The Tenants of Malory, Vol. I

J. Sheridan Le Fanu


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THE

TENANTS OF MALORY.

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A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO THE

RIGHT HON. THE LADY DUFFERIN,

This Tale is inscribed,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING TWO LADIES WHO SAT IN THE MALORY PEW.

THERE were tenants at last in Malory; and the curiosity of the honest residents of Cardyllian, the small and antique town close by, was at once piqued and mortified by the unaccountable reserve of these people.

For four years, except from one twisted chimney in the far corner of the old house, no smoke had risen from its flues. Tufts of grass had grown up between the paving-stones of the silent stable-yard, grass had crept over the dark avenue, which, making a curve near the gate, is soon lost among the sombre trees that throw a perpetual shadow upon it; the groves of nettles had spread and thickened among their trunks; and in the signs of neglect and decay, the monastic old place grew more than ever *triste*.

The pretty little Welsh town of Cardyllian stands near the shingle of a broad estuary, beyond which tower the noble Cambrian mountains. High and dim, tier above tier, undulating hills, broken by misty glens, and clothed with woods, rise from the opposite shore, and are backed, range behind range, by the dim outlines of Alpine peaks and slopes, and flanked by purple and gold-tinted headlands, rising dome-like from the sea.

Between the town and the gray shingle stretches a strip of bright green sward, the Green of Cardyllian, along which rows of pleasant houses, with little gardens in front, look over the sea to the mountains.

It is a town quaint, old, and quiet. Many of the houses bear date anterior to the great civil wars of England, and on the oak beams of some are carved years of grace during which Shakespeare was still living among his friends, in Stratford-on-Avon.

At the end of long Castle Street rise the battlements and roofless towers of that grand old feudal fortress which helped to hold the conquest of Wales for the English crown in the days of tabards, lances, and the long-bow. Its other chief street strikes off at right angles, and up hill from this, taking its name from the ancient church, which, with its churchyard, stands divided from it by a low wall of red sandstone, surmounted by one of those tall and fanciful

iron rails, the knack of designing which seems to be a lost art in these countries.

There are other smaller streets and by-lanes, some dark with a monastic stillness, others thinly built, with little gardens and old plum and pear trees peeping over grass-grown walls, and here and there you light upon a fragment of that ancient town wall from which, in the great troubles which have helped to build up the glory of England, plumed cavaliers once parleyed with steel-capped Puritans. Thus the tints and shadows of a great history rest faintly even upon this out-of-the-way and serene little town.

The permanent residents of Cardyllian for half the year are idle, and for mere occupation are led to inquire into and report one another's sins, vanities, and mishaps. Necessity thus educates them in that mutual interest in one another's affairs, and that taste for narrative, which pusillanimous people call prying and tattle. That the people now residing in Malory, scarcely a mile away, should have so totally defeated them was painful and even irritating.

It was next to impossible to take a walk near Cardyllian without seeing Malory; and thus their failure perpetually stared them in the face.

You can best see Malory from the high grounds which, westward of the town, overlook the estuary. About a mile away you descry a dark and rather wide-spread mass of wood, lying in a gentle hollow, which, I think, deepens its sombre tint. It approaches closely to the long ripple of the sea, and through the foliage are visible some old chimneys and glimpses of gray gables. The refectory of the friary that once stood there, built of gray and reddish stones, half hid in ivy, now does duty as a barn. It is so embowered in trees, that you can scarcely, here and there, gain a peep from without at its tinted walls; and the whole place is overhung by a sadness and silence that well accord with its cloistered traditions. That is Malory.

It was Sunday now. Over the graves and tombstones of those who will hear its sweet music no more, the bell had summoned the townsfolk and visitors to the old church of Cardyllian.

The little town boasts, indeed, a beautiful old church, Gothic, with side-aisles, and an antique stained window, from which gloried saints and martyrs look down, in robes as rich and brilliant as we see now-a-days only upon the kings and queens of our court cards. It has also some fine old monuments of the Verney family. The light is

solemn and subdued. There is a very sweet-toned organ, which they say is as old as the reign of Charles I., but I do not know how truly. In the porch are hung in chains two sacrilegious round-shot, which entered the church when Cromwell's general opened his fire, in those days of sorrow when the liberties of England were in the throes of birth. Beside the brilliant stained window, engraven upon a brass plate, is a record of the same "solemn times," relating how certain careful men, to whom we are obliged, had taken down, enclosed in boxes, and buried, in hope of a typical resurrection, the ancient window which had for so long beautified "this church," and thus saved it from the hands of "violent and fanatical men."

When "the season" is still flourishing at Cardyllian, the church is sometimes very full. On the Sunday I speak of it was so. One pew, indeed, was quite relieved from the general pressure. It was the large panelled enclosure which stands near the communion rails, at the right as you look up the aisle toward the glowing window. Its flooring is raised a full foot higher than the surrounding level. This is the seat of the Verney family.

But one person performed his devotions in it, upon the day of which I speak. This was a tall, elegantly slight young man, with the indescribable air of careless fashion; and I am afraid he was much more peeped at and watched than he ought to have been by good Christians during divine service.

Sometimes people saw but the edge of his black whisker, and the waves of his dark hair, and his lavender-gloved hand resting on the edge of the pew. At other times—when, for instance, during the Litany, he leaned over with his arms resting on the edge of the pew—he was very satisfactorily revealed, and elicited a considerable variety of criticism. Most people said he was very handsome, and so, I think, he was—a dark young man, with very large, soft eyes, and very brilliant even teeth. Some people said he was spoiled by an insolent and selfish expression of countenance. Some ladies again said that his figure was perfect, while others alleged that there was a slight curve—not a stoop, but a bend at the shoulder, which they could not quite sanction.

The interest, and even anxiety with which this young gentleman was observed and afterwards discussed, were due to the fact that he was Mr. Cleve Verney, the nephew, not of the present Viscount Verney, but of the man who must very soon be so, and heir presumptive to

the title—a position in the town of Cardyllian, hardly inferior to that of Prince of Wales.

But the title of Verney, or rather the right claimant of that title, was then, and had been for many years, in an extremely odd position. In more senses than one, a cloud rested upon him. For strong reasons, and great danger, he had vanished more than twenty years ago, and lived, ever since, in a remote part of the world, and in a jealous and eccentric mystery.

While this young gentleman was causing so many reprehensible distractions in the minds of other Christians, he was himself, though not a creature observed it, undergoing a rather wilder aberration of a similar sort himself.

In a small seat at the other side, which seems built for privacy, with a high panelling at the sides and back, sat a young lady, whose beauty riveted and engrossed his attention in a way that seemed to the young gentleman, of many London seasons, almost unaccountable.

There was an old lady with her—a lady-like old woman, he thought her—slight of figure, and rubrically punctual in her up-risings, and down-sittings. The seat holds four with comfort, but no more. The oak casing round it is high. The light visits it through the glorious old eastern window, mellowed and solemnized—and in this chiar'oscuro, the young lady's beauty had a transparent and saddened character which he thought quite peculiar. Altogether he felt it acting upon him with the insidious power of a spell.

The old lady—for the halo of interest of which the girl was the centre, included her—was dressed, he at first thought, in black, but now he was nearly sure it was a purple silk.

Though she wore a grave countenance, suitable to the scene and occasion, it was by no means sombre—a cheerful and engaging countenance on the contrary.

The young lady's dress was one of those rich Welsh linseys, which exhibit a drapery of thick ribbed, dark gray silk, in great measure concealed by a short but ample cloak or coat of black velvet—altogether a costume, the gravity of which struck him as demure and piquant.

Leaning over the side of his pew, Mr. Cleve Verney prayed with a remarkable persistence in the direction of this seat. After the Litany

he thought her a great deal more beautiful than he had before it, and by the time the Communion service closed, he was sure he had never seen any one at all so lovely. He could not have fancied, in flesh and blood, so wonderful an embodiment of Guido's portrait of Beatrice Cenci. The exquisite brow, and large hazel eye, so clear and soft, so bold and shy. The face voluptuous, yet pure; *funeste* but innocent. The rich chestnut hair, the pearly whiteness, and scarlet lips, and the strange, wild, melancholy look—and a shadow of fate. Three-quarters, or full face, or momentary profile—in shade, now—in light—the same wonderful likeness still. The phantom of Beatrice was before him.

I can't say whether the young lady or the old observed the irregular worship directed towards their pew. Cleve did not think they did. He had no particular wish that they should. In fact, his interest was growing so strangely absorbing that something of that jealousy of observation which indicates a deeper sentiment than mere admiration, had supervened, and Mr. Cleve conducted his reconnoitring with slyness and caution.

That small pew over the way, he was nearly certain, belonged to Malory. Now Malory is a dower house of the Verneys. His own grandmother, the Venerable Dowager Lady Verney, as much to her annoyance the fashionable morning paper respectfully called her, was at that time the incumbent. But though she held it with the inflexible grip of an old lady whose rights were not to be trifled with, she would not reside, and the place was, as I have said, utterly neglected, and the old house very much out of repair.

Why, then, should the Malory pew be thus tenanted? These ladies, he had no doubt, sat there of right—for if the seat had been opened to the congregation at large, in the then state of pressure, it would have been filled. Could they possibly be of kindred to the Verneys, and sit where they did by virtue of an order from the Dowager?

So Cleve Verney began to count up cousins whom he had never seen, and left off no wiser.

Close by this dark Malory pew, is a small side-door of the church. There is another like it, a little lower down, in the opposite wall, not far from the Verney pew, and through these emerge thin files of worshippers, while the main column shuffles and pushes through the porch. So, when the Rector had pronounced his final blessing, Cleve Verney having improved the little silence that followed to get

his hat and cane into his hand, glided from his seat before the mass of the congregation were astir, and emerging on the little gravel walk, stepped lightly down to the stone stile, from whence you command a view of every exit from the churchyard.

He stood with one foot upon it, like a man awaiting a friend, and looking listlessly toward the church. And as he loitered, a friend did turn up whom he very little expected to see. A young man, though hardly so young as Cleve—good-looking, decidedly, with light golden moustache, and a face so kind, frank, and merry, it made one happy to look at it.

"Ah! Sedley! I had not an idea. What brings you here?" said Cleve, smiling, and shaking his hand moderately, but keeping his large eyes steadily on the distant point at which he expected to see the unknown ladies emerge.

"Down here just for a day or two," answered Tom Sedley. "I was above you in the gallery. Did you see that beautiful creature in the Malory seat, right before you? By Jove, she's a stunning girl. There was an old woman with her. I think I never saw so beautiful a being."

"Well, I did see a pretty girl at the other side of the church, I *think*; isn't *that* she?" said Cleve, as he saw the two ladies—the younger with one of those short black veils which nearly obliterate the face of the wearer behind the intricacies of a thick lace pattern.

"By Jove! so it is," said Sedley; "come along—let us see where they go."

They were walking almost solitarily, followed only by an old servant who carried their books, toward the entrance at the further side of the churchyard, a small door opening upon a flight of steps by which you descend into one of the deserted back streets of Cardyllian.

Cleve and Sedley pursued as little conspicuously as possible. The quaint street, into which the stone stairs led them, follows the mouldering shelter of the old town wall.

Looking along the perspective of this street, if such the single row of small old houses confronting the dark ivied wall may be termed, the two young gentlemen saw the figures in pursuit of which they had entered it, proceeding in the direction of Malory.

"We mustn't get *too* near; let us wait a little, and let them go on," suggested Sedley in a whisper, as if the ladies could have overheard them.

Cleve laughed. He was probably the more eager of the two; but some men have no turn for confidences, and Cleve Verney was not in the habit of opening either his plans or his feelings to anyone.

CHAPTER II.

ALL THAT THE DRAPER'S WIFE COULD TELL.

THIS street, in a few hundred steps emerging from the little town, changes its character into that of a narrow rural road, overhung by noble timber, and descending with a gentle curve toward the melancholy woods of Malory.

"How beautifully she walks, too! By Jove, she's the loveliest being I ever beheld. She's the most perfectly beautiful girl in England. How I wish some d—d fellow would insult her, that I might smash him, and have an excuse for attending her home."

So spoke enthusiastic Tom Sedley, as they paused to watch the retreat of the ladies, leaning over the dwarf stone wall, and half hidden by the furrowed stem of a gigantic ash tree.

From this point, about a quarter of a mile distant from Malory, they saw them enter the wide iron gate and disappear in the dark avenue that leads up to that sombre place.

