of regeneration, of starting fresh again, that old things abandoned may drop clean out of a man's record and leave no mark behind, just as if they had been part of somebody else's experience and not his own. I have not many abstract convictions, they do not interest me, and I always left them where most people do in the long run, but I do believe in what one sees happening continually in the world all round, where people rise and make a fresh start pretty nearly as often as they sink. There is my confession of faith, forgive me for inflicting it upon you. I really can't think how I came to do so; I don't talk like this often."

They walked on in a companionable silence until they came to the turning which led down to the Swan Pottery.

"Good-bye," said Phil, stopping. "I believe this is my way, isn't it, to the old churchyard?"

"The churchyard?" he repeated, with surprise; "do you want to go there?"

"Yes, there is a grave I must find. Ah! how horrid to be buried under a pall of smoke in this dreadful place; it is hard on the poor dead! Fancy that being your last sight in the world," waving her hand towards

the huddled crowd of Pottery towns fortified, as it were, by the smoking dead-coloured mounds of refuse everywhere along their outskirts. "But how dreadful to be dead at all," she continued, shaking her little dark head and looking very small and pathetic and childish.

"Don't go to the churchyard," he urged, looking at her with wonder and concern.

"I must. I promised Mama I would go—I have a brother buried there. Don't think me heartless, I don't remember him at all; he was a great trouble to them, and a sad failure altogether. Mama has never got over his death; but I am not sure it would not have been really worse if he had lived though," she said impartially, "for I doubt whether poor Cuthbert could ever have been 'born again.'"

She would have gone on, but he stood in her way.

"Should you mind if I came with you?" he asked, with some hesitation.

Philippa did not mind. She was glad, in fact, of his strong, vital presence. Her own passionate delight in living, the youth that danced in her veins, and the rebellion that was part of it all, made the thought of death and everything connected with it as terrible to her as it had ever been to the old Greeks. No creature was ever more keenly and joyously alive than this one, to whom inactivity of mind or body seemed in itself a form of death. And for those whose day was over her pity was generally immense and unbounded.

They searched for some time in vain through the wilderness of weather-beaten tombstones. "Oh dear!"

said Phil, with a white face and a despairing little gesture; "what is to be done now? I know it must be here, yet I am sure we have looked twice over at every stone. I ought to have arranged beforehand with the sexton to come and meet me here."

"You go down to the Works and wait there. I will hunt here till I find it. I shall find it if it is here, you know," said her companion.

But she only shook her head and declared she was not going to be so feeble as to run away. She was obliged to laugh, in spite of herself, when he thereupon took out his handkerchief and dusted a place on the top of the low stone wall close by; but she sat down on it meekly, and waited, with her back to the graves, while he continued his search. It was not long before he fetched her to look at a cracked and blackened slab on the ground, almost hidden under a growth of nettles and dock leaves, and overlooked hitherto in its dark corner. A portion of the stone had disappeared, and the date with it, the letters that remained were partially defaced, but "C. Jordan" was still plainly discernible.

"Yes," said Philippa, bending over it, "that must really be Cuthbert's grave." The sight of it seemed to bring home the fact that she had once in truth had a brother in a more tangible fashion than anything else could have done. She looked at Mr. Handley across Cuthbert's resting-place, which he, too, was contemplating with a serious face.

"Twenty years ago, you and he must both have been going about down there in those streets. I wonder if you ever saw him? I wish I knew what he looked like."

"I never met anyone called Jordan before," said Mr. Handley. "Come away, Miss Phil, I must get back to work."

"But it must be tidied up. There must be a new stone, and the nettles should be cleared away, and there ought to be flowers."

"Leave it to me. All you need do is to say what flowers you would like, and my gardener will see to the rest."

But she shook her head. No; she must see to it herself, and there was an old man she wished to employ. Mr. Handley had learnt something from past experience and did not press the matter; they turned away together from the grave of this unknown Cuthbert. What part or lot could he possibly have in either of their lives?

They strolled in silence along a field-path, which led back again to the town. Phil leaned on the gate a moment when they came to it, looking out at the dun-coloured haze of a pale winter sunshine struggling across the smoke, through which now and again a tongue of flame leaped up high into the air from some tall shaft.

"I wonder whether Cuthbert could really have made a fresh start if he had had time and a chance. I am sure Father does not think so. I believe your doctrine applies only to the strong, not to the weak, Mr. Handley."

"I suppose certain people may be very little more responsible for being moral cripples, than others are for physical deformity. I don't know, it is difficult to realise it. If so, it is certainly better they should be there," he

said, pointing to the churchyard, "than going about in the world, where they are nothing but a nuisance. But you believe, don't you, in my article of faith, Miss Phil? I don't feel as if I had any more connection with the young savage who used to fight his way about these streets under my name, than your brother lying there, had. I haven't, in fact."

"No," said Phil; "it is what people are, not what they were once, which matters; although I persist in believing that your guilty past must be interesting."

"I don't regard it as guilty," said Mr. Handley turning round to catch her eyes, "only brutal and boorish. But you mean it, don't you?"

"Yes, of course. How persistent you are about everything. I wonder what it feels like to be so obstinate—is it more pleasant or more troublesome?"

"Do you really think me so obstinate?" he exclaimed with surprise. "I am very sorry. What can I do?"

"Oh, nothing, I expect," she said, laughing at his face of surprise as they passed through the gate; "it is the way you are made, no doubt."

"But I make myself, thank-you," replied William Handley.

His companion's laughter rippled in the air again as she walked on before him down the narrow path which cut short a corner of the road. He followed her with the half-puzzled but wholly benignant expression of a big dog stalking after a tyrannical, but adored child.

CHAPTER VIII.

PHIL'S favourite haunts at the pottery were the long rooms where white-robed figures bend over the whirling "jollies," which have almost superseded the classic potter's wheel for the making of simpler and cheaper articles of "pitcher" ware. She loved to watch a worker toss a shapeless lump of pale clay on to the jolly, with its measured motion, and deftly, without apparent effort as it spun, shape it in a moment into some common familiar object. The process looked so easy, but when she tried her hand at it she discovered that the potter's art, like any other, demands its own apprenticeship, and the result of her efforts was such as to arouse sardonic amusement on the part of her professional critics.

But there was an endless fascination in watching everywhere all round the work of creation going forward; formless masses whirling swiftly into form, shapes crystallising perpetually out of the void amidst a spotless whiteness of surroundings; the figures in snowy garments manipulating white clay which the jollies, their mysterious agents, sent spinning with unswerving and accurate industry. Sitting there tired, and at last drowsy, in the late winter's afternoon, she began to fancy herself in some vaster primeval workshop, where a new world was taking shape on the wheels of time, at the bid-

ding of the spirit which had set all these forces in motion.

This would never do. "Soup-plates!" she said out loud, rousing herself with a violent effort. "Only soup-plates, going to South America; he said so distinctly, because they eat everything in them out there in—where was it? Come, I am awake now. I should think the whole continent will be stocked with them soon, if they go on at this rate. How many a minute? No, that will send me off again. I think I had better move on somewhere else."

"Are you tired of waiting?" asked Mr. Handley, suddenly putting his head through an open door behind her. "It is getting late; I will see you home presently, if you don't mind my finishing up a job here first."

"No. I will go downstairs to the glazing-room now, and amuse myself by dipping saucers into the tubs; it's a lovely game."

"Don't do that, Miss Phil."

"Why not? Do you think I am going to make messes and spoil saucers? Not a bit; I can do it beautifully now."

"But you must not. You breathe in the lead all the time, it is poison."

"But how about the men and women who spend all their days breathing it in down there?"

"I am afraid their days are not often very long; although, of course, they are more seasoned to it than you."

"How can you employ people in such an abominable industry? How can you endure to live by it?" she cried with sudden horror.

He shrugged his shoulders. "How can I help it? They choose to do it; there could be no pottery without glaze. But we do all we can to protect them by preparing the stuff as carefully as possible; much depends on that. We also cover them up with these white garments you admire, and they are expected to take them off when they go home and leave them here, so that they may not hang up dresses impregnated with particles of lead over the beds of themselves and their children. But they are so lazy and stupid they slink off whenever they can escape attention without changing first; they won't believe it, and they don't care."

"Well," said Philippa, "say what you like, dinner-plates and cups and saucers made that way are too dearly bought, they are the price of blood. I shall never have any satisfaction out of them again."

"The world will have them, though, and I must be off to see they are properly made. It will be closing-time in half an hour. Will you meet me then in the work-room over the shed where the runners are? I want to show you a new mechanical process for transferring patterns on to the biscuit. I am doing away with artists in my establishment, Miss Phil; there is no place for them here."

"Isn't there?" said Phil to herself as he walked away. She caught up a lump of clay and a knife, and began modelling something which had little resemblance to the useful objects which were coming into existence all around her. "Bah!" she said out loud, flinging an unfinished head down presently. "I hate this clay now; it is all the price of blood!"

"That's so!" said a man's voice suddenly from behind, "but blude shall be given for blude!"

In front of her the shadow, sharply defined by the electric light, of a bent head with a cap and beard, moved across the dazzling whitewashed wall; when she turned to the divided door, the upper part of which was thrown open, nobody was to be seen in the dark passage.

"This certainly is an odd part of the world, but quite interesting so far," she said to herself.

Half an hour later she walked across the yards to the workshop where she was to meet Mr. Handley. A cold wind swept down from the hills, whose outline was blotted out by the cloudy night. All round, the windows of the workshops, brilliantly lit up, showed the busy figures of the workers still plying their trade. The furnaces crackled and roared as she passed by, sending out a fierce red glare below, and lighting up the strong form of Jem, the oven man, as he marshalled the lads bringing out the saggars, or earthenware cases, full of pottery ready for firing in a cold oven opposite, and saw to the careful piling of one tray on the top of another himself. The room Philippa sought was approached by an outside staircase from the yard, bounded by the canal. The ground floor was filled by a deep cavernous pool, wherein stood revolving machines with huge grinders, which crushed the masses of Cornish quartz, Jersey boulders and Dieppe flints into a soft, smooth pulp, called "slip," with no more difficulty than if they were stirring flour to a milky paste. As she paused for a moment with her foot on the steep and rickety flight of open steps which shook unpleasantly with the vibration

of the rumbling machinery, a little boy suddenly ran up and thrust a piece of paper into her hand, calling in a shrill voice "A' war to tell tha' to mind that," then he pattered away across the plank bridge over the canal, and disappeared into the darkness beyond. Phil held the scrap of paper to the light, and saw a few words in roughly printed characters, "do not step on the trap."

She supposed that the warning had been sent her on good authority, and peered about her apprehensively when she had climbed the stairs and stood alone on the threshold of the dark loft overhead, the floor shaking beneath her feet, and the muffled roar of the runners below in her ears.

In answer to some repeated calls an inner door opened and disclosed a long bright workshop; its light struck across to where she stood, and showed a closed door in the middle of the floor in front of her. "Is that you, Miss Jordan?" shouted Mr. Handley from somewhere a long way off, "come in! Excuse me, but I can't put down a work of art I am engaged upon for a minute."

Skirting the walls and picking her way nervously across the quaking planks, Philippa obeyed him, and passed between the tables which divided the room into long lines. The workers were trooping out by a distant door, only one old woman remained still, sweeping away the litter of pieces of paper from which patterns had been transferred to the plates and dishes piled up in orderly rows. Mr. Handley himself was manipulating a cover with absorbed attention, while a girl stood beside him, a look of sullen vexation on her face.

"There," said the master at last, "Eliza, if you can't take the trouble to lay on the pattern exactly in the right places like this, don't come back here again. Slimned work doesn't do for me. Now go down and tell James to bring up the saggars, and fetch all that down before he closes up the oven," motioning towards the array of unbaked pottery. Eliza departed, dumbly rebellious, but not venturing to express, though she paused twice on her slow way to the door of the loft, the anger that smouldered in her breast. Her master, however, was already unconscious of her presence.

"Well, Miss Phil, what do you think of my patent method of decoration?"

"Horrible! I suppose you sent me this mysterious message, didn't you?" holding up the paper. He took it from her with surprise.

"What is this? I never sent you any message." At the same instant a crash and a scream resounded from the outer room into which the work-girl had just disappeared. The scream was echoed by old Caroline, who had been sweeping near the entrance, and it was followed by wails from Eliza more dreadful still, so unmistakable was their ring of physical agony. For one moment Phil stood rooted to the ground paralysed with horror, the next she darted to the door, but Mr. Handley was there before her. The trap in the floor had given way, and was already being ground to powder in the great machine below. From its framework a rope hung down, and to the rope Eliza, a writhing figure, was clinging still with a desperate grasp, while below a scarlet stream was being churned into the creamy liquid mass, while fragments of her dark stuff skirt were re-

volving on its surface. Even while she looked Eliza slipped a few inches farther down the rope towards the remorseless whirling grinders moving in their rhythmic measure underneath. In the same instant Mr. Handley lowered himself nimbly down through the gap, holding the rope with one arm while he stooped and caught Eliza's substantial form round the waist with the other. She hung from it as a dead weight now, and the sounds that came from her were those of some animal in pain as the two figures swayed a foot or two below the floor. The rope was old, it creaked and groaned beneath the double burden, and Phil perceived with fresh horror that its strands were slowly wrenching and tearing themselves away from the iron staple at her feet. There was no time to follow her first impulse, and rush to the outer door through which Caroline had disappeared to shout for help; she could only fling herself face downwards on the ground and seize an upright post close by with one arm while she caught at the rope with the other.

The instantaneous strain was overwhelming, it left her cheeks bloodless; she moved her lips to call for outside help, but no sound came. Mr. Handley glanced upwards, and made a desperate effort to scramble towards the edge of the opening two feet above his head, but the helpless burden on his arm overweighted him, and the runners below had now caught a hanging strip of Eliza's short serge skirt again, and helped to drag them downwards towards their revolving grip, while the clay took a deeper pinkish hue every minute. The terrible strain on Philippa's arm was plainly visible in the drawn and working muscles of her face. His eyes

met hers for an instant, as he spoke in a quiet but peremptory voice: "Phil, let go. Do you hear, let go!" She slightly tightened the grasp of her left arm round the post beside her, and shook her head; she could scarcely hear or see now. The next moment voices suddenly sounded in her ears, a strong arm seized the rope and held it in an iron grip; somebody unfastened her clenched fingers, and lifted her from her place. A voice said, "Roon, lad, roon and stop th' engines at once, doost a 'ear!" and then a deep and most compendious oath resounded at her feet from the large form of James, who had taken her place on the floor. A minute of suspense, and brief directions from one man to the other—a creak—a strain—and Mr. Handley's dark head appeared above the level of the floor, while Jem stooped down and dragged up an inert heap, quite silent now, in his stout arms, and laid it gently on the floor of the inner room, with his own coat under the head.

Mr. Handley sent for one or two of the older women upon whom he could rely, and meanwhile did all he could for poor Eliza, issuing various directions as coolly as though he had not just been dangling above that near and horrible death. Shaking from head to foot Phil tried to help him, but was obliged to subside on a chair, trembling and sick at what had passed, and what lay before her on the floor. It was in truth a dreadful sight. Poor Eliza had only been rescued at the cost of her feet. It scarcely seemed possible that there could be any life left in the poor mangled form with tattered garments lying motionless and silent on the white boards, with a dark stain spreading around her. The women

came and did what they could, with many exclamations of pity and horror; but however gently they touched her, it brought moans from Eliza, and they could only bathe her head and put drops of a stimulant between her teeth, to keep her alive till the doctor should appear.

"Miss Phil," said Mr. Handley, now placing himself in front of her, "come away, now."

"No," said Phil, pulling herself together with a great effort; "look, we must stop that." She had risen, and perceived that the bandage hastily applied had slipped, and once more Eliza's life was ebbing away in great spurts. Phil seized a woman's apron. "Please tear that in strips." Mr. Handley took out his pocket-knife and slit the stout stuff, and then together they contrived a rough tourniquet, which at least answered the purpose quite efficiently. They had barely finished, when the doctor and Eliza's mother appeared upon the scene; and Phil, with a shuddering look at her own hands, crept away, feeling very sick, to make her way out into the air. All was quiet now in the place which had been the scene of the disaster; the runners below were motionless and silent; the glare of the electric light struck up through the open trap in the floor, leaving black shadows in the corners of the loft.

Phil suddenly found herself powerless to pass the chasm; she sat down on the floor at the sight of it. It was James, who, seeing what had happened, lifted her easily in his arms and carried her down the rickety stairs outside, saying in a loud voice:

"God bless tha, lass, for what tha's doon. Beg pardon, ah'm forgetting tha's a lady, but tha's a game

one, too; tha's saved th' mester's life, and 'appen 'Liza's too. A stouter one than tha' couldna ha' doon better work than what's cooloured th' 'ands and dress there!"

He put her down on her feet as he spoke. Many of the hands hearing of the catastrophe had gathered in the yard, and some who overheard Jem's words, raised a sort of subdued cheer. Phil, whose head was reeling, caught at the railing.

"Don't," she said; "tell them not to. It's so idiotic to make a fuss." A stab of pain from her shoulder as she stretched out her arm overwhelmed her finally, and James caught her again as she fell. But he was pushed on one side, and his burden taken from him next moment. It was his master who carried the unconscious girl across the yards into his office.

CHAPTER IX.

When the dressing gong sounded that evening the mistress of the White House crossed the hall to go upstairs and dress, with a fatigued body but a spirit almost restored to its usual calm and cheerful level. Not content with turning out her cupboard, she had proceeded thence to the laundry, where she entered into an engagement with the presiding genius, who was obliged in the end to own herself and her methods vanquished by the astonishing and annoying proficiency of this interfering lady. By the time Mrs. Kirkham emerged from the clouds of steam and floods of soap-suds, with a flushed face and aching back, she found that the afternoon hours she had dreaded had slipped imperceptibly away. Just as she was wondering whether Philippa meant to come home to dinner or to spend her evening at the Handleys' house, a carriage drove up to the door. She opened it herself, and was surprised to see Miss Alberta descend from it and then turn to help out Philippa, who had her arm in a sling, and looked as white as a ghost. The sight of her face and her dress brought a shocked and startled sound from her hostess.

"I'm not killed," said Philippa, with an attempt to smile and speak in her usual manner, although a horrible pain in her arm made her feel sick with every movement.

"I'm hardly hurt; this is not mine," pointing to the stained sleeves. Mrs. Kirkham did not answer. She only put her strong arm round the slim figure and swept it along to the nearest sofa.

"No more brandy," said Phil, pushing a glass away presently. "Miss Alberta has done her best to intoxicate me already; indeed, I believe she has succeeded."

"Nay!" exclaimed Miss Alberta, her back stiffening with protest, "that I did not, Miss Jordan. It would not be my way to wish to do anyone such an ill turn as that, let alone——" she paused for a moment, while repulsion and a sense of duty contended powerfully within her. Then she turned with a kind of solemnity to Mrs. Kirkham.

"Nell, do you know that William owes his life to this young lady?"

"Oh dear! dear!" exclaimed the young lady fretfully. "How I wish you wouldn't! I tried so hard to explain to you that he does nothing of the sort. James, *James,* the oven man is the hero of this tale, not I."

"The hero, I think," exclaimed Miss Alberta indignantly, "is my brother William."

"Is William hurt?" cried Mrs. Kirkham, catching her breath and turning as white as Philippa.

"No, Nell, no. William is unhurt, but he risked his life to save a work-girl from a dreadful death, and would have lost it, they all tell me, if it had not been for Miss Jordan."

"Much good Miss Jordan would have done him, if Jem had not arrived at the psychological moment!" exclaimed that young person petulantly. "What does it

matter, though, as nothing happened, except to poor, poor Eliza. I shall cut my shoulder off presently if it goes on hurting like this, bother it!"

"Philippa," said her hostess, bending down to her with swimming eyes, "is it true that you saved William's life?"

The girl was about to answer with another cross, impatient gibe, when something in Nell's look at once checked her tongue. Rare as such demonstrations were with her, she suddenly kissed the good honest face above her, and said in an apologetic voice—

"Well, you know, I just happened to be on the spot at the time. But I didn't really do anything; it was Mr. Handley and James. I am afraid, though, it's all no good for that poor thing. She can't live, and I suppose she would hardly care to, like that!"

All the horror she had so lately witnessed rose before her eyes again. She stopped short and burst into tears.

Philippa was conveyed upstairs, and shortly afterwards Miss Alberta departed, after having succeeded in delivering herself of another formal speech of gratitude which Miss Jordan had to receive with the best grace she could.

During the night of pain and fever that followed, Philippa opened her eyes several times from some appalling dream, to find Mrs. Kirkham bending over her with a cold drink in answer to the moans and calls which her visitor had been unconscious of uttering. Her shoulder now tortured her, and occasionally on waking she rambled for a few minutes in a light-headed, confused sort of way.

"I couldn't help it, Nell; it wasn't my fault," she exclaimed, starting up on one such occasion; "and indeed, I can't help it now. You know I can't, don't you? He will——"

"No, dear; you can't help it," said Mrs. Kirkham, laying her down again, with a sigh.

"Was he killed?" ejaculated Phil, starting up again.

"No; he is quite safe, and you saved him. Lucky woman!" she said, under her breath, as she turned away. Next time Philippa woke up, the ceiling was grey with the coming dawn, but Mrs. Kirkham was still in the room, seated in her long white dressing-gown by the fireplace, her face hidden in her hands.

The wrenched muscles and swollen shoulder made Miss Jordan's right arm entirely unserviceable, of course, and to her extreme dismay she could only carry it in a sling when she was able to come downstairs again. March was here, and Boney's portrait still remained to be done, while there were many finishing touches to be added to the little girl's, and both were to be sent up to the summer exhibitions. For some reason or other Philippa had found the fair-haired, commonplace little boy a peculiarly difficult subject, and had twice destroyed half-finished pictures of him in despair. The painting of Gladys, on the contrary, had proved one of those rare and enchanting experiences which sometimes reward the artist for much ploughing of stony soil. The quaint little elf had appealed to her from the first, and the portrait had marched without let or hindrance, after a fashion Phil had seldom experienced before. She knew that she had achieved a piece of work far in advance of anything she had done yet, and she hoped, with grow-

ing confidence, that it showed real distinction of style, as well as breadth of treatment and good brush work. She was impatient to add the necessary last touches to the drapery and background; to be disabled now was an intolerable nuisance. Mrs. Kirkham was very anxious for a satisfactory portrait of the boy to be completed in time to give it a chance of appearing at Burlington House. She was surprised and disappointed that Gladys, whom she did not consider at all pretty, should have so far proved the successful subject, while the various studies of her brother had been condemned as all wrong. His mother certainly had not considered that they did him justice, but secretly she did not altogether admire the style of Philippa's portrait of Gladys. The commonplace sketches of Boney were much better in keeping with her own ideas on the subject of art, and she hoped that a really pretty picture of him might be achieved after their manner, rather than after the original and audacious character of the other portrait. But many days went by without any improvement in the disabled arm. At first Philippa consented to remain upstairs, with a resignation quite unlike her usual restlessness and resistance to physical disabilities. She evidently endured a great deal of pain, and her nerves were quite shaken, but she refused to admit much need for sympathy, and was often found walking up and down the upper landing with grimaces that testified to her discomfort. Mrs. Kirkham began to wonder whether it was not to avoid some possible visitor that she bounded her wanderings to the top of the stairs.

It became apparent that Philippa's precautions, in case this were so, had been superfluous. Miss Alberta

came over to make a formal visit of inquiry after her every day, but she came alone. William had called early on the morning after the accident, so early, indeed, that Nell, who was tired by her night's vigils, had to keep him waiting while she fastened the last stray hairs into place, and buttoned herself into her rigid tailor-made gown with her usual care and precision.

"How is she?" he demanded, as they shook hands. After Helena had tried to reassure him as to Philippa's welfare, he remained standing with his back to the fireplace for some minutes in silence.

"Shall I give her any message?" inquired his hostess, a little languidly. She looked pale and worn, and therefore older than usual, but Mr. Handley did not notice it. His own face was haggard.

"Tell her—well, no, perhaps you had better not yet. But she's sure to ask about Eliza, isn't she?"

"Oh, yes. She has done so already, several times."

"Nell, do you think she will really be all right again soon?"

"How can I tell, William?" exclaimed Mrs. Kirkham, naïvely; "but if both her feet are gone, poor thing—"

"Oh! I don't mean Eliza. She can hardly last through the day, that is certain. What about Miss Jordan though, really?"

Nell's precise and formal little manner had never done her better service than now, when she was able to assure him afresh, with an appearance of unruffled serenity, that Phil would be quite herself again very shortly. "And now let us have some breakfast," she said, turning away to ring the bell. "Why, there is the

station cab still at the door. Why has it not gone round?"

"I told the man not to. I must be off at once to catch the other train back. No breakfast for me, thank-you; good-bye."

"Good-bye!" she answered resignedly, as he strode out of the room, but she was really rather cross and irritable with the children during the meal that followed. After this nine or ten days went by before any more was heard of William, and neither of the women mentioned his name.

When Phil dined downstairs again for the first time, Miss Alberta remained to celebrate the occasion, and casually remarked that she supposed William would hardly get home for another week, as he wrote that Mr. Morris wanted him to join him in a run to the Isle of Wight. It then appeared that he had left home the day after the accident.

Both her hearers were surprised by the intelligence, and one of them who had begun to be aware of some sense of neglect, now felt a pang of not unnatural indignation.

To begin with, she had submitted to a good deal of boredom and seclusion in order to avoid meeting the person whom she thought might be labouring under an overstrained feeling of gratitude towards her. To discover how superfluous her precautions had been, was a little mortifying for more reasons than one. And then it occurred to her that after all, and however much she might dislike unwelcome and absurd demonstrations, the pains, discomforts and inconveniences that she was suffering were after all incurred in the service of Wil-

liam, who had chosen this particular moment to run away and leave her to get through them as best she could. Nevertheless some remarks from Mrs. Kirkham met with little response from her guest.

"How odd of William!" she suddenly exclaimed looking up from the house accounts with which she had been silently occupied for the last hour. There was no answer, and she continued, "It was really most strange of him to go off suddenly just then without saying anything, after what had happened, and what you did."

"I don't see anything strange about it. I have no doubt Mr. Handley dislikes a fuss as much as I do. Miss Alberta, I am sure, has said all the occasion could possibly demand. But do let us give the whole performance decent burial now, Nell; if you knew how it bores me!"

"How extraordinary you are!" sighed Nell, returning to her tradesmen's books. But it was not much use, and this week the butcher was allowed to follow unchecked his own peculiar method of arithmetic, and reckon seven ounces as half a pound, and other vagaries dear to his heart.

The sun shone out on the crocuses and blue squills which embroidered the green lawn with gay knots of colour, and Phil begged for a drive away up to the hill slopes on the other side of the little town. They decided to go and hunt up Eli, who had not after all kept his promise of presenting himself at the White House in the character of a model.

The afternoon found them being dragged slowly by a steep and winding road to one of the nearer ridges

sheltered by the loftier heights behind. As they rose higher and higher the air grew keener continually, and the great plain gradually unrolled to a wider stretch below, from the distant smoke enshrouding Stockport, past little towns and hamlets dotted with tall factory-chimneys, away over endless green and wooded pastures to the faint outline of the Welsh peaks on the horizon. Behind and on each side stretched the long bare slopes of the Cheshire and Staffordshire hills, culminating on the left in the great green mound of the Staffordshire "Cloud," which, together with the jagged peak of Mow Cop, forms a complete and welcome screen to the hideousness of the Pottery towns lying behind it.

"How splendid these huge solitary stretches of green and grey are—so silent and austere and harmonious! What a long way off they seem from all the industries with their grinding wheels and struggling people down below! Don't you feel up here that sort of aching which some primeval memory left in our bones, to get nearer to all this great dumb life and to learn the language of the earth again? None of us, not even Wordsworth, can find the way back into that green lap, but we all want to at times."

"I am afraid," said Nell, with her even voice and precise way of speaking, which only sometimes allowed the strong intonations of the north to slip out, "I am afraid you would soon have enough of hills and solitude, Philippa; only the other day you were longing for a life of action."

"Ah!" said Phil, shutting her eyes for a minute, "I am cured of that. After all, I don't believe I am suited to the blood-curdling and melodramatic aspects

of existence, really. I have not a strong enough digestion."

"Phil," said her friend, with half-timid earnestness, "what sort of life would really satisfy you altogether?"

"Ah, don't! When I have always had such a mean opinion of people who are never satisfied, it would be dreadful to discover that I am one of them. The former superstition, too, about allowing a special licence to genius, seems to me a gross stupidity. If genius means anything, it surely means ideal sanity and the power of making the best of one's material, that is the conditions of life and its laws, and not the unbalanced, egotistical idiocy, called artistic temperament. But, to return to our sheep, how do you manage not to get sick of all the fixed conditions and surroundings of your life, as I do?"

"Among the conditions you get sick of, do you include people, Phil?" inquired the older woman anxiously.

"Oh, of course!" cried Phil laughing. "How any woman manages to be satisfied with only one husband, I can't think. It must be so tedious to have the same face always at meals, Nell! You look quite worried. I am afraid you have a bad habit of taking things hard in life, haven't you?"

"Don't all women?" asked Mrs. Kirkham, with a plaintive note in her voice.

"Good gracious, I should hope not! Not every day, anyhow; it is the greatest mistake."

"Yes," agreed Helena, with unusual bitterness, "it is, and I am old enough to have learnt better. But

some of us are like that, and can't help it. I am beginning to believe you mind many things more than you pretend, yourself, Philippa; I almost hope so!" she added tentatively. There was something she had wanted to say for some time past, but like most people, she had found Miss Jordan, who appeared to the world in general to be communicative and unreserved to indiscretion, peculiarly elusive, and difficult of approach at close quarters. It took long, indeed, to discover how reserved she really was, so carefully did she conceal even that quality beneath a surface of reckless talk.

But honest Nell who had made up her mind that she had a word to say, said it simply in her own direct fashion.

"There is someone you must take seriously. Oh, Phil! forgive me for speaking, but perhaps you hardly know how much it matters."

"Oh!"

"Don't play with him, dear; you don't know what it means to such a man."

"I am not playing with anybody that I know of at present, and nobody seems to want to play with me—not even Eli. That is his cottage. We shall have to get over this wall and walk across the field."