"*There!* I *said* it was Malory," exclaimed Sedley, laying his hand briskly on Cleve's arm.

"Well, I hope you're pleased; and tell me, now, what stay do you make at Cardyllian, Tom? Can you come over to Ware—not to-morrow, for I'm not quite sure that I shall be there, but on Tuesday, for a day or two?"

No—Tom Sedley couldn't. He must leave to-morrow, or, at latest, on Tuesday morning; and, for to-day, he had promised to go to afternoon service with the Etherges, and then home to tea with them. He was to meet the party on the Green.

So after a little talk, they turned together toward the town; and they parted near the Verney Arms, where Cleve's dog-cart awaited him. Having given his order in the hall, he walked into the coffee-room, in which, seated demurely, and quite alone, he found stout Mrs. Jones, the draper's wife—suave, sedate, wearing a subdued Sabbath smile upon her broad and somewhat sly countenance.

Her smile expanded as Cleve drew near. She made a great and gracious courtesy, and extended her short fat hand, which Cleve

Verney took and shook—for the tradition of homelier, if not kindlier times, still lingered in Cardyllian, and there were friendly personal relations between the great family and the dozen and a half of shop-keepers who constituted its commercial strength.

So Cleve Verney joked and talked with her, leaning on the back of a chair, with one knee on the seat of it. He was pleased to have lighted upon such a gossip, as good Mrs. Jones, the draper, who was waiting for the return of her husband, who was saying a word to Mr. Watkyn Hughes, in the bar, about a loan of his black horse for a funeral next morning.

"So it seems Lady Verney has got a tenant in Malory?" he said at last.

"Yes, *indeed*, sir," she replied, in her most confidential manner; "and I *hope*—I do *indeed*—it may turn out such a thing as she would like."

Mrs. Jones usually spoke in low and significant tones, and with a mystery and caution worthy of deeper things than she often talked about.

"Why, is there anything odd?" asked the young gentleman curiously.

"Well, it is *not*, now, *altogether* what I would *wish* for Lady Verney. I haven't seen any of the Malory family, excepting in church to-day; not one, indeed, sir; they are very strange; they never *come* into the town—not once since ever they came to Malory! but *dear* me! you know, sir, that might *be*, and yet everything as we could wish, mightn't it; yes, sure; still, you know, people *will* be *talking*; it's a pity we don't mind our own business more, and let others be, isn't it, sir?"

"Great pity; but—but what's the matter?" urged Cleve Verney.

"Well, Master Cleve, you know, Cardyllian, and how we *do talk* here; I don't say *more* than *other* places, but we *do*, and I do not like *repeatin'* everything I hear. There's more mischief than good, *I* think, comes of repeatin' stories."

"Oh! come, pray what's the good of a story except to repeat it? I ought to know, perhaps I should tell Lady Verney about it," said Cleve, who was really curious, for nothing could be more quiet than the get up and demeanour of the ladies.

"They haven't been here, you know, very *long*," murmured Mrs. Jones, earnestly.

"No, I *don't* know. I know nothing about it; *how* long?"

"Well, about five weeks—a little more; and we never saw the gentleman once; he's never been down to the town since he came; never indeed, sir, not once."

"He shows his sense; doesn't he?"

"Ah, you were always pleasant, Master Cleve, but you don't think *so*; no, you don't *indeed*; his conduct is *really most singular*, he's never been outside the walls of Malory all that time, in the *daylight*; very odd; he has hired Christmass Owen's boat, and he goes out in it *every night*, unless twice, the wind was too high, and Owen didn't choose to venture his boat. He's a *tall* man, Christmass Owen says, and holds himself straight, like an officer, for people *will* be making *inquiries*, you know; and he has *gray* hair; not *quite* white, you know."

"How *should* I know?"

"Ah, ha, you were always *funny*; yes, indeed, but it *is* gray, gone *quite* gray, Christmass Owen says."

"Well, and what about the ladies?" inquired the young gentleman. "*They*'re not gone gray, *all*? though I shouldn't wonder much, in Malory."

"The *ladies*? *Well*. There's *two*, you know; there's Miss Sheckleton, that's the elderly lady, and all the Malory accounts in the town is opened in her name. Anne Sheckleton, very reg'lar she is. I have nothing to say concerning her. They don't spend a great *deal*, you understand, but their money is *sure*."

"Yes, of course; but, you said, didn't you? that there was something not quite right about them."

"Oh dear, no, sir; I did not say quite *that*; nothing *wrong*, no sure, but very odd, sir, and most *unpleasant*, and that is all."

"And that's a good deal; isn't it?" urged Cleve.

"Well, it *is* something; it is *indeed* a great *deal*," Mrs. Jones emphasised oracularly.

"And *what is* it, what do you know of them, or the people here what do they *say?*"

"Well, they say, putting this and that together, and some hints from the servant that comes down to order things up from the town—for servants, you know, will be talking—that the family is *mad*."

"*Mad!*" echoed Cleve.

"That's what they say."

"The whole family are *mad!* and yet continue to manage their affairs as they do! By Jove, it is a comfort to find that people can get on without heads, on emergency."

"They don't say, no, dear me! that *all* that's in the house are mad; *only* the old man and the young lady."

"And what is she mad upon?"

"Well, they don't say. I don't know—melancholy I do suppose."

"And what is the old gentleman's name?"

"We don't *know*, the *servants* don't know, they say; they were hired by Miss Sheckleton, in Chester, and never saw the old gentleman, nor the young lady, till after they were two or three days in Malory; and one night comes a carriage, with a madhouse gentleman, they do say, a doctor, in charge of the old gentleman, and the young lady, poor thing! and so they were handed over by him, to Miss Sheckleton."

"And what sort of lunacies do they commit? They're not pulling down the house among them, I hope?"

"Very gentle—very. I'm told, quite, as you may say, *manageable*. It's a very sad thing, sir, but *what* a world it is! yes, indeed. Isn't it?"

"Ay, so it is.—I've heard that, I think, before."

"You may have heard it from *me*, sir, and it's long been my feeling and opinion, dear me! The longer I live the more melancholy sights I see!"

"How long is Malory let for?"

"Can't say, indeed, sir. That is they may give it up every three months, but has the right to keep it two whole years, that is if they *like*, you understand."

"Well, it is rather odd. It was they who sat in the Malory seat to-day?"

"That was Miss Sheckleton, was the old lady; and the young one, didn't you think her very pretty, sir?"

"Yes—she's pretty," he answered carelessly. "But I really could not see very well."

"I was very near as she turned to leave—before she took down her veil—and I thought what a really *beautiful* creature she was!"

"And what do they call her?"

"Miss Margaret, sir."

"Margaret! a pretty name—rather. Oh! here's Mr. Jones;" and Mr. Jones was greeted—and talked a little—somewhat more distantly and formally than his goodwife had done—and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, with a dutiful farewell, set off upon their Sunday's ramble.

CHAPTER III.

HOME TO WARE.

"MAD!" thought Cleve. "What an awful pity if she is. She doesn't *look* mad—melancholy she may. She does not look a *bit* mad. By Jove, I don't *believe* a word of it. It's utterly out of the question that the quiet old lady there could bring a mad girl to church with her. And thus resolved, Cleve walked out of the coffee-room, and awaiting his conveyance, stood on the steps of the Verney Arms, from whence he saw Wynne Williams, the portly solicitor of Cardyllian, and of a wide circle of comfortable clients round it. Wynne Williams is omniscient. Nothing ever happens in Cardyllian that he does not know with precision.

"Wynne," Cleve called up the quiet little street, and the attorney, looking over his fat shoulder, arrested his deliberate walk, and marched swiftly back, smiling.

So there was another greeting; and some more questions ensued, and answers, and then said Cleve—

"So Malory's let, I hear."

"Yes," said the attorney, with a slight shrug.

"You don't like the bargain, I see," said Cleve.

"It's a mismanaged place, you know. Lady Verney won't spend a shilling on it, and we must only take what we can get. We haven't had a tenant for five years till now."

"And who has taken it?"

"The Reverend Isaac Dixie."

"The devil he has. Why old Dixie's not mad, is he?"

"No, he's no fool. More like the other thing—rather. Drove a hard bargain—but *I* wouldn't take it myself at the money."

"Doesn't he live there?"

"No. There's an old gentleman and two ladies; one of them an old woman."

"And what's the old gentleman's *name*, and the young lady's?"

"Don't know, indeed; and what does it matter?" The attorney was curious, and had taken some little trouble to find out. "The Reverend Isaac Dixie's the tenant, and Miss Sheckleton manages the family business; and devil a letter ever comes by post here, except to Miss Sheckleton or the servants."

"Old Mother Jones, the draper's wife, over the way, says the girl and the old fellow are mad."

"Don't believe it. More likely he's in a fix, and wants to keep out of sight and hearing just now, and Malory's the very place to hide a fellow in. It's just *possible*, you know, there may be a screw loose in the upper works; but I don't believe it, and don't for the world hint it to the old lady. She's half mad herself about mad people, and if she took that in her head, by Jove, she'd never forgive me," and the attorney laughed uneasily.

"You do think they're mad. By Jove, you *do*. I *know* you think they're mad."

"I *don't* think they're mad. I don't know anything about them," said the good-humoured attorney, with Dundreary whiskers, leaning on the wooden pillar of the Verney Arms, and smiling provokingly in the young man's face.

"Come now, Wynne, I'll not tell the old lady, upon my honour. You may as well tell me all you know. And you *do* know; of *course*, you do; you *always* know. And these people living not a mile away! You *must* know."

"I see how it is. She's a pretty girl, and you want to pick up all about her, by way of inquiring after the old gentleman."

Verney laughed, and said—

"Perhaps you're right, though, I assure you, I didn't know it myself. But *is* the old fellow mad, or is there any madness among them?"

"I do assure you, I know no more than you do," laughed Mr. Wynne Williams. "He may be as sober as Solomon, or as mad as a hatter, for anything *I* know. It's nothing to me. He's only a visitor there, and the young lady, too, for that matter; and our tenant is the Reverend Isaac Dixie."

"Where is Dixie living now?"

"The old shop."

"I know. I wonder he has not wriggled on and up a bit. I always looked on Dixie as the bud of a dignitary; he has had time to burst into a Bishop since I saw him. Dixie and I have had some queer scenes together," and he laughed quietly over his recollections. "He and I spent three months once together in Malory—do you remember? I dare say *he* does. He was tutor and I pupil. Charming time. We used to read in the gun-room. That was the year they had the bricklayers and painters at Ware. Do you remember the day you came in exactly as I shied the ink-bottle at his head? I dare say the mark's on the wall still. By Jove, I'd have killed him, I suppose, if I'd had the luck to hit him. You must come over and see me before I go. I'm quite alone; but I can give you a mutton chop and some claret, and I want to show you the rifle I told you of. You'll be delighted with it."

And so this young man, with large dark eyes, smiled and waved his farewell, and, with a groom behind him, drove at a rapid pace down the street, and away toward Ware.

"He'll do that seven miles in five-and-thirty minutes," thought the attorney, looking after him drowsily; and his speculation taking another turn, he thought mistily of his political possibilities, for he had been three years in the House, and was looked upon as a clever young man, and one who, having many advantages, might yet be—who could tell where? and have power to make the fortunes of many deserving attorneys.

Cleve meanwhile was driving at a great pace toward Ware. I don't suppose a town life—a life of vice, a life of any sort, has power to kill the divine spark of romance in a young man born with imagination.

Malory had always had a strange and powerful interest for him. A dower house now, it had once been the principal mansion of his family. Over it, to his eye, hung, like the sombre and glowing phantasms of a cloudy sunset, the story of the romance, and the follies and the crimes of generations of the Verneys of Malory. The lordly old timber that rises about its chimneys and gables, seemed to him the mute and melancholy witnesses of bygone tragedies and glories.

There, too, in the Steward's House, a veritable relic of the ancient Friary, lived dreamy old Rebecca Mervyn; he wondered how he had forgotten to ask whether she was still there. She had seemed to his boyish fancy one of those delightful German ambiguities—half human, half ghost; her silent presents of toffy, and faint wintry smile and wandering gaze, used to thrill him with "a pleasing terror." He liked her, and yet he would have been afraid to sit alone in her latticed room with that silent lady, after twilight. Poor old Rebecca! It was eight years since he had last seen her tall, sad, silent form—silent, except when she thought herself alone, and used to whisper and babble as she looked with a wild and careworn gaze over the sea, toward the mighty mountains that built it round, line over line, till swell and peak are lost in misty distance. He used to think of the Lady of Branksome Tower, and half believe that old Rebecca was whispering with the spirits of the woods and cataracts, and lonely headlands, over the water.

"Is old Rebecca Mervyn there still?" he wondered on. "Unless she's dead, poor thing, she *is*—for my grandmother would never think of disturbing her, and she shall be my excuse for going up to Malory. I ought to see her."

The door of her quaint tenement stood by the court-yard, its carved stone chimney top rose by the roof of the dower-house, with which, indeed, it was connected. "It won't be like crossing their windows or knocking at their hall door. I shan't so much as enter the court-yard, and I really ought to see the poor old thing."

The duty would not have been so urgent had the face that appeared in church that day been less lovely.

He had never troubled himself for eight years about the existence of old Rebecca. And now that the image, after that long interval, suddenly returned, he for the first time asked himself why old Rebecca Mervyn was ever there? He had always accepted her presence as he did that of the trees, and urns, and old lead statues in the yew walk, as one of the properties of Malory. She was a sort of friend or client of his grandmother's—not an old servant plainly, not even a house-keeper. There was an unconscious refinement, and an air of ladyhood in this old woman. His grandmother used to call her Mrs. Mervyn, and treated her with a sort of distinction and distance that had in it both sympathy and reserve.

"I dare say Wynne Williams knows all about her, and I'll go and see her, at all events." So he thought as his swift trotter flew under the noble trees of Ware, along the picturesque road which commands the seaward view of that unrivalled estuary flanked by towering headlands, and old Pendillion, whose distant outline shews like a gigantic sphinx crouching lazily at the brink of the sea. Across the water now he sees the old town of Cardyllian, the church tower and the ruined Castle, and, further down, sad and sequestered, the dark wood and something of the gray front of Malory blurred in distance, but now glowing with a sort of charm that was fast deepening into interest.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE GREEN OF CARDYLLIAN.

WARE is a great house, with a palatial front of cut stone. The Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney seldom sees it. He stands next to the title, and that large residue of the estates which go with it. The title has got for the present into an odd difficulty, and cannot assert itself; and those estates are, pending the abeyance, compulsorily at nurse, where they have thriven, quite thrown off their ailments and incumbrances, and grown plethorically robust.

Still the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney is not, as the lawyers say, in perception of one shilling of their revenues. He feels indeed that he has grown in importance—that people seemed more pleased to see him, that he is listened to much better, that his jokes are taken and laughed at, and that a sceptical world seems to have come at last to give him credit for the intellect and virtues of which he is conscious. All this, however, is but the shadow of the substance which seems so near, and yet is intangible.

No wonder he is a little peevish. His nephew and heir presumptive—Cleve—runs down now and then for shooting and yachting; but his uncle does not care to visit Ware, and live in a corner of the house. I think he liked the people of Cardyllian and of the region round about, to suffer and resent with him. So they see his face but seldom.

Cleve Verney sat, after dinner, at an open window of Ware, with one foot on the broad window-stone, smoking his cigar and gazing across the dark blue sheet of water, whose ripples glimmered by this time in the moonlight, toward the misty wood of Malory.

Cleve Verney is a young man of accomplishment, and of talents, and of a desultory and tumultuous ambition, which sometimes engrosses him wholly, and sometimes sickens and loses its appetite. He is conceited—affecting indifference, he loves admiration. The object for the time being seizes his whole soul. The excitement of even a momentary pursuit absorbs him. He is reserved, capricious, and impetuous—knows not what self-mortification is, and has a pretty taste for dissimulation.

He is, I think, extremely handsome. I have heard ladies pronounce him fascinating. Of course, in measuring his fascinations, his proximity to a title and great estates was not forgotten; and he is as amiable as a man can be who possesses all the qualities I have described, and is selfish beside.

Now Cleve Verney was haunted, or rather possessed, for the present, by the beautiful phantom—sane or mad, saint or sinner—who had for so long, in that solemn quietude and monotony so favourable for the reception of fanciful impressions, stood or sat, Nun-like, book in hand, before him that day. So far from resisting, he encouraged this little delirium. It helped him through his solitary evening.

When his cigar was out, he still looked out toward Malory. He was cultivating his little romance. He liked the mystery of it. "Margaret—Margaret," he repeated softly. He fancied that he saw a light for a moment in the window of Malory, like a star. He could not be sure; it might be the light of a boat. Still it was an omen—the emblem of life—an answer of hope.

How very capricious all this was. Here was a young man, before whom yearly the new blown beauties of each London season passed in review—who fancied he had but to choose among them all—who had never experienced a serious passion, hardly even a passing sentiment—now strangely moved and interested by a person whom he had never spoken to—only seen—who had seemed unaffectedly unconscious of his presence; who possibly had not even seen him; of whose kindred and history he knew nothing, and between whom and himself there might stand some impassable gulf.

Cleve was in the mood to write verses, but that relief, like others, won't always answer the invocation of the sufferer. The muse is as coy as death. So instead, he wrote a line to the Rev. Isaac Dixie, of Clay Rectory, in which he said—

"MY DEAR DIXIE,—You remember when I used to call you '*Mr*. Dixie' and '*Sir*.' I conjure you by the memory of those happy days of innocence and Greek grammar, to take pity on my loneliness, and come here to Ware, where you will find me pining in solitude. Come just for a day. I know your heart is in your parish, and I shan't ask you to stay longer. The *Wave*, my cutter, is here; you used to like a sail (he knew that the Rev. Isaac Dixie suffered unutterably at sea, and loathed all nautical enjoyments), or you can stay in the house,

and tumble over the books in the library. I will make you as comfortable as I can; only do come, and oblige

"Your old pupil,

"CLEVE VERNEY.

"P.S.—I shall be leaving this *immediately*, so pray answer in person, by return. You'll get this at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, at Clay. If you take the 11·40 train to Llwynan—you see I have my "Bradshaw" by me—you will be there at four, and a fly will run you across to Cardyllian in little more than an hour, and there you will find me, expecting, at the Chancery; you know Wynne Williams's old house in Castle Street. I assure you, I really do want to see you, *particularly*, and you must not fail me. I shan't detain you a moment longer than your parish business will allow. Heavens, what a yarn have I post-scribbled!"

He walked down to the pretty little village of Ware, which consists of about a dozen and a-half of quaint little houses, and a small venerable church, situated by the road that winds through a wooded glen, and round the base of the hill by the shore of the moonlighted waters.

It was a romantic ramble. It was pleasanter, because it commanded, across the dark blue expanse, with its glimmering eddies, a misty view, now hardly distinguishable, of Malory, and pleasanter still, because his errand was connected with those tenants of old Lady Verney's of whom he was so anxious to learn *any*thing.

When Tom Sedley, with the light whiskers, merry face, and kind blue eyes, had parted company that afternoon, he walked down to the green of Cardyllian. In the middle of September there is a sort of second season there; you may then see a pretty gathering of muslins of all patterns, and silks of every hue, floating and rustling over the green, with due admixture of

> "White waistcoats and black,
> Blue waistcoats and gray,"

with all proper varieties of bonnet and hat—pork-pie, wide-awake, Jerry, and Jim-Crow. There are nautical gentlemen, and gentlemen in Knickerbockers; fat commercial "gents" in large white waistcoats, and starched buff cravats; touring curates in spectacles and "chokers," with that smile proper to the juvenile cleric, curiously

meek and pert; all sorts of persons, in short, making brief holiday, and dropping in and out of Cardyllian, some just for a day and off again in a fuss, and others dawdling away a week, or perhaps a month or two, serenely.

Its heyday of fashion has long been past and over; but though the "fast" people have gone elsewhere, it is still creditably frequented. Tom Sedley was fond of the old town. I don't think he would have reviewed the year at its close, with a comfortable conscience, if he had not visited Cardyllian, "slow" as it certainly was, some time in its course.

It was a sunny Sunday afternoon, the green looked bright, and the shingle glittered lazily beyond it, with the estuary rippling here and there into gleams of gold, away to the bases of the glorious Welsh mountains, which rise up from the deepest purple to the thinnest gray, and with many a dim rift and crag, and wooded glen, and slope, varying their gigantic contour.

Tom Sedley, among others, showed his reverence for the Sabbath, by mounting a well brushed chimney-pot. No one, it is well established, can pray into a Jerry. The musical bell from the gray church tower hummed sweetly over the quaint old town, and the woods and hollows round about; and on a sudden, quite near him, Tom Sedley saw the friends of whom he had been in search!

The Etherage girls, as the ancient members of the family still called them, were two in number. Old Vane Etherage of Hazelden, a very pretty place, about twenty minutes' walk from the green of Cardyllian, has been twice married. The result is, that the two girls belong to very different periods. Miss Charity is forty-five by the parish register, and Miss Agnes of the blue eyes and golden hair, is just nineteen and four months.

Both smiling after their different fashions, advanced upon Tom, who strode up to them, also smiling, with his chimney-pot in his hand.

Miss Charity of the long waist, and long thin brown face, and somewhat goggle eyes, was first up, and asked him very volubly, at least eleven kind questions, before she had done shaking his hand, all which he answered laughing, and at last, said he—

"Little Agnes, are you going to cut me? How well you look! Certainly there's no place on earth like Cardyllian, for pretty complexions, is there?"

He turned for confirmation to the curiously brown thin countenance of Miss Charity, which smiled and nodded acquiescence. "You're going to-morrow, you say; that's a great pity; everything looking so beautiful."

"*Everything*," acquiesced Tom Sedley, with an arch glance at Agnes, who blushed and said merrily—

"You're just the same old fool you always were; and we don't mind one word you say."

"Aggie, my dear!" said her sister, who carried down the practice of reproof from the nursery; and it was well, I suppose, that Miss Aggie had that arbitress of proprieties always beside her.

"I suppose you have no end of news to tell me. Is anyone going to be married? Is anyone dying, or anyone christened? I'll hear it all by-and-by. And who are your neighbours at Malory?"

"Oh, quite charming!" exclaimed Miss Agnes eagerly. "The most mysterious people that ever came to a haunted house. You know Malory has a ghost."

"Nonsense, child. Don't mind her, Mr. Sedley," said Miss Charity. "I *wonder* how you can talk so foolishly."

"Oh, that's nothing new. Malory's been haunted as long as *I* can remember," said Tom.

"Well, I did not think Mr. Sedley could have talked like that!" exclaimed Miss Charity.

"Oh, by Jove, I *know* it. *Everyone* knows it that ever lived here. Malory's *full* of ghosts. None but very queer people could think of living there; and, Miss Agnes, you were going to say——"

"Yes, they are *awfully* mysterious. There's an old man who stalks about at night, like the ghost in "Hamlet," and never speaks, and there's a beautiful young lady, and a gray old woman who calls herself Anne Sheckleton. They shut themselves up so closely—you can't imagine. Some people think the old man is a maniac or a terrible culprit."

"Highly probable," said Tom; "and the old woman a witch, and the young lady a vampire."

"Well, hardly that," laughed Miss Agnes, "for they came to church to-day."

"How you *can* both talk such folly," interposed Miss Charity.

"But you know they would not let Mr. Pritchard up to the house," pleaded Miss Agnes. "Mr. Pritchard, the curate, you know"—this was to Tom Sedley—"he's a funny little man—he preached to-day—very good and zealous, and all that—and he wanted to push his way up to the house, and the cross old man they have put to keep the gate, took him by the collar, and was going to beat him. Old Captain Shrapnell says he *did* beat him with a child's cricket-bat; but *he hates* Mr. Pritchard, so I'm not sure; but, at all events, he was turned out in disgrace, and blushes and looks dignified ever since whenever Malory is mentioned. Now, everyone here knows what a good little man poor Mr. Pritchard is, so it must have been sheer hatred of religion that led to his being turned out in that way."

"But the ladies were in church, my dear Aggie; we *saw* them, Mr. Sedley, *to-day*; they were in the Malory pew."

"Oh, indeed?" said Tom Sedley, artfully; "and you saw them pretty distinctly, I dare say."

"The young lady is quite beautiful, *we* thought. I'm so sorry you were not in our seat; though, indeed, people ought not to be staring about them in church; but you would have admired her immensely."

"Oh, I saw them. They were the people nearly opposite to the Verneys' seat, in the small pew? Yes, they *were*—that is, the young lady, I mean, was perfectly lovely," said little Tom, who could not with any comfort practise a reserve.