Nell said no more, but helped Phil in silence over the wall by some projecting stones which acted as rough steps. Ten days ago she would have sprung over it as easily as a cat; now she had to sit on the top and make faces before she could proceed to jump down on the other side.

"I don't think I ever quite knew before how dis-

gusting it must be to be crippled. What a mercy for poor Eliza that she did not live!"

The whitewashed cottage stood on the bare hillside, with a handful of ragged and wind-threshed firtrees for its only protection. The door was shut, and only a volley of barks and growls answered their repeated knocks. They went round to look in at the side window.

"He's there! old rascal!" exclaimed Phil; "and not asleep either, for he's talking away to the fire like anything. Hi! Eli! Come and let us in. See who is here!" rapping on the pane.

He turned his head and stared at her with vacant eyes, but without further movement. Eli's appearance had altered distinctly for the worse since Phil's encounter with him ten days ago; but when Mrs. Kirkham took her place and looked at him with compassionate wonder, while she called a few words to him through the glass, he stared at her fresh-coloured face for a minute or two, and then his own suddenly changed and he rushed to the door with a shout—

"Who be tha? Who be tha?"

Mrs. Kirkham came to him quickly, with tears in her eyes. The sight of this wrecked creature brought back a flood of memories of childish days. "Eli, you have not forgotten the little girl, Nell, you used to be so kind to at the Swan Pottery in old days? We were great friends then."

He leaned against the frame of the open door for a moment, gazing at her with eyes into which intelligence was gradually struggling back, while his mind groped slowly for the clue. All in a moment he found it, and

seized both the hands she held out to him, while the tears ran down his cheeks as he wrung them in his own, exclaiming over and over again,

"Th' owd mester's lass! th' owd mester's lass, and hoo's found out owd Eli again."

Phil stepped inside the cottage, and left them alone together. It looked very bare and poverty-stricken. A ragged armchair which had once been covered with patchwork was balanced on three legs and an upturned jam pot by the dusty fireplace. A rough table, a tall old clock, a palliasse on the floor with a dirty cover thrown over it, and a milking-stool completed the furniture. Phil stole into the little kitchen or wash-up place, which opened out of the front room by a second door. She saw nothing there in the shape of food but a hunch of dry-looking bread. Turning back, she was about to go out and join Mrs. Kirkham again, when she caught sight of a faded photograph in a cheap frame propped up on the high chimney-piece overhead. Curiosity drew her to mount on the three-legged stool and examine it more closely. There was something familiar about this group of lads in striped football jerseys; certainly, yes certainly, she had seen it before. As she looked long and intently she recognised one of the faces; it was that of her dead brother, and it flashed into her recollection that this photograph had once hung, along with the others of Cuthbert, in her mother's bedroom years ago, but that it had fallen down, and Mrs. Jordan had put it away in its broken frame. How strange to find it here! Behind Cuthbert's mean, ill-tempered looking face, familiar from many photographs, was another in the group which attracted her attention. Any doubt

that remained in her mind as to its identity was presently set at rest.

"Phil, where are you?" called Mrs. Kirkham. "Why!" she exclaimed as she entered the cottage and looked over her shoulder, "what is this? How extraordinary! There is William as a boy, as I remember him before he left Meeshaw. I have not seen this group for years and years, but I remember Eli showing it to me when I was a young girl. I believe William was a famous player in those days. Phil, did you recognise it? Of course, he is very much changed since then."

Miss Jordan coloured as she answered haltingly that she was not sure, she thought she had.

Mrs. Kirkham took pity upon an embarrassment which seemed to her only too natural, and departed to make final arrangements with Eli for coming to work regularly at the White House. "I am going, Phil," she called presently through the open door as she turned away to the field-path.

"A bad man, a bad man," growled Eli over her shoulder, suddenly shooting out a lean finger to the picture in her hand. "Eh! ahve not forgotten thee," he went on to himself, "and ahve doon what a' could, but th' Lord war not ready, and a' reckon he'll forgi'e me th' boggle ahve made." He took the frame from her hand and put it in its place again.

"Eli!" exclaimed Phil, pointing to her brother's figure, "did you know that one?"

But he only shot a suspicious look at her, and remained silent.

"And who is that?" she continued, touching the other face.

But so angry a light came into the old man's eyes as he turned in wrath at her curiosity, that she ran out of the door in a panic, and rejoined Mrs. Kirkham. It was evident that she could get nothing out of Eli today.

Mr. Handley had once declared that he had never known Cuthbert, yet there they were standing one behind the other in that group of youths and young men. It was puzzling; evidently Mr. Handley must have forgotten all about him, or else he had never heard Cuthbert's name.

She listened with an abstracted and thoughtful air to Helena's expressions of satisfaction at having lighted upon the old man again by so curious a chance, at the moment of his extreme need, and while she explained in detail all the plans she had made for his welfare. "He has made me promise not to tell William he is back here again," she added. "It is rather tiresome, but I should not have succeeded in making him come down to the house if I hadn't. Poor old Eli, his mind is quite gone, as you said, but the memory of old days comes back to him. He thinks I am still little Miss Nell!" she said smiling, "but I can take care of him now."

"Do you think it is quite safe that he should be wandering about loose?"

"Oh! perfectly safe. He is quite harmless, I am sure," answered Nell, with the decision of one who does not wish to admit ground for doubt.

"Well, Helena, he has got a grudge against some-

body, which makes him uncomfortably fierce at times. Somehow or other just now it occurred to me that Mr. Handley is the person."

"That is quite impossible," replied Nell easily. "William has provided for him in America for years and years past. I think Eli is only afraid of his being angry with him for running away from the place where William left him."

Phil was not wholly convinced, but Eli's indignation might well have been directed against any one of the other figures in the group, possibly even Cuthbert. She did not tell Mrs. Kirkham that she had recognised another face also in the picture. She could not help sharing her father's feeling that Cuthbert's memory had better be left, as far as possible, in his grave, and she was sure that the only other person who knew about him would keep her counsel.

CHAPTER X.

PHILIPPA'S secret sense of injury had time to grow before the return of the person whose gratitude she had been so unnecessarily anxious to avoid. A few days after the expedition to Eli's cottage, she found further inactivity in face of the unfinished portraits unendurable. Regardless of the doctor's injunctions, one afternoon, she suddenly flung the sling in which she carried her arm across the room, and seizing brushes and palette, set to work once more on the little red-haired imp who was to make her name famous.

For a little while she painted doggedly, while her colour came and went with the pain of the effort. But no force of will could command her touch or prevent her right hand from shaking, and the result of her efforts was such as to make her throw aside her implements even more impulsively than she had taken them up, and subside into the nearest armchair with her face hidden in the cushions.

A carriage passed the window unheeded, as was also the sound of voices which arose in the next room. Presently someone opened the communicating door and looked in; after a glance at the disconsolate figure in the chair, he carefully closed it behind him. The sound of a familiar voice close beside her startled Philippa, and she looked up, to find Mr. Duke's putty-

coloured face bending over her, with an expression of profound sympathy.

"What, you! How did you come here?" she exclaimed, with a vexation more frank than polite. The single eyeglass dropped down Mr. Duke's smooth and rounded cheek; evidently Philippa was not quite in so favourable a mood as he had hoped. He intended to be cautious, for he had experienced her anger before, and had no deliberate intention of encountering it again —for nothing.

"I am not doing any harm, please," he said in his most dulcet tones, his face puckered into humorous and propitiatory creases. "I was dragged here by wild horses, at the risk of my life, in Lady Victoria's phaeton. She would drive me herself. I'm staying at the Wynch at present. I was afraid you were in trouble just now, Phil," he added, with a tenderly anxious air, taking a step nearer to her.

"I am only in a rage. I have hurt my painting arm, and it won't work. Look at this thing, not nearly finished, and another hardly sketched in, which won't come a bit. They will never be ready to go up on the proper day if I can't paint for another fortnight. But I want you to have a look at this one," said Phil eagerly.

Mr. Duke turned to the portrait and directed his attention to it for several minutes without speaking. The artist watched him with undisguised anxiety. However much she might dislike the man, there could be no question at all about the judgment of the critic. The fact that he was a serious power to reckon with in the world of painters, and that to make an enemy of him

was most undesirable for any young artist with a possible future, would have counted for little with Phil, whose conduct was seldom, indeed, influenced by any such considerations. But for his opinion and technical counsels she had the greatest possible respect, and had availed herself, though somewhat against her will, freely of both since her artistic studies had become the serious occupation of her life. When Mr. Duke took up his stand before a canvas, the man was lost in the judge, the critic of whom many people declared that he possessed a heaven-born *flair,* and a knowledge of technique that was surpassed by few actual painters.

Indeed, there were many in England, and in Paris too, of no small reputation, who were glad to obtain Mr. Duke's advice over a difficulty, and waited anxiously for his verdict on a finished performance before sending it to "the shows." His counsels had been invaluable to Philippa, and had been freely offered, but they were not without their price, and Miss Jordan often declared to herself now that the price was too high. To drink in the words of wisdom that fell from Mr. Duke's lips one minute, made it more difficult to rebuff, the next, observations of a different nature, and an offensive familiarity of manner which was assumed whenever the smallest opportunity offered itself, ever since the mistake she had made in the beginning of their acquaintance by amusing herself with his admiration for a time when she was only eighteen.

Phil had knocked up against many queer people in her unconventional life, and in moments of peculiar exasperation would fall back upon the reflection that Ashley Duke was a toad whom nobody troubled to take

seriously, except when he was talking about pictures, and then he was a prophet.

The critic, for his part, looked upon her as his own discovery, and boasted both of her talent and her looks, as if neither could have won appreciation without his intervention. There was another fact that he did not so publicly proclaim, which was that the strange, irregular face, with the mocking eyes, haunted him, and the more its owner rebuffed him, the stronger was her fascination, and the stronger also his determination to humble this arrogant, irresistible little creature.

But nobody could have waited with more flattering suspense for judgment to fall from his lips than did Philippa at this moment, while Mr. Duke, his pale eyes fixed on the canvas, and his lips pursed together, silently surveyed the portrait before him. The bland impertinence of his usual manner dropped from him like a garment, when he stood before a piece of work which he considered worthy of his attention; his words then became brief, but they carried weight.

When he turned to the artist, his praise was scanty, but it made her eyes grow bright. "That must be finished," he said, pointing to the portrait of Gladys. Then he recommended one or two technical alterations, but repeated, "get it finished."

"How can I finish it with an arm that won't stop wobbling, and a knife inside my shoulder blade?" cried his disciple despairingly, with the tears coming back into her eyes.

"How did it happen, you poor little soul?" said Mr. Duke, turning to her with an air which caused Philippa to stiffen her backbone again immediately.

"Oh! just an accident. The question is not how it happened, but how to get it mended without losing any more time. The old doctor here has tinkered away at it for a fortnight without getting any forwarder."

"I believe I might manage to get you a few days' grace," said Mr. Duke, holding his chin with his right hand while he reflected.

"Unless you could get me a month, I don't see that it would be much good at this rate; and, of course, you can't do that," she cried fretfully.

"Stay, my dear child. I can do better than that. I am a man of resources, as I think you might know by this time. What should you say if I sent Sir William Marston, the great surgeon, to you this afternoon?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Phil, clasping her hands with delight, a movement which was followed by irrepressible contortions of countenance.

"Poor little girl!" said Mr. Duke, gently patting her on the other shoulder, but a look sufficed to correct him. "Well, Marston is staying at the Wynch for Sunday. Of course, he has come for a holiday, but I am sure he would do anything for me. He knows something about painting himself, and buys pictures."

At another time Phil would have hesitated long before accepting any such services offered out of friendship for Mr. Duke, but scruples were overruled by the urgency of the occasion. Moreover, she shrewdly guessed, what was actually the truth, that the great surgeon would probably be appealed to through the medium of his host, rather than by Mr. Duke, with whom he had really only the slightest acquaintance.

"How long have you been here?" inquired her visitor.

"Oh! for some time."

"Where is our friend the potter?"

"I don't know," looking him steadily in the eyes.

"So you have given him his despatch then, have you?"

The angry colour mounted to Philippa's cheeks, but she could not well quarrel with him just now, as, of course, he knew.

"I am glad of that," pursued Mr. Duke coolly. "I always thought you might find yourself in a tighter place than you bargained for there. Take my advice as a man of the world, Phil, and never indulge in a flirtation with a fellow who—well, how shall I put it?—isn't one. And besides that, Handley is a literal, downright sort of beggar, who would not understand being made game of, and might be an awkward customer to trifle with, I should think."

"Thank-you for your valuable advice," answered Philippa in an icy voice. "As regards Mr. Handley, I quite agree with you. I don't think anybody would try to make game of him twice, and so far as my acquaintance with him extends, I should say he was at least as much of a gentleman as anyone in the charmed circle of light and leading to which you and I belong."

A dull, expressionless look came over Mr. Duke's pasty face and light eyes, it meant anger, and generally mischief, too; but his wrath did not fly off in rockets, like Philippa's, it could sometimes smoulder long, and wait for its opportunity. He prided himself on moving in a "smarter" set than most of his artistic friends.

He only smiled disagreeably, and remarked how edifying it was to find Phil also amongst the prophets.

"You will be hymning the praises of the great Middling Class next; you really must give me a little time to get used to such a new departure. You see," he added pathetically, "I have not forgotten the old Phil of studio days—and what is more, I don't want to."

"You surely could not expect one's salad days to last for ever?"

"You are ranging yourself then, Phil?" with agitation. "Is it decided? Good God! you can't expect me to be pleased at such a waste."

"I don't know what you mean," she broke in hastily. "Nothing is decided, except that I am growing older, and the world seems rather a larger place than it did. Only babies and idiots worship unconventionality for its own sake. Pray don't be so ridiculous. And besides, who is more orthodox than yourself, if it comes to that?" with a glance at the flawless perfection of his tweed suit and appointments.

"Not so much so as you think," he replied with real heat. "There are times when you tempt me to be very unconventional indeed. Oh! you provoking, irresistible child! Why do you play with me?"

Alarmed at the unusual agitation of his voice and manner, for she had never suspected him of cherishing any real feeling for her, Phil answered with a detached air, while she straightened her scattered brushes:

"Set your mind at rest; I have just explained to you

that I am not a child any longer, so you need fear no temptation to stray from the even tenor of your path."

"But I do!" he cried, seizing her hand and holding it so tightly in his that she could not draw it away. "What is this new nonsense, Phil? I know you better, you exquisite creature. You were never made for this hidebound, middle-class tread-mill! If you commit the folly of marrying this man, your spirit will faint within you before six months are over. You can't help it, you were born an artist; you and I understand one another. Rage as you like, you can't do without me, Phil," putting his face, which worked with excitement, very near hers. "Try what it is to do with me instead."

Completely taken by surprise, for several years of continually suppressed advances had been varied by no such genuine outbreak as this, Phil stared at him without speaking. She had never seen the man let himself go before; he was quite sincere for the moment.

"This is absurd, Mr. Duke," she said; "forget it as quickly as I shall. You are not a marrying man, you know; you would hate it as much as I should."

"Phil!" he exclaimed in the same agitated voice, still holding her hand a prisoner in his own, "do you know why I am not a marrying man? We are rational people, you and I; you were not brought up to believe in ridiculous prejudices. I will tell you a secret; nobody in the world knows it. I married long ago, when I was scarcely more than a boy; it was a disastrous mistake."

"When did she die?" asked Phil with surprise.

"She died really soon afterwards," said Ashley Duke, drawing nearer still, and speaking in a low, hurrried voice. "She died to me and all the world when she was taken to a lunatic asylum thirteen years ago, hopelessly insane. Nobody knew about it; my marriage had never been announced, we were too poor. I had to get on. But, as a matter of fact—no one will ever know this—she is there now, a decrepit wreck they tell me. She can't last long. They think there she is my sister-in-law."

"Then how can you talk of marrying me?" cried Phil, dragging her hand away indignantly.

His face twitched and his hands trembled, he looked down at the carpet and sideways at her.

"Between rational people, Phil, could such an obstacle count? Nobody would ever know; we could go through the ceremony, it would be quite safe, I give you my word; and she can't last long they say. Of course we could do it again afterwards."

There is a time-honoured saying about being called to account for all one's idle words one day. In that moment Phil paid a heavy price for all her vain talk, the meaningless froth, which is for the moment called "modernity," but which has doubtless had its day, in one shape or another, on the lips of the young and wayward and rebellious, from generation to generation. Philippa Jordan had imagined herself to be emancipated from all conventional prejudices; in this moment she discovered her mistake, for she was sick with shame and anger as she moved slowly away from him to the door.

It was opened at the same moment to admit Lady

Victoria and Mrs. Kirkham, the widow a little flushed with the pleasure of this very unexpected visit. The Wynch and its owners formed a world apart from the life of the neighbourhood; it was observed through opera-glasses, so to speak, by the inhabitants of Meeshaw and the neighbouring places. Never until now had Mrs. Kirkham had any direct communication with Lady Victoria or her relations. She had watched them with interest when they took part in local charitable festivities, and had occasionally occupied a seat on the platform at a meeting graced by their presence; but Lady Victoria's appearance at the White House was a great and astonishing event.

"Well, Miss Phil," said her ladyship, shaking hands with the usual high action; "so you've been gettin' into our newspapers. A regular heroine, I hear; savin' life, and I don't know what. Courageous person! Why haven't you been to look me up? I couldn't find out where you were till Mr. Duke told me this morning."

"But you never told me that Miss Jordan had been distinguishing herself by daring deeds," said Mr. Duke, coming forward, with a very creditable attempt at his usual manner. Nevertheless, Lady Victoria's sharp eyes glanced under their sandy lashes from Philippa's face to his with an alert expression that was intensely irritating.

"Oh! didn't I? Haven't you heard how she caught hold of a rope or chain or something, and held on like grim death, with Mr. Handley dangling at the other end over an infernal machine, to rescue a work-girl who had tumbled down there? Pretty good, wasn't it? Weren't you awfully hurt Miss Phil, with such a tug?"

"Oh! pray spare us the romance of the *Meeshaw Herald,*" exclaimed Philippa impatiently.

"Well, but Mrs. Kirkham says it was all true."

"It does not follow that it was interesting."

"Good gracious!" cried Lady Victoria. "If I had saved anyone's life and dragged my shoulder to bits over it, I should look upon it as an interestin' occurrence, shouldn't you, Mr. Duke?"

"Painfully interesting, perhaps," said Mr. Duke. He turned away abruptly and looked out of the window across the trim lawn where Eli was at work spudding up intrusive dandelion roots.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Mr. Duke to himself under his breath, as the old man picked up his basket and came slowly walking towards the house; then, "Mrs. Kirkham, that is a fine-looking old patriarch there on your lawn. Miss Jordan ought to paint him."

"Miss Jordan is going to paint him, I believe," said his hostess smiling, "though what either you or she sees to admire in old Eli's appearance I really cannot imagine."

"We painter folk have peculiar ideas, you know. Eli! did you not say his name was Eli? I rather think I have had the pleasure of meeting him before. Where does he spring from?"

"Impossible! Old Eli Grimwade was starving in a hovel up in the hills, when Miss Jordan discovered him, and we brought him down here. He was one of the head workmen at my father's pottery when I was a little girl. I remember him all my life. I had lost sight of him for years, until the other day."

"Eli Grimwade, that is my man! He worked in your father's pottery did you say?"

"Yes, but that was many years ago, long before my father died. Since then Mr. Handley has had the Swan Works, you know."

"Ah! but did not Handley start his great and honourable career there too, like our friend?" waving his hand towards Eli.

The sneer in his voice was not lost on Mrs. Kirkham.

"He did," she answered gravely, "and I am proud to think that my father's work is carried on by such a man as William Handley."

She turned sharply away from him, while Mr. Duke remained gazing at the bowed figure on the lawn through the window. He raised his eyebrows slightly, and dumbly whistled to himself, as he mentally exclaimed with mingled rage and amusement, "What a devil of a fellow it is! Now what on earth can the women see in him?"

CHAPTER XI.

In spite of what had passed, Mr. Duke did not fail to arrange the promised visit from Sir William Marston. He was curt, impressive, and quite positive as to the impossibility of Philippa being able to use her arm for a long while to come—how long he declined to say, but he thought if she placed herself under his treatment in London, well, in some months' time. The sight of her quivering lips and despairing eyes induced him at last to be a little more encouraging, but as to finishing pictures in time for this Academy he was quite relentless.

"It will look just as well there next year, Miss Jordan," he remarked, with a cheerfulness she felt to be absolutely brutal; "and you have plenty of Academies to look forward to at your age. Don't trouble about this one," patting her kindly on the shoulder. Her distress seemed to him like that of a pretty child who had to put off its birthday treat. "Now, come to town and see me again as soon as you can. Do you know, I am ambitious enough to try and paint myself; so I shall take especial pride in mending an artist, if you will look upon me as a humble follower of your profession—and between artists, you know, there must be nothing of this sort," handing back his fee to her with a beautiful old-fashioned bow.

When he had gone, Philippa escaped as soon as she could from Mrs. Kirkham's kind attempts to administer consolation. Perhaps only children—and there are plenty of them grown-up as well as little—can feel this same anguish of disappointment over hope deferred. And her imagination, of course, conjured up a sickening fear. Was it not quite likely that the arm on which all her hopes of fame and success rested would never be serviceable again? Did not Sir William really mean that by his refusal to name any time for her cure?

Easily moved alike to heights of gladness or depths of gloom, Philippa rushed out of the house to work off a fit of desperation. She climbed some way up the hill which rose not very far from the house, and turned from the road into bare green fields, intersected by the usual low stone walls, and stretching away before and behind. Where the footpath ended she sat down on the wall and stared out at the valley below, and the curling smoke of a train rushing away to disappear behind the "Cloud" and dive into the heart of the Potteries. The thought of its destination added fresh bitterness to Miss Jordan's dark mood. Was there no one anywhere in the world to care one jot for this great trouble of hers? How hard and heartless and detestable men were after all, she reflected; all they cared for was that women should look well and amuse them. She did not often cry out of pity for herself, but on this occasion it must be confessed that her tears flowed, while the brown-and-white Cheshire cows looked on placidly, caring as little about the woe they witnessed as if they had been two-legged men, thought Phil, shaking her fist at them.

However, even despair has its limits, and in time

the air blowing softly from the distant heights, and the rare flood of sunshine, and the calls of the exuberant birds, did their work unconsciously. Miss Jordan dried her tears and began to wonder how soon her eyes would be presentable, while she took note, with the almost mechanical and involuntary observation of the artist, of the effects of colour and of light and shade all round about her. It was a chastened Phil who sat on the wall, watching the flying shadows of the clouds scud after one another across the great green shoulders, while the breeze dealt kindly with her eyelids and only left her eyes brighter and softer than usual, and a gentle melancholy, which was new and very becoming, pervaded the whole of her young face and drooping shoulders. At this moment there was a pathetic grace about her which seemed infinitely moving to a person who had seen her from afar after an eager search through the fields. His quick steps slackened as he drew near, but suddenly she looked up and caught sight of him a few yards off and smiled a little, while the tears suddenly sparkled in her eyes again.

Everything suddenly became quite simple after that, for Phil had had time to discover lately that the dark, ugly man with abrupt manners had contrived to make himself necessary to her, and that she really could not get on without him. Other episodes—and they had been many, for she had made unconscionable use of her powers—had not prepared her for anything like this. William Handley was quite different from anybody else she had ever met, though exactly when this conviction took root in her mind she would have found it very difficult to say. She had amused herself by making

friends with him at first out of sheer curiosity, drawn on by the sense of the impression she had made upon him. Philippa's methods of flirtation had never been vulgar, but she certainly had amused herself in exercising her fascinations with little scruple or thought, not merely from vanity, rather from sheer buoyancy of spirits, interest in life and all those other ingredients which go to the making of that refined species of egotism which has been called *joie de vivre,* and treated with poetry and respect.

There was no doubt about it now, however. After all these forlorn days of dulness and disappointment, William Handley's unexpected appearance broke down Phil's defences, and William himself, half incredulous and entirely amazed, was at last obliged to believe that impossible happiness sometimes actually falls to the lot of man in a much-maligned world.

Half an hour afterwards Philippa was still sitting in the same place on the wall, and Mr. Handley, almost silent, was standing beside her. But he held one small hand in his almost as if it would break like a piece of his own fragile wares, and the look on his face would have astonished Miss Alberta. It might not have pleased her; for it is a fact, that the expression of a triumphant lover seldom meets with feminine appreciation when first seen, as inspired by somebody else, on the face of a male belonging or friend. It really is not always becoming to masculine features, at anyrate, when they chance to be of the rough-hewn and aggressive order of those which had fallen to the lot of Philippa Jordan's future husband.

She was talking away again now while he listened

and looked at her and wondered over and over again how so amazing a piece of good fortune had come about, and whether it was really true that she had promised to marry him. Philippa chattered partly to relieve an entirely new feeling of shyness and constraint which had overtaken her, but her conversation and his rare observations were not much more entertaining for the outside world than the dialogues on such occasions usually are. They began to perceive, however, that the sun had nearly disappeared behind some distant woods and the grey winter mist was spreading its chill touch over the fields and houses again.

"It is late," said Philippa; "we must go back. Had you not better help me down off this wall?"

Mr. Handley needed no second suggestion to come to her aid, and only restrained himself with a great effort from claiming a reward as she stood looking up in his face with half-shy, challenging eyes. But he was terribly afraid of encroaching, and therefore stood upright as stiff as a post in front of her, which was, of course, a mistake, and one for which he got no credit.

"I have never asked you what you have been doing with yourself all these days," said Phil, beginning to walk quickly down the hill. "It was not very polite of you never even to come and leave a card on me, was it, considering all things?" She lifted her chin with a little vexed air.

"Do you think it is very polite to occupy a poor man's whole time and thoughts to the exclusion of everything else? That is what you have been doing to me lately. I must have been a delightful companion,

for I could not get you out of my head at all, and I am sure I tried."

"Thank-you! you have a flattering tongue, William. Shall I have to call you William, by the way? I doubt if I can manage the whole of it. And why, pray, should you have been so anxious to turn your attention away from me to worthier objects?"

"Oh Phil! don't you see? If I had come near you I should have had to say—well, exactly what I have said now. And I had not the least bit of hope—I was quite hopeless. For besides, what could I offer you? What can I offer you? I have told you what a poor man I really am, and how I shall be obliged to live on here for years and years to make more money. What a dull, isolated life for you in exchange for what you have been accustomed to! Do you really think you can face it?" he asked, growing serious and troubled once more. She gave the inevitable answer, and they walked on quietly through the fields till they came to the road which led to the White House.

Mr. Handley was eager to communicate his great news to the friend who had always been so ready to share both his troubles and his pleasures. He was perplexed and a little restive when Phil refused to allow him to come inside the gate of the drive, and declared that he was not to appear again till the next day. He was obliged to obey her, but he had never been so anxious for Nell's sympathy. His happiness quickened all old affections with a new glow, and deepened the sense of what he owed to the faithful and tried affection of his old friend and comrade.

During dinner Mrs. Kirkham began to perceive that

her guest was not quite at her ease. Philippa was by turns silent and talkative, but she evidently talked with effort, and she had several absent fits during which she did not hear a word that was said to her. The kind woman's heart was filled with pity for the girl's great disappointment about her pictures, and she felt sure that a blank year, as regarded the exhibitions, was a serious check and financial loss to the artist. Helena also relapsed into silence while she tried to devise a means of making good the material part of Philippa's troubles without offending her pride. She had not arrived at any satisfactory solution to the difficulty when they rose from the little round table where the yellow-shaded lamplight gleamed on the daffodils and Venetian glass. Mrs. Kirkham had no suspicion that the sword which had been hanging over her head for months was to fall to-night. During the last few days she had almost persuaded herself that it would not fall at all; and though, of course, she felt many a sympathetic pang at the thought of William's discomfiture, there were unacknowledged possibilities of consolation which brought back the life to her eyes and the energy to her manner.

To do Phil justice, she would have given a good deal to escape from what now lay before her. In the course of her long stay under Nell's roof the half-disdainful tolerance which she had begun by extending to a worthy but hopelessly commonplace and limited woman had developed slowly into a strong liking and even respect. The discovery of Nell's secret had helped to deepen these, for there was a kind of modest and self-respecting heroism in the devotion which never betrayed itself to less observant eyes, in the entire self-suppression

which gave so much while expecting nothing in return. They touched the better side of a nature which had at anyrate nothing mean or petty amongst its many defects. Had Mrs. Kirkham impressed Phil less, that young lady would certainly have made an excuse for running away, as she had run away from many an unwelcome duty before, leaving the blow to fall from William's own hand, unless chance interposed to arrange matters otherwise.

But she did not do this; she walked slowly in front of Mrs. Kirkham into the drawing-room instead, and there presently blurted out the truth, without any preparation or circumlocution, just as baldly as Nell would have done it herself. Probably after all, it was the best way. Mrs. Kirkham acquitted herself valiantly. She had drawn aside the curtains and the blind, and was looking out at the brilliant moonlit night, with her back to the room, when Phil spoke. She caught in her breath and remained standing where she was without speaking for a minute or two, and then dropping the blind she came quietly to Phil and kissed her, and said one or two suitable things in the nicest possible way, although the colour had fled from her cheeks and left a sudden withered look instead. She kept her arm round the girl's slim shoulders for a minute while she said hesitatingly, "Phil, dear, you will always try and make him happy, won't you?"

Then she said something about the parlour-maid and vanished out of the room for a short time, beating a handsome retreat in good order.

"Bah!" said Phil to herself, sitting down on the sofa and wringing her flimsy pocket handkerchief be-

tween her hands. "That was a nasty job! Thank God it is done. Poor old Nell!"

The usual outburst of congratulations followed the announcement of the engagement. Phil would have liked to return to London at once, but Mrs. Kirkham refused to hear of it, and Mrs. Jordan wrote that the little house on Campden Hill was in the hands of the British workman at the moment. Mr. Jordan wrote vaguely, but affectionately, from the heart of Spain, indefinitely postponing the interview which his future son-in-law was anxious to have with him as soon as possible. Indeed, Mr. Handley was astonished at his apparent oblivion of all practical questions connected with the matter. Philippa was able to read her father's disappointment and vexation pretty clearly between the lines of his letter. William perceived none of it, but was a little put out by Mr. Jordan's announcement that no further communications could pass between them at present, as he intended to explore a part of Spain on foot remote from the track of tourists, and his route was quite uncertain. He did not imagine, he said, that Mr. Handley would be so grasping as to wish to take Phil away from him for some time to come, and perhaps she would join him later on for a last *voyage à deux* with him, and see Velasquez at home—a bribe the crafty parent thought would prove irresistible.