"See, the people are beginning to hurry off to church; it must be time to go," said Charity.

So the little party walked up by the court-house into Castle Street, and turned into quaint old Church Street, walking demurely, and talking very quietly to the solemn note of the old bell.

CHAPTER V.

A VISIT TO HAZELDEN.

THEY all looked toward the Malory seat on taking their places in their own; but that retreat was deserted now, and remained so, as Tom Sedley at very brief intervals ascertained, throughout the afternoon service; after which, with a secret sense of disappointment, honest Sedley escorted the Etherage "girls" up the steep road that leads through the wooded glen of Hazelden to the hospitable house of old Vane Etherage.

Everyone in that part of the world knows that generous, pompous, and boisterous old gentleman. You could no more visit Cardyllian without seeing Vane Etherage, than you could visit Naples without seeing Vesuvius. He is a fine portly bust, but little more. In his waking hours he lives alternately in his Bath chair and in the great leathern easy chair in his study. He manages to shuffle very slowly, leaning upon his servant on one side, and propped on his crutch at the other, across the hall of the Cardyllian Club, which boasts about six-and-thirty members, besides visitors, and into the billiard-room, where he takes possession of the chair by the fire, and enjoys the agreeable conversation of Captain Shrapnell, hears all about the new arrivals, who they are, what screws are loose, and where, and generally all the gossip and scandal of the little commonwealth of Cardyllian.

Vane Etherage had served in the navy, and, I believe, reached the rank of captain. In Cardyllian he was humorously styled "the Admiral," when people spoke *of* him, not *to* him; for old Etherage was fiery and consequential, and a practical joke which commenced in a note from an imaginary secretary, announcing that "The Badger Hunt" would meet at Hazelden House on a certain day, and inducing hospitable preparations, for the entertainment of those nebulous sportsmen, was like to have had a sanguinary ending. It was well remembered that when young Sniggers of Sligh Farm apologised on that occasion, old Etherage had arranged with Captain Shrapnell, who was to have been his second, that the Admiral was to fight in his Bath chair—an evidence of resource and resolution which was not lost upon his numerous friends.

"How do you do, Sedley? Very glad to see you, Tom—very glad indeed, sir. You'll come to-morrow and dine; you must, indeed—and

next day. You know our Welsh mutton—you do—you know it well; it's better here than in any other place in the world—in the whole world, sir—the Hazelden mutton, and, egad, you'll come here—you shall, sir—and dine here with us to-morrow; mind, you shall."

The Admiral wore a fez, from beneath which his gray hair bushed out rather wildly, and he was smoking through an enormous pipe as Tom Sedley entered his study, accompanied by the ladies.

"He says he's to go away to-morrow," said Miss Charity, with an upbraiding look at Sedley.

"Pooh—nonsense—not *he*—not *you*, Tom—not a bit, sir. We won't let you. Girls, we won't *allow* him to go. Eh?—No—no—you dine here to-morrow, *and* next day."

"You're very kind, sir; but I promised, if I am still in Cardyllian to-morrow, to run over to Ware, and dine with Verney."

"*What* Verney?"

"Cleve Verney."

"D—— him."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Miss Charity, grimly.

"Boh!—I *hate* him—I hate *all* the Verneys," bawled old Vane Etherage, as if hating were a duty and a generosity.

"Oh—no, papa—you *know* you don't—that would be *extremely wicked*," said Miss Charity, with that severe superiority with which she governed the Admiral.

"Begad, you're always telling me I'm wicked—and we know where the *wicked* go—that's catechism, I believe—so I'd like to know where's the difference between that and d—ing a fellow?" exclaimed the portly bust, and blew off his wrath with a testy laugh.

"I think we had better put off our bonnets and coats?—The language is becoming rather strong—and the tobacco," said Miss Charity, with dry dignity, to her sister, leaving the study as she did so.

"I thought it might be that *Kiffyn* Verney—the uncle fellow—Honourable Kiffyn Verney—*dis*-honourable, *I* call him—that old dog, sir, he's no better than a cheat—and I'd be glad of an

opportunity to tell him so to his face, sir—you have no *idea*, sir, how he has behaved to me!"

"He has the character of being a very honourable, sir—I'm sorry you think so differently," said honest Tom Sedley, who always stood up for his friends, and their kindred—"and Cleve, I've known from my childhood, and I assure you, sir, a franker or more generous fellow I don't suppose there is on earth."

"I know nothing about the jackanape, except that he's nephew of his roguish uncle," said the florid old gentleman with the short high nose and double chin. "He wants to take up Llanderis, and he *shan't have* it. He's under covenant to renew the lease, and the devil of it is, that between me and Wynne Williams we have put the lease astray—and I can't find it—nor *he* either—but it will turn up—I don't care two-pence about it—but no one shall humbug me—I won't be gammoned, sir, by all the Verneys in England. *Stuff*—sir!"

Then the conversation took a happier turn. The weather was sometimes a little squally with the Admiral—but not often—genial and boisterous—on the whole sunny and tolerably serene—and though he sometimes threatened high and swore at his servants, they knew it did not mean a great deal, and liked him.

People who lived all the year round in Cardyllian, which from November to May, every year, is a solitude, fall into those odd ways and little self-indulgences which gradually metamorphose men of the world into humorists and grotesques. Given a sparse population, and difficult intercommunication, which in effect constitute solitude, and you have the conditions of barbarism. Thus it was that Vane Etherage had grown uncouth to a degree that excited the amazement of old contemporaries who happened, from time to time, to look in upon his invalided retirement at Cardyllian.

The ladies and Tom Sedley, in the drawing-room, talked very merrily at tea, while old Vane Etherage, in his study, with the door between the rooms wide open, amused himself with a nautical volume and his terrestrial globe.

"So," said Miss Agnes, "you admired the Malory young lady—Margaret, our maid says, she is called—very much to-day?"

"I did, by Jove. Didn't you?" said Tom, well pleased to return to the subject.

"Yes," said Agnes, looking down at her spoon—"Yes, I admired her; that is, her features are very regular; she's what I call extremely handsome; but there are prettier girls."

"*Here* do you mean?"

"Yes—here."

"And who are they?"

"Well, I don't say here *now*; but I do think those Miss Dartmores, for instance, who were here last year, and who used to wear those blue dresses, were decidedly prettier. The heroine of Malory, whom you have fallen in love with, seems to me to want animation."

"Why, she couldn't show a great deal of animation over the Litany," said Tom.

"I did not see her then; I happened to be praying myself during the Litany," said Miss Agnes, recollecting herself.

"It's more than *I* was," said Tom.

"You ought not to talk that way, Mr. Sedley. It isn't *nice*. I wonder you can," said Miss Charity.

"I would not say it, of course, to strangers," said Tom. "But then, I'm so intimate here—and it's really true, that is, I mean, it was to-day."

"I wonder what you go to church for," said Miss Charity.

"Well, of course, you know, it's to pray; but I look at the bonnets a little, also; every fellow does. By Jove, if they'd only say truth, I'm certain the clergymen peep—I often saw them. There's that little fellow, the Rev. Richard Pritchard, the curate, you know—I'd swear I've seen that fellow watching you, Agnes, through the chink in the reading-desk door, while the sermon was going on; and I venture to say he did not hear a word of it."

"You ought to tell the rector, if you really saw that," said Miss Charity, severely.

"Pray do no such thing," entreated Agnes; "a pleasant situation for me!"

"Certainly, if Mr. Pritchard behaves himself as you describe," said Miss Charity; "but I've been for hours shut up in the same room with

him—sometimes here, and sometimes at the school—about the children, and the widows' fund, and the parish charities, and I never observed the slightest levity; but you are joking, I'm sure."

"I'm *not*, upon my honour. I don't say it's the least harm. I don't see how he can help it; I know if *I* were up in the air—in a reading-desk, with a good chink in the door, where I thought no one could see me, and old Doctor Splayfoot preaching his pet sermon over my head—*wouldn't* I peep?—that's all."

"Well, I really think, if he makes a habit of it, I *ought* to speak to Doctor Splayfoot. I think it's my *duty*," said Miss Charity, sitting up very stiffly, as she did when she spoke of duty; and when once the notion of a special duty got into her head, her inflexibility, as Tom Sedley and her sister Agnes knew, was terrifying.

"For mercy's sake, my dear Charry, do think of *me*! If you tell Doctor Splayfoot he'll be certain to tell it all to Wynne Williams and Doctor Lyster, and Price Apjohn, and every creature in Cardyllian will know everything about it, and a great deal more, before two hours; and once for all, if that ridiculous story is set afloat, into the church door I'll never set my foot again."

Miss Agnes' pretty face had flushed crimson, and her lip quivered with distress.

"How *can* you be such a fool, Aggie! I'll only say it was at *our seat*—and no one can possibly tell which it was at—you or me; and I'll certainly tell Dr. Splayfoot that Mr. Sedley saw it."

"And I'll tell the Doctor," said Sedley, who enjoyed the debate immensely, "that I neither saw nor said any such thing."

"I don't think, Thomas Sedley, you'd do anything so excessively wicked!" exclaimed Miss Charity, a little fiercely.

"Try me," said Tom, with an exulting little laugh.

"Every *gentleman* tells the truth," thrust she.

"Except where it makes mischief," parried Tom, with doubtful morality and another mischievous laugh.

"Well, I suppose I had better say nothing of *Christianity*. But what *you* do is your own affair! *my* duty I'll perform. I shall think it over; and I shan't be ruffled by any folly intended to annoy me." Miss

Charity's thin brown cheeks had flushed to a sort of madder crimson. Excepting these flashes of irritability, I can't charge her with many human weaknesses. "I'll not say *who* he looked at—I've promised that; but unless I change my present opinion, Dr. Splayfoot shall hear the whole thing to-morrow. I think in a clergyman any such conduct in church is *unpardonable*. The effect on other people is positively ruinous. *You*, for instance, would not have talked about such things in the light you do, if you had not been encouraged in it, by seeing a clergyman conducting himself so."

"Mind, you've *promised* poor little Agnes, you'll not bring her into the business, no matter what *I* do," said Sedley.

"I have, certainly."

"Well, I'll stay in Cardyllian to-morrow, and I'll see Doctor Splayfoot." Sedley was buttoning his coat and pulling on his gloves, with a wicked smile on his good-humoured face. "And I'll tell him that you think the curate ogles you through a hole in the reading-desk. That *you* like *him*, and *he's* very much gone about *you*; and that you wish the affair brought to a point; and that you're going to appeal to him—Doctor Splayfoot—to use his authority either to affect *that*, or to stop the ogling. I will, upon my honour!"

"And I shall speak to papa to prevent it," said Miss Charity, who was fierce and literal.

"And that will bring about a duel, and he'll be shot in his Bath chair, and I shall be hanged"—old Vane Etherage, with his spectacles on, was plodding away serenely at the little table by the fire, over his *Naval Chronicle*—"and Pritchard will be deprived of his curacy, and you'll go mad, and Agnes will drown herself like Ophelia, and a nice little tragedy you'll have brought about. Good night; I'll not disturb him"—he glanced toward the unconscious Admiral—"I'll see you both to-morrow, after I've spoken to the Rector." He kissed his hand, and was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

MALORY BY MOONLIGHT.

WHEN Tom Sedley stepped out from the glass door on the gravel walk, among the autumn flowers and the evergreens in the pleasant moonlight, it was just nine o'clock, for in that primitive town and vicinage people keep still wonderfully early hours.

It is a dark and lonely walk, down the steep Hazelden Road, by the side of the wooded glen, from whose depths faintly rises the noise of the mill-stream. The path leads you down the side of the glen, with dense forest above and below you; the rocky steep ascending at the left hand, the wooded precipice descending into utter darkness at your right, and beyond that, rising black against the sky, the distant side of the wooded ravine. Cheery it was to emerge from the close overhanging trees, and the comparative darkness, upon the high road to Cardyllian, which follows the sweep of the estuary to the high street of the town, already quiet as at midnight.

The moon shone so broad and bright, the landscape looked so strange, and the air was so frosty and pleasant, that Tom Sedley could not resist the temptation to take a little walk which led him over the Green, and up the steep path overhanging the sea, from which you command so fine a view of the hills and headlands of the opposite side, and among other features of the landscape, of Malory, lying softly in its dark and misty woodlands.

Moonlight, distance, and the hour, aided the romance of my friend Tom Sedley, who stood in the still air and sighed toward that antique house.