Mrs. Jordan wrote and crossed several sheets, which Phil glanced at, and Mr. Handley conscientiously deciphered, devoting nearly an hour to the task, which he performed alone in the morning-room at the White House.

"Well, what is it all about?" she inquired, when he

brought back the letter, carefully folded and replaced in its envelope.

"Phil," he replied with great seriousness, "for the life of me I don't know. A good deal of it is about us, and a good deal more of it is about her; and I think she is worried about something, I don't know what. That is positively all I can arrive at."

Phil laughed her gay laugh. "You stupid! Perhaps you will take my word for it another time. What you have just said, describes one and all poor Mama's letters. But I wish she would let me come home."

William Handley was the least exacting of lovers. He watched Phil with delight, and wondered ceaselessly, secretly, and quite humbly at his own incredible good fortune. Just occasionally the audacities of her reckless tongue grated a little. It was not that he took them for more than they were worth, but he could not bear to think of the sort of talk and manners amongst which she had been thrown as a very young girl in Paris studios, and indeed, in her own home too, to a certain extent. He had a true Briton's detestation of all that savoured of Bohemia. But he looked forward with all the greater pleasure to building Phil a studio of her very own, in their future home, remote from doubtful company and rubbishing talk, where she could paint away at her ease.

Philippa quite appreciated his attitude, and intended to deal gently with him. She told herself that his nerves would grow stronger in time, and that when you have spent so many years surrounded by middle-class prejudices and ideas, it must be difficult to throw them off. It did not occur to her that the process of putting

off the old man and putting on the new might prove to be as difficult after all for William as for her.

Mrs. Kirkham meanwhile clung obstinately to her hair-shirt, refusing to let Philippa go, and looking on at William's happiness every day. The chafing of that shirt is seldom becoming to the complexion, and many people observed that she had begun to look older. She certainly did not look well and she grew thinner. Time hung a little upon her hands in spite of many charitable enterprises. The period for "spring cleaning" had not arrived; the children's education was being conducted according to the latest theories and newest fads by highly-trained and more or less incompetent persons who would brook little interference on the part of a mere mother.

Her cup was not quite full, however, until the day that William himself noticed her worn looks, and with dreadful kindness busied himself as to the cause of them; trying clumsily enough to show her many little attentions which threatened continually to break down her self-command. He began to beg her to take more care of herself and not to worry about things. He had a conviction that nearly all women worried about trifles; it was a part of the weakness of their mortal nature. He had always thought Nell a remarkable exception to the rule of her sex, and was sorry to find she was not. He felt sure she could not be in her usual health, and begged her to see the doctor. The fact that she became strangely touchy and unreasonable whenever he tried to talk to her about herself confirmed his belief that all was not well with her. But Philippa was rather short with him, too, when he expounded his uneasiness

about Nell to her; and so, to Nell's extreme relief, he ceased to try and regulate her welfare.

But Mrs. Kirkham was not the only person who possessed a troubled spirit in consequence of Mr. Handley's engagement to Philippa Jordan. Miss Alberta's face wore its most dour and set expression through the days that followed on that announcement. She alluded darkly to certain "wrestlings" which disturbed her rest o' nights, and her temper, it might be added, by day. Whenever Miss Alberta "wrestled" in devotional exercise, the peace of the household suffered, and the servants trembled. She seemed to be always wrestling now. When in company with her future sister-in-law and her light-winged tongue, Miss Alberta showed signs of visible disquiet very often at what she considered the evidences of a frivolous and corrupt spirit, by the ominous glitter in her eyes and the dark splotches of colour on her cheek-bones.

She went further than this at times, and when roused, she possessed a distinct advantage—she could say things which a woman brought up in a different sphere of life could only have hinted at in the red heat of anger. She knew how desirable it was that William's small capital should be increased, she shrewdly guessed how easily he might have been placed out of reach of all further care and anxiety by a marriage in every way desirable. His present infatuation appeared to her to partake of the sorceries of the Scarlet Woman, so now and then her remarks had a double edge to them which galled Philippa to the quick. Her own were in consequence far from conciliatory. Miss Alberta looked forward with anguish to the day when she would have to

hand over the keys of the treasured silver chests and linen and china cupboards to a daughter of Babylon who cared for none of these sacred possessions, and the thought of William's future discomfort caused her to be most disagreeable to him now.

He knew how keenly she would feel leaving him and his house, to live alone in the one he was providing for her, and he was sorry; but, of course, it could not be helped. Such is the common lot of sisters who keep house for marriageable brothers, and Alberta had often upbraided him for not marrying in former days. But she had always hoped he would make the wise and obviously suitable choice which Providence had placed in his way. So it came about that the engaged couple pleased hardly anybody but Mrs. Jordan and Jem the oven-man by the step they had taken; but they pleased themselves immensely and increasingly, which after all was the principal thing.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE came a few days of brilliant sunshine, rare enough anywhere in England in March, rarest of all in the bleak and rain-sodden district lying between the Mersey and the Trent. The daffodils starred the lawns and borders of Mrs. Kirkham's well-kept garden; the rooks bawled their domestic news all day from their giddy houses on the topmost twigs of the tall elms; the buds swelled on the thorn trees, the breath of spring was in the air.

Philippa tempted Mr. Handley away from his desk and stuffy little office to walk with her in the green country. He needed little persuasion, though he protested, to satisfy his conscience, that he ought to resist temptation, and work doubly hard now at his business to secure their future. Times were difficult; labour troubles loomed ahead, while German competition was slowly but surely encroaching on the South American markets, until lately practically monopolised by English potters. But he was not in the habit of talking about his difficulties, and though he thought it right to explain them to Philippa now, he begged her to keep them to herself. It would be bad for his credit if it were known that his trade had fallen off, and would only lead to worse troubles; whereas, he felt sure with a few years of prudence and personal attention to every detail, he

should secure a sufficient though not a rich provision for old age.

"If it is so difficult, why don't you give it up? There are other places to make money in besides that black hole," said Philippa, pointing in the direction of the Potteries.

"Not many at my age, you know. This is my only trade. As a boy, I used to think that to be master of the old place one day would be the finest thing in the world. Now I am master of it, and it is mine, I can't help having a sort of feeling about every brick and bit of iron about the place. Of course, dear, it must be incomprehensible to you; but you see, you are going to marry a working man. Phil! do you think you can do it?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Will. I am a working woman, and you don't know how hard my trade is, too. But if things are so difficult, why in the world do you choose this particular time to get rid of all Nell's capital?"

"Because I could not risk it. It would have been a very poor return for my old master's confidence to have lost his daughter's money. I have raised what I require elsewhere instead."

"But why did you not tell her so, instead of turning her off, without reasons given, like one of the hands? She cares about the place almost as much as you do yourself. It vexed her dreadfully; she has not got over it at all."

"I can't help that. If she had known, she would have refused to take her money, and there would have been bother."

"Well, but you hurt her so by the way you did it."

"I am afraid that is my way, and I can't help it. I told you I was a barbarian, now you see it is true."

"Oh, by the way! I think now I am entitled to hear some of the dark deeds you refused to tell me about before."

"I think," said Mr. Handley slowly, "that you are."

He lifted the tweed cap from his head as they climbed a steep field-path, and turned his face to catch the breeze, for the sun was strong, and it was quite hot work. Philippa helped herself up a slippery slope by holding his elbow with both hands.

"Go on," she said, when they reached the top; "but I am afraid it won't be very blood-curdling after all; nothing so good as a murder, now?"

"Well, no," he said reflectively; "I hardly think any fool could give it that name. No sensible person would, certainly."

"Good gracious! Make haste and tell me about it. Have you thrown some mangled corpse into one of your ovens, or what?"

"Not quite!" said William, with half a smile, but his forehead was knitted into some straight perpendicular lines, and he spoke hesitatingly, drawing his breath rather hard at times. "I believe I helped to hurry a mean and degraded scoundrel out of the world a little faster than he would have gone otherwise. I have no regret in connection with the matter, and if his miserable life was slightly shortened, so much the better. It's a very old story now. Yet it would not do

for it to get about. Nobody knows—that is, practically nobody."

"That is all right. I never tell secrets."

"It would not do for you to marry a man within reach of the vengeance of the law, would it?"

"Go on, and tell me about it, Will. Don't make those grisly allusions; I don't like them."

They sat down on a sun-warmed boulder, and Mr. Handley for once took up his parable.

"It is an ugly old story, Phil, and hardly fit for you, so I will make it as short as I can. You know my father was a working potter at the Swan Works. There were several of us then, and he was a stern man. He would have thrashed any of us, big boys and girls, whom he had caught doing wrong at any age. Mother and Annie, our eldest sister, were mortally afraid of him. Annie was pretty and fond of pleasure, rather giddy. When father saw that, he would not let her go to the handling rooms at the pottery any more. He made her stay at home with Mother, which was no good, for Mother never could refuse her anything. She had a great many admirers, and several young men earning good wages wanted to marry her; but she only cared to flirt, not to settle down. She knew too well what the life of a working-woman after marriage meant. She amused herself pretty harmlessly, until she fell in with a wretched scoundrel and loafer from nobody knew where, with soft sort of manners and a boastful way of pretending to be superior to us all, which he certainly was not. He picked up a living by gambling with the Pottery lads, cheating them at cards and billiards, and so forth; occasionally he made fairly good designs for

Nell's father. He joined our football club—it is a great game, you know, in these parts. The teams travel about from one place to another for matches on holidays, and all the workpeople turn out to see and to bet on the play. I was very fond of playing, and went about a good deal. James, the fellow I am telling you about, was a fine player when he was sober; but he never could stand being beaten, and when the game went against him he used to lose his temper and play tricks; he would hurt and disable anybody on the other side if he could and dared. He made up to me a good deal, and, like a young fool, I was flattered, and played into his hands without knowing it. Father forbade him the house when he found out what he was, for he was making up to Annie, and she had quite lost her heart to him. It was too late when my father tried to stop it; but he did not know that I had long begun to find out what a blackguard James was, and that I could not stand his tricks at football. Then he told me some lies, and cheated over various small transactions, and I told Annie she must have no more to do with him."

"And, pray, what did Annie say to that?"

"Just what you might expect. She tried to prevent my knowing any more about it after that, but I caught her twice after supper going to meet him along a road that runs above those great banks of refuse that smoke at night beyond the canal. I told Mother if she could not stop Annie I should speak to my father. Mother seemed frightened, and begged me not to do that. She said James was going to marry Annie, and that I must not interfere. I swore he should not marry her, and

could not understand why Mother seemed so upset. She made me promise to wait a few days before I spoke. Phil, this is a part of the story I hate to tell you."

"You must go on, though."

He went on with an effort, thrusting his stick through and through an antheap as he talked.

"The next day was the New Year holiday, and we went to play a match at another town. James had not played; he was past it then, for he was dying of a disease, though I did not know it; but he had swindled and cheated some lads I knew, and we grew quarrelsome in the train coming back. He had a biting tongue, and I lost my temper. I was a good deal younger than he, of course; I was barely seventeen. When we got near home some low fellows began taunting me, and Annie's name came in, and James only sneered and laughed. I should have fought him then, but the older men kept me down, and made James and the others hold their tongues, but not before I knew, even from the silence of the better sort, what the truth was. I slipped away when we got out and waited for him on that same road by a red-hot mass of rubbish underneath a blast furnace shaft. It was the way to his lodgings. I had no idea the brute was in consumption; he always looked lean and haggard. I don't suppose he knew how bad he was himself. He soon came along. I stopped him and asked him, as calmly as I could, how soon he was going to marry Annie. He sneered and laughed, and said when he married it would be a woman of his own class. I need not tell you any more of the conversation—it was short; then

James suddenly came and tripped me up with his foot, hitting me, as I fell, with all his might with a big stick he had in his hand. Of course, after that I fought him, and between drink and lungs he was no match for me. In struggling, we had got closer than I noticed to the steep bank which falls away from the road, with a deep drop into a mass of stones and hard stuff from the ironworks lying about below. When James fell, he rolled over the side down on to these, and lay there. I looked over and heard him groan, though he didn't answer. Just then a man I worked under at the pottery came up; he was a drunken rascal, but clever, and managed to keep his place. He had heard us quarrelling in the train, and had followed me up the road, so he saw all that happened. He and I between us managed to carry James to the infirmary in a blanket we got from a cottage. We told them he had rolled down a high bank on to some stones, and we left him there. They saw he had been drinking, and asked no more questions. Next day the man who had seen it all came and told me he was dying, and said that I had better make off in case anything came out at the inquest. He was going to America himself, and would join me if I went on. So I went, not altogether because I was afraid my share in James's death would come to light, but knowing what I did about Annie I hated to be at home, and I had always wanted to go off to try what I could do in a new country. Father had forbidden it when I told him, but I had been saving what he let me keep out of my earnings for a long while on purpose, and in the night I got up and walked until I got to Stockport the next evening, and from there by

train to Liverpool, where I had the good luck to fall in with the man who has been a father to me. You know the rest, Phil."

"Not all," she said softly; "what about poor Annie?"

"Annie died, and her baby with her. Father was killed by an accident very soon after I left, though I did not hear of it till long afterwards. Mother was dead, too, when I came back to England. My brother had gone to Australia; only Alberta was left."

"Well, what became of that man who saw you fighting? He was the only person who knew about it, wasn't he?"

"Yes; and he went out of his mind years ago. You are not troubling about him, are you? He will never count for anything again. Phil, I have told you an ugly story, because I thought I ought to show you what a rough early life I had, how unlike anything you have been accustomed to. Can you still put up with me? If you can't, say so now and let me go away straight off. I warn you I might not be able to do it later."

He got up and stood in front of her, with the veins standing out like cords on his temples. Phil got up, too, and slipped her hand in his.

"Don't go away and leave me, Will," she said in her most beguiling little voice; "I don't know what I should do without you now."

"Tell me," said Phil, the inquisitive, resuming the conversation presently, "did you, or do you, ever feel at all badly about having hurried that man out of the world? Some people would, you know, at times."

"Certainly not! Why should I?" he said, looking at her with real surprise. "I only wish it had happened earlier in his career."

"There is no doubt about it, you certainly are robust, Will."

"All the same, it would not do for it to get about. People exaggerate so, and there are such a lot of cranky fools in the world."

"It certainly would not do. I shall lock it in my breast, you may feel sure. I suppose you did not see the man again before he died?"

"No, but he scrawled me a line, which was brought me by my other friend. It was not written in a very Christian spirit, so far as I remember: he said he hoped I should meet with a certain specific reward. But don't let us talk any more about such an unpleasant subject."

"We won't; but just tell me one thing. Did you destroy that letter?"

"I forget; I expect I did. Why, little Phil, you are not going to worry about it, are you? I shall be sorry I told you such a horrid story; it was not meant for such ears as those," looking at the perfectly formed little shell nearest to him.

"No, Will, it would certainly be too silly to begin fussing now. I am only interested, that is all. I have never met anyone with such good nerves as yours; or, perhaps, it is a question of digestion more properly, I don't know I am sure. What I do know is that my feeble frame will presently require lunch for its support, so we had better go back directly. By the way, I quite forgot to tell you—do you know you must have seen

Cuthbert; for there is an old photograph of a large group of boys in football jerseys taken here, in which both he and you appear. I have seen it for years past at home, but I only discovered you were in it the other day."

"Really! Well, I suppose I must have, then; but I have not the faintest recollection of him. Our football club was very large, and we used to be photographed all together, or with other teams, on various occasions."

He sprang to his feet, threw his stick up in the air and caught it again, looking as if a weight had been lifted off his mind.

"Phil, how glad I am that you know all about me, and the sort of life it is here, and don't mind! It is so wonderfully clever and good of you. But I mean to toil away for a few years and make a lot of money, and then we will go and do whatever you like, so long as you will promise to be quite happy."

"That is quite the way a properly-trained husband should talk. You really are very promising, Will!"

"I hope so," he said seriously; "you don't know how anxious I am to learn. I know so little of women and their ways; you must teach me."

"Trust yourself to me, sir; your education will be my first care."

He laughed with a great rebound of good spirits, after the tension and gravity of the last hour's talk. Looking round, but perceiving no spectators save the stolid company of ruminating cows, he stooped suddenly, picked up the slim creature with the laughing provoca-

tion in her eyes, and ran down the steep hillside with her.

"Put me down directly, sir! A man may not carry his teacher about—it is forbidden in my book of etiquette. Good gracious, Will! How strong you are! I feel like a fly. When I am seventy years old, you shall carry me up all the hills, instead of down them."

"But where shall I be when you are seventy years old? You forget——"

"I always forget unpleasant things, and so must you hereafter. How dare you allude to old age and ——bah!" She stopped, and shook her head with disgust.

"Please, teacher, it wastn't my fault; it was all that naughty little——"

"It is always your fault, sir! That is another of the things you have to remember."

CHAPTER XIII.

Miss Alberta was too loyal to William to complain openly of the bitterness which filled her spirit with regard to the person who was to occupy the honoured position of William's wife. To Nell, and to Nell only, it occasionally overflowed, and the widow did her best to admonish and comfort one whose case she secretly thought more bearable than her own.

"Just think Nell!" groaned Miss Alberta next day, as she sat bolt upright in her friend's morning-room, "just think what sort of upbringing that girl must have had! She didn't know cotton pillow-slips from linen ones, yesterday, when I made her look at the house-linen! William will never know what it is to be comfortable in his own 'ome again! And when I asked her what they cleaned their brasses with in London, she said she hadn't the least idea, and probably they were never cleaned at all! What a wife for William!"

"After all, she is William's choice," said the widow, a little impatiently. "Come Alberta, you must not look at the dark side of things so much. Housekeeping is easily learnt, and if William is not comfortable with her, he would certainly be a great deal more uncomfortable without her. Don't you see how everything she says and does pleases him?" she asked, with an irrepressible sigh.

"That is William's foolishness," returned his sister sternly. "And you'll see it won't last when he doesn't have his dinners as he likes them. I doubt he's chosen badly; for I don't fancy she will have a penny of her own to help the housekeeping with, either."

"Oh! as to that, I suppose William can afford to marry a wife without fortune."

"All I know is he's likely to find himself in sore straits if trade does not improve, with a wife who brings him nothing."

"Do you really mean that, Alberta?" asked her friend, with grave surprise.

William's sister began to perceive that she had committed an unusual indiscretion; for she was not given to making rash confidences. Since Mr. Handley had got rid of a valuable partner, he was probably desirous of keeping his own business affairs to himself. She rose to her feet abruptly, and said she must go. Mrs. Kirkham laid a detaining hand on her shoulder, and was evidently about to open fire once more, when Philippa came into the room. For once her future sister-in-law was glad to see her, but she did not delay her departure for many minutes, and the manner of it was more informal and precipitate than usual. Miss Alberta was a great stickler for social observances, as she understood them. She had certainly mastered a difficult and complicated ritual with much trouble to herself.

"Thank goodness, she has gone at last!" sighed Phil. "I am so worried, Nell."

"What is it?" asked her hostess, coming up to her as she stood twisting a letter between her fingers in evident distress and perplexity.

"I don't know. That is just it. Something odd seems to have happened at home. Nell," hesitatingly, "do you know I think mama must really have gone out of her mind."

"My dear child, what has put such an idea into your head?"

Philippa handed her a letter to read: it came from Mrs. Jordan's parlour-maid, and told in a few brief sentences that the writer feared her mistress was ill, and did not know what she ought to do. The doctor had come to see Mrs. Jordan the day before, and ever since his visit she had seemed to be worse. She had spent the night in walking about the house talking to herself and could scarcely be persuaded to touch any food. Would Miss Jordan soon be coming home?

The customary reserve of a class which does not easily commit its ideas to paper, and still preserves a wholesome distrust of the written word was obvious throughout the letter; it alarmed Philippa greatly, and she said she must go to London at once.

"There is an express train at six o'clock. I will have your things packed," said Mrs. Kirkham, rising to the occasion with her usual quiet promptitude. "I suppose you have telegraphed to William?"

Philippa admitted that she had done so.

"I should like to come with you," said Nell, who foresaw trouble, "particularly as your father is away."

"You are too good, Nell. But don't trouble, I expect Will is sure to come."

"In that case I will follow to-morrow morning," said Mrs. Kirkham, with a melancholy little smile.

But at this moment a telegram was brought to Philippa. She tore it open and read:

"Mrs. Jordan went away this morning. Think to Meeshaw. No luggage."

"What does this mean? Why on earth did they not telegraph before?"

The two women looked at each other in dumb astonishment.

"Some people still think telegraphing an extreme measure," said Mrs. Kirkham recovering herself. "She must have taken the midday express from town. I heard it pass twenty minutes ago. She ought to be here by now."

"She may not know the name of your station. I don't believe she was coming here at all. She must have got out at Meeshaw nearly three-quarters of an hour ago. What shall we do?"

"Come to Meeshaw at once and ask William to help look for her. There is a train in a quarter of an hour; we can just do it. We shall soon find her and bring her back here. I will tell them to prepare a room."

When they got out at Meeshaw station they ascertained that someone answering to Mrs. Jordan's description had given up a ticket from London and passed out. Nobody had noticed which road she had taken, but it was made clear that she had not engaged a cab. The only one called was otherwise accounted for.

"We will go to the Works and tell William first," said Mrs. Kirkham. But when they came to the cross-roads her companion suddenly stopped.

"You go to the pottery and wait there, Nell. I am

going to try a place where I think there is just a chance of finding her. An idea has struck me."

"But surely you would like William to come with you. Phil, wait! Tell me!"

Philippa only waved her onwards and sped away through a sharp shower of rain up one of the steep squalid streets. Mrs. Kirkham, feeling more than ever that this was a case for William, hastened to the pottery door, whose threshold she had not crossed since Mr. Handley had decreed the dissolution of their partnership.

After listening to her breathless story, he was at no pains to conceal his vexation that she had let Philippa disappear alone on her quest without discovering where she was going to. He scarcely said anything; but Nell felt she was in the wrong as usual, and could not explain how it had come about.

"Where can she have gone to?" she repeated, looking vaguely round the dreary little office, with its desk, high chair and wire blinds. Mr. Handley stood silently reflecting for a minute or two; then he took his hat and stick from the stand outside the door, and called to her to come with him.

"It is only an idea," he said, almost in Philippa's own words; "but I am going to the cemetery."

"To the cemetery!" repeated Mrs. Kirkham with stupefaction. Then she remembered that the way Philippa had taken led there. "Why, she did go up Cross Street; but what in the world should take Mrs. Jordan to Meeshaw Cemetery?"

"Come on!" was all William said, opening the door for her.

"William," she said, as they walked away, "has Mrs. Jordan always been mad, or is this something new?"

"This is certainly something new. I always thought her rather a foolish kind of person, but not in the least mad."

They were climbing rapidly up a steep street. Mrs. Kirkham's utterances grew rather spasmodic as the pace told upon her, and her flushed cheeks made her eyes seem rounder and more projecting than ever, especially when they were fixed upon her companion with that expression of amazed interrogation which makes many a sensible face look foolish. It was Nell's misfortune that her features lent themselves to this expression rather easily when she was surprised or perplexed. It slightly irritated her friend, and besides, at this moment he thought her unnecessarily dense. When she repeated "but why should she go to the cemetery?" he only said, "why not?" with gruff shortness. When she reiterated the ejaculation, he replied, in a slightly exasperated voice, that he could not pretend to account for Mrs. Jordan's having come to Meeshaw at all; but since she had gone out of her mind so far as to take this step, it was probable that her head was full of the grave, about which he knew she had worried herself lately.

"The grave!" echoed Nell, her perplexity only deepening; "but what grave has she got anything to do with here?"

"Ah! I thought Phil must have told you after all this time. The fact is, she has a brother buried here, but

they never mention it, as he was not a credit to his family. He died years and years ago."

"This is the first I have heard of it," said Nell, feeling a little wounded. "What a reserved creature Phil is, though she seems to be so communicative!"

But William was not at all wounded at discovering that he was the sole recipient of Philippa's confidences, and his perspicacity in all that concerned her now received a fresh testimony. As they approached the corner of the cemetery, which had lately been cleaned and planted afresh round Cuthbert Jordan's grave, they saw her kneeling over a figure which was lying on the wet grass against the new headstone. Unaware of their approach, Phil suddenly rose to her feet, and stooping down, raised her mother in her arms. With a great effort she contrived to stagger a few yards with her burden, but it was too much for her strength and her injured arm; she slipped backwards on the wet grass beneath her mother's dead weight with a little cry of horror and consternation. Mr. Handley reached her at the moment of her fall, lifted her mother from her, and laid Mrs. Jordan gently down again, exclaiming; "Phil, are you hurt?" He was immensely relieved to see her rise to her feet at once.

"How could you attempt such a thing? Are you sure you are not hurt?"

"No, no! I am all right. But oh! Will, Will! look at Mother. Is she——?" She stopped, unable to speak another word, her cheeks white with horror.

"No, no!" said Mrs. Kirkham, who was occupying herself with the prostrate figure; "her eyelids are moving. I think she is coming to herself. We ought to move

her from here before she does. If you can carry her to that cottage by the gate, William, I will run down to the station and send up a cab. We will get her to the White House as soon as we can."

"That is impossible," said William, gathering up Mrs. Jordan in his strong arms; "but go for a cab as fast as you can, Nell, and when you have sent one up, will you take another to my house and tell Alberta to get a room ready at once?"

"Oh, no!" cried Phil. "Think of your sister; that will never do."

"Yes, it will," said William in his even, resolute voice. "Where else should your mother go if not to my house? Is it not yours too, now?" Even at this moment he could not suppress a feeling of infinite satisfaction at the thought, and to have the right to share Phil's family troubles gave a new reality to the bond between them.

It was some days before Mrs. Jordan recovered consciousness. She had talked and tossed wildly after she was put to bed, and all her delirious dreams seemed to be haunted with some fear. Even when she came to herself again she looked at everyone who approached her bedside with a kind of dumb anguish of appeal for help. Phil began with a sick heart to understand what it all meant. The doctor had discovered a disease, whose work was already advanced before Mrs. Jordan's sudden flight in a paroxysm of despair and delirious terror, to the place where Cuthbert had been laid. The malady had only been revealed by a specialist the day before her crazed rush to Meeshaw.

There is, after all, as much diversity amongst the men of science as there is amongst those who practise

other arts and crafts, and certain of them nowadays, mercifully for mankind their number is still few, make a point of holding nothing back in the way of dreadful certainty or even possibility from the creature whose vitality and power of fighting death depends on the spirit as well as on the flesh. There are some persons who cannot stand up against this Spartan method; others whom it exasperates into fresh life and an angry determination to put the man who has pronounced sentence in the wrong, which has been known to achieve astonishing results. Mrs. Jordan belonged to the first and more numerous category; the announcement which had been made to her killed her—that is, cut short the life which remained to her—as certainly and less mercifully than if the doctor had taken up a poker and knocked her on the head with it. No living creature had a greater physical horror of death, she went mad when she heard of its approach; often as she had been wont to threaten her husband and daughter with her probable decease if she could not get her own way. And she had neither the strength of will nor the reasonableness which together make resignation. As for her religion, which had always been of an orthodox and professing but unreflective kind, it forsook her entirely while this first agony of sheer animal terror lasted. And it lasted for days; to look on at it, helpless to relieve, impotent to comfort, struggling vainly to pierce the solitude in which the human soul must fight out its own battles, Philippa suffered after a fashion of which she had never before realised the possibilities. At times an imagination which enables you to put yourself really in another's place becomes merely an exquisite torment,

and its tendency is to exaggerate the pain of the actual sufferer on all occasions. Philippa, who a few days ago had shrunk from all that suggested death in the world, felt that she would now be thankful if she could take the place of the woman who was appointed to die, and who could not submit herself to the law. The fact that she had never had any great affection for her mother only made the present crisis more intolerable; a passion of pity crushes when it is unsustained by the love that robs any situation of that last horror of detachment. The commonplace events of life remain mere phrases until they meet one face to face, and then each human creature discovers them separately as entirely original experiences of tremendous significance.

Mercifully, Mrs. Jordan's fits of wild and excited shrinking and rebellion passed away as her strength diminished. Perhaps nothing in life is more mysterious or more interesting than the infinitely varied manner in which people find their own particular consolations, and their different ways of meeting trouble.

For some days all their efforts to communicate with Mr. Jordan failed; at last a telegram reached him, and he replied that he was starting immediately and would be with them as soon as express trains could bring him. Meanwhile his wife grew gradually calmer. Her uneasy egotism had always suffered under a vague sense of her personal unimportance, of not being able to fill the most prominent place in the lives of those about her. Now all this was changed, she was the first and absorbing care of all her little world; it insensibly soothed her. Even Lady Victoria's frequent calls of inquiry and messages gave satisfaction, though nothing would induce

Mrs. Jordan to see her. Phil was a little surprised at her persistent refusal, for there were often hours when other visitors were warmly welcomed, and especially Mrs. Kirkham and Mr. Handley. Miss Alberta seldom proved a success; her methods in a sick-room were not soothing, and she found it difficult to abstain from trying to inculcate what she considered a proper frame of mind for a dying woman. Such seasonable words as burst from her lips occasionally, in spite of the conscientious efforts she made to restrain herself, produced disastrous consequences. So Miss Alberta's visits were few and short.

It was in William Handley, strange to say, that poor Barley found her greatest support and consolation. His steady voice and manner, together with his matter-of-fact way of treating everything, as if the whole situation presented no unusual or alarming features, steadied Mrs. Jordan's nerves, and gradually put an end to her fits of hysterical sobbing. She came to lean upon him with all her weight, clamorously and inconsiderately as her manner was, with no thought of his much-occupied time; but she controlled herself and achieved a certain self-mastery foreign to her habits whenever he was within hearing. Phil was amazed to see what an effect he had upon her; his patience and kindness did not surprise her, but she had perceived how little he had liked her mother in old days, and she had supposed he might be awkward and ill at ease with so difficult an invalid. On the contrary, he was able to do more than anybody to smooth her way out of life, and to give her something of the fortitude she so sorely needed. To William she would talk for hours about her lost boy,

and forget her troubles while she dwelt upon his pretty curls, and the lovely frocks she had embroidered for him. In the midst of her distress Philippa could not help smiling as she watched Mr. Handley nodding with serious attention to the description of those bewildering scolloped flounces and the perils they passed through at the hands of the laundress, all those long years ago before Cuthbert and the starched frocks had alike become things of the past.