With arms folded, his walking-cane grasped in his right hand, and passed, sword-fashion, under his left arm, I know not what martial and chivalric aspirations concerning death and combat rose in his good-natured heart, for in some temperaments the sentiment of love is mysteriously associated with the combative, and our homage to the gentler sex connects itself magnanimously with images of wholesale assault and battery upon the other. Perhaps if he could have sung, a stave or two might have relieved his mind; or even had he been eloquent in the language of sentiment. But his vocabulary, unhappily, was limited, and remarkably prosaic, and not even having an appropriate stanza by rote, he was fain to betake himself

to a cigar, smoking which he at his leisure walked down the hill toward Malory.

Halfway down, he seated himself upon the dwarf wall, at the roadside, and by the ivied stem of a huge old tree, smoked at his ease, and sighed now and then.

"I can't understand it—it is like some confounded witchcraft," said he. "I *can't* get her out of my head."

I dare say it was about the same time that his friend Cleve Verney was performing, though not with so sublime an enthusiasm, his romantic devotions in the same direction, across the water from Ware.

As he stood and gazed, he thought he saw a figure standing near the water's edge on the shingle that makes a long curve in front of Malory.

If a living figure, it was very still. It looked gray, nearly white, in the moonlight. Was there an upright shaft of stone there, or a post to moor the boats by? He could not remember.

He walked slowly down the road. "By Jove! I think it's moving," he said aloud, pulling up all at once and lowering his cigar. "No, it *isn't* moving, but it *did* move, I *think*—yes, it has changed its ground a little—hasn't it? Or is it only my stand-point that's changed?"

He was a good deal nearer now, and it did look much more like a human figure—tall and slight, with a thin gray cloak on—but he could not yet be *quite* certain. Was there not a resemblance in the proportions—tall and slight? The uncertainty was growing intense; there was a delightful confusion of conjecture. Tom Sedley dropped his cigar, and hastened forward with an instinctive stealthiness in his eagerness to arrive before this figure—if such it were—should be scared away by his approach.

He was now under the shadow of the tall trees that overhang the outer wall of Malory, and cast their shadows some way down upon the sloping shore, near the edge of which a tall female figure was undoubtedly standing, with her feet almost touching the ripple of the water, and looking steadfastly in the direction of the dim headland of Pendillion, which at the far side guards the entrance of the estuary.

In the wall of Malory, at some three hundred yards away from the gate, is a small door, a little sally-port that opens a nearly direct access from the house to the rude jetty where the boats are sometimes moored. This little door stood now wide open, and through it the figure had of course emerged.

Tom Sedley now for the first time began to feel a little embarrassed. The general privacy of the place, the fact that the jetty, and in point of law the strand itself, here, belonged to Malory, from which the private door which still stood open, showed that the lady had emerged—all these considerations made him feel as if he were guilty of an impertinence, and very nearly of a trespass.

The lady stood quite still, looking across the water. Tom Sedley was upon the road that skirts the wall of Malory, in the shadow of the great trees. It would not have done to walk straight across the shingle to the spot where the lady stood, neither could he place himself so as to intercept her return to the doorway, directly so, as a less obvious stratagem, he made a detour, and sauntering along the water's edge like a man intent solely on the picturesque, with a beating heart he approached the female, who maintained her pose quite movelessly until he approached within a few steps.

Then she turned, suddenly, revealing an old and almost agonized face, that looked, in the intense moonlight, white, and fixed as if cut in stone. There is something ludicrous in the sort of shock which Tom Sedley experienced. He stood staring at the old lady with an expression which, if she had apprehended it, would not have flattered her feminine self-esteem, if any of that good quality remained to her.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the old woman, with a nervous eagerness, drawing near. "But pray, can *you* see a sail in that direction, a yawl, sir, they call it, just *there*?"—she pointed—"I fancied about two miles beyond that vessel that lies at anchor *there*? I can't see it now, sir, can *you*?"

She had come so close that Sedley could see not only the deep furrows, but the finely etched wrinkles about the large eyes that gazed on him, and from him to the sea, with an imploring stare.

"There's no sail, ma'am, between us and Pendillion," said Sedley, having first raised his hat deferentially; for did not this strange old lady with her gray mantle drawn over her head, nevertheless, represent Malory, and was not Malory saddened and glorified by the

presence of that beautiful being whom he had told himself a thousand times since morning service, he never, *never* could forget?

"Ha, ha! I thought I saw it, exactly, sir, in *that* direction; *pray* look more carefully, sir, my old eyes tire, and fail me."

"No, ma'am, positively nothing there. How long ago is it since you first saw it?"

"Ten—twenty—minutes, it must be."

"A yawl will run a good way in that time, ma'am," said Tom with a little shake of his head, and a smile. "The yawl they had at Ware last year would make eight knots an hour in this breeze, light as it is. She might have been up to Bryll by this time, or down to Pendrewist, but there's no sail, ma'am, either way."

"Oh! sir, are you very sure?"

"Quite sure, ma'am. No sail in sight, except that brig just making the head of Pendillion, and that can't be the sail you saw, for she wasn't in sight twenty minutes since. There's nothing more, ma'am, except boats at anchor."

"Thank you, sir," said the lady, still looking across the water, and with a deep sigh. "No, I suppose there's none. It sometimes happens to me—fancy, I suppose, and long expectation, from my window, looking out. It's a clear view, between the trees, across the bay to Pendillion; my eyes tire, I think; and so I fancy I see it. Knowing, that is, feeling so very sure, it will come again. Another disappointment for a foolish old woman. I sometimes think it's all a dream." She had turned and was now stumbling over the large loose stones toward the door. "Foolish dreams—foolish head—foolish old head, yet, sir, it *may* be that which goes away may come back, all except life. I've been looking out that way," and she turned and moved her hand towards the distant headlands. "You see nothing?"

"No *sail*, ma'am," answered Tom.

"No, no sail," she repeated to the shingle under her feet, as she picked her steps again homeward.

"A little longer—another wait; wait patiently. Oh! God, how slowly years and months go over!"

"May I see you to the door, ma'am?" asked Tom Sedley, prosaically. The old lady, thinking, I dare say, of other things, made him no answer—a silence which he accepted as permission, and walked on beside her, not knowing what to say next, and terribly anxious to hit upon something, and try to found an acquaintance. The open door supplied him.

"Charming place this Cardyllian, ma'am. I believe no one ever was robbed in it. They leave their doors open half the night, just like that."

"Do they, indeed?" said she. I think she had forgotten her companion altogether in the interval. "I don't remember. It's fifteen years and upwards since I was there. I live here, at Malory." She nodded, and raised her eyes to his face as she spoke.

Suddenly she stopped, and looked at him more earnestly in silence for some seconds, and then said she—

"Sir, will you forgive me? Are you related to the Verneys?"

"No, I haven't that honour," said he, smiling. "I *know* Cleve Verney very well, and a very good fellow he is; but we're not connected; my name is Sedley—Thomas Sedley."

"Sedley!" she repeated once or twice, still looking at him, "I recollect the name. No—no connection, I dare say, Cleve; and how *is* Cleve?"

"Very well; he's at Ware, now, for a few days."

"Ah! I dare say, and very well; a pretty boy—very pretty; but not like—no, not the least."

"I've heard people say he's very like what his father was," said Tom.

"Oh! *yes*, I think so; there *is* a likeness," acquiesced she.

"His father's been dead a long time, you know?"

"I know; yes. Cleve is at Oxford or Cambridge by this time?" she continued.

Tom Sedley shook his head and smiled a little.

"Cleve has done with all that ever so long. He's in the House of Commons now, and likely to be a swell there, making speeches, and all that."

"I know—I know. I had forgot how long it is since; he was a clever boy, wild, and talkative; yes, yes, he'll do for Parliament, I suppose, and be a great man, some day, there. There was no resemblance though; and you, sir, are like him, he was so handsome—no one so handsome."

Tom Sedley smiled. He fancied he was only amused. But I am sure he was also pleased.

"And I don't know. I can make out nothing. No one can. There's a picture. I think they'd burn it, if they knew. It is drawn in chalks by a French artist; they colour so beautifully. It hangs in my room. I pray before it, every morning, for him."

The old lady moaned, with her hands folded together, and still looking steadfastly in his face.

"They'd burn it, I think, if they knew there was a picture. I was always told they were a cruel family. Well, I don't know, I forgive him; I've forgiven him long ago. You are very like the picture, and even more like what I remember him. The picture was taken just when he came of age. He was twenty-seven when I first saw him; he was brilliant, a beautiful creature, and when I looked in his face I saw the sorrow that has never left me. You are wonderfully like, sir; but there's a difference. You're not so handsome." Here was a blow to honest Tom Sedley, who again thought he was only amused, but was really chagrined.

"There is goodness and kindness in your face; his had little of that, nothing soft in it, but everything brilliant and interesting; and yet you are wonderfully like."

She pressed her hand on her thin bosom.

"The wind grows cold. A pain shoots through me while I look at you, sir. I feel as if I were speaking to a spirit, God help me! I have said more to you to-night, than I have spoken for ten years before; forgive me, sir, and thank you, very much."

She turned from him again, took one long look at the distant headland, and then, with a deep sigh, almost a sob, she hastened towards the door. He followed her.

"Will you permit me to see you to the house?" he pleaded, with a benevolence I fear not quite disinterested. She was by this time at the

door, from which with a gesture, declining his offer, she gently waved him back, and disappeared within it, without another word. He heard the key turned in the lock, and remained without, as wise with respect to his particular quest as he had arrived.

CHAPTER VII.

A VIEW FROM THE REFECTORY WINDOW.

THE old discoloured wall of Malory, that runs along the shore overshadowed by grand old timber, that looks to me darker than any other grove, is seven feet high, and as he could see neither through nor over it, and could not think of climbing it, after a few seconds spent in staring at the gray door, Tom Sedley turned about and walked down to the little hillock that stands by the roadside, next the strand, and from the top of this he gazed, during an entire cigar, upon the mullioned windows of Malory, and was gratified by one faint gleam of a passing candle from a gallery window.

"That's a nice old woman, odd as she is; she looks quite like a lady; she's certainly not the woman we saw in church to-day; how well she looked; what a nice figure, that time, as she stood looking from the shore; that cloak thing is loose to be sure; but, by Jove, she might have been a girl almost; and what large eyes she has got, and a well-shaped face. She must have been quite charming, about a hundred years ago; she's not the mother: she's too old; a grand-aunt, perhaps; what a long talk we had, and I such a fool, listening to all that rubbish, and never getting in a word about the people, that peerless creature!"

His walk home to Cardyllian was desultory and interrupted. I should not like to risk my credit by relating how often he halted on his way, and how long, to refresh his eyes with the dim outlines of the trees and chimneys of Malory; and how, very late and melancholy, and abstracted, he reached his crib in the Verney Arms.

Early next morning, in pursuance of a clever idea, Tom Sedley made, I admit, his most picturesque and becoming toilet. It consisted of his black velvet knickerbocker suit, with those refined jack-boots of shining leather, and the most charming jerry that had ever appeared in Cardyllian, and away he marched over the hill, while the good people of the town were champing their muffins and sipping their tea, to the back gate of Malory.

It stood half open, and with as careless a boldness as he could assume, in he went and walked confidently up the straight farmyard lane, girt with high thorn hedges. Here, bribing a rustic who showed symptoms of churlishness, with half-a-crown, he was admitted into a

sort of farmyard, under pretext of examining the old monastic chapel and refectory, now used as a barn, and some other relics of the friary, which tourists were wont to admire.

From the front of the refectory there is a fine view of the distant mountains. Also, as Tom Sedley recollected, a foreground view, under the trees, in front of the hall-door, and there, with a sudden bound at his heart, he beheld the two ladies who had yesterday occupied the Malory pew, the old and the young, busy about the flower-bed, with garden gauntlets on, and trowel in hand.

They were chatting together cheerily enough, but he could not hear what they said. The young lady now stood up from her work, in a dress which looked to him like plain holland.

The young lady had pushed her hat a little back, and stood on the grass, at the edge of the flowers, with her trowel glittering in the early sun, in her slender right hand, which rested upon her left; her pretty right foot was advanced a little on the short grass, and showed just its tip, over the edge of the flower-bed. A homely dress and rustic appliances. But, oh! that oval, beautiful face!

Tom Sedley—the "peeping Tom" of this story—from his deep monastic window, between the parting of the tall trees, looked down upon this scene in a breathless rapture. From the palmy days of the Roman Pantheon down, was ever Flora so adored?