Philippa was made to send for all the old photographs of Cuthbert his mother had in her possession, she was so anxious to show them to her new friend and confidant. All of them, excepting one, dated from his childish and schoolboy days. The last frame Mrs. Jordan took out of its paper wrappings was the group of young men in football jerseys, in which she was unaware that her future son-in-law also appeared.

When she handed it to him he got up, and took it to the window, where he stood with his back to her.

"Yes, that is right," said the feeble, querulous voice. "It is so dark and foggy this morning. Take all these to the light, Willy. They do not do him justice, but I should like you to have some idea what my boy looked like."

But instead of coming back to fetch the rest of the collection, Mr. Handley put the picture in his hand down on the nearest table and left the room without another word.

Mrs. Jordan was a little offended, and explained to Philippa when she came in presently, that dear Willy's

manners (would it have occurred to anyone else in the world to call him by that name?) left a good deal to be desired. He had a heart of gold, dear fellow, but, of course, he was a rough diamond; and, after all, Mrs. Jordan feared her daughter might discover that birth and breeding did count for something in everyday life.

Philippa thought of her own maternal grandfather, but contrived to suppress the smile which rose to her lips.

When William failed to return to carry in Mrs. Jordan's tray himself, as his custom now was, she began to feel aggrieved. At night, when a note came over from the Works to say he was too busy to come home to dinner, she was hurt and offended. It was Miss Alberta who brought the message up to her guests.

"Eh!" she exclaimed in answer to some querulous remarks from the invalid, "but it's time your daughter was learning what it is to marry a man who has to work hard for his living and hers. It isn't all playing about, and wasting time courting. William must buckle to now or he will lose his season's export trade; and, with a wife to keep, he will have to stick to it harder than ever before."

She experienced an ungodly satisfaction, not unmingled with surprise, when she saw how greatly all such tonic observations were disliked by both mother and daughter. Mrs. Jordan drew herself up on her pillows with feeble dignity and pursed her lips together. Philippa grew pale, while her face assumed an impassable and expressionless air, as if it was carved in ivory, always a sign with her of stung and wounded pride.

"Why, what's this?" cried Miss Alberta, pausing in her triumphant retreat from the room to take up the photograph which William had left on the table. "Wherever did William find this, I wonder? I've not seen it these twenty years and more! Mother used to keep it on the mantelpiece after William left home as a lad, and I thought it was lost long ago. Did he give it you, Mrs. Jordan? Should you have known who it was meant for? It was never much like him, I will say."

"I don't know what you mean," began the invalid stiffly, and then a sudden light came into her face, and she clasped her hands with excitement: "Miss Handley, did you say you knew that photograph in old days, twenty years ago? Then you must mean that you knew him, that you knew my boy. Tell me all about it, all you can remember about Cuthbert."

Miss Alberta looked at her with amazement. "Nay, I did not know him," she said, slowly shaking her head. "I never heard of anybody called Jordan before, nor Cuthbert either."

"Bring it here!" cried Mrs. Jordan, two red spots showing themselves in her sunken cheeks. "Never mind about the name; he did not use his own here. This is my picture, I have always kept it because my son is in this group. I had no idea your brother was there too. Quick! let me show you my son, and then, perhaps, you will remember him."

"But these were all Pottery lads," said Miss Alberta, obeying her with a puzzled face. "Eh!" recollecting herself; "that is all, except——"

She stopped short. Mrs. Jordan had seized the

broken frame, and now pointed triumphantly to the faded face of her son.

"That was never your son?" said Miss Alberta slowly.

"Yes! yes!" cried the mother. "Now tell me all you can about him," laying her hand on the hard knuckles near her.

But Miss Alberta slowly drew them away. Her cheeks had turned scarlet, her eyes were fierce; the embers of the old passion of anger and indignation flamed out anew at the remembrance of one who had brought her family to shame. She looked at Philippa, who had risen and stood near her, but behind the head of the bed, and opened her mouth as if to speak. Philippa's eyes were fixed on hers with an expression which caused Miss Alberta to turn away and close her lips with a snap.

"Why don't you speak?" cried the mother fretfully; she was becoming exhausted.

But her hostess only gave vent to an inarticulate but eloquent species of groan as she stalked out of the room. After a moment's hesitation Philippa followed her, but she returned very quickly, for her mother was already shedding tears of fatigue and disappointment.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was late that night before Philippa heard the house door open underneath her room and the boards creak as Mr. Handley walked stealthily across the hall. Miss Alberta was sitting up for him, and had made it plain to her visitor that she did not wish for any companion. So Philippa had gone to bed, but she did not sleep, and was awake indeed long after the distant sound of two voices talking for another hour in the little smoking-room, which opened out of the hall below, had ceased. Once Miss Alberta's had risen so much that the night-nurse had crept out of her mother's room, along the passage, and had uttered an emphatic "Hush!" from the top of the stairs, after which there was only a low rumbling for a few minutes more, and then a rustle as Miss Alberta passed to seek her bed. There was another sound too, outside Philippa's door, as well as the swish of the black silk skirt; improbable as it seemed, the visitor could have vowed that she heard a vociferous sob. At the sound of it she threw off the bed-clothes impatiently, put on her dressing-gown, and, drawing up her blind, sat staring out into the night, illumined garishly by the great tongues of flame that darted upwards every minute from some of the tall chimneys across the canal.

She sat there till at last the red flames turned paler and quivered in the white light of early morning, while her own face looked ghostly and her head ached as she propped it on her hand. But Philippa shed no tears to-night, she only felt dazed and stupid with many troubles and perplexities, and was conscious of a dogged determination to put any fresh ones far from her at once and for ever. Life was too difficult in the present to allow old phantoms from the past to have any share in it. Her father was right—closed chapters should never be opened again.

Mr. Handley was standing by the fire warming his hands when she came into the dining-room next morning. Miss Alberta, with her most dour and grim expression, had seated herself already behind the urn. She scarcely answered Philippa's salutation, and disappeared with her key-basket the moment she could absent herself from the table.

"Bad man!" said Philippa when she had gone, drawing her chair up close to Mr. Handley's, and putting her hand through his arm. "You look too haggard and dissipated after all your toils and shockingly late hours. I shall enforce the eight hours' day when you are under my charge."

For the first time he was quite unresponsive, and his arm hung stiffly by his side.

"Will," she said in her most caressing voice, resting her chin on his shoulder, "why don't you answer? You're not trying to be offended with me, you great stupid?"

"Offended!" he ejaculated, suddenly seizing her in his arms. "Phil! are you quite sure, perfectly certain, that nothing which happened ever so long ago could ever make any difference to you? I told you a horrid old story the other day; you did not mind it, did you? Nothing fresh that chance could devise to plague us with, about things that happened ever so long ago, can affect you and me, can it?"

"Don't crack my ribs, Will! Certainly late hours are not good for the nerves. Surely you are not becoming morbid now after being so robust before about your youthful experiences? At this rate you will soon resemble the remorseful Weelyam of the melodrama!"

"No," said William, resuming his natural manner. "I have never suffered from remorse, for I have never done anything wrong." He frowned as he spoke.

"That is more like you," she said, smiling a little though her lips trembled; "and now since we have decided quite finally a number of times already that we have no intention of getting rid of one another on any pretext whatsoever, let us drop a foolish and unprofitable style of conversation for good and all. But, first, bend down and let me smooth those very unbecoming crumples out of your forehead."

"You shall, Phil, and it shall be for good and all too," he said, suddenly kneeling down in front of her, while she passed her hand lightly over his forehead and its frowning creasing relaxed.

"What a wise and clever and beautiful fairy you are!"

"Will, come up and see mama now. Poor soul! She fretted after you yesterday."

He did not answer for a moment, but rose slowly and turned away before he spoke.

"Do you really think she wants me?"

"Why, you know how she depends on you; nobody can do for her what you do," said Phil, half timidly.

They were both silent for a minute while he stared into the fire, then he gave himself a kind of shake.

"All right, then. I will come to her."

She paused at the door and looked round; he was still standing leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, but catching a kind of pleading in her eyes he strode after her and took her hand in his, and together they went up to her mother's room.

Mr. Jordan arrived in the evening, jaded and worn with travelling night and day from the centre of Spain. The week that followed tried him cruelly. He was so accustomed to his wife's many small complaints it had not occurred to him that one day the cry of "Wolf!" would really be uttered to some purpose. He had always felt a conviction that she would outlive him, though she was two or three years older than he. The announcement that the fretful voice and disturbing presence, which yet clung to him with a persistent affection of its own strange egotistical order, were to pass out of his life gave him a violent shock, and stirred up many painful reflections.

Yet whatever he may have had to reproach himself with in his secret soul as to his conjugal relations in the past, it is certain that he might have possessed a conscience void of offence on the score of patience and

good temper in daily life. His enemies sometimes said that his forbearance was exercised in expiation of other shortcomings; for Mr. Jordan had a few enemies as well as a devoted following of admirers, and neither were confined to the public Press. To a man of his temperament the mere passage from happy idleness under a brilliant sky in the most congenial and picturesque surroundings to the grim and smoky region in the dull North, where the presence of death lying in wait almost seemed to be made visible to the eye, rendered him physically as well as morally sick, but outwardly he did not flinch. With Philippa also he felt a new constraint; for, urbane and courteous as was his manner to the host who stood to him in a new and wholly unwelcome relationship, those who understood Mr. Jordan as she did had little difficulty in divining that he did not love his future son-in-law.

His wife became quiet and untroubled in mind, and rapidly weaker during the days that followed his arrival. She was quite satisfied that he should sit by her for hours at a time, often without speaking, and he did it scrupulously, though he suffered a martyrdom meanwhile. It seemed likely that things might go on as they were for two or three weeks or even more, but suddenly the end overtook them. In the first greyness of a bleak April morning the nurse summoned them. Barley seemed to be asleep, but she never woke again; only the breaths came slower and slower until they stopped. For the first time Philippa saw death; it had come so gently she would not believe at first that it was there. Afterwards, when she left the room, the sun was struggling through a thick haze and the rooks were call-

ing loudly. She went down into the smoke-dried garden and held her head between her hands, feeling quite dazed. What was it that had happened? Here everything was as usual, where was *she?*

It had all happened so suddenly, nobody had called Mr. Handley until it was over. He came out now into the chill early sunshine to look for Philippa, and put his arms round her gently as if she were a child in trouble.

"Don't!" she said, extricating herself and looking at him with dry, strained eyes. "I can't think what it is that has happened, but I have got to make it out alone. It can't have been that, really, Will—what they said, I mean; it was as simple as if she were going to sleep." Her voice trembled here, and the tears followed, and William was not asked to go away again.

They buried Barley in her son's grave. The sight of it again after all these long years caused Mr. Jordan to take a step back involuntarily as he found himself on the same spot where he had stood before, when they had lowered that first failure of his life and covered it up out of sight. If this was another disappointment that was being buried away, it was also the disappearance of a certain faithful affection and of the last outward and visible link with his youthful days.

What thoughts filled his mind it would perhaps be fairer not to inquire too closely, but when he raised his eyes once he dropped them again directly, for opposite him was Philippa standing beside the potter, who signified to her father the submersion of many hopes. She came to his side when all was over, but he strode away from her alone. Lady Victoria ran after her and

walked beside her to the gate, after depositing a wreath of great magnitude in the place she thought most suitable. A bitter east wind blew their black draperies about them, and made them both look pinched and blue. A light sleet was falling on the masses of strongly-scented lilies and tuberoses; their penetrating fragrance made Philippa shudder, but she lingered before passing out of the gate, unable to conquer an unreasoning repugnance to going back to a warm fireside and leaving that poor little figure behind in the cold churchyard. Lady Victoria's brisk accents grated on her ears. She was anxious to manage them all for their good; she certainly succeeded in sending Philippa quickly enough through the gateway at last.

"You poor little thing, you look perfectly starved; you ought to be put to bed and tucked up. But just get him home first," nodding in the direction of Mr. Jordan's retreating figure, "and make him take some hot brandy-and-water; pretty stiff dose it ought to be, too."

It was evident she only needed the smallest encouragement to come and carry out her directions in person; but she did not receive it, and at last reluctantly mounted again into the family coach, with its monumental pair of horses, which had brought her from the Wynch. On the way home she had to take out her pocket-handkerchief several times when she thought of Mr. Jordan's forlorn and desolate appearance, and the end of her nose became red with unusual emotions, amongst which pitiful thoughts were not wanting for the poor, silly, common little woman who had been so deplorable a drag on a man of genius while she lived.

The next day Philippa went back to the White House to collect her possessions and bid good-bye to Nell Kirkham before joining her father in London. Towards evening she looked out of the window across the smooth shaven lawn to where a wall of thick-growing laurels hid the shrubbery walk. Eli was hacking and hewing away at the branches of the hedge to trim its surface to the even level required of all growths, however unruly by nature they might be, in Mrs. Kirkham's garden. The old man was talking away to himself all the while; now and then he paused, gave a look behind him, and then flourished the species of sharp sickle he had in his hand wildly round his head. He looked unpleasantly mad, and it passed through Philippa's mind that she would call Mrs. Kirkham's attention to the fact, for it might be unwise to place such implements in his hands. He had only lately returned to the place after spending some weeks in persistent seclusion at his cottage up in the hills.

At this moment a man's figure appeared in the distance coming up the field-path which led down to the little town and the station from the White House. It was Mr. Handley, who had taken an afternoon train from Meeshaw, to spend this last evening with his *fiancée* before she returned to London. She watched him pass through the iron gate and enter the shrubbery walk from the farther end, where the winter's gales and frosts had smitten the laurel hedge and reduced it to a ruin. Somebody else had seen him too, and her attention was suddenly attracted by Eli's extraordinary movements. His gaunt figure was bowed almost double; he was creeping stealthily but rapidly along one side of the

hedge, grasping his sickle in both hands, and keeping pace with the unconscious figure which was advancing on the other. Presently, where the laurels came to an end and another path led away at a right angle up to the drive, they would meet.

Something in the old man's sinister action flashed a sudden fear into Philippa's mind. She ran out of the house and across the lawn as fast as her feet would carry her, calling loudly, as she went, first to the gardener, who might be within hearing, and then to Eli himself. He had just arrived at the place where the hedge ended, but the sound of her voice startled him and he turned with his tool upraised. The tone of it had startled somebody else too, who came crashing through some sparse boughs and over the railings without waiting to reach the gate. Eli flew at him with a shout of rage, and in an instant the astounded potter found himself struggling with a lunatic, who was making desperate attempts to hack at his head.

The noise brought the gardener and his subordinates running from the conservatories at the side of the house, and Mrs. Kirkham appeared too from another quarter, to behold a sight which filled her with horror and amazement. It had all happened in a moment, and before anybody could reach him William had already mastered the madman, whose frenzy was no match for his cool head and the scientific methods which he had practised to some purpose in his youth. Finding himself overpowered, the old man dropped his arms and became quite passive, while looking wildly round about him and talking incoherently. He allowed himself to be led away quietly by the gardeners, while Mr. Handley

straightened his collar and coat, which had become considerably disarranged in the struggle.

"Can you tell me, Nell, how that homicidal old lunatic comes to be stalking abroad in your garden? I have been maintaining him, as I supposed, in America all this time. He came home, and I had him shipped back there again, or thought I had, only this winter. How on earth did he come here?"

"Oh, William!" sobbed Mrs. Kirkham, becoming quite hysterical now the danger was past; "to think that I should have been the means of bringing you in contact with a murderer. I thought he was quite harmless! He turned up at his old cottage; we found him starving there, and for the sake of old days I gave him work here. He asked me not to tell you, but I never thought —I only believed he was afraid of your being angry. Oh, to think of this!" She became speechless with woe.

"There, don't, Nell! pray don't! It's all right. As if I could ever be in danger from that decrepit old imbecile!" ejaculated Mr. Handley, patting her on the arm, and thinking within himself how infinitely he preferred fighting to tears.

Phil had said nothing, though she trembled from head to foot. "Why, it was I who found Eli and told Nell about him," she exclaimed now, in an awestruck voice.

"What possessed him to attack you, who have always been so generous to him?" ejaculated Mrs. Kirkham, recovering herself a little.

"I could have told you, if I had known he was about, that he was very keen about doing me some sort

of damage. He went off his head years ago, partly from drink. Finally at some revivalist meeting he found grace, which seems to have added to his old jealousy and detestation of me."

"But how could that be? How very shocking!"

"How very mad, rather!"

"Shall you prosecute him?" asked Mrs. Kirkham anxiously.

"Of course not. How could I prosecute a lunatic?"

"Well, then, he must be shut up in the asylum as soon as possible. It is not safe for him to be at large any more after this. I know the doctor there; he will tell us what steps to take. I will send the garden boy at once with a note."

"No," said Mr. Handley, barring the way as she turned to hurry off to the house; "there is no occasion to do that, Nell."

"No occasion to shut up a dangerous lunatic who has made an attempt on your life?"

"At least one," he said in frowning reflection. "Now I come to think of it, I believe this may explain the mystery of the drawn bolts in the trap, through which poor Eliza fell. I never could find out anything about that, except that it could only have been done a few minutes before, and that a strange old man had been seen hanging about the place. Poor girl, it was bad luck for her!"

"Well, then, how can you hesitate about getting him shut up in the asylum here, at once?"

"Not here, I think. I know a better plan, too, than the asylum. He will be quite harmless if he is taken out of reach of me. I know of an old soldier, a

local preacher, too, in a remote village in the South, who will be delighted to take charge of him for a consideration, and will see to it that he does not get away again."

"But he may, as he did before."

"He can't without money, and he won't have any; besides, he will be quite happy there and won't want to."

Mrs. Kirkham shook her head more than once as they walked back to the house. She could not imagine why William would not choose the safer and simpler course of sending him to the local asylum, which was barely a mile away. But he remained quite obstinate about it, and turned a deaf ear to all her unanswerable arguments.

Eli was by nature a loquacious person, and the subjects of his ramblings were not always judiciously chosen.

Next day Philippa went back to London to wait until her marriage at the little house where all was so changed. After that she would return to the North Country in a different character, to make a stay of quite indefinite length there.

CHAPTER XV.

On one of the hillsides, rather less than halfway up the steep slope of the Cheshire border ridge, looking down on the railway and out over the plain, stood a small gabled house to which a studio had been added on the north side. The view from all the other windows was wonderful; it stretched from the Staffordshire Cloud on the left to the faint outline of the Welsh hills and an occasional gleam, said to be on a far-off river, in the other direction. Not far away in the plain below, on the rising ground across the railway, rose the clustering roofs and chimneys of the White House and its dependencies, set in the midst of the wooded pastures, stretching away on all sides. But the house on the hill stood in an isolated position, and the incessant aggravated rains of the wettest and cloudiest part of England converted its breezy solitude into black desolation at times, for one at least of its inhabitants.

Mrs. William Handley had lived here now for quite a long while. This was indeed the third October whose gales and waterspouts she had watched beating themselves against the windows with untiring fury and the noise of a great artillery engagement. The house had been an old farm, and had been cleverly adapted to modern needs under Mr. Handley's auspices at the time of their marriage, when it suddenly fell vacant in the

summer following Mrs. Jordan's death. Philippa had fallen in love with the old-world air of the place, and its isolated situation had been reckoned among its advantages at the time of long days and bright gardens. But now the mistress of it found the question of whether she preferred her neighbours' room to their company a matter requiring further consideration, as she leaned her elbows on a window-sill and watched the streams chasing one another down the panes, while she idly flourished the paint-brush in her hand and added further patches to a much-stained blouse of blue linen such as French workmen wear.

She was wondering dreamily what was going on in all the other studios that she knew of, and how many of the fraternity of painters were able to go on producing good things out of their inner consciousness, removed from all the delightful atmosphere of "shop" and one another's comradeship. It was months since she had seen anybody else's work than her own, and it was not possible to blind even herself to the fact that her own had gone steadily backwards rather than forwards, ever since her portrait of Mrs. Kirkham's little girl had been so well spoken of, when it appeared in the New Gallery after her marriage. These and kindred reflections had been growing for some time past in the mind of the artist, who had to spend most of her days alone, while William was far away at the pottery from morning till night.

Other changes, too, had helped to make Philippa feel the complete severance between the old life and the new. The little brown house amongst the trees on Campden Hill had passed into other hands, and was

now the home of a commercial gentleman with a small business and an increasing family. Mr. Jordan lived in a far more aristocratic region, and his wife provided him with dinners at least as satisfactory in quality as the one for which he had been unconsciously indebted to his present son-in-law on a former occasion.

It was more than a year since he had made Lady Victoria a happy woman and himself a thoroughly comfortable man. His marriage had given his daughter as little satisfaction as hers had occasioned to him. She continued to find her stepmother the most irritating person in the world, but Lady Victoria did not cease to fire off continually a profusion of unwelcome plans and arrangements for her husband's daughter, regardless of the fact that all of them were rebuffed and set aside. Her good temper was as inveterate as her habit of meddling; and since she had a wholesome awe of her husband, who relegated her organisation of his affairs to domestic matters, she tried to expend some of her superfluous energy on the Handleys, with the best possible motives and the greatest conceivable absence of tact.

For this reason and from a certain soreness of feeling seldom acknowledged even to herself, arising from the spectacle of her father's complacent absorption in new ties and complete detachment from old ones, Philippa only occasionally paid a brief visit to Cadogan Square, in response to many invitations. Cadogan Square had been considered a kind of handsome neutral ground in which the union of genius and aristocratic descent might find a suitable dwelling-place, less conventionally

"smart" than the Grosvenor Square region, yet less remote and Bohemian than Chelsea. It was far enough, at anyrate, from Cheshire; and so low had Mrs. Handley been brought by many weeks of bad weather, solitary days and unsuccessful work, that she was absolutely wondering that afternoon, as she stared out of the window, whether she would not for once fall in with Lady Victoria's last plan, and "come up for a few days to see the brat" (a newly arrived stepsister), though nothing should induce her further consent to sell at Lady Victoria's stall at a fashionable bazaar. There was another plan in her mind, however, of a more extensive kind, one which she had long hesitated about broaching to her husband from many mixed motives; but she was now sure that the moment had arrived when her art demanded some personal sacrifice at her hands, also at his. The difficulties of Mr. Handley's business had not grown less since his marriage, and though, to tell the truth, he rather enjoyed the struggle with contending powers, it necessitated his close and continual attention, and he could rarely take a holiday, far less afford to spend part of the year in London, as he promised to do as soon as he had accumulated sufficient capital to feel some confidence about the future.

In one sense Philippa Jordan's marriage was a success beyond all the expectations of her friends and enemies. Her happiness with her husband was complete; her feeling for him deepened year by year. It was the violent change of the circumstances and surroundings of her existence which was her trouble, and also the fact that she felt her artistic powers slipping

away from her, as those abilities which are below the highest and above the feeblest kinds are apt to do under the influence of unfavourable conditions. Possibly her arm, which was thought to have been cured by Sir William Marston's treatment, had lost something of that steadiness and sureness of poise upon which her brush-work so greatly depended. The sad suspicion that her gifts might after all only be of a second-rate order filled the artist's soul with a dumb but cruel anxiety to prove it false.

The door opened in the midst of her depressing reflections, and Miss Alberta put her head through it, crowned with a fearsome bonnet.

"Why, Mrs. William, are you here and like that in the afternoon!" pointing with consternation to the paint-stained smock and disordered hair. "And there is Mr. Byrne in the drawing-room, come with me to call upon you."

The visitor in question was a pompous and vulgar man, who had grown rich by a series of speculations, not more questionable, perhaps, than those which have raised more agreeable persons to social eminence, but apt to recall themselves to the memory of those who suffered under the blatant self-satisfaction and religious brag of the very stout and highly-coloured Christian, whose hair refused to lie flat on his head. Mrs. Handley groaned aloud at the sound of his name.

"Do go and tell him I am dead, Alberta; nothing less will dislodge him!"

"Nay, Mrs. William, that I cannot do. I will never speak an untruth for you or anybody else. Most people would be glad if Mr. Byrne took the trouble to come

and see them. He has a most beautiful house of his own, and he is rebuilding Little Bethel Chapel at his own expense, with everything about it most handsome."

"Well, I wish he would stop there, then, and get a handsome new soul made to match. Heigh-ho! I suppose I must go. What a bore!"

"Mrs. William!" exclaimed her sister-in-law in accents of consternation, laying a detaining clutch on her shoulder as she was passing out of the door; "you are never going to receive company like that?"

"Oh, ah! I forgot my pinafore"; tearing it off.

"But your hair!" whispered Alberta, with agony, as she opened the drawing-room door.

The hasty adjustment of a hairpin and a stray lock was all, however, that was attempted, and Miss Handley sighed like a furnace as she followed William's incorrigible wife into the room. But Mr. Byrne, who had fallen a corrupt victim to Philippa's charms even while his conscience impelled him to testify to her want of Gospel, and general levity, saw nothing amiss in the fine wavy mass which adorned a shapely little head and pretty white forehead.

He was considerably startled half an hour later, when his hostess darted up from her duties at the tea-tray and threw her arms round the neck of a massive figure, with a face flushed scarlet by wind and rain, now advancing into the room.

"Oh, you angel! What a surprise! How did you get here?"

The angel was a good deal out of breath, and panted while returning Mrs. Handley's salute.

"Dear child!" he said, in a wonderfully soft voice, and held her hand while he looked round the room, blinking at the lamplight, to see if he recognised any friends.

It was impossible not to be reminded by Mr. Morris just then of the good Beast who won Beauty's heart in the fairy story, and many another along with it. His huge ungainly form, pathetic eyes, gentle manner and deprecatory affection, all recalled the Prince who was so unfortunately disguised, but whose virtues nevertheless triumphed over his uncomely proportions.

Mr. Byrne stiffly returned his greeting, and soon departed, carrying off Miss Alberta with him in his carriage.

"Tell me, now, how you got here, just as I was preparing to hang myself on the blind-string with crossness and boredom," said his hostess, sitting down on the hearthrug in front of him, and propping her chin on her hands as she looked up at him with bright eyes.

Mr. Morris, ensconced in a wicker chair which creaked and groaned beneath him, sat drinking his tea with an air of gloomy abstraction, unlike his usual genial and childlike cheerfulness. He smiled for a moment at Philippa, whom he adored as his own child; indeed, both as Will's wife and for her own sake too, she entirely filled this position in his mind. To Mr. Morris, at anyrate, their marriage had brought all the pleasure which it had failed to arouse in Mr. Jordan.

"What a good thing I was in time, bad child! I came down suddenly to talk over some business with Will." He passed his hand over his forehead, now furrowed with many lines, and sighed. "He sent me on

here, and told me I should find a little friend at home, whose days were rather long and dull."

"Now, what is it?" asked Phil, coming to sit nearer his feet. "You've got a trouble somewhere about you, Daddy; take it out and show it me directly!"

"How did you know, child?" with great surprise. "No; let us forget my business bothers. Nothing will do me so much good as to spend a few hours with you and Will, away from all cares."

"Forget them, by all means—it is a good plan with all troubles; but just tell me first, please."

"It is nothing, Phil; only money matters, that is."

"Money!" she exclaimed with astonishment, for she had always known in a vague way that he was well off, and that he gave away a large proportion of his income, while living very comfortably, though not in a luxurious manner.

"Yes, money! Isn't it stupid at my time of life to go making speculations, and bad ones too? I have got rid of it nearly all, I am afraid, except just a few hundreds a year, perhaps four, or at most five."

Philippa considered, while she laid her hand on his.

"You have such simple tastes and no vices, except buying pictures, and you really haven't a corner left for any more. It might be worse, Daddy. I don't think you will be very uncomfortable on that."

"I don't care anything about that; it isn't for myself I mind," groaned Mr. Morris, raising himself ponderously from his chair and beginning to tramp backwards and forwards between the window and the door, his hands clasped behind him and his head bowed. "But think

of all my people whom I have planted out in Uruguay —the settlement is not self-supporting yet, far from it, indeed; and then there is a technical school, and two men's clubs, and a hundred other things and persons at home. I suppose I have managed badly, but I have never been able to do them all under four thousand a year, sometimes more. Until now, I have always had nearly six thousand a year to spend."

"It is certain that other people will have to look after them; you have plenty of well-to-do friends both in and out of the community. What is more, a good many of your paupers will have to begin to look after themselves; and I am not at all sure, dearest Daddy, that that will be quite such a wholesale calamity as you seem to think. You get shockingly taken in as a rule."

He gazed at her with troubled wistful eyes and shook his head again.

"Ah! but even that is not all."

"What more can there be?" she asked softly; perhaps divining what he would say. "It can be nothing to matter really, you know."

He looked down at her; something glistened in his eyes.

"It is my children," he said in a husky voice at last, laying his hand on her shoulder; "my son and my daughter. Senseless blockhead that I am! I thought I was going to do great things for you, and now——" he was obliged to stop.

Philippa stooped down and kissed the big hand she held in both hers before she spoke.

"It is not a bit of good your worrying about that,"

she said, "and never would have been; not if you had made millions. Will never would have allowed you to give him any more; he can earn quite as much as we want. So if you had made ever such a fortune instead of losing one, you would have been just as sorry, because you would not have been allowed to squander it on us, anyway."

But Mr. Morris was not to be consoled. "Nonsense, nonsense, child!" he groaned, wiping his forehead. "It is no use even talking about it now. But this was a special affair. Will could not have refused it as he does everything else; it would have been something quite extra and apart from the rest. I was so anxious that he should go into Parliament, and that you should spend part of the year in London. I know he cannot do it as things are, so I should have made all straight if the affair had gone as it ought to have done. He could not have refused to gratify my dearest wish. And now I can't even leave behind what would have made all easy for you. How could I have been such an old fool!"

His self-reproach and anguish overpowered him. It was difficult to measure the force of the blow which had shattered all his cherished projects for his adopted children, and laid waste the many benevolent schemes which had been the occupation of his life, and, it is to be feared, in part the demoralisation of many others ever since he had grown to man's estate. Mr. Morris did a great deal of good with his money, but as he was physically incapable of disbelieving anybody, there is no doubt he did a great deal of harm too.