From under his Gothic arch, in his monkish shade, Tom could have stood, he fancied, for ever, gazing as friar has seldom gazed upon his pictured saint, on the supernatural portrait which his enthusiasm worshipped.

The young lady, as I have described her, looking down upon her old companion, said something with a little nod, and smiled; then she looked up at the tree tops from where the birds were chirping; so Tom had a fair view of her wonderful face, and though he felt himself in imminent danger of detection, he could not move. Then her eyes with a sidelong glance, dropped on the window where he stood, and passed on instantly.

With the instinct which never deceives us, he felt her glance touch him, and knew that he was detected. The young lady turned quietly, and looked seaward for a few moments. Tom relieved his suspense with a sigh; he hoped he might pass muster for a tourist, and that the privileges of such visitors had not been abridged by the recluses.

The young lady then quietly turned and resumed her work, as if nothing had happened; but, I think, she said something to her elderly companion, for that slim lady, in a Tweed shawl, closely brooched across her breast, stood up, walked a step or two backward upon the grass, and looked straight up at the window, with the inquisitive frown of a person a little dazzled or near-sighted.

Honest Tom Sedley, who was in a rather morbid state all this morning, felt his heart throb again, and drum against his ribs, as he affected to gaze in a picturesque absorption upon the distant headlands.

The old lady, on the other hand, having distinctly seen in the deep-carved panel of that antique wall, the full-length portrait of our handsome young friend, Tom Sedley, in his killing knickerbocker suit of black velvet, with his ivory-headed cane in his hand, and that "stunning" jerry which so exactly suited his countenance, and of which he believed no hatter but his own possessed the pattern, or could produce a similar masterpiece.

The old lady with her hand raised to fend off the morning sun that came flickering through the branches on her wrinkled forehead, and her light gray eyes peering on him, had no notion of the awful power of her gaze upon that "impudent young man."

With all his might Tom Sedley gazed at the Welsh headlands, without even winking, while he felt the basilisk eye of the old spinster in gray Tweed upon him. So intense was his stare, that old Pendillion at last seemed to nod his mighty head, and finally to submerge himself in the sea. When he ventured a glance downward, he saw Miss Anne Sheckleton with quick steps entering the house, while the young lady had recommenced working at a more distant flower-bed, with the same quiet diligence.

It was to be feared that the old lady was taking steps for his expulsion. He preferred anticipating her measures, and not caring to be caught in the window, left the refectory, and walked down the stone stairs, whistling and tapping the wall with the tip of his cane.

To him, as the old play-books say, entered from the side next the house, and just as he set the sole of his resplendent boot upon the paving-stones, a servant. Short, strong, and surly was the man. He did not seem disposed for violence, however, for he touched an imaginary hatbrim as he came up, and informed Mr. Sedley, who was properly surprised and pained to hear it, that he had in fact

committed a trespass; that since it had been let, the place was no longer open to the inspection of tourists; and, in short, that he was requested to withdraw.

Tom Sedley was all alacrity and regret. He had never been so polite to a groom in all his life. The man followed him down the back avenue, to see him out, which at another time would have stirred his resentment; and when he held the gate open for him to emerge, Tom gave him no less than three half-crowns—a prodigality whereat his eyes opened, if not his heart, and he made a gruff apology for the necessities imposed by duty, and Tom interrupted him with—

"Quite right, perfectly right! you could do nothing else. I hope the la——your master is not vexed. You must say I told you to mention how very much pained I was at having made such a mistake. Say that I, Mr. Sedley, regret it very much, and beg to apologise. Pray don't forget. Good morning; and I'm very sorry for having given *you* so much trouble—this long walk."

This tenderness his bow-legged conductor was also in a mood to receive favourably. In fact, if he had not told him his name was Sedley, he might have settled affirmatively the question at that moment before his mind—whether the intruder from whom silver flowed so naturally and refreshingly might not possibly be the Prince of Wales himself, who had passed through the village of Ware, only seven miles away, three weeks before.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT SAIL.

POOR Tom Sedley! The little excitement of parting with the bull-necked keeper of his "garden of beauty", over, his spirits sank. He could not act the unconscious tourist again, and re-commit the premeditated mistake of the morning. His exclusion was complete.

Tom Sedley paid a visit that day at Hazelden, and was depressed, and dull, and absent to such a degree, that Miss Charity Etherage, after he had gone away, canvassed the matter very earnestly, and wondered whether he was quite well, and hoped he had not had bad news from London.

I don't know how Tom got over all that day; but at about four o'clock, having paid his penny at the toll-gate of the pier of Cardyllian, he was pacing up and down that breezy platform, and discussing with himself the possibility of remaining for another Sunday, on the chance of again seeing the Malory ladies in church. Lifting up his eyes, in his meditation, he saw a cutter less than a mile away, making swiftly for the pierhead, stooping to the breeze as she flew, and beating up the spray in sparkling clouds from her bows. His practised eye recognised at a glance the *Wave*, the victorious yacht of Cleve Verney. With this breeze it was a run without a tack from Ware jetty.

In less than five minutes she furled her sails, and dropped anchor close to the pier stair, and Cleve Verney in another minute stepped upon it from his punt.

"You're to come back in her, to Ware, this evening," said he, as they shook hands. "I'm so glad I've found you. I've to meet a friend at the Verney Arms, but our talk won't take very long; and how have you been amusing yourself all day? Rather slow, isn't it?"

Tom Sedley told his story.

"Well, and what's the *name*?" inquired Cleve.

"I can't tell; they don't know at the hotel; the Etherages don't know. I asked Castle Edwards, and *he* doesn't know either," said Sedley.

"Yes, but the fellow, the servant, who turned you out at Malory——"

"He did not turn me out. I was *going*," interrupted Tom Sedley.

"Well, who *saw* you out? You made him a present; he'd have told you, of course. *Did* he?"

"I didn't ask him."

"Come, that's being very delicate indeed! All I can say is, if I were as spoony as you are, on that girl, I'd have learned all about her long ago. It's nothing to me; but if you find out her name, I know two or three fellows in town who know everything about everybody, and I'll make out the whole story—that is, if she's anybody."

"By Jove! that's very odd. There he *is*, just gone into the Golden Lion, that groom, that servant, that Malory man," exclaimed Tom Sedley very eagerly, and staring hard at the open door of the quaint little pot-house.

"Well, go; give him a pound, it's well worth it," laughed Cleve. "I'm serious, if you want to learn it; no fellow like that can resist a pound; and if *you* tell me the name, I'll make you out all the rest, I really will, when we get to town. There, don't let him get off, and you'll find me at the Verney Arms."

So saying, Cleve nodding his irresolute friend toward the Golden Lion, walked swiftly away to meet the Reverend Isaac Dixie. But Dixie was not at the Chancery; only a letter, to say that "most unhappily" that morning, Clay Rectory was to undergo an inspection by a Commissioner of Dilapidations; but that, D.V., he would place himself next day, at the appointed hour, at his honoured pupil's disposal.

"Those shovel-hatted martinets! they never allow a minute for common sense, or anything useful—always pottering over their clerical drill and pipe-clay," said Cleve, who, when an idea once entered his mind, pursued it with a terrible concentration, and hated an hour's delay.

So out he came disappointed, and joined Sedley near the Golden Lion.

They said little for a time, but walked on, side by side, and found themselves sauntering along the road toward Malory together.

"Well, Sedley, I forgot,—what about the man? Did he tell you anything?"

"I do believe if a fellow once allows a girl to get into his head, ever so little, he's in a sort of way drunk—worse than drunk—systematically foolish," said honest Sedley, philosophizing. "I've been doing nothing but idiotic things ever since church time yesterday."

"Well, but what did he say?"

"He took the pound, and devil a thing he said. He wouldn't tell anything about them. I give you leave to laugh at me. I know I'm the greatest ass on earth, and I think he's the ugliest brute I ever saw, and the most uncivil; and, by Jove, if I stay here much longer, I think he'll get all my money from me. He doesn't ask for it, but I go on giving it to him; I can't help it; the beast!"

"Isn't there a saying about a sage, or something and his money being soon parted?" asked Cleve. "I think if I were so much gone about a girl as you are, and on such easy terms with that fellow, and tipped him so handsomely, I'd have learned her name, at least, before now."

"I can't; everything goes wrong with me. Why should I risk my reason, and fall in love with the moon? The girl wouldn't look at me; by Jove, she'll never even *see* me; and it's much better so, for nothing can possibly come of it, but pain to me, and fun to every one else. The late train does not stop at our station. I can't go to-night; but, by Jove, I'll be off in the morning. I *will*. Don't you think I'm right, Cleve?"

Tom Sedley stopped short, and faced his friend—who was, in most matters, his oracle—earnestly laying his hand upon his arm. Cleve laughed at his vehemence, for he knew Tom's impulsive nature, his generous follies, and terrible impetuosity, and, said he—"Right, Tom; always a philosopher! Nothing like the radical cure, in such a case, absence. If the cards won't answer, try the dice, if they won't do, try the balls. I'm afraid this is a bad venture; put your heart to sea in a sieve! No, Tom, that precious freightage is for a more substantial craft. I suppose you have seen your last of the young lady, and it would be a barren fib of friendship to say that I believe you have made any impression. Therefore, save yourself, fly, and try what absence will do, and work and play, and eating and drinking, and sleeping abundantly in a distant scene, to dissipate the fumes of your intoxication, steal you away from the enchantress, and restore you to yourself. Therefore I echo—go."

"I'm sure you think it, though you're half joking," said Tom Sedley.

"Well, let us come on. I've half a mind to go up myself and have a peep at the refectory," said Cleve.

"To what purpose?"

"Archæology," said Cleve.

"If you go in there, after what occurred this morning, by Jove, *I*'ll not wait for you," said Sedley.

"Well, come along; there's no harm, I suppose, in passing by. The Queen's highway, I hope, isn't shut up," answered Verney.

Sedley sighed, looked towards Malory, and not being in a mood to resist, walked on toward the enchanted forest and castle, by his companion's side.

When they came by the dark and narrow cross-road that skirts the southern side of Malory to the farmyard gate, nailed on its pier, on a square bit of board, in fresh black and white paint, they read the following words:—

NOTICE.

No admission at this gate to any but servants or others employed at Malory.

Any person found trespassing within the walls will be prosecuted according to law.

—September, 18—.

When the young men, in a momentary silence, read this warning, the ingenuous countenance of Tom Sedley flushed crimson to the very roots of his hair, and Cleve Verney was seized with a fit of laughter that grew more and more violent the more grave and reproachful grew Tom Sedley's aspect.

"Well, Tom, I think, if we have any dignity left, we had better turn our backs upon this inhospitable refectory, and seek comfort elsewhere. By Jove! a pretty row you must have made up there this morning to oblige the governor to declare the place in a state of siege, and mount his artillery."

"Come away, Cleve; that is, as soon as you've done laughing at that board. Of course, you knew as well as I do, that my coming in, and

looking as, I hope, any gentleman might, at that stupid old barn, this morning, could not possibly be the cause of that offensive notice. If you think it is pointed at me, of course, it's more amusing, but if not, hang me if I can see the joke."

Tom Sedley was out of spirits, and a little testy, and very silent all the way back to Cardyllian. He refused Cleve's invitation to Ware. He made up his mind to return to London in the morning; and this being his last evening in this part of the world, he must spend it at Hazelden.

So these young gentlemen dined together at the Verney Arms, and it grew dark as they sat by the open window at their wine, and the moon got up and silvered the distant peaks of shadowy mountains, and these companions grew silent and dreamy as they might in the spell of distant music.

But the people of Hazelden kept early hours, and Tom Sedley suddenly recollected that he must go. They parted, therefore, excellent friends, for Sedley had no suspicion that Cleve was his rival, and Cleve could afford to be amused at Sedley's rivalry.

When Verney got on board there was a light breeze. "We'll run down toward Penruthyn Priory," said he; and round went the cutter, leaning with the breeze, and hissing and snorting through the gentle swell as she flew on towards the headland on which stands that pretty monastic ruin.

She glided into the black shadow cast by the solemn wall of cloud that now hid the moon from sight, away from the hundred star-like lights of Cardyllian, flying swiftly backward on the left, close under the shapeless blackness of the hill, that rises precipitously from the sea, and over which lies the path from the town to Malory, and onward by the wooded grounds of that old mansion, now an indistinguishable mass of darkness, whose outline was hardly visible against the sky.