Phil allowed him to pour out his woes until he was

somewhat appeased. When Mr. Handley opened his drawing-room door a couple of hours later, he smiled, well pleased to see Mr. Morris absorbed with delight in Phil's spirited performance of a discourse by Mr. Byrne, their late visitor, an achievement she had brought to great perfection.

She broke off to run and welcome her husband in the usual way by pulling his hair while she kissed his chin.

In the company of the two people he loved best in the world, Mr. Morris spent an evening which was, after all, only occasionally chequered by the sudden remembrance of his unfathomable woe.

CHAPTER XVI.

"COME now and show me some immortal works," said Mr. Morris next morning, after he and his host had smoked a leisurely cigarette or two together on the terrace in front of the house. They had talked late into the night after Phil had gone up to bed, but their vigils had had the unusual effect of making one of the faces, at anyrate, look decidedly younger and less care-worn than it had done the evening before. Mr. Handley thought the future of that unfortunate investment by no means hopeless, and Mr. Morris, who had great faith in the soundness of his judgment, began to take a less gloomy view of the ordering of human affairs in consequence. It was somebody else's turn now to sound the depths of such an attack of depression as more robust temperaments scarcely experience under any stress of trouble.

Phil watched him with a sombre expression as he went about the studio turning round many unfinished studies, which stood with their faces to the wall in forlorn abandonment. On the easel was a portrait more nearly completed, but this had just been decorated by the artist, in a fit of rage, with cross-bars of bright cobalt dashed through the face which would not "come right." One or two specimens of her former work hung

on the walls, and one of them was a striking head of her husband, painted just after their marriage.

"Why don't you finish some of them, child?" asked Mr. Morris, when his survey was complete. "And what does this mean?" pointing to the defaced canvas on the easel with anxious perplexity. His taste in pictures had not marched with the times; it stopped short at the fashion of the school to which Philippa belonged. For a moment he wondered whether bars of bright blue across a human countenance was the latest decree of the New English Art Club.

"It means," she cried tragically, "that I can't paint any more. It means I have forgotten all I ever knew, here in this desert, and that I am done for as an artist if I stay on!"

Mr. Morris came to a standstill in front of her, alarm, dismay, and astonishment depicted on his countenance.

But Philippa's face was now buried in the cushions of the chair, and only the brown wavy mass of her fine hair was visible. He was greatly relieved when at last she lifted up a woebegone face, and fixed her dark eyes, charged with tragedy, on his own. Their black lashes were wet, but at anyrate she could speak.

"Little Phil, what is it? Is it your arm that makes all the trouble?"

"No, indeed!" with a despairing gesture of the small hands, "it is far worse than that; it's *me,*" with an immense sigh.

She looked so pretty and forlorn and ridiculously childish, with tear-marks on the warm ivory of her cheeks, and her red lips trembling a little, that a far

less tender-hearted man than Mr. Morris would have been moved to sympathy. But he still failed to grasp the reason of this great trouble, or else it seemed to him impossible that it should not have some greater cause than the one she gave. As he searched for one, a sudden momentary fear flickered across his mind, the injustice of which he of course recognised immediately.

"Phil!" he exclaimed, laying his hand on her shoulder and speaking in quite a hoarse voice; "it isn't, it can't be Will who makes you unhappy?"

This extravagant suggestion had an excellent effect, however.

"Daddy!" she exclaimed, starting up indignantly and dashing the straying hair out of her eyes; "how can you think of such idiotic things? Will, indeed! Why, it is just because I can't bear to think about leaving Will that I am so miserable."

Mr. Morris gave a sigh of relief, but if his spirit was lightened his perplexity was not.

"Leave Will, my dear! What are you talking about? Why should you leave Will?"

"Because I must!" cried Phil, turning on him excitedly. "Because I was born an artist, and I owe a duty to my art. Here I am losing it all. Soon I shall have no more painting left in me, and I have no right to let it go. I must paint, Daddy, it is my duty; and I must go and get it back again. I must go to Paris for some time, and work away and get to feel things right and see them again. Here I am losing everything. My colour even is going all wrong, and I have no one to help me. No doubt it is a weakness in me, but there

it is. I can't paint alone, far away from all the others, and I have no right not to paint. A few months in Paris would put me straight again for a long time, I daresay. But if you want any proof that I can do nothing here, look there, and there, and there!" pointing excitedly to the canvases he had turned to the light.

"They are not finished, certainly," said the bewildered man, passing his hand through his fine white locks. "But if you worked at them, Phil, I am sure several of them would turn out just as well as ever."

"They wouldn't and I couldn't!" she exclaimed vehemently. "Ah! you don't know what it is to be made like that; to know there is something you have got to do and could do, and to feel it slipping away from you. I don't know how it is with other kinds of art, but painting pulls you—it has got to be done. If I could only see other people doing good work and hear them talk about it! Even the smell of the turpentine in Merlin's studio would bring it all back. There is art in the air over there, I believe; one breathes it in. But I shall have to go away all alone, and leave Will for months and months. He has got to be here. It is a terrible sacrifice to make!"

"But, my dearest child, you cannot possibly leave your husband and your home, and go away alone back to those horrid places and people. As you say, Will must not leave his business at present. But you can't seriously think of doing what you say?"

For the first time there was real vexation and disapproval in his face as he looked down at the little figure, gazing darkly before her with tragic eyes and the renunciation of the martyr in her face.

"But I do! I must! It is my duty, whatever it costs me, to leave Will and go away for the winter."

Her husband had entered the room unperceived and stood behind her as she spoke.

"Well, when do you want to go, Phil?" he now asked in his usual calm and matter-of-fact manner.

It struck like cold water on their heated mood, and naturally a little steam went up.

"Oh, Will!" she cried, throwing her arms round his neck and bursting into tears.

"Come, dear, come; there is no need for so much distress. If you must go, you must; so let us talk it over quietly."

His arm was round her and he spoke much as one does to an excited child; but Mr. Morris, watching them with continued amazement, noticed that he had turned very pale. It struck him that Philippa's plans might not be quite so great a surprise to her husband as to himself; he also decided, with much relief, that his own presence was no longer necessary, and made his way cautiously out of the room. Outside on the terrace he wiped a heated brow, and puzzled himself still further with meditating on some very old conundrums concerning the nature of women, on which far cleverer persons than Mr. Morris have failed to shed any new light. But he was guiltily conscious of a new and tangible sensation of thankfulness that he himself was not a married man.

It was not so very long before Mr. Handley joined him, for it was never the potter's habit to talk at great length where he felt deeply.

After the manner of her sex, Phil no sooner found

that she was to have her own way without any opposition than she was seized with a decidedly remorseful mood, and discovered that she would be deterred by many scruples which had scarcely occurred to her until now. Her husband set them quietly aside many times over while he was explaining to her the comfortable conditions under which alone she was to spend the winter in Paris with his consent. The arrangements he proposed were so well thought out, it was difficult to believe that the plan was quite new to him; indeed, it would have been far stranger if any idea which had taken such possession of her mind for a long time past had remained unknown to him, even if she had not exactly explained it in so many words before.

If Mr. Handley's affections were few and not very articulate, they were certainly concentrated. Nell doubted sometimes whether Philippa had any plumb-line deep enough to sound them; but there she did Phil an injustice, she would scarcely have been human if she had not. Nevertheless, Mrs. Handley at last began to get almost vexed at the way in which her husband passed over without remark her many tearful protestations that she should never be able to make up her mind to leave him, and so forth.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed; "how hateful it all is! But I don't believe you really mind as much as I do, Will."

"Don't you?" was all he said, but it was enough to put a stop to further remonstrances and to make her wonder whether even her "art" was not dear at this price.

"We must find some nice people for you to live

with, in a good house, where you will have proper meals. I can't have you going back to your bachelor haunts, Mrs. Handley. There must be no more dinners at two-penny-halfpenny *crêmeries,* where the students have been known to throw bread-pellets." He shook his head at her as he spoke.

"They only did once," she answered in a very small voice. "I went straight home without my *déjeuner.* It was horrible, Will! I cried when I got in."

"It was so horrible," said her husband, frowning, "that it must never be possible for such a thing to happen again. No *crêmeries,* mind, Phil! You will have to promise that; and one other thing, too. Another promise, a very serious one."

"Well, my lord?" seeing that he paused.

"I don't know that it is even necessary to mention it, after all; you would always do the right thing, in my eyes, anyway. I don't even like referring to the hound," he said, getting up and thrusting his hands into his pockets.

"You mean Ashley Duke?"

He nodded.

"After what you told me, you would not be likely to let the blackguardly scoundrel venture to speak to you if you come across him over there."

"I don't think you need take him so seriously as all that, Will. Nobody ever does. Of course, he is a toad; and I was desperately angry and upset about him that time before we were married, and should never talk to him again as I did before. But he is hardly worth the fuss of a dead cut; they would all notice it so over there."

"They would have a good deal more to notice if you did not cut him dead, I can answer for that," replied her husband, striding angrily about the room. "Good heavens, Phil! you can't mean that you would think of allowing that scoundrel to claim any acquaintance whatever with you, after insulting you as he did. I have longed to meet him ever since you told me about it, for the pleasure of kicking him downstairs."

"He is hardly big enough. I shouldn't if I were you. I can trample on him without any help. You can't think how useful he is for painting purposes, though."

"You are not talking seriously, Phil, but I am. I can't joke about that cad. It is fully understood, isn't it, that if you ever meet him again, you cut him dead, and refuse to have any sort of acquaintance with him at all?"

He stood in front of her with a face which had compelled submission from many an unruly spirit before now, though he forced himself to speak in a quiet, deliberate voice.

Phil regarded him with artistic admiration.

"How impressive you are, Will! I shall have to paint you like that when I come home again."

"Promise!" he said insistently, though trying to smile.

"Oh, I promise! What a bother it will be, though! Don't!" hastily seeing his face darken again. "Don't look like that. I tell you I promise, honour bright, to walk past Ashley Duke with my chin as high in the air as even you could desire, in future."

"That is all right then," said her husband. "We

will now consider the Duke incident closed. The animal's existence need never trouble us again for the rest of our lives."

"Well?" inquired Mr. Morris in his soft voice, when his adopted son came out to join him on the terrace. Then as Will struck a match moodily, without answering, he exclaimed, "Of course, you can't dream of letting the dear child go off alone into that bear-garden again?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Will, do you call that wise?"

"What else can I do?"

"Refuse," murmured Mr. Morris basely and treacherously, after he had looked all round to see there was nobody within hearing.

"I can't," said the potter, drawing in his breath.

"She loves you, my boy," said the older man gently. "What should she want to go away for?"

"Boredom here. She wants something to do, and she is too much alone."

"Ah! Women's nerves! What a calamity they are to the world!" reflected Mr. Morris with a sigh.

"They are."

"What a pity she has not got a baby to occupy her!"

Will nodded.

Meanwhile, the artist indoors was weeping over the sacrifice she was preparing to offer to her gods. What would she have said if she had heard how it was regarded by these two bad men?

CHAPTER XVII.

So Philippa went to Paris and took up her abode in the house of a French professor of large celebrity and small means, who added to his slender salary by taking in pupils, or as in this case, a boarder. The shabby old house in the quiet byway, not very far from the Collège de France, was the scene of many interesting gatherings on Madame's Friday evenings, when illustrious scholars and pilgrims would often gather together from all parts of the world and talk their best in the low fusty rooms with the shabby furniture, over modest glasses of *sirop* or a rare and occasional *"Ponche."*

Philippa was greatly interested by the life that was led in that house. The daily cares, the difficult struggle, might so easily have offered a sordid spectacle, yet no such suggestion could ever have connected itself with the grey-haired dignity of the mistress of the home, any more than with the excitable and absent-minded gentleman who could with such difficulty be wiled from his studies to attend to his material needs. But he never complained of having so often to abandon the researches which were to illumine the dark places of certain Oriental literatures, in order to teach stolid British youths French grammar, for by so doing his own sons were enabled to finish their education, and he could offer Madame an

occasional little *sortie,* which was certainly as hardly earned by her as by himself.

To combine a consuming scholarly ardour and a great reputation with dire poverty, and to remain unspotted from all bitterness, discontent or heartburning, is probably an achievement even more difficult than the acquisition of a profound acquaintanceship with Oriental lore. At anyrate, it was in this light that the home life of the Professor and his family struck Mrs. Handley, and it contrasted strangely with the continual ferment of personal ambitions, claims, jealousies, egotisms, enthusiasms and detestations of the youthful and restless world into which she had plunged back after several years' absence. Her own contemporaries and seniors had mostly moved on or away out of the old circle, where the clamorous, the self-seeking, the crude, and the extravagant seemed to her to predominate in a manner she had never noticed before in the old days, when she too was young and wholly inexperienced and perfectly positive. At first the freshness, the enthusiasm, the exclusive interest in the *métier,* had proved as stimulating and invigorating as she had hoped, and the first few weeks of her stay in Paris realised all that she had looked forward to. Her painting took a fresh impetus, she regained her old vigour and certainty. She was welcomed back on all sides, and the veterans of her art, the leaders whom she most of all admired, themselves offered help and counsels which she would not have ventured to ask for.

A couple of months of hard work and hard talking and gaiety went by. Through it all ran the consciousness of something which had not existed for Philippa in

former days here, any more than it did now for so many of her companions. Gradually she became more and more aware how completely that something had changed the face of the world. As more weeks grew into fresh months, a sense of strange isolation and longing grew more and more prominent, and turned into a persistent ache. The exclusive enveloping affection which had been always with her for the last three years left a void which became horribly painful, and which Will's frequent but brief, terse letters only served to mark the more. The attitude of many of her friends and comrades towards the things which had taken place in her life, and in particular her marriage, had amused her at first, then it began to jar upon her, soon it became exasperating. That her marriage was a joke, a caprice infinitely amusing and characteristic, was the general opinion; that it contained no elements of seriousness—except perhaps for "the bourgeois"—and that it was done with; a momentary divagation from the serious part of her career as a painter; was the attitude of more than one of the artists with whose work she had most sympathy, as well as of most of the young feather-heads of both sexes whose opinions on such subjects had certainly no value at all.

Philippa's peculiar reserve prevented her from attempting to correct such suggestions; in fact, the more she became aware of a false position towards the world about her, the less it was possible for her to reveal the smallest corner of her real feelings. She only answered with laughter, which still further confirmed the general opinion that the unknown husband had retired into obscurity again, and counted for little in her existence.

Here and there, of course, a more mature or more interested individual suspected the soundness of this view; but Philippa was not inclined to make any confidences in Paris, even to those who, under different circumstances, might have been treated with less reserve. So she missed Will more every day, and, as usual, at last even her painting began to show again some decided signs of a preoccupied mind.

But at last, in answer to urgent and repeated invitations, he wrote to say he found he should really be able to run away after stock-taking was over, and he hoped to be with her before the end of January. He had not thought it worth mentioning how long and dreary his round of daily work, unbroken by any companionship or relaxation, had seemed without her. He had let the house on the hill above Oldcross, and had taken up his abode in a dark cottage close to the pottery, where he spent very long days; for what was there to come home to in the evenings? But the determination to struggle through and make his business very profitable again, in spite of almost overwhelming odds, was not without its compensations, and certainly told upon the balance-sheets. It was not until their results proved that the fight was not by any means hopeless that Will, flushed with a foretaste of victory, allowed himself a reward, and prepared to join his wife for a brief holiday.

When he wrote to announce this joyful prospect, he mentioned another piece of news at the same time.

"Old Morsehead is ill, and has given out that he won't stand again here. They have been at me to take his place. I told them, as before, that I could not afford it. This morning Byrne came on

behalf of the Conservative Association to say that the whole of the expenses had been privately guaranteed on condition that I would stand. They do not believe I should be opposed, and Morsehead says he will hold on, in spite of bad health, till the Government goes out, if he can. Probably that will not be for another two years, barring accidents. What shall I say? I have given no answer yet. I have pledged them to say nothing to anybody till I do, for I thought you ought to be the first to know. I think I can guess what you would like, and I believe in two years' time I might be justified in doing it. I think I am getting the place on its legs again. This stock-taking was better than last, and the next one ought to show the full effect of my new plans. In two years the thing ought to be going so that a good manager could carry it on while I was away. I could always run down for a night once a week. I don't know who is going to find the money for the election expenses; it is to remain a secret for the present, but there are several rich men about here who would pay not to have to stand themselves. We will talk it all over when I come. I have lots of things to say to a little woman who has a way of leaving a very big gap behind when she is not there."

Phil performed a war dance on reading this letter, thereby greatly startling an artist friend, a middle-aged bachelor woman of pronounced opinions, who had an enthusiastic admiration for the clever pretty creature, such as solitary spinsters sometimes expend so lavishly on other women. Phil had forgotten her presence while reading the letter, and Miss Waterton rose to her feet with a grim expression of countenance. Her previous suspicions were now to be quite confirmed.

"Business or nonsense?" she asked sternly, buttoning up her coat. "You seem to be pleased, anyway."

"I am," admitted Mrs. Handley, blushing as she remembered her presence.

"Has somebody given you a commission, or have you got the Prix de Rome?"

"Neither. It is only that—well, I think someone, my husband, in fact—may be coming over for a few days."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Miss Waterton bitterly. "You might as well pack up and go right back home to your domestic fireside. You will never do any good here again. I knew your head was just stuffed with nonsense, really, and I'm sorry, for you might have been a decent painter; and I'm idiotic enough to care about it, you little torment." She stalked out of the room and tramped noisily down the stairs; but Mrs. Handley hardly heard what she said, and did not notice her departure as she stood lost in joyful meditation.

That evening she received a letter from Mrs. Kirkham also. To tell the truth, the relations between them had been decidedly strained ever since Phil's abandonment of her domestic hearth to follow after false gods abroad had been announced. Such a step had seemed to Nell's simple mind incomprehensible and shocking. Like many another woman of our race in whose veins runs the Puritan blood, life to her meant duty. Happiness was a combination of love and duty reserved for the few extraordinarily blessed ones of the earth. Philippa was chosen to be one of these, and here she was deliberately turning her back upon her priceless heritage! At first Nell could hardly believe it. Afterwards, while refusing to join in any of the outspoken comments and criticisms of Miss Alberta and her neighbours, she attempted once to remonstrate with William's wife, and having discharged this duty and only succeeded in making Phil lose her temper, she held aloof from her. Her letters had consisted only of a few lines sent twice when William

had suffered from influenza, and she relented so far as to inform Philippa that he was recovering; for Nell was soft-hearted, even when convinced that she did well to be angry.

Her present communication was puzzling; it took so much for granted, and it was written on the same day as the one Phil had received from William saying that he had told nobody about the affair.

"DEAR PHILIPPA. What a good thing it is that William's way is now made clear for him about standing for Parliament. His friends have long wished to see him there. I hear that Mr. Morsehead is much worse, and that he will certainly have to retire very soon. So there is no time to be lost, for I happen to know the seat will be contested in spite of what people may say here. William has been looking thin and worn lately, but he is sure to pick up now that he will get you back. I am afraid he does not look after himself at all. You will enjoy the excitement of electioneering, and are no doubt busy preparing to leave, so I will not write more."

"She seems to know a great deal more than anybody else," thought Phil, frowning as she twisted the letter between her fingers. "Will said he should tell nobody. Who told her? Those *vieux respectables* on the committee, I suppose, or was it the people who are going to pay? Who is it really that wants to pay Will's parliamentary expenses?"

A possible answer to this question flashed into her mind at the same moment; it fitted into all the rest too neatly to be readily dismissed, but it did not at all please Mrs. Handley, and she walked about the room restlessly, looking worried and cross.

The next morning was bitterly cold. A thin, cruel wind raked the streets and sent storms of dust to sting

the cheeks of the passers-by, together with a flutter of torn papers, straws, and all the moraine collected about the stream of the city traffic. Philippa looked out of her sitting-room window after breakfast and shuddered at the sight of pinched noses and blue lips as they hurried past below, while she laid down her cloak and determined to warm her feet for ten minutes more before starting forth to her labours at a distant studio.

She had scarcely settled herself so as to gratify these promptings of the flesh, when a loud knock and simultaneous opening of the door brought Rosalie, the much-occupied *bonne à tout faire,* dashing into the room after her usual headlong fashion. She threw down a telegram and announced a visitor for Madame, a gentleman. Supposing it to be some fellow-worker, Mrs. Handley told her to show him up, rejoicing at the thought of a further respite from going out in the wind. Rosalie disappeared, and she opened the telegram, it was from her husband.

"Morsehead dead—Seat contested—Campaign begun—Cannot leave here—William."

She had just been reckoning with delight that only ten days now remained to the date fixed for his arrival and stood absorbed in the surprise and disappointment, when the door opened and her visitor entered unannounced. He came forward smiling as blandly as usual, but there was a gleam of suppressed excitement in his pale eyes, and the plump hand he held out trembled slightly under the heavy cuff of a magnificent sable-lined coat.

"This is nice, Phil! But why have I only just found

you out as I am on my way to the Gare du Nord, homeward bound again?"

She was greatly startled at the sight of him; lately she had altogether forgotten the disagreeable possibility of meeting him, which had at times made her feel uncomfortable at first, since she was committed to a serious, dignified quarrel and decisive measures, to both of which Phil had a constitutional dislike. She was quite taken aback now, for it had not occurred to her that he would actually track her to her rooms without invitation, after the manner of their last parting three years ago.

Finding that his greeting and outstretched hand met with no response, Mr. Duke put his hat down composedly and unfastened his fur coat. His head had grown balder, his round hairless cheeks showed patches of ugly colour where the wind had caught them. He was decidedly stouter than three years ago. There was a look of confidence and even of suppressed amusement about him as he surveyed Philippa from under his heavy eyelids, which had the welcome effect of exasperating her to instantaneous anger.

"If you had sent up your name, Mr. Duke, I might have saved you the trouble of coming up here now, or at any other time."

Phil's little head was erect, her air was stately, and it was very becoming to her.

"Come, come, Phil! You can't want to quarrel with me. Why on earth should you?" observed her visitor genially, as he walked to the fire and began warming his hands composedly; only a slight twitching of certain muscles in his face betrayed any sign of agitation.

Phil did not move from the place where she stood.

"I do not want to quarrel with you. I merely wish to point out to you that our acquaintance ended the last time we met, and that I have no intention of renewing it."

Mr. Duke gave a disagreeable little laugh, the dull colour thickened in his cheeks.

"Oh, is that it? So these are the orders of the great Handley. Well, so be it then. But who would have believed that you would ever come to swallow such nonsense, and throw over an old friend? What harm have I ever done you? Might it not even be said that you owed something to my small services? In virtue of them you can hardly refuse, Mrs. Handley (emphasising the name), to exchange a few words with me before I depart."

"I have nothing to say to you," answered Philippa, taking up her hat and cloak from the chair close by. "I am going out. Good-bye, Mr. Duke; after this we are strangers."

"I am sorry," said Ashley, nimbly stepping between her and the door; "but you will really have to endure my presence and listen to me for a few minutes."

"Are these the methods you usually employ to force your acquaintance upon those who have no desire for it? They do you credit," exclaimed Philippa, white with anger, and speaking with bitter contempt in her voice.

"It is no manner of use your getting angry, Phil," said Mr. Duke still in suave accents, though he kept an attentive eye on her face. "And, of course, I know it's not you yourself. Really, you couldn't go on bearing

malice for a minute's madness of mine ever so long ago. But you threw yourself into the ranks of the Philistine *bourgeois,* and you are still trying to keep up the farce. It is no good; if one wanted any further evidence of the absurdity of it, wouldn't the fact that you are back here alone among the paint-pots be enough? You can't stand the life up there, you never will."

He leaned with his back against the door while he talked. But when Philippa now stepped to the bell which hung near it, so did he, and their eyes met.

"You had better hear what I have got to say," he said, with a change of tone. "It is for your own sake I urge it."

"Nothing that you can have to say can possibly concern me."

"Perhaps not; but it concerns somebody whom you have chosen to identify yourself with pretty nearly, and I am here to give him a chance. Perhaps you may believe how much I wish you well, when I tell you what I am prepared to do for your sake. If you won't listen now," continued Mr. Duke, taking the bell-cord in his hand, so that she could not pull it, and speaking with unusual emphasis, "I will go away at once; but I shall go to address my remarks to a large meeting of my constituents at Meeshaw, where I oppose your husband in the Radical interest. Had you not better hear what I shall otherwise tell them about him? You may have no suspicion what it is; if not, I warn you, Phil, it is a pretty serious matter, about as serious as it could be for Handley. You are not a fool. Is it likely I should

threaten him with public exposure if I could not prove my facts?"

She stood motionless, her face scornful as before, but involuntarily her eyes, which had defied his until now, dropped, and the hand which had rested lightly on the table, now grasped the edge of it so tightly that the knuckles whitened. Nothing was lost on Mr. Duke; he seated himself before the fire, feeling sure that she would not run away yet. His eagerness was very thinly concealed now, but he was making a great effort to preserve a show of coolness.

"You know something," he said, still watching her. "Not all perhaps, yet. Nothing when you married him, or you could not have done it. It will be very hard for me if I have to be the first to deal you the blow though; for it must be a blow, even though you have left your husband, to find he is——"

"I have not left my husband!" she cried, her anger flaming out uncontrollably at last. "So far from having left him, I go back to-morrow to Meeshaw to help him by every means in my power to win the election. Not that my help is needed; his character is too well known there for anyone matched against him to have a chance."

"Ah!" said Ashley Duke, with a little smile which filled Philippa with murderous impulses, slowly drawing his gloves through his hand, "I should not do that, Mrs. Handley, if I were in your place. But I accept your amendment, for the moment. You have not, you say, left your husband in the ordinary meaning of the words. You intend going back to him. Personally, I think such an intention does you honour, though some people might

take a different view. I must ask you, however, to put off your journey home for a time; until after the election, in fact. If you give me your word that you will do this, I give you mine to spare Handley. You treat me worse than a dog, Phil"—his voice changed a little—"but, like a fool that I am, I am ready to shelter this man from his deserts for your sake."

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" said Philippa, feeling with despair that her very lips were turning white. "How dare you suggest any such promise to me? You hint at extraordinary accusations against my husband. Unless you have courage to explain yourself you must leave this room at once. I have little time to prepare for my journey to-morrow."

"I would rather have spared you," he said, speaking very deliberately, his eyes fixed on her face; "I don't know how much, or, rather, how little, you know, but you make it impossible for me not to speak." He hesitated, cleared his throat, and began again: "You know, at anyrate, that your husband grew up in a sphere of life very different from the one in which you met him. I daresay he was not really rougher or more violent than many other Pottery youths like himself, but he had a temper, and he had a quarrel—with unfortunate consequences. Need I go on, Phil?"

"Go on, if you like," she cried, holding herself resolutely erect, though the room was sliding about her, "but it shall be to my husband himself, if you dare to repeat your abominable accusations when you are not alone with a woman."

"By Jove!" he cried, for once carried out of himself beyond all other considerations with rage, "you shall

have it then, the whole truth. Do you know that husband of yours kicked a man to death years ago, before he ran off to America, where Morris picked him out of the gutter? And the man he killed was your own brother!"

"I knew that you were a coward and a liar," said Phil, whose nerve had suddenly returned to her at the moment of her need. "I did not know that you were stupid, too. Does it not occur to you that there are—consequences—to a man who brings such accusations against another without a shadow of proof?"

"You are right in one respect, though not complimentary, Mrs. Handley. I am not a fool, except where you are concerned. I have a witness who was present on the occasion of your brother's death. Your husband has been to a great deal of trouble and expense to keep him out of England, but he has not succeeded in doing so. He is in his native land, and his name is Eli Grimwade." Philippa managed to laugh scornfully. She held herself together as in a vice.

"Your witness matches your case! I know him well, an old pensioner of my husband's. Will has been charitable to him for years because they worked together formerly at the pottery. You can know very little about Eli if you do not know that he lost his wits years ago, and is a hopeless lunatic with a homicidal mania that breaks out at times. He has twice attempted my husband's life when it seized him. What a witness to bring in support of such a charge!"

"Oh, I am aware that Eli's unsupported testimony would scarcely be complete evidence, though he is less

often mad now than he used to be, and his story is always perfectly clear and coherent, but he possesses a document. I wonder Handley never succeeded in getting hold of it, for it is quite enough in itself to condemn him. I suppose he did not know anything about it, though; for your brother wrote it when he was dying in Meeshaw Infirmary and gave it to Eli to give to Handley. Evidently that letter was not delivered. Cuthbert knew perfectly well how he came by his death, and hoped his murderer would meet with his deserts. Have you nothing to say now, Phil?"

She shook her head scornfully. "I congratulate you on your melodrama. It is a new departure; a little risky though, is it not? Had you not better produce your document? Do you imagine that I or anybody else will take it on faith?"

She felt that her nerves would not play her false now.

"Whether I produce that document or not depends on you, Phil," he said slowly, coming up to her and fixing his eyes upon her face. "You are the bravest woman I have ever met, and, as usual, I lose all strength of mind and all right perceptions where you and your tranquillity are in question."

She laughed bitterly at his words, but he really meant what he said for the moment. He held up his hand.

"Stay! for your own sake don't drive me mad with anger again, but listen. For your sake I am ready to suppress this infamous business now, and to let your husband go on posing as a respectable, law-abiding

citizen; to make myself an accessory after the fact, in short, on the condition that I stated just now."

He paused, but she remained silent.

"It's a silly condition, only a sentimental fool like myself would make it. Phil, look here; don't you understand? All you've got to do to save your husband is to stay here and get on with your painting, and leave us to fight it out alone at Meeshaw. It's no good; I can't stand having you working against me down there—for that fellow! I can't answer for myself if I meet you at every turn fighting me—for him. So long as you keep out of it altogether and take no part in the whole affair, I will keep quiet about this bad business; but remember your crossing the Channel or taking any part at all in the election even from here will be the signal for me to do my duty, and stop sheltering a criminal from the law."

Philippa scarcely breathed. It seemed to her that there was no word or movement which would not betray her, and that even the silence seemed in itself to constitute an admission. She took up her hat again and put it on with fingers which would tremble in spite of herself, threw her cloak over her shoulders, and went to the door as if the room were empty of that malign and watchful presence.

"Good-bye, then, Mrs. Handley," said Ashley, biting his lips. "I hope the rest of your winter here will be pleasant and profitable. Phil!" following her as she vanished out of the door, "you can't leave me like this! Think what I am doing for you! think what it is in my power to do! Do you understand I have a letter which

would convict your husband of something uncommonly like murder?"

She stopped on the landing and half-turned.

"If you have it produce it."

"I don't mean that I have got it here with me."

"I thought not!"

She turned away again.

"But I can obtain it at any moment. I know where it is to be had."

She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"Once more; don't defy me, Phil. I am not your enemy. I am doing violence to my conscience to serve you. I do not even ask for your decision, though I know what it cannot fail to be. If you want to know where to find me, I shall be at the Wynch from to-morrow until the election is over."

But she was already vanishing round the corner of the stairs, making her way out of the house away from him as fast as her trembling limbs would carry her. Unconscious of the cutting wind and the sleet storm, she walked for a couple of hours hither and thither, up the Champs Elysées, down the Avenue Montaigne, along the river, heedless of what direction she took in the tumult of her spirit. But her place at the studio up on Montmartre remained unoccupied all that day.

Her uninvited guest stayed behind her for a minute or two before he descended to the cab which was waiting to take him to the station. His eyes travelled slowly and observantly round the little sitting-room where she spent so much of her time, and rested

greedily on some of the trivial personal tokens which were scattered about it.

Some photographs lay on the table; they were copies of a new one which Phil had just had taken of herself to send to her husband. He caught them up and examined them closely, made his choice, and went away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was a source of bitter regret to Lord South Molton that the accident of his birth and early succession to the peerage prevented him from carrying out his cherished dream of fighting the Meeshaw election himself as a Radical candidate. As a great landlord he knew his influence would be widely felt, and he intended to employ it in quite the opposite direction to the political principles which had so far been associated with his house.

He was a young man of eager spirit, more easily roused to enthusiasm than qualified to judge of the merits of the cause which possessed him wholly for the time being. The late Marquis, a staunch Conservative by conviction, and a man of sound and sober judgment, disliked most of his son's vehement and erratic crusades, but none quite so much as the democratic and socialistic frenzy which overtook him when he left Oxford. He hoped his heir would have time to outgrow these noxious ideas before he was in a position to do much harm by them; but this was not the case. The father died suddenly at fifty, and his son found himself placed out of reach of his desired goal, the House of Commons, at the age of twenty-five.

He looked about him for someone to take his place and represent his own particular views in the con-

stituency which so largely consisted of his property, and he found Ashley Duke. A certain amount of well-directed talk, and some very judicious handling soon placed the Marquis entirely in the hands of this astute gentleman. Lord South Molton eagerly placed himself at Mr. Duke's disposal when the campaign opened, and the Wynch became the Radical candidate's headquarters, office and hotel, where the only bills presented were those sent in by the guest to his landlord. Mr. Duke's first step had been to expel from it, by the exercise of a little audacity, a number of unworthy persons whom he looked upon as poachers on his own preserves. Lord South Molton was apt to make friends in haste whom he often had cause to repent at leisure. He had not succeeded in freeing himself quite so thoroughly as many people supposed from all the traditions of his early training. He would still rebel suddenly after enduring a good deal of vulgar impertinence and blatant self-seeking pretentiousness, when driven too hard by those who had thought it would be easy to make use of him for their own ends, and Mr. Duke appeared on the scene just at a moment when the worm was ready to turn. His cool head and imperturbable self-possession soon rescued Lord South Molton from his social difficulties, and filled that young man with gratitude and admiration. He was ready to do anything for his new friend, who understood perfectly how to deal with him. Mr. Morsehead's seat could not have fallen vacant at a more opportune moment for Ashley Duke, who, to tell the truth, had been cautiously directing his little bark towards this desired haven for a long while past.

And so democracy and socialism at Meeshaw were supported by an hereditary landed proprietor and found their representative in the person of an expensive-looking individual, understood to be a journalist, with a smooth manner and a glib tongue. Whereas Mr. Handley, the working potter's son, and formerly an oven boy at the Swan Pottery, represented all the sober established interests of the country, and carried the sympathy of all Lord South Molton's family in the county along with him as well as those of so many of his fellow townsmen.

He was standing one morning in his dreary little office at the Works holding some letters in his hand, and meditating over them with that forbidding expression which his face always assumed when in repose.

One was from his wife's stepmother, and was written in a stout, school-girlish hand.

"DEAR MR. HANDLEY. (They had never advanced beyond this point in spite of mutual liking and respect.) "South Molton has always been a kind of lunatic, and now I think he is quite off his head. It is too bad of him to turn the old place into just the sort of bear-garden my father would have detested more than anything. I knew he would get some horrible Radical down as he could not stand himself, but I did not really think it would be as bad as this. I think it really is low of him, for he knows quite well how we all hate Ashley Duke. It is so awkward for you. I am very surprised and sorry about it. Tell Phil the bore for me is that I can't come and help her canvass and join in everything she is doing. I should love to, but, of course, it wouldn't do in Meeshaw, against my own brother practically. I suppose she has come home now the fight has begun? Please give her my love, and tell her I only hope you will give South Molton and his man Friday a thorough good beating."

The other was from Phil, a few incoherent, almost

illegible lines, expressive of little but strong agitation on the part of the writer. It was a curious fact that Phil was always paralysed by her pen. She was almost incapable of expressing herself with it, although she had been accustomed all her life to living in a literary atmosphere, where writing of all kinds was the common occupation. Her paint-brushes might reveal something of the real woman; her written words, with the meagre, difficult phrases, rather obscured her from view.

"DEAR DARLING WILL,—You must come, whatever happens. I can't come to you. It is so important. I can't explain in writing; it would not do, but I simply must see you. You must spare the time; this matters more than anything else. Mind you come.—PHIL."

Mr. Handley was a good deal perplexed by this epistle, but the more he considered it the more there grew up in his mind a real root of bitterness. He had scarcely known till now, himself, how confidently he had expected his wife to come back directly and stand beside him while he fought his battle. For, after all, why had he thrown all considerations of prudence to the winds and accepted this thing, except to please Phil; and, if the whole truth were known, to bring her home again? His sober jugdment told him that he was not justified in going into Parliament for many years to come; until his business should be so firmly re-established as to run no very great risk by being left in other hands for so many months out of the year. But life without Phil was unendurable, and he was fully convinced that she would never, under the most

favourable circumstances, settle down in Meeshaw again without some other outlet for a great part of her time. Therefore, he had flung wisdom to the winds, and behold it had not availed to bring her back to him. What was this talk about her not being able to come? It could only mean some infatuated nonsense or other about her painting; indeed, it meant more. No doubt of her real affection for him had ever before risen in his mind; the pain of it now made him want to go out and knock down a house or fight somebody. To remonstrate with Philippa was the last thing that occurred to him. William Handley had the misfortune to be one of those men (fortunately there are not very many of them) who had nowhere about him any trace of that necessary feminine fibre which occasionally enables most men to know instinctively when they may gain much by asserting themselves domineeringly, dogmatically, and illogically. Only a certain number of women are purely and exclusively feminine by nature; still fewer men are purely male. The satisfactory human being is always compounded of both in certain proportions. Being what he was, the potter could not help always taking a woman at her word, which was a pity, and in this case doubly so, for he believed her word to be that she did not want to come home, and that though she would like to see him, she would rather he risked the chances of his election than leave Paris and return to Meeshaw.

He was, therefore, in no amiable mood when Mrs. Kirkham appeared in the doorway after knocking twice in vain. He had not even heard her, and he wanted to be let alone now.

"Oh, there you are, William! Good-morning. I have just come from the Conservative club to try and find you. Mr. Byrne and several other people have been waiting there for you for the last hour. There are a good many important questions to be decided at once. They don't think the new posters which came down from London this morning will do here at all. Then they declare you ought to have an extra meeting to-night, and there is something else, too. Can't you come now? Are you well, William?" with a sudden, anxious change of tone as he turned towards her.

"Well? Of course I am well," surlily. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"You looked tired, I thought," she said in a deprecating voice.

"I'm not, though, if I look it," giving himself a shake. "I can't be expected to appear perfectly fresh after bellowing at the top of my voice for the greater part of every evening and afternoon in that abominable dusty oven of a Corn Exchange, or still worse, the Town Hall, both packed with idiots."

"Oh, what charming photographs of Phil!" cried Mrs. Kirkham, suddenly perceiving them on the table and picking them up. "I hope she will arrive in time for your great meeting on Saturday. She has never heard you speak in public yet, has she?"

"It is a privilege that will keep, I think."

"But surely," with round-eyed wonder, "surely she is coming home at once, isn't she?"

"Why on earth should she?" very gruffly. "We had better not waste any more time talking here. "Do

you see my stick anywhere? Confound that fool, Silas, he always hides it somewhere."

Mrs. Kirkham went straight to the corner where it usually stood and brought it to him. With raised eyebrows and her lips pressed together she silently performed one or two other little services, collected and tied up necessary papers, gathered together letters for post, and handed him his cigar case. This ordinarily mild and even-tempered woman could have known no greater satisfaction just now than to take William's stick and lay it about the shoulders of his truant wife, after which she would have lain down in his path as usual for him to walk over her.

"Come on," said William, buttoning his coat, "there must be no more dawdling, Nell."

She suddenly laid a detaining hand upon his sleeve.

"Oh! come, Nell! I've lost too much time already."

"Only a minute, William. There is something I am afraid I must ask you before we go," she said timidly, almost entreatingly.

"Well?" he answered, relenting, and trying to speak good-humouredly. "What is it? Don't look as if I should eat you."

"It is not for myself," she said hurriedly. "But oh, William, dear! the committee have just been saying they do wish you would manage to be just a little more —well, just a little polite to the other candidate, at any-rate in public, it would make a much better impression. They think it does harm when you are seen to walk by him in the street, looking straight past his head as if

he wasn't there; or as if he was a nasty sight you did not want to see."

There was an abrupt explosion like a laugh from William, but it was not a merry one, and she went on without heeding it.

"He took off his hat, and would have spoken to you in the market-place the other day, but you would not notice him. People are beginning to talk about it; they don't like it. The best of them think a fight of this kind ought not to be made personal. It really is a pity."

She talked with nervous fluency, for his looks only grew blacker. When she stopped there was an awkward silence. At last he broke it in a hard, slow voice.

"The committee must remember that they invited me to fight this election, and I shall fight it, in my own way. What is more, I shall win it. They did not ask me to show civility to that hound, and I will not. To ignore him is the utmost I can do in that direction. Before I take his hand, or take off my hat to him, he will feel my fist in his face. I quite admit it is a misfortune on public grounds that my opponent should happen to be a person whom, for private reasons, I cannot consent to treat with the civility I should otherwise wish to show to the other side. It certainly is a pity, but I can do nothing to remedy that."

"You are wrong, Will, you are wrong!" exclaimed the genial voice of Mr. Morris, whose bulky person now advanced through the open door. "You have no right,

dear lad, to carry a private grudge in public matters to the injury of the cause you represent."

"Wrong or right," declared the potter in his harshest voice, "I can't help it. I have a better chance of keeping that damned scoundrel out of the seat than anybody else who might take my place, so I'll stick to it; but be civil to him I will not!" He emphasised his determination with a heavy knock of his stick on the floor, and signed to Mrs. Kirkham to pass out before him.

She sighed as she obeyed him, and Mr. Morris lumbered after them, his face drawn into many worried creases. They all proceeded to the committee room, where they left the intractable candidate in the hands of his supporters, whose errand they had performed with such poor success.

Armed with electioneering literature, Mr. Morris and Mrs. Kirkham then walked away together to disseminate their tracts and leaflets.

"Do you know what this quarrel is, between William and Mr. Duke?" asked she, as they climbed a steep street.

"My dear lady," gasped her companion, seizing the opportunity of standing still for a moment, "I was just going to ask you that. I knew Will never cared much about him when they used to meet pretty often in London long ago; but this is something new, something must have happened since then. It is a most deplorable chance that Duke, of all men, should have been brought down here to oppose him. Elections are al-

ways demoralising enough, but this stirring up of bad blood by personal vindictive feeling is dreadful; its influence is already perceptible everywhere here," lamented the good man.

Personal quarrels and vindictive feelings pained him quite unspeakably, more particularly on the part of those to whom he was attached; they caused him almost physical discomfort. He had a habit of making allowances and discovering good qualities in the most offensive persons; and this was a trial sometimes to other ordinary human creatures.

"I know Will never liked Mr. Duke," said Mrs. Kirkham thoughtfully. "But he was not exactly uncivil to him at my house in the old days. The last time they met there was shortly before William's engagement; I noticed nothing marked then. Whatever it is must have happened since, as you say."

On their way back to the committee-room they fell in with the Radical candidate. He advanced towards them, half smothered in his sable-lined coat, hand in hand with one small ruffian, and followed by a train of others several degrees more grimy still; but he was smiling heroically at them and at the mothers who watched him from open doors with faces admiring or cynical as the case might be.

Mr. Duke let go of the black little paw, took off his glove and shook hands effusively with Mrs. Kirkham and her companion. They returned his greetings with great cordiality, being determined to show that the Conservative candidate's supporters acknowledged no personal quarrel with his opponent.

"Ah! Mrs. Kirkham! how hard it is that we should be in opposite camps!" he exclaimed in his most mellifluous accents, speaking from the tip of his tongue. "I tremble in my shoes when I see you going about, and Morris too! But I bear no malice (with the slightest possible emphasis on the pronoun) and I will be generous enough to spare you the rest of the climb. Someone else has been there before you, for I have been confronted with these patriotic effusions you are carrying in every cottage up here this morning. So let us proclaim an armistice and enjoy a little stroll together, while we forget all about these brutes for a time," waving his hand towards his recent companions in the background. "And now for a little rational conversation for a change," he continued, as they all three walked away together. "Ouf! isn't it a disgusting experience? Does not electioneering teach one to loathe one's fellow-man, especially the recently enfranchised fellow-man! Confound him!"

"Indeed, no!" protested Mrs. Kirkham in a scandalised voice. "If you really think so, Mr. Duke, how can you advocate such democratic doctrines?"

"Ah! how nice that is, now! How nice!" with a patronising wave of the hand, which made her feel as if she had said something wonderfully foolish. "If only everyone could be as sincere and direct as yourself, Mrs. Kirkham, what a different world it would be!"

They chatted as they walked, about matters remote from the struggle in which they were all engaged, until

they reached the market-place, where they paused to take friendly leave of one another in full view of as many of the crowd of buyers and sellers as possible.

"By the way, Paris certainly agrees with Mrs. Handley," said Mr. Duke with a little drawl, as he leaned on his silver-headed stick. "She was looking wonderfully well and charming when I saw her two or three days ago."

"What! have you seen her in Paris?" exclaimed both his companions together.

"Yes, certainly," he replied, with an amused smile which showed all the gold decorations in his teeth.

"Well, we shall see her too, back here directly, I hope," said Mr. Morris easily.

"Really! Has she announced her return to Meeshaw, then? She was decidedly doubtful about it when I saw her the other day."

"We expect her at the end of the week," announced Mrs. Kirkham with a decision that surprised herself. There was something in his manner which impelled her to let him know that William's wife was returning to fight his battle with him as a matter of course.

"Are you quite positive of that, Mrs. Kirkham? Is it absolutely settled?" he persisted in a more eager and animated manner than usual. Then, noticing the shade of displeasure in her face, he added, more lightly, "Just think what it must mean to me, if I am to have both you and Mrs. Handley arrayed against me here!"

"I am perfectly positive that Mrs. Handley is return-

ing at once," affirmed this usually upright woman, stoutly subduing the inward qualm of her protesting conscience by assuring herself that she would justify her words, if she had to go and bring Philippa back herself by main force.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Duke, falling into a brown study and studying the buttons on his boots. But he roused himself almost immediately. "What do you think of these, by the way! I suppose you must have got them by this time? Charming, are they not, as photographs go?"

He produced from a leather case from his pocket and exhibited the two photographs of Philippa which her husband had received from her that morning. The sight of them in the hands of the man to whom William refused the commonest forms of civility, startled both Mrs. Kirkham and Mr. Morris.

"Did she give them to you?" asked Helena, with an audible gasp.

A curious smile curled Mr. Duke's mobile lips.

"Why, of course, my dear lady. How else could I have come by them?" he answered suavely.

"Liar!" exclaimed a deep voice suddenly behind her.

Helena and Mr. Morris both uttered a flurried exclamation. Mr. Duke alone betrayed no astonishment at the sight of Philippa's husband standing before him. He smiled again, though a little unsteadily, as he raised his hat in mocking salutation. Mr. Morris's large person by chance or otherwise, was interposed between them as he turned. There was only the slightest perceptible

pause before Mr. Duke continued, with a small shrug of the shoulders:

"Well, I will say good-day, Mrs. Kirkham, since I leave you in such good company. I must go and prepare for the platform, to which I confine all my fighting. I prefer to do my quarrelling openly and before the public. I am prepared to answer any questions and give all information in the same place, having nothing to conceal."

He spoke the last words with emphasis as he raised his hat again and turned away.

The potter, who had watched him with his lips compressed into a thin straight line, took a step towards him and raised his stick. Some of the people standing by the nearest stalls watched them curiously. Mrs. Kirkham darted in front of Mr. Handley and laid her hand firmly on his arm.

"Not here, William!" she said, in a quiet, steady voice. "There must be no scene—for your wife's sake."

He hesitated, remained standing as he was for a minute, and then turning on his heel, walked slowly away in the opposite direction to that taken by his adversary.

"Has Will taken leave of his senses?" gasped Mr. Morris, taking out his handkerchief to wipe away the perspiration which had broken out upon his forehead.

"Has his wife taken leave of any conscience she ever had, had you not better ask?" retorted his companion, with scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes. Then

she, too, departed, leaving an elderly and much agitated gentleman standing all alone on the pavement, with no sympathetic ear to receive his overflowing soul. It was the first time that nice woman, Helena Kirkham, had failed Mr. Morris in his hour of need, and that she should speak in such a way about dear Phil was truly astonishing and lamentable.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FORTNIGHT later Phil was wandering round and round her little salon, a prey to the intolerable fits of restlessness which overtook her now every day with increasing severity as the hour for the English evening letters drew near. Long before it was reasonable to listen for the postman's footsteps, she would begin opening her window continually and putting her head out into the winter's night, straining her eyes to follow the light of the gas-lamp just below as far as possible down the street. And every evening so far, her fever of suspense ended in the cold chill of disappointment, for no letter came from her husband, and her repeated appeals to him to join her were only answered by one brief telegram after another saying that it was impossible. It is true Mrs. Kirkham had written urging the necessity for her immediate return in good set terms, but Philippa only tossed her mandates impatiently aside, together with the pathetic entreaties of Mr. Morris. What did they know of this nightmare which encompassed her? Every night she vowed to herself that she would go home in spite of it, but the thought of possible consequences assumed more appalling dimensions in her mind each day, and the vision of Ashley Duke's clay-coloured face and venomous eyes rose before her, barring the way as effectively as did a more sanctified apparition

armed with a flaming sword in the days of the Prophet Balaam.

In fact Philippa's nerves began to be entirely demoralised by the strain of that vague terror borne in solitude, without anyone to comfort and advise her, with the growing conviction that her husband was alienated from her. Exactly what the consequences might be if Ashley Duke kept his word and brought forward his accusation, she could not tell. She feared everything, and sometimes she lay awake till morning trying to devise some plan for gaining possession of that incriminating letter written by her dead brother. Without it the madman's evidence could not really count for much, his wandering wits were too obviously irresponsible. The longer she thought about it the more convinced she felt that he had not as yet parted with the letter, and that Ashley Duke would have some difficulty in obtaining it. She knew how suspicious and guarded Eli became when any attempt was made to obtain information from him, and how secretive were his ways with regard to his self-imposed mission of vengeance. Where could he be now? She had written to beg her husband to ascertain whether the old man was still in the home which had been found for him, and to institute a cautious search for him if he had left it; above all things, to be on his guard against any possible future attempts against him by the madman. But these suggestions, like all the others she had lately made, met with no reply. She began to wonder how long it would be before she went mad herself if this state of things continued.

On this particular evening the figure in uniform did

stop at the door to hand something to Rosalie. Philippa rushed down, like a whirlwind, to receive two newspapers—again no letter from Will. She could hardly help crying with disappointment and bewilderment as she subsided limply into one of her stiff Empire chairs. How was she to put an end to this intolerable situation?

She snatched one of the papers and tore the cover off, it was the Meeshaw Conservative organ. At anyrate she could read about her husband's recent doings here. An article headed "Stabs in the Back," in capital letters, attracted her attention. It was an indignant protest against certain methods which it seemed had lately been adopted by the opposite side, a system of scandalous attacks on the reputation of the Conservative candidate. Dark rumours had apparently been circulated during the last few days, by whom it was so far impossible to discover; they connected the honoured name of Mr. Handley with evil doings in the past hitherto unheard of, they did not stop short of an accusation of a brutal crime. If any such charges were to be brought forward, let the person or persons from whom they emanated do so frankly and openly that Mr. Handley might have the opportunity of meeting and repelling them. Such dastardly attempts to blacken—and so forth, through a column of righteous indignation.

Philippa's eyes dilated with horror as she read, and every drop of blood fled from her cheeks. But the next minute she tossed away the paper and sprang to her feet, her way had suddenly grown clearer. "He's done it!" she said to herself, "how could I ever imagine he would keep his word, idiot that I was? Now I can

go home, at anyrate." She rang the bell and called at the same time excitedly for Rosalie and her trunks.

"Go and tell Madame that I have to leave for England by the first service to-morrow morning," she cried as soon as the stalwart form appeared.

"Ah! that is right," said a familiar voice from behind Rosalie. Phil felt no surprise when Mr. Morris advanced into the room; she was too excited to think about it.

"I came to fetch you, child. We have been wanting you terribly all this time."

"Has Will?" she asked, looking eagerly up in his face.

"Has Will!" echoed Mr. Morris, shaking his head reproachfully. "Oh, my dear! come and see. Why have you waited so long?"

"I am coming now, this minute. We can catch the night train, can't we?"

"No, of course not. Are you in such a hurry, Phil, after all?" with much astonishment. "Why, I came to fetch you because I thought we should never get you back if you were not carried off by main force."

"Oh, did you? I wonder how you would have liked to be tied by the leg all alone in one place when you were dying to be in another, and had only dreadful things to think about, and no letters, no anything! Perhaps you would be in a hurry if you had been through what I have!" she exclaimed, incoherent with excitement and agitation.

"But Phil!" remonstrated Mr. Morris in his kind voice, putting his arm round the quivering little shoul-

ders, "I don't understand anything about it. I thought you could not bear to leave your painting." She tapped the floor indignantly with one foot, while tears sparkled in her eyes. "Dearest child, dearest little Phil, we had no idea you were in trouble all this time. Tell me, what is it? And why—why, in the name of wonder—did you stay on all alone in such distress, instead of coming back to your own place, your own home?"

But she only put him aside, and dried her eyes hastily without answering. Then she darted off, and began collecting a number of heterogeneous objects from the different shelves and tables, many of which fell on the floor from the sofa on which they were indiscriminately piled, "ready for packing." Mr. Morris rubbed his forehead with the tips of his fingers (his usual trick when in perplexity) while he watched her. But he succeeded in obtaining no further information.

"You had better go now, Daddy," she said. "I am so busy. I will meet you at the Gare du Nord in time for the eight o'clock train to-morrow morning."

He hardly knew what to say. He had expected to encounter a good deal of resistance, and had been prepared to devote a day or two to the task of persuading the truant to come home to her duties. His success surpassed his fondest hopes; indeed, it was a little embarrassing. He had scarcely crossed the threshold before she was ready to return in a moment. It was, of course, most satisfactory; but, to tell the truth, Mr. Morris would have preferred to be a little less precipitate. He had looked forward to taking Phil to *déjeuner*

at his favourite restaurant next morning. He would have greatly liked to see the new piece at the Gymnase. He had endured a horrible crossing, and the storm showed no signs of abating yet. The thought of facing such a sea again to-morrow was not exhilarating to one who suffered a martyrdom on the slightest provocation from the waves. But it was not for Mr. Morris to complain of having accomplished his errand too successfully; he resigned himself heroically to his hard fate, and the travellers returned to their native land next day. When they reached London, however, even Philippa was seized with compunction at the battered state of her unfortunate companion, and, devouring her impatience, proposed sleeping in town instead of pushing on by the night train to the North.

The next day they were rushing through the familiar Midlands, the rain driving against the windows and shutting out the expanse of desolate fields from sight. They travelled almost in silence, for a wonder, each absorbed in his or her preoccupations. But when Rugby had been left behind, Mr. Morris, who had cleared his throat several times lately, and looked nervously towards Philippa as if to attract her attention, suddenly broke into speech.

"Phil—ahem—Phil, my dear!"

She turned her head away from the window out of which she had been gazing for a long while.

"I don't suppose Will has told you about a good deal of annoyance he is going through just now, has he?"

Phil turned her head towards the window again without answering.

"Did you hear, child?" with a most unwonted touch of irritation. Mr. Morris was finding his task a difficult one. She nodded.

"Elections nowadays are a very different matter from what they used to be. There may be less financial corruption, but it seems to me the moral corruption of modern methods is a great deal worse for everybody concerned. Nowadays some candidates stoop to making personal attacks on one another's characters, and a great deal of mud is raked up and thrown. I am sorry to say Mr. Duke and his followers have not abstained from baseness of this kind."

"It would have been odd if Mr. Duke had abstained from any sort of baseness!" she said, sitting upright, her eyes dark with indignation.

"Oh! you think so, too!" exclaimed Mr. Morris, with fresh surprise at her attitude. "Dear me, now, how mistaken I have been about many things, and particularly with regard to that man! I always thought he was such a decent fellow, although he did not particularly attract me."

She laughed bitterly. He looked at her with wonder, and fidgeted with the newspaper before beginning again.

"Phil, do you really mean that you never liked Ashley Duke? It seemed as if you did, somehow or other, to all of us."

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, throwing off her preoccupied air. "What seemed? How could you—any of you—get hold of such an extraordinary idea? *Like* Ashley Duke? Do I like unclean beasts generally?"

Her unmistakable and indignant sincerity brought inexpressible comfort to her old friend, but no solution of various perplexing questions, rather the contrary indeed.

"Then why on earth did you receive visits from him in Paris, and give him your photographs, when Will won't even recognise him in the street? You don't know what trouble it has made," he exclaimed, letting loose the flood-gates of his annoyance at last.

"Give him my photographs!" repeated Phil, with stupefaction. "What are you talking about, Daddy? You can't mean Ashley Duke?"

"But I do, of course I do! He showed them to us on the very day Will himself received them. I am afraid it vexed Will very much. There was quite a painful scene."

Phil stared at him as though she thought he had taken leave of his senses.

"I never gave Ashley Duke any photographs since I was a very young girl. The only time I saw him in Paris was on the morning he left, when he forced himself into the room without warning and made me very angry."

"Then how could he have got hold of the new ones he showed us in the street at Meeshaw a fortnight ago."

Phil put her hand to her head. "Ah!" she cried suddenly, "of course! He must have got hold of those photographs by stealing them! I remember now, they were lying about on the table. How like him!" She clenched her hands with rage at the thought of it. Presently she asked half hesitatingly, "Surely Will did not imagine I had given them to him?"

"What else could he think?" replied Mr. Morris helplessly. "But it will be all right now, Phil, nearly all right, that is, when he has you back."

She was silent. Then, "I suppose Will was very angry, wasn't he, Daddy? It is a good thing he didn't break Ashley Duke's head for him on the spot. How did you prevent him?"

"Well—er—to tell the truth, we were quite afraid he would, for a minute or two, Phil. Fortunately he restrained himself. But Mrs. Kirkham and I had just been sent by the committee to ask him to observe the usual forms of civility towards the other candidate, which he refused to do."

"How like Will!" said Philippa, with a little smile.

"Well, I am afraid it has had a bad effect," continued Mr. Morris, puckering his forehead again. "I was telling you just now that some of his opponents are resorting to the most reprehensible measures. I am afraid, Phil, my dear, it is impossible to conceal from you what will pain you very much. The Radical paper even is helping to insinuate all sorts of dark things about poor Will; some story has been trumped-up about a violent assault he is supposed to have committed, with fatal results, when he was a lad. They are fairly guarded in the newspaper and in speeches, but hint at all sorts of things and the monstrous tale is whispered about, growing every day. I can't bear to tell you, but I should not like you to see it in the papers."

"I have," she cried, leaning her head back against the cushions. "You need not tell me any more, I know all about it."

"My poor child!" he said, taking her hand in his

own, "Don't take it to heart. He will rouse himself and confound all his enemies now you have come back. He has been so apathetic about it; we have all failed to rouse him to the necessity of taking the matter up, and publicly confuting these vile fabrications. He seems to have lost interest in things lately, but he only wants you, my dear, I am sure. The committee are getting desperate; they say it is absolutely necessary he should publicly challenge his enemies to produce their proofs or take the legal consequences. Of course, all his friends and half the town or more know how preposterous such tales must be; but, all the same, when dirt is thrown some of it sticks, and we believe he is losing votes amongst many ignorant and easily influenced people. You must make him take the matter up and allude to it publicly to-morrow night at his great meeting. He need not dwell upon it, but he must not go on ignoring it."

Philippa nodded, but she hardly heard, her brain was busily at work. She felt almost overwhelmed by the dangers and difficulties which beset them; one false step would be irretrievable.

"They grow more impudent every day from not being challenged," continued Mr. Morris. "At first they only referred to the testimony of an old man who used to work with Will at the pottery. But since it became publicly known that he has been out of his mind these ten years, they now speak of some letter or document which he is supposed to possess and which would incriminate Will."

"Who is supposed to have it?" asked Philippa eagerly.

"Why, this old lunatic. Grimwade, I believe his name is," answered Mr. Morris.

"I thought as much!" she cried triumphantly; but she gave no explanation of her mysterious exclamation, and employed most of the rest of the way in planning a difficult and perhaps hazardous experiment. All that Phil held dear in the world was at stake now, and she would flinch from nothing in its defence.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. HANDLEY was quite unaware what travellers were speeding towards him, for Mr. Morris had actually kept his own counsel, at anyrate, so far as his adopted son was concerned, when he started for Paris. Perhaps the Conservative candidate might have exhibited a less darkly forbidding countenance to his supporters and enemies alike, if he had known what the evening would bring forth, when he walked through the town that afternoon, feeling harassed and dejected beyond measure. As it was he wore an unfortunately scowling aspect, of which he was quite unconscious. A small boy was playing marbles across the pavement in front of him, the potter motioned to him with his stick to get out of his way.