I dare say, the thought of crossing the lights of these windows, had its share in prompting this nautical freak, and towards these Cleve's gaze was turned, when, on a sudden, the man looking out at the bows shouted "Starboard;" but before the boat had time to feel the helm, the end of the cutter's boom struck the mast of a small boat; a shout from several voices rose suddenly, and was almost instantaneously far behind. Round went the yacht; they hailed the boat.

"She's lost her mast, I think," said one of Cleve's men.

"D—— you, where are your lights?" shouted a stern, fierce voice.

"No one overboard?" cried Cleve.

"No, no. You'll be the *Wave*, sure? Mr. Cleve Verney, from Ware?" replied a different voice.

"Who are these fellows, do you know?" asked Cleve of his men.

"That will be Christmass Owen, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed Cleve. "And the other's the old gentleman from Malory?"

"Well, I think 'twill be him, sure."

In another minute the punt of the yacht was alongside the boat, with a message from Cleve, inviting the old gentleman on board, and offering to put him ashore wherever he liked best.

Shortly and grimly the courtesy was refused. The wrath of the old man, however, seemed to have subsided, and he gathered himself within the folds of his silence again. All had passed in a darkness like that of Styx. A dense screen of cloud had entirely hid the moon; and though so near, Cleve could not see the old man of Malory, about whom he was curious, with a strange and even tender sort of curiosity, which, certainly, no particular graciousness on his part had invited. In a few minutes more the boat, with the aid of another spar, was on her course again, and the *Wave* more than a mile away on hers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REVEREND ISAAC DIXIE.

AT five o'clock next day, Cleve Verney was again in Cardyllian.

Outside "The Chancery" stood a "fly," only just arrived. The Reverend Isaac Dixie had come only a minute or two before, and was waiting in the chamber which was still called the state room.

The room is long and panelled with oak, and at the further end is the fire-place. The ceiling above the cornice slopes at each side with the roof, so as to give it quite a chapel-like effect; a high carved oak mantel-piece, and a carved wainscotting embedding in its panels a symmetrical system of cupboards, closed the perspective, and, as Cleve entered at the door in the further wall, gave effect to the solitary figure of the Reverend Isaac Dixie, who was standing with his back to the fire-place on the threadbare hearthrug, waiting, with an angelic smile, and beating time to a sacred melody, I am willing to believe, with his broad flat foot.

This clerical gentleman looked some six or seven and forty years old, rather tall than otherwise, broad, bland, and blue-chinned, smiling, gaitered, and single-breasted.

"Capital place to read out the Ten Commandments," exclaimed Cleve. "Glad to see you, old Dixie. It's a long time since we met."

The clergyman stepped forward, his chin a little advanced, his head a little on one side, smiling rosily with nearly closed eyes, and with a broad hand expanded to receive his former pupil's greeting.

"I've obeyed the summons, you see; punctually, I hope. Delighted, my dear, distinguished young pupil, to meet you, and congratulate you on your brilliant successes, delighted, my dear Cleve," murmured the divine, in a mild rapture of affection.

"That's not so neat as the old speech, Dixie; don't you remember?" said Cleve, nevertheless shaking his great soft red hand kindly enough. "What was it? Yes, you were to be my *tutamen*, and I your *dulce decus*. Wasn't that it?"

"Ha, yes, I may have said it; a little classic turn, you know; ha, ha! not altogether bad—not altogether? We have had many agreeable

conversations—colloquies—you and I, Mr. Verney, together, in other and very happy days," said the clergyman, with a tender melancholy smile, while his folded hands faintly smoothed one another over as if in a dream of warm water and wash-balls.

"Do you remember the day I shied that awful ink-bottle at your head? by Jove, it was as large as a tea-pot. If I had hit you that time, Dixie, I don't think we'd ever have found a mitre to fit your head."

"Arch, arch—ha, ha! dear me! yes—I had forgot that—yes, quite—you were always an arch boy, Cleve. Always arch, Mr. Verney.".

"Very arch—yes, it was what old Toler called the office bottle; do you remember? it weighed three or four pounds. I think you were glad it was broken; you never got one like it into the room again. I say if it had caught you on the head, what a deal of learning and other things the Church would have lost!"

Whenever it was Cleve's pleasure to banter, the Reverend Isaac Dixie took it in good part. It was his ancient habit, so on this occasion he simpered agreeably.

"It was in the little study at Malory. By-the-by, who are those people you have put into Malory?" continued Cleve.

"Ha—the—the people who occupy the *house*?" asked the clergyman, throwing out a question to gain time.

"Come—who are they?" said Cleve, a little briskly, throwing himself back in his seat at the same time, and looking in Dixie's face.

"Well, *I*'m the person responsible; in fact the lease is to me."

"Yes, I know that; go on."

"Well, I took it at the request of Miss Sheckleton, an elderly lady, whom——"

"Whom I don't care to hear about," interrupted Cleve. "There's an old gentleman—there's a young lady; who are *they*? I want their names."

The Reverend Isaac Dixie was evidently a little puzzled. He coughed, he looked down, he simpered, and shook his head.

"You don't want to tell me, Dixie."

"There is *nothing* I should not be most happy to tell my distinguished pupil. I've been always frank, quite frank with you, Mr. Verney. I've never had a secret."

Cleve laughed gently.

"You wrong me if you think I have," and the Rector of Clay dropped his eyes and coloured a little and coughed. "But this is not mine—and there really *is* a difficulty."

"Insuperable?"

"Well, really, I'm *afraid* that term expresses it but too truly," acquiesced the clergyman.

"What a bore!" exclaimed Cleve.

"Shut the window, if it isn't too much trouble, like a dear old Dixie—a thousand thanks."

"I assure you I would not say it," resumed the Rector of Clay, "if it were not so—and I hope I'm in the habit of speaking truth—and this secret, if so trifling a thing may be seriously so termed, is not mine, and therefore not at my disposal."

"Something in that, old Dixie. Have a weed?" he added, tendering his cigars.

"Thanks, no; never smoke now," said he, closing his eyes, and lifting his hand as if in a benediction.

"Oh, to be sure, your bishop—I forgot," said Cleve.

"Yes, a-ha; strong opinions—very able lecture; you have no doubt read it."

"With delight and terror. Death riding on a pipe-clay coloured horse. Sir Walter Raleigh, the man of sin, and the smoke of the Bottomless pit, smelling of cheroots. You used not to be such a fool, old Dixie. *I*'m your bishop now; I've said it, mind—and no one sees you," said Cleve, again offering his cigars.

"Well, well; anything, anything; thanks, just for *once, only* once;" and he selected one, with a playful bashfulness.

"I'm your bishop—I don't forget. But you must wait till I'm—what d'ye call it?—*consecrated—there*, you need not laugh. Upon my

honour, I'm serious; you shall have your choice; I swear you shall," said Cleve Verney, who stood very near the title and estates of Verney, with all their comfortable advowsons appendant.

The Reverend Isaac Dixie smiled affably and meekly with prospective gratitude, and said he softly—

"I'm only too happy to think my distinguished, and I may say, honoured pupil, should deem me fit for a weighty charge in the Church; and I may say, although Clay has been considered a nice little thing, some years ago, yet, since the vicar's—I must say, most unreasonable—claim has been allowed, it is really, I should be ashamed to say how trifling in emolument; we have all our crosses to bear, my dear pupil, friend, and I may say, patron—but it is good, nay, pleasant to me to have suffered disappointments, since in their midst comes no trifling balm in the confidence you are pleased to evidence in my humble fitness."

The clergyman was moved. A gleam of the red western sun through the window, across his broad, meek, and simpering countenance, helped the effect of his blinking eyes, and he hastily applied his handkerchief.

"Isaac, Isaac, you shan't come that over me. I *don't* think you fit—not a bit. I'm not an Aristides, only a bishop; and I don't pretend to more conscience than the rest." His eye rested on him with an unconscious disdain. "And for the life of me, I don't know why I intend doing anything for you, except that I promised, and your name's lucky, I suppose; you used to keep telling me, don't you remember, that all the promises were to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? and you are Isaac, in the middle—*medio tutissimus*—and I think Isaac is the queerest mixture of Jew and muff in the Old Testament, and—and—so on."

The sentence ended so because Cleve was now lighting his cigar. The clergyman smiled affably, and even waggishly, as one who can bear to be quizzed, and has a confidence in the affection of the joker; and Cleve smoked on serenely and silently for a little.

"And those are really my intentions respecting you," he resumed; "but you are to do as I bid you in the mean time, you know. I say, you mustn't snub your bishop; and, upon my honour, I'm perfectly serious, you shall never see my face again, nor hear of me more, if you don't, this minute, tell me everything you know about those people at Malory."

"Are you really *serious*, Mr. Verney?—*really* so?"

"Yes, quite so; and I can keep my word, as you know. Who are they?"

"You are placing me in the most awkward possible position; pray consider whether you really *do* make a point of it."

"I *do* make a point of it."

"I, of course, keep *nothing* from *you*, when you press it in that way; and beside, although it *is* awkward, it is, in a measure *right*, inasmuch as you are connected with the property, I may say, and have a right to exact information, if you thus so insist upon it as a duty."

"Come, Dixie, who *are* they!" said Cleve, peremptorily.

"Well, he's in some difficulties just now, and it is really vital that his name should not be disclosed, so I entreat you won't mention it; and especially you won't mention me as having divulged it."

"Certainly; of course I don't want to set the beaks on your friend. I shan't mention his name, depend upon it, to mortal. I've just one reason for wishing to know, and I have brought you a journey, here and back, of a hundred and forty miles, precisely to answer me this question, and I *will* know."

"Well, Mr. Verney, my dear sir, I venture to wash my hands of consequences, and unfeignedly relying upon your promise, I tell you that the old gentleman now residing in very strict seclusion at Malory, is Sir Booth——" he paused as if willing that Cleve should supply the surname, and so, perhaps, relieve him of a part of the disclosure.

"Sir Booth *what*?"

"Don't you know?"

"*No*. You can't mean Sir Booth Fanshawe."

"Sir Booth—Sir Booth Fanshawe; yes," said the clergyman, looking down bashfully, "I *do* mean Sir Booth Fanshawe."

"*By Jove!* And don't you think it was rather a liberty, bringing Sir Booth Fanshawe to occupy our house at Malory, after all that has passed?" demanded Cleve Verney, rather sternly.

"Well, *no*, it really did *not*—I'm grieved if I have erred in judgment; but it never *did* strike me in that light—never in that point of view; and Sir Booth doesn't know who it belongs to. It never struck me to tell him, and I don't think he has an idea."

"*I* don't care; but if my *uncle* hears, *he*'ll not like it, I can tell you."

"I should not for any earthly consideration have made myself accessory to anything that could possibly have given a moment's pain to my honoured patron, the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, or to my honoured pupil——"

"Why, yes, my uncle might do you a mischief; as for me, I don't care. Only I think it was rather cool, considering how savage he has always been—what a lot of money he has cost us—getting up contests and petitions, and vilifying us wherever he could. He has left no stone unturned—but that's all over; and I think you've committed an indiscretion, because he hasn't a guinea left, and my sensible old grandmother will positively make you pay the rent, and that will be as unpleasant as sharing your tithes with the vicar."

"We are not all so wise as perhaps we should be in our generation," said the Reverend Isaac Dixie, with an apostolic simper that was plaintive and simple. To quiet the reader's uneasiness, however, I may mention that this good man had taken particular care to secure himself against a possible loss of a shilling in the matter. "And there are claims to which it is impossible to be deaf—there is a voice that seems to say, turn not thou away."

"*Do* stop that. You know very well that Booth Fanshawe was once a man who could give you a lift; and you did not know, perhaps, that he is ruined."

"Pardon me; but too well. It is to protect him against immediate and melancholy consequences that I ventured, at some little risk, perhaps, to seek for him an asylum in the seclusion of Malory."

"Well, it wasn't all sentiment, my dear Dixie; there's a gold thread of a ravelled tuft running through it somewhere; for whatever the romance of Christianity may say, the practice of the apostles is, very much, nothing for nothing; and if old Fanshawe wasn't worth

obliging, I dare say Hammerdon wrote or spoke to you. Come, your looks confess it."

"Lord Hammerdon, I have no hesitation in saying, did suggest——"

"There, that will do. Will you come over to Ware, and dine with me? I'm sure old Jones can give you a bed."

The Reverend Isaac Dixie, however, could not come. There was to be a religious meeting in the morning at Clay school-house; the bishop was to be there; and the rector was himself to move a resolution, and had not yet considered what he was to say.