"Eh! Harthur. Be off wi' thee, lad! 'Tis 'Andley, and he'll do for tha' if tha' doosna' roon! He's a rare one for catching a mon a crack on th' 'edd!" screamed a facetious imp from the midst of a group in the road.

Then he ran on ahead, and producing a piece of chalk from his pocket, rapidly sketched a rough outline on a blank wall at the end of the street. His companions clustered round him, and all ran away with demon yells of laughter as Mr. Handley, plodding on his deliberate course, came up to the spot where they had been standing. Attracted by the noise, he glanced

at the wall and perceived a rude, but sufficiently graphic outline of a gallows with something hanging from it, beneath which, one of the wags had scrawled "Handley."

At this moment Helena Kirkham came round the corner and stopped beside him; she looked at the wall and burst into tears.

"Nell! why Nell! what can be the matter with you?" ejaculated the potter with an inward groan. Tears, this woman's tears, came as an unexpected addition to a load of trouble which he had considered quite heavy enough for one man's shoulders. What on earth should Nell cry about?

"Come, let us walk on," he suggested lamely, seeing that her agitation had passed beyond her control for the moment and that it had several interested spectators here. "Surely that work of art hardly merits such a tribute."

Helena removed the handkerchief from her eyes and looked round. The artist, thrilled by such an unexpected triumph, had left his hesitating comrades behind, while he crept nearer and nearer to watch the developments of the situation. Mrs. Kirkham caught sight of him in the act of indulging in a graceless pantomime indicative of unhallowed delight. It was the last straw. Her temper, too, had been sorely tried that day. She made a sudden dash at the culprit, seized him by the collar, and before he had recovered from his surprise, boxed both his ears soundly. He wriggled out of her grasp, and ran away howling in a very different key.

Mr. Handley barked a short "Ha! ha!" as she rejoined him, flushed with her exertions.

"Feel better now, Nell, don't you?"

"Oh, William, the world is a bad place! I have lived a long while, but I never discovered it before. Do you know, I am beginning to hate all the people fighting for the other side. It is a bad feeling, isn't it?"

"Catch a few of them and administer the same treatment, and you will soon be in charity with all mankind again."

"Surely, William, you must see now that this horrible affair is no longer a laughing matter?"

He did not answer, and she continued with flurried eagerness.

"You cannot go on ignoring all these shocking lies about you. At the Radical meetings your good name is attacked more directly each time. Indeed, you must put your foot down and stop it; your silence is misinterpreted, you are losing votes, and worse than that even, because you allow these wicked lies to go unanswered. Mr. Duke has been cautious, but his speeches have been full of insinuations and hints about you for the last fortnight. Last night he went further than he has ever done before, and declared that he held written evidence against you which he should shortly deliver over into the proper hands, and then all the world would know whether the Conservative candidate had anything to say for himself. William, this must be stopped. I have been canvassing down about Watergate, and have met this atrocious story everywhere. The committee believe last night's speeches and an article in the *Meeshaw Advertiser* furnish you with amply sufficient

ground for a legal action. They are urgent that you should refer to it to-morrow night. You don't know what ghastly tales they tell about your kicking someone to death when you were a boy."

He still tramped in silence beside her.

"Do you know, William, I am afraid that all this was set about by Mr. Duke himself in the first place."

"Had you ever any doubts about it, Nell?"

"To think that I should ever have been friendly with him, and have entertained such a wretch in my house! And that he should dare to speak to me as he did just now!" Her face grew scarlet again.

"You have not been talking to Duke about it?" demanded Handley, with more energy in his manner than he had yet shown.

"Yes, I have," confessed Mrs. Kirkham reluctantly. "I simply could not believe it was true that he was countenancing, and, indeed, inspiring, the whole thing. I believed he was an honest man and a gentleman."

"What extraordinary mistakes women constantly make on that last head!"

"I felt sure he would wish to put a stop to such disgraceful attempts to gain votes by blackening you if he only understood how far some of his supporters were going, and what sort of man you really are. I knew there was a personal misunderstanding between you, but I thought if I just explained to him that some unprincipled people were taking advantage of it to—you see, I did not know then what he said himself last night—I told him that I had known you all my life, and—then he——"

She stopped, overwhelmed with anger and confusion

at the remembrance of Mr. Duke's insolent and meaning sneer at his opponent's good fortune in having one such devoted advocate.

"Good God! Nell, did you really do that? I would not for the world have had you go to that rascally cad on such an errand. He is not fit for you to associate with, the hound!"

He clenched his fingers on his stick involuntarily.

"He is all you say, Will!" she agreed, turning away that he might not read in her ashamed eyes Mr. Duke's insinuations about her championship of Mr. Handley's cause.

"Did he insult you? Was that why you were so upset just now?" demanded William.

"Oh, never mind! Don't let us talk any more about it. I ought to have known better than to go to him," she cried eagerly.

"What would I give to thrash him within an inch of his wretched life!" said the potter slowly. "I only wish he was three inches higher, and less squashy. It really would be murder if I gave him what he deserves, but I don't believe I shall be able to keep my hands off him next time we meet. The score is too heavy."

"You must! You must!" she pleaded. "I am sorry I said anything. Don't you see any violence from you now would lend colour to what they say, and ruin you. What you have to do is to take up the matter in your speech to-morrow night, and also engage a good solicitor to attend to it legally at once. And," she added in a low voice, "make your wife come home at once, William, for both your sakes."

At this moment a cab loaded with luggage came

round the corner that led to the station, and proceeded down the street in front of them in the direction of Mr. Handley's present quarters. Helena stopped involuntarily for a second and laid her hand on his sleeve.

"Hullo! that must be Morris come back again. He went up to town at the beginning of the week."

Her quick woman's eye had taken instant note of the dress trunks, however.

"Good-bye, William," she said hurriedly, her breath coming quickly. "Good-bye, go on and meet—Mr. Morris."

"All in good time. I will see you into your train first, Nell. You look quite knocked up. You meant to catch the 4.15 to Oldcross, did you not? You have plenty of time. Go home and rest, and try not to bother yourself quite so much. It really is not worth it."

Her lips trembled; she knew that she ought not to detain him now, but she offered no remonstrance. With the conviction that had flashed into her mind at the sight of those boxes, came also for the first time a sense of lawless enjoyment in a pleasure deliberately stolen. For once, just for once, Nell thrust her stern conscience into the background and enjoyed the thought that William's kindness and attention were being bestowed on her instead of on the undeserving wife who was so heedlessly oblivious of everything but her own egotistical and unprincipled amusements. Had not Nell borne all the burden and heat of the day here, though most gladly it is true, for William's sake? Had she not toiled for him and fought for him, incurred now an insult through her efforts on his behalf? she, who had no thought of receiving any other reward than his success, and laid

claim to no gratitude? For once, she had all his attention, and was receiving from him many little kind and thoughtful services, rare enough at his hand, and full of sweetness for poor Nell.

In the midst of his own trouble William was touched by the recollection of the faithful creature's tears and of all the toil and sympathy which they called to mind. Such friendship and loyalty were a possession he was little tempted to undervalue in one of the darkest hours of his life. He waited with her until the train moved out of the station, taking care that she had the carriage to herself, and, indeed, most people would have thought twice before forcing a way into it past him as he stood at the door.

He sent for half the papers on the bookstall, and carefully put up both windows without consulting her. Like most men, he had a well-grounded disapproval of the common feminine love of travelling in a strong draught.

As he walked away from the station that hateful spectre which had entered into his mind and would not be driven out, do what he would, rose up again. Phil's refusal to come home to him, the sight of the photographs he himself had only just received from her in the hands of the man she had promised to have no acquaintance with, had staggered him. He had called Duke a liar, nevertheless it was impossible not to believe it was true that she had received him in Paris and given him her photograph.

In the train of this conviction came a darker one still. By what manner of means had that episode of his youth, known only to himself, his wife, and the mad-

man Eli, come to the knowledge of his enemy, who was working his ruin by the atrociously distorted version of it he had spread abroad? That Duke could have discovered Eli's existence except through Philippa, seemed to Handley impossible. Only three weeks ago the old couple who had charge of the lunatic far away in the South had reported him as leading a peaceable and contented existence. Removed from all familiar surroundings he had had no further violent outbreaks, and had very seldom referred in his wandering talk to Meeshaw and his former life. That Eli and Ashley Duke could have fallen in with one another by mere chance appeared to him to be out of the question. Evidently Phil and her former guide, philosopher, and friend had met on friendly terms in Paris. William remembered how reluctantly she had promised to forswear his acquaintance, but until lately he had never doubted that that promise would be kept. Now he felt sure she had broken it, perhaps for some fancied artistic necessity. Duke was on the alert for every weapon he could find to use against him; giddy Philippa must have let fall something; and this was the result.

Such were the judicious and logical conclusions William had come to after long and bitter meditation. He did not as yet allow his thoughts to dwell on any suspicion of more deliberate betrayal, but this was enough to darken the past, present, and future for him. With regard to other tangible and public consequences which might arise out of the dragging up of that long-past quarrel, he troubled comparatively little, perplexing and even menacing as his situation might be. His mind was too much absorbed in the recently made discovery

that Philippa had broken her word, and was on terms so friendly with the man he refused to acknowledge when he met him. Along with these profitable and cheering reflections came yet another painful question. Throughout the years that had followed on the unwelcome discovery made during Mrs. Jordan's illness, that Cuthbert was the man of whose death he had been the immediate cause, he had never doubted that the decision he had arrived at then had been the right and only sensible one. Convinced of Philippa's love, he had determined then to spare her the superfluous suffering which would arise from this knowledge. She was highly-strung; women were easily upset; it was difficult for them always to rest upon the rational common-sense view of things, even after having accepted its conclusions. That she would agree with him in principle that such a discovery ought not to be allowed to interfere with their marriage, he had felt convinced from his knowledge of the strong and male sense underlying all the vagaries of her imagination. But he thought that she might perhaps suffer sometimes from some over-sensitive scruple, and therefore, hateful as it was to him to conceal anything from her, he had determined to do so rather than inflict such a possibility upon her. Now it was pretty sure to come to her ears; it was even possible that it had done so. Was it pure self-absorption and forgetfulness or not that kept her away?

Much trouble and worry had no doubt warped William Handley's whole mind at this time, and brought to the surface that peculiar temperament which he shared in common with many another offspring of the soil; bitterness, moroseness, and suspicion were in his blood.

Long training and mixing with another world had done much to banish them from the surface and from his consciousness; that which now threatened the absorbing passion of his life had brought out the original elements of his nature again. Every day he told himself that he was worse than a scoundrel to suspect Phil of breaking her word and of any disloyalty, whatever appearances might be; but the shadow always fell again with the undeniable hard fact that she had abandoned him now in his time of trouble.

This dreary and injudicious round of thought, always repeating itself, accompanied him on his walk back to the dark little house he had lived in all these months. He let himself in with the latchkey, and went upstairs, barely noticing the boxes which encumbered the small passage. His usual sitting-room was on the first floor, as being lighter and brighter than the level of the narrow street. When he opened the door there was a joyful cry, the familiar cry, and a rush; before he had clearly realised anything, he was holding his wife in an iron grip, and kissing her roughly, repeatedly, fiercely. Then, to her amazement, he suddenly put her down—for he had lifted her quite off her feet—and went out of the room, without saying a word. She heard him rush downstairs and out into the street, banging the door behind him with a violence that shook the whole house.

She was standing where he left her, petrified with amazement, when Mr. Morris came in. Will had passed him on the doorstep without word or sign of greeting, but the older man had seen his face, and came hurrying upstairs.

"We ought to have let him know, Phil. He has had so much worry, the surprise was too much for him."

Phil looked at him vaguely, without hearing a word he said. She was as white as a ghost.

"Oh!" she exclaimed softly to herself, it sounded like a little moan. "Oh!" She put up her hands to her face.

Mr. Morris prepared himself for tears, but they did not come. With a great sigh Phil sat down on a chair and thought while she abstractedly fingered the braid on her jacket. Presently she spoke quite calmly. "If Will's next big meeting is to-morrow night, Daddy, there is no time to be lost. Steps must be taken at once to crush these hateful stories. Is not Dr. Ridgeway one of his committee?"

"Yes; I think he is the most valuable man on it, really. He has practised at Meeshaw nearly thirty years. He attends so many of the poor for nothing, he has great influence with the working-people all round about."

Philippa seated herself at her husband's writing-table, casting a glance at the mass of papers and letters with which it was littered, and hastily scribbled a few lines. "Please find someone to take this directly to Dr. Ridgeway."

"My dear child, you can do nothing this evening, you must be quite worn out with travelling and worry."

"Not a bit. I have a good deal to do to-night," looking out into the darkening street, as the rain began to drive against the window again.

"You can't go out, anyway," he declared, following her glance.

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Phil, with an almost imperceptible shiver.

"Well, but we are only going to do some accounts and business details at the committee-room. We have no public meeting to-night. Duke is holding one at the Corn Exchange, but----"

"Oh, I am not going to that," she said, with a strange little laugh. "I suppose they go on pretty late, these meetings, don't they?"

"Well, they are generally over about nine or so; but why do you want to know?"

"Nothing, nothing; just curiosity," she said, unable to help smiling at him; but she looked anxious and troubled again a moment afterwards.

A message was brought from the pottery to say that Mr. Handley would be kept out late by important business. He hoped that Mrs. Handley would not wait up for him. Soon afterwards Dr. Ridgeway was shown in. He was a short man, with a big beard which had once been red but which was now grey, his face was bronzed by much exposure to the weather, and his manner was short and rather aggressive. Few people knew the Pottery folks as well as he, after his long experience of them in all the crises of life. He had always had a strong liking and respect for William Handley, and was one of his most vigorous supporters.

"Glad to see you back, Mrs. Handley," he said in the jerky intonation so characteristic of the district. "We could have done with you some time ago. I am sorry you want my services. What is the matter?"

Now this Philippa suddenly found it very difficult to explain. She had rehearsed several methods of

approach to her subject, but they all went out of her head at the sight of him, and she shook hands in silence."

"Come," said the doctor more encouragingly. "Nothing very serious, I hope?"

"Yes it is!" she affirmed suddenly, looking up into his keen grey eyes, and then she stopped again.

"Well?" he asked, more patiently than would have been the case but for those beautiful eyes with their long, black lashes, for he had more work than he knew how to get through that evening.

"Dr. Ridgeway," she said clasping her hands, "I have only just heard that they—the other side—are spreading these stories about Will."

"Oh, I see!" It was the doctor's turn to feel a little awkward now that he found the case was not a professional and therefore simple one.

"I wanted to ask you whether they are really doing him any harm in the town? Surely people don't believe them?"

"People are great fools, I am afraid, as a rule. I am sorry to say it, Mrs. Handley, but it can't be doubted that they are doing him great harm—indeed, I am afraid they may lose him the election if he goes on taking no notice of them. People want to hear him tackle the matter himself—they don't understand his just letting it alone. We like stand-up fights in Meeshaw, you know. Can't you make him say something at the meeting to-morrow night?"

"He shall," said Phillippa quietly.

"That's right," said Dr. Ridgeway more genially than he had yet spoken, for he had shared in the

general indignation amongst Handley's supporters at the absence of his wife. "I was sure you could put it all right if you came back. Don't mind my telling you it was high time you did."

Softened by her manner and a face he thought lovely, he held out his hand with a smile to say good-bye.

"Oh! please wait a minute. I want to know a little about what they are saying. They fix on some particular person, I suppose, for Will to have——" She stopped short.

"Yes, they do; but I only succeeded in identifying his supposed victim yesterday. It is not easy to find the thread of such a tangle of lies."

"You have lived here a long time, Dr. Ridgeway," she said, the colour coming and going in her face; "you have known my husband a great many years, haven't you?"

"I have, indeed," he said warmly; "from the time he was a little lad at the Works. He is a man for his fellow townsmen to be proud of, and so they are. You will see this will come out all straight."

Her eyes brightened at his words, but clouded with anxiety again immediately.

"You say you have identified the—the person. Did you by any chance know him? Can you remember anything about it?"

"Fortunately I can," he said heartily. "There, don't go worrying yourself about him, Mrs. Handley. I was there when he died, and signed the certificate, he had been a patient of mine for some time before that. It was a clear case of rapid pneumonia at the end; it

must have been on him for a day or two before he was brought in drunk as well as ill. But James was a doomed man before that, one of his lungs was nearly gone. I had warned him of it and of his habits several times. He was a hopeless subject in all respects, and I think he had come down in the world. It was your husband who helped to carry him to the Infirmary. I remember all the circumstances, for my curiosity had been rather excited about the fellow, bad lot as he was. I think he must have been a gentleman's son originally, fallen into disgrace and disowned by his family. From something he let fall it was evident he had been at a public school, and there were other curious things about him which will not interest you. I know he had done your husband's family a great wrong, and that young Handley had a score to pay off against him," continued the doctor, going back unconsciously to earlier days as he spoke of Philippa's husband. "There was a talk at the time about a dispute between them, and James had some bruises on him when he was brought in; but they were superficial and unimportant, and whether they really came from his falling down a high bank or from other means I did not think it worth while to inquire. They certainly had nothing to do with his death, and I am ready to swear to that. I could have told your husband so if he had ever allowed me to refer to the subject, but he has shut us all up if we ventured to approach it."

He was surprised by a sudden gasp from his listener, and thinking she was going to faint moved forward to help her, but she recovered herself immediately. The sensation of relief had been almost overwhelming.

"Poor little lady!" said Dr. Ridgeway to himself. "She must have taken it terribly to heart after all. She doesn't look fit for this sort of scrimmage, and Handley was quite right to keep her out of it." Out loud he observed, "You are tired, Mrs. Handley, after your long journey. Go to bed early, and don't trouble about anything till to-morrow. We will put it all straight to-morrow night, and there will be an end of a nasty business. Do you know, they try to make out that James was related to yourself, Mrs. Handley?" looking sharply at her.

"I know," she said; but her head was bent down and he could not see her face. He rose to leave again.

"One minute," said Philippa, detaining him once more and feeling quite inclined to fall upon his neck with gratitude. "I am told they talk about producing some letters written by the—the man who died, which would accuse Will. Do you remember his writing a letter?"

"Yes," said Dr. Ridgeway, frowning a little. "I have been going over all my recollections and notes carefully lately. I do remember James asking me to lend him a pencil and paper next morning. The nurse held him up. We thought he wished to communicate with his friends, and she offered to help him write. I have a clear remembrance of it, because she brought me the letter afterwards, almost crying because she was so shocked at what he had written. She said it was so dreadful for a man to die in such a frame of mind, trying to spite somebody even at the last. I was busy over another case and refused to look at it, as she wanted

me to do, and told her not to bother me any more about such stuff. I expect he tried to make out that Handley had done for him."

"Then they have got hold of that letter."

"No doubt. It is a pity. If only we could kidnap it again!" exclaimed Dr. Ridgeway, beginning to walk up and down the room. "No man's enemies ought to have such a handle against him at an election. It can do him no harm in a court of law if Duke tried that on, but it can do him a great deal in other ways if it is circulated amongst ignorant people. They attach enormous importance to the words of a man on his death-bed—nine-tenths of them would believe implicitly in this letter."

"You don't think it has been made use of as yet, then?"

"No; I am sure it has not, from various inquiries I have made. Besides, I have been told it is still in the possession of that old lunatic, Grimwade, who won't give it up. One of Duke's humbler henchmen got his head broken by one of our chuckers-out at the meeting last night, and told me a good many things while I was binding him up. But how Duke and his friends came across old Eli beats me, I confess. Wonderful and mysterious are the ways of electioneering!"

"They are. We ought to get that letter then, Dr. Ridgeway, before they do."

"Of course we ought. I think it is most important, but I confess I can't see how it is to be done, short of violence, which would defeat our object. I hear Duke has moved heaven and earth to get hold of it, but Eli has hidden it away somewhere and can't be persuaded

to give it up. They are determined to succeed in obtaining it now, by fair means or foul, otherwise they have no evidence, of course. It will be a bad thing if they do find it."

"Really very bad?"

"So bad it might well lose us the seat. The generality of people are such fools, you know. Now good-night, Mrs. Handley. Eat, and also drink, and go to bed early, so as to be fresh for to-morrow. You will need all your strength, you know, for the battle."

"I shall," said Philippa, with a sigh. "Good-night, Dr. Ridgeway, and many, many thanks."

"Now what on earth for?" he demanded, but he looked unusually bland and amiable all the same as he walked away.

CHAPTER XXI.

APPARENTLY nobody's day's work was over yet, and the task that still lay before Philippa weighed on her mind like lead as she stood drubbing on the window-pane, and peering out into the tempestuous darkness of the night. Physical courage was not one of her attributes, but she had enough of another kind to force herself to undertake an adventure which a bolder person might well have considered too difficult and doubtful.

But the stake for which Philippa Handley was playing meant more to her than the gain or loss of a seat in Parliament, more even than the silencing of evil rumours about her husband amongst credulous and ignorant persons. In her excitement and agitation, a conviction had laid hold of her with all the unreasoning force of a superstition. She felt positive that the whole happiness of her married life hung in the balance to-night, and that her errand was not only the securing of an old letter, but of her husband's belief in her and the sweeping away of this shadow which had fallen between them. She felt like the princess of the old fairy-stories who, having lost her happiness, has to go forth into the wide world to find it again, through desperate adventures and by perilous ways.

About half-past six Mr. Morris put his head in at the door, his face lined with fuss and worry. He was convinced, of course, that an immense weight of responsibility rested on his shoulders, and that he had to make all manner of arrangements single-handed in an incredibly short space of time.

"Phil, my child, I shall do my very best to run back and dine with you later; but I have a thousand things to do and people to see. I may not manage it. Don't wait for me. I doubt very much indeed whether I shall get any dinner at all," with panting haste and agitation.

"Don't try and come back. Both you and Will must dine somewhere. Make him go with you to the hotel when your business is over; you will be close by. I shall say good-night now. Don't expect to see me any more till to-morrow morning."

"Quite right! Quite right! Go to bed when you have had something to eat," and he fussed off again.

Philippa's own programme, however, did not exactly correspond to that which had been suggested to her several times this evening. She descended to the stuffy little dining-room, and with a stern sense of duty forced herself to eat something, having with difficulty prevailed upon the sullen black-browed widow woman who waited upon Mr. Handley to supply her needs. Then she put on a long, dark cloak, and tied a black gauze veil over her hat. On the doorstep she paused and turned to this uncompromising person, who regarded her with extreme disapproval.

"If I am not back by the time Mr. Handley comes

in, be sure and give him this, please," handing a note which she had scribbled a few minutes before, but which she had only just determined to leave in case of need. It comforted her a little to think he would know where to look for her if anything——with a little shiver she drew her cloak about her, and plunged into the street, making her way to the station, where she had timed herself to catch a train which stopped at Oldcross. Another one ought to bring her back by ten o'clock —would it, she wondered, with another irrepressible shiver?

Less than an hour later a little figure was fighting its way in the teeth of a fierce gale up a steep road which climbs into the heart of the hills along the Cheshire border. The moon had now risen, but the wrack of heavy clouds only occasionally allowed it to shine out for a minute or two upon the long lines of the hills, and the clustered buildings of the little town lying below with its twinkling lights. The trees tossed and groaned under the buffeting rushes of the wind, but trees grew rarer as she climbed, and soon the last cottage by the wayside, with its companionable lamplit window, was left behind too. Here and there on the higher slopes a spot of brightness indicated the position of some isolated dairy-farm. A little to the left of the road, not much further now, there was a tiny point of light like a glow-worm, and this must be the cottage on Drake's edge, the goal of Phil's pilgrimage. The hurricane came tearing down the great bare hillsides every few minutes in paroxysms of rage, and swirled round the panting figure as it climbed on and on, now catching

her cloak and blowing it out like a great sail, sometimes forcing her to stop and turn her back to it for a moment while she took breath.

The solitude, the blackness, the rage of the storm were all horrible to a nervously impressionable young woman, whose life had been so largely spent in the thronged and brightly-lit ways of great cities.

With aching limbs, panting, almost sobbing, Phil was on the point of turning back more than once; but again and again she nerved herself with the thought of what depended on this night's work, and struggled on as before.

Once the sound of clogs came near, with an irregular and uncertain trampling, accompanied by a voice which roared the pathetic news that its owner was "far, far from 'ome." Seized with panic the other wayfarer darted under the shadow of the rough wall by the roadside, and cowered there behind a heap of stones, her heart knocking against her chin, while the moon suddenly gleamed out upon the unsteady form of a huge navvy on his way down from the quarries overhead, where he had obviously contrived to make merry this evening. When he had disappeared, she took advantage of the fitful light to run on till she came to the steps over the wall, which led across the field to Eli's cottage.

There was no blind to the window. She crept softly up to it and cautiously peeped in. Through the hurly-burly of the storm now broke out a volley of barks from a short-eared, sharp-nosed dog, who was lying beneath it inside. Here was another complication, for Philippa was an arrant coward where dogs were concerned, and detested them. However, dog, madman, or

devil incarnate must be faced to-night. Eli, still more haggard and grizzled than of old, was sitting by the fireside, his head bent forward on his hands, his pipe in his mouth. He rose and gave a kick to the noisy beast, but as its clamour did not cease though it slunk under the table, he came to the window and looked out. The light behind him gleamed upon a white face and pair of eyes which met his through the pane. Behind it all was blackness again. The old man started back with a groan of terror at the apparition. Philippa went quickly to the door, opened it suddenly, and slipped into the room.

The dog dashed out barking from under the table; but she called to its master to quiet it in a clear, authoritative voice, and he did so mechanically, after which he stood shading his eyes and blinking again at the dark figure with the pale face which had suddenly appeared out of the night.

"Eli!" said Philippa quietly, at last, "don't you know me?"

"Ahm a great sinner, Lord!" he broke out, with another of those heartfelt groans which are dying out of the land in company with the old revivalists. "Doonna soommon me 'till ahve finished what tha gavest me to do. It isna' ma fault that ahve been all this while aboot it! Spare me for a bit longer, *Oh* Lord!"

Philippa hesitated for a moment whether she would take advantage of his belief that she was a supernatural being sent to convey the unwilling evangelist to the region he had so often described with enthusiasm, but she decided that the part might be difficult to sustain.

"Eli, I am not a spirit. Don't you remember how I brought Mrs. Kirkham to see you a long time ago, and then you came down to work for her?"

He stared at her for awhile, and nodded his head at last. "Ay, a' worked for th' owd Mester's lass, a'd fain see hoo again. Be tha coom fra' hoo?"

"No," said Philippa. "Don't you remember me, though? I was going to paint a picture of you. My name was Jordan then."

He started, and an angry light came into his eyes. "A' mind tha noo," he said, coming so close up to her that it was only by a great effort she prevented herself from shrinking away; but she was instinctively aware that she must not betray a sign of fear.

"What doost a' want wi' me? They tell me tha've mated with that mon o' sin, William 'Andley. Woman, I tell tha if tha's doon that tha's wedded the mon that killed thine own flesh and blood. Doost a' knaw?"

"Yes, I know," she answered as quietly as she could, trying not to tremble under the grip he laid on her shoulder; "and I've come to you for help, Eli."

"Hoo's coom to Eli for 's 'elp agen' yon bad man!" he shouted with exultation. "Lord, hoo's coom t'owd Eli! Wilta' not deliver him into ma yond now? Eh! lass, Eli 'ull set tha free fro' bondage, never fear. He swayed from side to side in an ecstasy of delight, threw his head back, shut his eyes, and laughed aloud.

Suddenly he staggered, caught at the table, and lowered himself into the rickety chair, holding his head and muttering: "Eh! but ahm bad, ahm bad, ahve a pain i' th' 'ead as a' canna do with." He rocked back-

wards and forwards for several minutes; evidently he had forgotten her presence again.

"Eli!" she said, stepping up to him, and trying to overcome her repugnance so far as to lay her hand on his arm, "Eli! listen to me."

He raised his eyes, but they were dull and vacant now; he only went on rambling something about blood-guiltiness and the vengeance of the Lord, and the work that was given him to do.

"You must give me that letter, Eli!" said Phil, in a clear, insistent voice. "I have come for it, and your work will not be done unless you give it to me now."

Her words penetrated through the fog which enveloped his mind, the understanding came back into his eyes, he sat upright in his chair with a knotted, muscular hand clenched firmly round each arm of it. Watching him, Philippa saw that he had fixed his eyes anxiously on the old photograph she remembered, still hanging in its tarnished frame over the high chimney-piece. Was the object of her search by any chance to be found within that frame?

He slowly raised himself and stretched out his hand towards it. She shook with suspense and excitement as he took the frame in his hand. There was an inexpressible gleam of triumph in her eyes. He turned and saw it—it changed his mood in a moment.

"Nay, nay!" he said to himself, shaking his head doubtfully. "A' winna do 't. 'Tis but a female; a' 'ave never thowt mooch o' females for the Lord's work. Yo' canna trust 'em." He carefully replaced the picture again.

With a prayer for patience, Philippa used every means she could think of to bring back his former confidence, but all to no purpose. The more urgent she became, the more the look of obstinate cunning deepened on his face. The minutes were precious, and they were slipping by fast. That letter must be absolutely within her reach. Come what might, she could not leave the cottage without it now. She glanced from the picture to the door, calculating her chances of escape if she were to risk a bold manœuvre and make a dash with it into the night. But it might not be there after all, and, in any case, she was reminded by an uneasy growl from the dog at her feet that she had a fleeter enemy to contend with than the infirm old man.

The diabolical perspicacity of the lunatic read her thoughts in her face, and an ugly look of anger came into his eyes.

"A' did well not to trust tha, ma lass!" he growled. "'Appen tha's one o' Satan's messengers after a'. But there'll coom wan here joost now as a'll knaw whether tha's trying on tricks or no."

"Who is that, Eli?" she asked, mastering her impatience and excitement by an almost superhuman effort.

"Ahm no saying 'ee's a good mon neither," he rambled on, "and 'appen a'll keep th' letter mysen', but 'ee'll knaw where tha' cooms fro' and what tha's dooin'. Mebbee th' Lord's got a use even for th' mon Duke i' th' 'arvest field. Us 'll see, and us can wait."

"Is Mr. Duke coming here to-night?"

"Ahm no saying' as 'ee's not," returned Eli, the

cautious habit of his class as well as his aroused suspicion forbidding any direct answer to a question.

This was indeed a complication. It was late already, so much time had been spent in climbing on foot up the hill, for she had not thought it prudent to engage a cab, whose driver might afterwards prove inconveniently communicative with regard to so unusual an expedition.

A good deal of time had been spent, too, in useless attempts to persuade Eli to yield up his treasure. Was the only result of this horrible errand to be a nocturnal meeting between her and Ashley Duke in the madman's lonely cottage on a night when nobody in their senses would have gone out? She could have cried with rage. To add a thousandfold to her consternation, she thought of the letter she had left for her husband in a fit of terror, to say where he was to look for her if she did not return. What a *dénoûment!* Better—far better—to have left heroic attempts alone! What a cruel trick for evil fate to have played her! In ten minutes the last train before midnight would leave Oldcross station below. At any moment her enemy might now appear. Might it not be reckoned as likely amongst the chances of to-night's work that her husband would come in earlier than she expected, and start off to find her—and Ashley Duke?

She grew desperate, and most unwise in consequence.

"Eli!" she cried imperiously, "I must have that letter now—at once! If you wish to do the Lord's will, you must give it up to me now, or more harm will come of it than you know of."

The old man's surly mood was turned to fierce anger by her peremptory manner.

"Tha limb o' Beelzebub!" he shouted. "A'll no let tha stir till Duke coomes now. Noan o' thy tricks! Set tha down!" seizing her by the shoulders with his hard hands, and forcing her on to a three-legged stool. "A'll keep tha quiet enoo' if tha offers to stir."

He picked up a heavy cudged, and shook it threateningly in her face. Evidently he wanted little provocation, and would enjoy carrying out his promise. For a moment everything swam before Philippa's eyes as she realised how helplessly she was at his mercy; but this would never do, and she summoned all her sinking energy and failing nerves to face the situation.

She offered no resistance, but sat quietly on the rickety stool where Eli had planted her. He stood before her with angry, wandering eyes, and menacing stick for a minute or two, talking to himself. Presently, seeing that she made no attempt at escape, his excitement subsided, and he sat down in his own chair, taking the cudgel beside him, and keeping a watchful eye upon her.

She waited while the precious minutes slipped away, hoping that he would fall asleep, beating her brains for some plan of escape, and listening intently for footsteps outside. She had no doubt whatever that Ashley Duke was bent upon the same errand as herself to-night. The frame just overhead drew her eyes like a magnet. Had anyone ever been so tantalised before? A clock ticked in the corner of the room; the dog had settled to sleep, but he whined uneasily in his dreams now and then; the wind was abating, but it still came in great

gusts against the walls, and shook the casements till the whole cottage quivered. A whistle and a rush rising from the valley below proclaimed the departure of the train for Meeshaw. How much longer would this go on? At last an idea occurred to her, and she spoke in as steady a voice as she could could command.

"There is Mr. Duke, at last!"

Eli started to his feet. Philippa held up her finger. "Hush! listen! Don't you hear him shouting to you? He must have fallen down into the ditch getting over the wall. It is too dark to see anything; he can't find the way across the fields. Come, Eli, we had better go and bring him in. Come quickly!"

She threw open the door, but managed to close it behind her before the dog reached it, as they ran out together. Black clouds had covered away the moon—nothing could be seen in the thick darkness a yard ahead.

"There, Eli!" cried Philippa. "He is shouting for you by the road. Quick—run across the field!" He dashed off in the direction she pointed, and disappeared in an instant. She slipped inside the door again, and locked it. A precious moment's delay was necessary after snatching down the frame to see if it really held what she sought. Ah! how firmly the back was wedged! Eli's stick was seized to break it, and there, between it and the photograph, was a piece of frayed and yellowed paper with faint pencil writing upon it, in a hand that Philippa recognised. She had seen it repeatedly amongst her mother's papers after her death. For one moment it must be held under the lamp for certainty, and then away! Stay, the frame must be returned to its place,

and so, perhaps, delay discovery when every minute was invaluable.

Flinging the hood of her black mantle over her head, Phil opened the second door leading into the little kitchen, and closed it behind her. There was a moment of suspense before it was ascertained that this place, too, had another outlet, and then she was out in the thick darkness again, with a fine rain pricking her face, and the precious paper slipped inside the body of her dress.

Guessing at the direction as well as she could, Phil ran straight down the field instead of following the path which led sideways from the cottage door to the curving high road. She would climb the boundary wall at the bottom, and turning to the left, keep along under another wall which separated the next enclosure from the highroad, until she dared to strike into it.

The ground was uneven and slippery; in her headlong flight she fell more than once, and struck against a tree. Behind her she heard Eli now shouting and calling to his dog which she had left locked up inside the cottage. How many minutes or seconds would it be before he realised what had happened, and broke open the door? The full moon suddenly shone out as she arrived panting at the first wall, and showed her a gap in it, also a footpath, beside which she had been running all the way. She was thankful to be spared a climb, she was so nearly spent already; but just as she was about to pass through the gap she caught sight of a figure advancing towards it through the white light—a short figure in a double Inverness cape, which flew

out behind it, and evidently impeded its progress, for its owner stopped and turned to draw it tightly round him with an audible objurgation. Philippa drew back and darted into the shadow, crouching in the ditch on her hands and knees. Had he seen her or not? She waited, scarcely breathing, in an anguish of suspense.

Evidently he had not, for he passed through the gap and went on up the hill. His cloak flying out again had almost brushed her face at one moment. The moonlight gleamed upon his own, but Phil had recognised Ashley Duke before this. He heard Eli shouting somewhere ahead, and called himself in answer. There was not a minute to lose; indeed, her last hope of getting away undiscovered lay in the chance of Eli's excitement causing him to be crazily incomprehensible and past all power of explanation. It was certainly likely. She made a dash across the moon-lit space and ran along the next field under the shadow of the wall again, thankful indeed when the clouds presently blotted out the moon and all was safely black once more.

Two lights flashed out when she came to the gate and made her start back again. Mr. Duke had left a cab there to wait for him. She hesitated a moment before following her impulse to jump in and bid the coachman drive as fast as the horse would go; it was long enough for a wiser second thought, for at this moment a male voice calling from the darkness inside the vehicle to the driver, set her gasping in a fresh panic. Mr. Duke had evidently not ventured his precious person

on this expedition without having help at hand in case of need.

Moving stealthily out into the field again, far beyond the reach of the carriage lights, she sped on once more. Her breath was nearly gone, it came in gasps. She fell often over every lump in the ground; there was a noise like a hammer in her head. But she was still able to think. The highroad was not safe now, the cab would certainly overtake her there. What was she to do? She staggered to the wall again and clung to it for support. She was obliged to rest a moment; she could not move another step until she had taken breath. She felt that the wall had crumbled here and was quite low, so she sat down on it. The lights of the cab were stationary some distance above at the corner of the road.

Three ways crossed at the spot where she was now, and down another of them, leading from the stone-quarries, a great rumbling and creaking was now heard, and other lamps became visible, slowly descending towards her like great eyes in the darkness. It was a huge waggon or lurry conveying the stone to the station to catch one of the freight trains which run by night. The slipper on the great wheel gave unearthly shrieks continually. Phil's strength was exhausted; she felt with despair that she could run no more, and must drop if she tried. There was a weight pressing on her forehead, her breath came in great gasps, but here was a rescue. As the waggon creaked slowly by she summoned the last remains of her energy and stumbled out into the road behind it. The big blocks of stone hid the silhouette of the sleepy driver sitting in front, and

cast their heavy shadows backwards across the little patch of lamplit road that moved along with them. Philippa caught a great chain that hung down rattling from the framework, and with a last effort raised herself to a broad, low beam that projected across the lurry at the back; here she crouched, with labouring breath and swimming head, huddled in her black cloak, while the driver urged his strong beasts slowly onwards, unconscious of the extra burden they were bearing along with them.

As they reached the bottom of the hill, near the station, she roused herself to consider what to do next. She determined to drag herself through by-ways past the town on the other side of the railway to the White House, and appeal to Nell for help and counsel. Mr. Duke's cab might appear at any moment now. As she peered out over the great wheel, preparing to let herself softly down from her perch again, she caught sight of two carriage lanterns flashing up the hill towards them at a great pace. Philippa sprang to the ground in a moment and ran to the dog-cart as it came up, calling "Will! Will! stop. Here am I!" with all the voice she had.

The horse was checked with a suddenness which nearly threw it and the cart over together. Mr. Handley was alone in it. He jumped down, and the next moment the little figure in the heavy, rain-soaked mantle was caught up and lifted bodily into the vehicle.

"Don't wait a second!" she cried. "Turn here, quick! down this by-road, and drive on as hard as you

can, Will! Nobody must see us, for I've got it—that letter. Oh! something odd is happening to me! Hold me in!"

It was not so very odd after all. He caught her with his left arm and wound the reins round the other; then he managed to get out a flask and shake a few drops from it between her teeth. Those who knew him best would have wondered at the sight of William Handley's agitation now. The thought of what his wife must have gone through to-night all alone on his behalf, while he was sitting by the fire in his office, nursing suspicion and anger in his heart, made him groan aloud. He could not speak when Philippa raised herself up out of the heap into which she had subsided. He could only bend down and shower humble kisses upon the little shoulder nearest to him. "Drive on!" she said; "oh, quick, Will! What shall we do? How shall we get home? Have you turned out of the main road yet?" Her voice sounded quite weak and tremulous.

"We will drive to Leek, dearest," said her husband. "It is a long way, but we shall catch a train on that line."

It was a long way to go, but the miles slipped by almost imperceptibly; the husband and wife had so much to explain to one another. By the time they reached Leek all the misunderstandings had been cleared away, and a radiant if disreputable-looking couple arrived about one o'clock in the morning at the little house in the stuffy street. Torn, splashed with mud from head

to foot, wind-blown, rain-soaked, Philippa was a strange object, and the Conservative candidate was only a little more presentable than she as they cautiously opened the door with a latchkey and stole about the kitchen premises like thieves collecting scanty ruins of previous repasts on which to banquet gaily.

Upstairs Mr. Morris had left a good fire behind him when he went up, in the interests of his adopted son; he had crept on tiptoe past Philippa's door supposing her to have been asleep for a long while. When they sat down to warm themselves for a few minutes Phil turned grave, and produced the scrap of paper which had both cost them and given them so much. Her husband took it and read it again silently after all these years.

"And you actually knew, Phil, about its being Cuthbert. I didn't like the discovery when I made it before your mother died, I can tell you!"

"No more did I!"

"But you didn't know it then; all that while ago?"

"I fancy I knew it before you did."

"And I thought I was sparing you so much discomfort, though it gave me a good deal not to tell you!"

"And I thought just the same. What idiots we have been!"

"No, only I!"

"Well, we won't quarrel about that at present. Oh, Will, what a horrid time we've had! I shall always think Dr. Ridgeway an angel. He little knows how

nearly I fell on his neck and embraced him this afternoon after what he told me."

"He is a most decent fellow, indeed. I certainly owe him a great deal, and shall owe him still more to-morrow night. I met him this evening on my way from the Works, and he told me—well, what you heard from him too."

"You are very glad it was not your fault after all about Cuthbert's death, aren't you?" she asked.

"As things have turned out, I certainly am; otherwise, I didn't see that it mattered."

"And about the meeting, Will; do you know I was rash enough to promise and vow on your behalf that you could speak out and put your enemies to confusion there."

"I mean to!"

"What shall you say?"

"Exactly what happened. I do not think it necessary to inform the audience that the man I had a fight with turned out to have been destined to be my brother-in-law after a different fashion to that which I expected, for it concerns nobody but ourselves. Since they have been good enough, however, to interest themselves in an episode of my youthful days, they shall hear a more accurate version than they have been treated to lately. Then Ridgeway says he shall tell his tale, and after that the incident will be closed."

"Do you mean to go to law with your libellers?"

"No; it is not worth the bother. I should really like to give that blackguard a thrashing, but I suppose I must not!" he said regretfully.

"What shall we do with this?" inquired Philippa, holding out the letter.

"We will burn it," he answered. And so they did, and the shadow of Cuthbert vanished from the lives over which it had lain for so long.

CHAPTER XXII.

THERE was a white Christmas in Meeshaw that year, and the black nakedness of the place was covered away under a new veil of glittering snow. It shone blood-red where it caught reflections from the furnace-flames and glowing mounds. Travellers who passed by after dusk now on their way to Stockport or Manchester were struck for once by the splendour and beauty of the Potteries region, instead of by its sheer horror and luridness.

It was many months now since Meeshaw returned Mr. Handley to Parliament by a good majority, though not so large a one doubtless as would have been the case had he been opposed by any other rival than the astute Mr. Duke. For there is no doubt that his advisers had been quite right in their prognostications, and the mud stains had not all come out in the wash; although his personal explanation, followed up by Dr. Ridgeway's statement, had met with so magnificent a reception at one of his last great meetings before the election. Gold and other substances may be purified in the fire, but the mud of well-continued and skilfully scattered implications against the character of any individual towards whom much attention is directed, may defy all the elements to cleanse it away.

The Handleys had taken up their abode in a little

flat in London immediately after the election was over at the end of February. William had travelled backwards and forwards between Meeshaw and Westminster with great frequency, and if he found the combination of new and old duties tiring sometimes, he did not say so, and he certainly looked quite contented. Philippa had never been so happy in her life.

When the House rose towards the end of August, they went back to their first home on the hillside above Oldcross, where they were joined by Mr. Morris. The good man was filled with devoted anxieties and agitations by a prospect which had lately been revealed to him, and when he was suddenly summoned to America by an unexpected revival of one of the financial enterprises which had proved so disastrous to him, his children saw him off under a perfect storm of recommendations, exhortations, and transparently veiled alarms, with an unmistakable sense of relief.

The autumn was lonely again in the quiet house, for William having been away so much from his business, was devoting his whole attention to it now. Philippa, however, appeared to have learnt philosophy from her troubles; she showed no signs of discontent or restlessness when most people were ready to pity her for having to be alone for the greater part of her time, with only an occasional visitor. She did not think it likely that Will could afford to stand again when the days of the present Parliament were numbered, which seemed likely to come about earlier than was expected. But she appeared to be resigned even to that. She must certainly have learned something, for her attitude was changing even about her art, and actually she was

beginning to suspect that the more she sacrificed to it and demanded of others in its behalf, the less it showed signs of profiting by the taxes it levied on her life and the lives of those connected with her. The great lessons in what may be called sanity often take a long while to learn, even for those who have the power of learning them at all; sometimes they come at last in the shape of useless remorses. Mrs. Handley was to be congratulated at having acquired even the apprehension of them so soon. As usual it had come to her through the deepening of an affection; she was learning to see things from other points of view than one, and to care increasingly about doing so.

Accordingly, when Wlliam came in one night with a great piece of news, it was not received with the entire and unmixed rejoicing it would certainly have produced a year ago.

Part of his preoccupations this autumn had been due to a decision silently made earlier in the year. For some time past he had been, in fact, going through the slow and difficult process of turning his business into a company, in which he was only to retain a small number of shares, without any personal responsibility. At last he had found means to accomplish this feat, and so to free himself altogether from any tie to Meeshaw. The shares had been well taken up after one of the leading potters of the district had suddenly come forward as chairman of the new company and as a large purchaser.

In addition to this, Mr. Handley had been offered and had accepted a financial appointment in London, with a moderate salary, such as a man a little over

forty with only an exclusive kind of business experience hitherto might hope to obtain.

"Oh, Will!" exclaimed his wife, turning pale when he told her, "why have you done this?"

But she knew, and it brought the tears into her eyes.

"Why, Phil!" he exclaimed with astonishment; "I kept it a secret till now so that the news that your solitude and exile up here are over might be a real surprise for Christmas. You don't mean to tell me that you are not glad after all?" He was not a little taken aback.

"Will, is it all settled? Couldn't you go back now?"

"Not now. The Works have passed out of my hands to-day, only I have agreed to carry on the business on behalf of the company until after the new year, when their manager will take it over. Why, Phil, I thought you would be so glad. I have been looking forward to telling you all this time. Surely, dear, you must be glad; is it too much of a surprise all at once?"

"It is such a very big suprise, and I am so glad I don't know what to do," said Philippa, hiding her face in his coat sleeve, and determining to do honour to the occasion. To tell the truth, it was not easy quite, at first, for there flashed before her mind, with the instantaneous prevision which was one of her peculiar characteristics, all that he would lose by her gain. Will would, perhaps, only gradually discover what it meant to be no longer master of his own Works, steering his own ship, pushing out on new enterprises in all directions, without consulting anybody but himself,

while directing, guiding, even contending, with his own men, the race from which he sprang, whose qualities and defects none could enter into with more intimate understanding than himself. How dull would be the dull routine of any office after this, more especially one in which he was scarcely even his own master!

It is only a few people who possess this lamentable faculty of instantaneous realisation of a situation; it is seldom serviceable to their fellow-creatures, and is usually only an extra trouble to themselves. Cassandra has plenty of descendants, but it is not written of any of them that their horrible habit of foreseeing annoyances was ever otherwise than a source of dissatisfaction to all concerned. *"Mais j'ai le cœur navré de joie,"* said Philippa to herself, in the words of Lorenzaccio, in answer to his anxiety that she should be glad; but she contrived presently to produce as much exuberation as was required. After all, apart from these considerations, the prospect of London again was, of course, delightful.

The next day they moved down from Chapel Place, almost inaccessible now from the ice and snow which surrounded it and glazed the roads, to the house across the canal at Meeshaw, where Mr. Handley had lived before his marriage. It had just come back upon his hands again, and it would be necessary to find a new tenant. Meanwhile Miss Alberta returned to it with delight, and flourished her keys once more in the old places, sparing her sister-in-law all housekeeping troubles except the storm of scrubbing, dusting, and rubbing which prevailed all through her waking hours, and longer, too.

But unwonted harmony prevailed between the sisters-in-law, for Miss Alberta was both awed and delighted by the event they were awaiting, and took elaborate pains not to put out Mrs. William on the eve of her fulfilment of the whole duty of woman, or, at anyrate, of William's wife. Of William's own nefarious proceedings with regard to the pottery and his plans for the future, Miss Alberta actually knew nothing as yet; if she had, it would have gone hard with her to have lived in peace with either of them, even at this crisis.

Helena Kirkham had only lately come back to the White House after long wanderings abroad. The poor woman had been possessed by an unconquerable restlessness after a blow which had fallen suddenly early in the spring. The pretty elf whom Philippa painted failed all at once, and was gone almost before anyone realised the danger. The mother suffered quietly but cruelly, and her pain only grew more unbearable as the months went by. She had been obliged to consent to Boney being sent to school some time ago. William, his guardian, had been urgent, and at last relentless; he had little faith in patent novelties in education; in the end he induced Helena to see that the boy was suffering from the need of salutary companionship and commonplace independence for expansion.

While he was away there seemed to be no place left for her in a world where a woman so bruised and broken was necessary to nobody. William had been reconquered by his wife, whom Helena, nevertheless, could never quite forgive or believe in, for she was only human, and desolate at heart. There was nothing more

to do for William, now that his troubles were over and he had reached the goal she had not only long ardently desired for him but, of course, had contrived to place financially within his reach. The secret of the election expenses was, however, never divulged to the member for Meeshaw, who continued to suppose they had been subscribed for by many wealthy persons in the neighbourhood. Philippa had forgotten, or, at anyrate, never revived the suspicion that had crossed her mind at first on the subject.

The charitable undertakings of all kinds, to which Mrs. Kirkham now devoted herself more strenuously than before, left her very much where they found her, except for the additional physical fatigue. The work was full of disappointments and dreary to the woman who had lost her spring. She grew to look much older, new lines appeared in her face, her cheeks were thinner, her hair had lost all its colour, it was only grizzled now. Alas! many people in life have to cross these dismal tracts without any well-spring of interest or daily encouragement from the companionship of affection. They do not often last for ever; most persons can make their desert blossom again somewhere in some degree; but they always feel as if there was no end to them. Nell had too wholesome and sound a spirit to be laid waste beyond repair in the prime of life, but at present she felt as if she could never recover her interest in anything when she was alone during Boney's school terms.

And yet, for the moment, William's approaching fatherhood certainly revived her a little. She had intended to take Boney to London for Christmas festivities,

but she found it impossible to go away after all before William's anxiety was at an end; and Boney offered no serious objection to coming home first, for there was skating to be had now at Oldcross, and the pantomimes would keep.

On the evening of Christmas Day, the potter, in a strangely meek and docile mood, was fetched downstairs in his own house by peremptory women, who hovered about in the dining-room, ordering him to eat things; what it was that he ate to avoid discussion he could not have told. If he had been asked he would have found it impossible to give any clear account of himself during a long and indefinite period. All that he was quite sure of was that just now he had bent over a ridiculous arrangement of laces and furbelows, in the midst of which a tiny red thing lay with its eyes shut. Suddenly it made a sound and waved a minute hand which touched Mr. Handley's face and caused him a wonderful sensation in which there was both alarm and pity. He felt quite unlike himself altogether; he had found himself doing something womanish and amazing a little while ago, all of a sudden, when they came and told him it was over, and that the strange sound he heard on the landing, where he had spent a year or so, was the voice of his own son.

This new living thing awed him, but as yet he hardly realised that it belonged to him. All he could think about was that his wife was there too, and that she had smiled at him and asked him in a whisper whether he had ever seen anything quite so ugly or so attractive as Billy.

When the meal was despatched, Mrs. Kirkham and

Lady Victoria (who had insisted upon coming to stay with her at the White House) walked away together to the station through the still sparkling garden. William opened the window and leaned out after they had gone, eagerly breathing in the cold frosty air. Across the canal a great flame here and there shot up high into the night wherever a furnace had been kept in during the Christmas holiday, and glared for a long distance across the fields or the streets. The stars were spangling a cloudless sky, and far away a half moon was climbing behind the fantastic silhouette of Mow Cop.

The sharp breath that stirred about his forehead was wonderfully welcome and refreshing, and William decided that he would go for a stroll. "I shall not be away long, Alberta," he said; "I will only walk a little way along the canal towards the bridge in case I am wanted."

He had not been gone more than a quarter of an hour or so when Alberta was startled by a tapping from outside on the long window which opened to the lawn.

"Alberta!" cried a low eager voice, "quick! let me in!"

Her surprise was great when she opened the door-casement to admit Helena Kirkham again, with panting breath and flushed cheeks. She had evidently been running up the hill.

"I did not want to make any noise at the front," she said; "I had to run nearly all the way from the station. Where is William?" looking round quite wildly. "He has not gone out, has he Alberta?" seizing Miss Handley by the arm.

"That he has, Nell; and why not? William went for a little walk along the canal directly after you left."

To her further astonishment Helena's face turned a sickly white colour; she clutched the back of a tall chair, it appeared for an instant that this robust woman was actually going to faint. But even while Alberta was making a dash at the spirit-case Mrs. Kirkham pulled herself together and spoke in a rapid, concentrated way quite unlike her usual measured accents.

"Alberta! run at once and bring men, the nearest men you can find anywhere! Run after William with them along the canal. There is not a moment to lose. Eli Grimwade has escaped with a murdering fit on him again. I met him half-way to the station. He said he was coming to kill William. I tried to hold him, but he knocked me over. I saw him turn down by the canal then. I rushed back up the short way through the garden. Good God! if only we are not too late—quick—go and find people, the watchman at the Works if there is nobody nearer!"

She vanished into the darkness, and Miss Alberta heard her running again with uneven steps over the crunching snow on the lawn. For five seconds she stood stock still, wondering whether it was more likely that Helena was mad or that her tale was true. Miss Alberta had not been told much about Eli's former attempts against William, nor did she think it possible that he should have escaped from the place to which he had been sent after the Meeshaw election in the spring. She had almost forgotten his existence in the long interval which had elapsed between her ac-

quaintance with him in youthful days and that occasion.

The story was incredible, but, on the other hand, that the sober Helena should suddenly have taken leave of her senses was even more improbable. She snatched up a thick shawl from the hall and went flying down the garden in the wake of Helena before two minutes had elapsed since her departure. As she ran out into the deserted road and over the canal bridge towards the Works, the feeling of the shawl over her head brought back the days when she had gone out like this in the dark mornings to her work at the old place.

William had walked away along the solitary path by the canal in the Cheshire direction. The water at his feet glowed red with the reflection of the fires opposite. Here and there large spaces of snow were brilliantly illuminated; stretches of dark shadow lay between them. He stood still in one of the bright patches and gazed about him at the strange yet familiar scene.

From the town, sounds of distant merrymaking floated across the still yards and fields which lay between it and the canal here. The turmoil of feeling which had possessed William Handley, gradually subsided into a mood of peaceful happiness mingled with an overwhelming gratitude to the immense unknown beneficence which had not only given, but—what was far more to him—had spared. William Handley had never occupied himself greatly about abstract and insoluble problems; the fact that they were insoluble robbed them of much interest to his concrete mind, and he had been glad to

leave them early in his life, where so many people do in the long run. Extremely definite laws of conduct and fixed dislike of wandering and unprofitable speculations had sufficed him so far. He had always admitted that incomprehensible and illimitable possibilities might lie outside the domain of ascertained facts; he only denied the wisdom of wasting time and energy on attempting to imagine what was unimaginable and out of reach.

To-night, for the first time, he wanted to say something to somebody, just to express his gratitude. He felt, as he looked up and about at the mysterious worlds hung in darkness, that the unknown was nearer than he had thought, and that it must be beneficent. His thoughts went out to it in a humbler and more softened mood than they had ever done before; shaken as he was with the recent anguish of mind he had gone through for the wife who was now, more than ever, the essential part of life to him.

His eyes wandered down to the black shapes of material and familiar objects. Over there, above the glowing line of high mounds, the road ran under the furnace shafts; just at that spot he and Cuthbert had quarrelled, with consequences which had left so deep a mark on his after life. But he preferred to contemplate the nearer solid mass of the Swan Pottery, which had been as dear to him all his life as any splendid historic home could be to a man whose forefathers have handed it down to him with honoured traditions to preserve intact. Now William Handley, the potter, had a son too, but the old place was no longer his, and he would never see his boy in possession there. He sighed involuntarily,

for he could have wished it otherwise, but he put the thought away from him, he meant to have no regrets to-night.

He had no idea, as he stood in the centre of a great patch of brightness, that a figure was stealing cautiously towards him through the darkness that lay beyond. When it reached the edge of the shadow it paused for a moment, but only a moment. Exactly what happened Mr. Handley could not have said, except that there was a sudden rush and a shout, and before he could realise anything, a grip like an iron claw was on his throat, with a noise in his ears that made all the stars overhead slide about together. Before he could make out what it was he was lying on the ground struggling violently, with one ankle bone broken by a kick from a brass-clamped clog, and a man kneeling on his chest. A blow on the head followed, which only made him stupid for a second or two, and then by the glare of the furnace lights he recognised the face of Eli Grimwade, his features working with crazy rage and triumph.

"A'hve got thee at last, 'ave a', William 'Andley? Th' Lord's delivered tha into ma yonds, and a'hll do for tha noo, tha son o' Bellial!"

Everything swam before William's eyes, the lights on the water, in the sky, even the gleam on the blade which was flourished above his face; a sort of numbness and indifference had come over him. But suddenly he caught sight, as he lay there, of a light that twinkled through the skeleton trees in front of his own house, and the remembrance of what was there waiting for him, struck through the fog that clouded his brain. He roused himself, with an effort, for one more struggle, and with

a sudden movement of which Eli had supposed him incapable, he snatched the knife out of the lunatic's hand, and threw it backwards over his head, hoping it would fall into the canal. It rattled, instead, on a heap of stones, but Eli left him and bounded after it.

Rolling himself desperately on to his hands and knees, the potter tried to rise, but the agonising pain which darted up his leg when he attempted to stand, forced him to his knees again. He looked about, but there was no railing or post at hand to support him. He shouted twice, three times, with all his strength, and Eli, who caught sight of his lost knife, again answered him with a hoot of triumph. He could see no other creature anywhere, when suddenly a woman's scream rang out from the thick darkness behind them, and Eli stood still just as he was on the point of hurling himself on his victim again.

"William! William! Where are you? I am coming!"

"Keep back, Nell! Keep back, woman! He has got a knife, he will kill you!"

But Nell did not keep back. Recovering from his surprise, Eli turned to rush forward again to finish his work, when the arm which held the knife was caught from behind. He shook himself loose, but now she seized the other arm in both hands and held it with all the force of her sturdy North-country muscles, her feet firmly planted in the snow.

It all passed in a minute, but to William, forcing himself forwards along the ground as best he could, it seemed to last an age.

"For God's sake, let go, Nell! Let go, I tell you! He will kill you!"

But she only clenched her hold the tighter. Furious at the check, unable to shake off her strong grip, Eli raised his other arm.

The potter threw himself forward as the knife flashed in the air, but he was too late. He heard a little choking sound, there was a heavy thud upon the stones, but even as she fell Helena caught Eli by the collar and dragged him down with her. A leaping flame from a furnace chimney glared upon her face, and Eli sprang to his feet with a loud and bitter cry.

"Th' owd Mester's lass! 'Tis th' owd Mester's lass, and owd Eli's doon for thee!" Then with unspeakable reproach he shouted as he looked up into the starlit night overhead:—

"Lord! tha's letten *me* do for th' owd Mester's lass!"

The knife gleamed out once more before it clashed upon the stones. At the same moment there was a great splash where Eli fell forwards into the water. The fiery reflections danced away broken into a thousand fragments, and the ripples washed up against the bank for a long while afterwards. They were still lapping over a broken ledge of ice when Alberta and her helpers came running presently with shouts to the illuminated space where they could see two dark heaps lying on the ground from some distance away.

Helena Kirkham lay quite still and paid no more heed to them than she had done to the frantic efforts and disjointed words of her friend when he had dragged himself to her side. He chafed her hands and rubbed her temples with snow, but when he contrived to open

her collar, and saw the place from which the dark stream was now only trickling drop by drop, William, too, fell back upon the snow as silent and motionless as herself.

Nell had always been ready in William's service, and many of the things she had done for him had seemed far harder to her than this.

They lifted the potter first and brought him safely home, where he lay helpless for many days before he recovered. But they carried Nell quite away out of sight of William, who never saw her again; but nothing mattered to Nell any more.

THE END.

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