So he stepped with a bland countenance and a deliberate stride into his fly again; and from its window smirked sadly, and waved his hand to the future patron of Fridon-cum-Fleece, as he drove away; and the clergyman, who was not always quite celestial, and could, on safe occasions, be sharp and savage enough, exploded in a coarse soliloquy over the money, and the day and the ease he had sacrificed to the curiosity of that young man, who certainly *had* some as *odious* points as it had ever been his lot to meet with.

CHAPTER X.

READING AN EPITAPH.

CLEVE VERNEY next afternoon was again, on board his yacht. Wind and tide both favouring, the cutter was running under a press of canvas that brought her gunwale to the water's edge once more for Penruthyn Priory. This time it was no mere aquatic whim; it was pursuit.

Searching the wooded sea-board of Malory with his glass, from the terrace of Ware, he had seen an open sail-boat waiting at the jetty. Down came a servant with cloaks and rugs. Cleve grew more and more interested as he adjusted the focus of his glass more exactly. On a sudden, from the little door in the boundary wall, emerged two ladies. There was no mistake; he could swear to them. They were the very same whom he had seen on Sunday in the Malory seat.

He watched till he saw the boat round the point, and then—"Yes," he thought, "they are certainly going to Penruthyn Priory."

And away went Cleve Verney in pursuit of the shadow which he secretly adored. From Ware to Penruthyn Priory is about six miles, and by the time the pursuing cutter was in motion the chase had made more than a mile of her course, and was within two of the landing point at the ruin.

Cleve saw the two ladies disembark. It was now plain that they had come either to visit the ruins, or for a walk in that wild and lonely park called the Warren. Cleve had brought his gun with him, only for an excuse.

Little more than five minutes after the arrival of the open boat, Cleve Verney set his foot upon the rude landing place, as old perhaps as the Priory itself; a clumsy little pier, constructed of great rocks, overgrown with sea-rack, over which slippery platform he strode with reckless haste, and up by that steep and pretty little winding lane, the trees overhanging which look centuries old, stooping and mantled in ivy. They may have heard the tinkle of the bells of the prior's mule, as he ambled beneath their boughs, and the solemn swell of the monkish requiem from the melancholy little churchyard close by, under the old Priory windows. The thick stone wall that fences this ancient by-road is clasped together with ivy, and hoar

with lichens, irregular, and broken as the battlements of a ruined tower. The approach, and the place itself, are in their picturesque sadness and solitude the very scene and setting of such a romance as Cleve Verney was pursuing.

Into the Warren, by the stile up this road's side, went Cleve, and climbed the gray rocky hillock that commands an extensive view of that wild park; but there they were not.

Well, they must, then, have pursued the path up to the Priory, and thither he followed.

Oh, ho! here they are; the young lady at a little distance looking up at the singular ruin; the old lady engaged in an active discussion with shrewish old Mrs. Hughes, who was very deaf, and often a little tipsy, and who was now testily refusing the ladies admission within the iron gate which affords access to the ruins, of which she held the keys.

No situation could have been more fortunate for Cleve. The Warren and the Priory being his uncle's property, and the termagant Mrs. Hughes his officer, he walked up to the visitor, and inquired very courteously the object of the application, and forthwith ordered the portress to open the gate and deliver up her keys; which she did, a good deal frightened at sight of so unexpected a *deus ex machina*.

An unmistakable gentleman, handsome, and plainly a sort of prince in this region, the old lady, although she did not know to whom she was obliged, was pleased at his offer to act as cicerone here, and accepted it graciously.

"My young friend will be very glad; she draws a little, and enjoys such sights immensely. Margaret!" she called. The young lady turned, and Cleve saw before him once more in flesh and blood, that wonderful portrait of Beatrice Cenci, which had haunted him for three days.

The young lady heard what her companion had to say, and for a moment her large eyes rested on Cleve with a glance that seemed to him at once haughty, wild, and shy.

With one hand he held the gate open, and in the other his hat was raised respectfully, as side by side they walked into the open court. They each bowed as they passed, the elder lady very cheerily, the younger with a momentary glance of the same unconscious

superiority, which wounded him more than his pride would have allowed; and a puzzled recollection flitted across his mind of having once heard, he could not remember when, that Booth Fanshawe had married a beautiful Italian, an heiress (a princess—wasn't she?)—at all events, a scion of one of their proud old houses, whose pedigrees run back into the Empire, and dwarf into parvenus the great personages of Debrett's Peerage. What made it worse was, that there was no shyness, no awkwardness. She talked a good deal to her companion, and laughed slightly once or twice, in a very sweet tone. The old lady was affable and friendly; the young lady, on the contrary, so far from speaking to him, seemed hardly to give herself the trouble of listening to what he said. This kind of exclusion, to which the petted young man certainly was not accustomed, galled him extremely, the more so that she looked, he thought, more beautiful than ever, and that her voice, and pretty, slightly foreign accent, added another charm to the spell.

He made them a graceful little lecture on the building, as they stood in the court. If she had any cleverness she would see with what a playful and rapid grace he could convey real information. The young lady looked from building to building as he described them, but with no more interest in the speaker, it seemed to him, than if the bell-man of Cardyllian had been reading it from a handbill. He had never done anything so well in the House of Commons, and here it was accepted as a piece of commonplace. The worst of it was that there was no finesse in all this. It was in perfect good faith that this beautiful young lady was treating him like a footman. Cleve was intensely piqued. Had she been less lovely, his passion might have recoiled into disgust; as it was, with a sort of vindictive adoration, he vowed that he would yet compel her to hang upon his words as angels' music, to think of him, to watch for him, to love him with all that wild and fiery soul which an intuition assured him was hers.

So, with this fierce resolve at his heart, he talked very agreeably with the accessible old lady, seeming, in a spirit, I dare say, altogether retaliatory, to overlook the young lady's presence a good deal.

"I've got the key of the church, also; you'll allow me, I hope, to show it to you. It is really very curious—a much older style than the rest of the building—and there are some curious monuments and epitaphs."

The old lady would be charmed, of course, and her young companion, to whom she turned, would like it also. So Cleve, acting

as porter, opened the ponderous door, and the party entered this dim and solemn Saxon chapel, and the young lady paused and looked round her, struck, as it seemed with a sense of something new and very interesting.

"How strange! How rude it is, and irregular; not large, and yet how imposing!" murmured the girl, as she looked round with a momentary awe and delight. It was the first remark she had made, which it was possible for Cleve Verney to answer.

"That's so true! considering how small it is, it does inspire a wonderful awe," said he, catching at the opportunity. "It's very dark, to be sure, and that goes a long way; but its style is so rough and Cyclopean, that it overcomes one with a feeling of immense antiquity; and antiquity is always solemn, a gift from the people so remote and mysterious, as those who built this chapel, is affecting."

At this point Cleve Verney paused; either his ideas failed him, or he felt that they were leading him into an oration. But he saw that the young lady looked at him, as he spoke, with some interest, and he felt more elated than he had done for many a day.

"Is that a broken pillar?" asked Miss Sheckleton,—as I shall for the future call the elder lady.

"That's the font—very ancient—there's some odd carving about it, which has puzzled our antiquaries," said Cleve, leading the way to it.

The young lady had not followed. His exposition was to Miss Sheckleton, whose inquisitiveness protracted it. It was dry work for Cleve. The young lady had seated herself in a sort of oak stall, and was looking up at the groining of the round ribbed arches, at some distance. The effect was singular. She was placed in the deep chiaroscuro, a strong gleam of light entering through a circular aperture in the side wall, illuminated her head and face with a vivid and isolated effect; her rich chestnut hair was now disclosed, her bonnet having fallen back, as she gazed upward, and the beautiful oval face was disclosed in the surrounding shadow with the sudden brilliancy and isolation of a picture in a phantasmagoria.

Verney's eyes were not upon the font on which he was lecturing, his thoughts were wandering too, and Miss Sheckleton observed perhaps some odd vagueness and iteration in his remarks; but the

young lady changed her position, and was now examining another part of the church.

Cleve either felt or fancied, seeing, as the Italians say, with the tail of his eye, that she was now, for a moment, looking at him, believing herself unseen. If this were so, was it not the beginning of a triumph? It made him strangely happy.

If Cleve had seen those sights in town, I can't say whether their effect would have been at all similar; but beautiful scenery, like music, predisposes to emotion. Its contemplation is the unconscious abandonment of the mind to sentiment, and once excite tenderness and melancholy, and the transition to love is easy upon small provocations. In the country our visions flit more palpably before us; there is nothing there, as amid the clatter and vulgarities of the town, to break our dreams. The beautiful rural stillness is monotony itself, and monotony is the spell and the condition of all mesmeric impressions. Hence young men, in part, are the dangers of those enchanted castles called country houses, in which you lose your heads and hearts; whither you arrive jubilant and free, and whence you are led by delicate hands, with a silken halter round your necks, with a gay gold ring in your obedient noses, and a tiny finger crooked therein, and with a broad parchment pinned upon your patient shoulders, proclaiming to the admiring world that your estates have gone the way of your liberties, and that you and they are settled for life.

"Now, *this*," said he, pointing to a block of carved stone placed in the aisle, "is the monument of old Martha Nokes; pray ask your young lady to come for one moment; it's worth reading."

"*Margaret!*" called the elder visitor, in the subdued tone suited to the sacred place. "Come, darling, and see this."

"This inscription is worth reading, and I can tell you about the old woman, for I remember her quite well. I was eight years old when she died. Old Martha Nokes; she died in her hundred and twentieth year."

The young lady stood by and listened and read. The epitaph related her length of service, her fidelity, and other virtues, and that "this stone was placed here in testimony of the sincere and merited esteem, respect, and affection cherished for the deceased, by Eleanor, Viscountess (Dowager) Verney, of Malory."

"There's some beautiful embroidery on satin, worked by her more than a hundred and fifteen years ago, at Ware," said Cleve Verney. "They say such work can't be had now. '*In the course of her long pilgrimage*,' you see by the epitaph, '*she had no less than twenty-three substantial offers of marriage, all which she declined, preferring her single state to the many cares and trials of wedded life, and willing also to remain to the end of her days in the service of the family of Verney, (to whom she was justly grateful,) and in which she had commenced her active and useful, though humble life, in the reign of King George the First*.' So you see she spent all her life with us; and I'll tell our people, if you should happen to pass near Ware—it's not an hour's sail across—and would care to see it, to show you her embroidery, and her portrait; and if there's anything else you think worth looking at; there are some pictures and bronzes—they'll be quite at your service; my uncle is hardly ever at Ware; and I only run down for a little boating and shooting, now and then."

"Thank you," said the old lady, and utter silence followed. Her young companion glanced at her for a moment, and saw her look blank and even confounded. She averted her gaze, and something, I suppose, struck her as comical, for, with a sudden little silvery laugh, she said—

"What a charming, funny old woman she must have been!"

And with this excuse she laughed more—and again, after a little interval. Nothing more contagious than this kind of laughter, especially when one has an inkling of the cause. Cleve looked at the font, and lowered his large eyes to the epitaph of the Virgin Martha Nokes, and bit his lips, but he *did* laugh a little in spite of himself, for there was something nearly irresistible in pleasant Miss Sheckleton's look of vacant consternation.

CHAPTER XI.

FAREWELL.

THE young lady was instantly grave, with even a little fiery gleam of anger in her eyes, he thought. He could not help raising his also, now quite gravely and even respectfully, looking on her.

"I think you know who we are," she said a little suddenly and haughtily.

"You are at present living at Malory, I believe," said he, with a respectful evasion.

"Yes; but I mean *who* we are," said Margaret, very pale, very proud, and with her splendid hazel eyes fixed full upon him with the irresistible inspiration of truth.

"I *have* heard—in part accidentally—something."

"Yes," said the girl; "you are Mr. Cleve Verney, and my name is Fanshawe; and my father, Sir Booth Fanshawe, is at present living at Malory."

"My dear! are you *mad*?" gasped Miss Sheckleton aghast.

"Yes. We are the people who live at Malory, and my father had hoped that he might have escaped there the observation of all but the very few persons who take a friendly interest in him. The place was looked out and taken for us by a person of whom we know nothing—a clergyman, I believe. I have now, for the first time, learned from that gravestone to whom the place belongs. We know nothing of the townspeople or of neighbours. We have lived to ourselves; and if he had known that Malory belonged to the Verneys, I hope you believe he would neither have been mad or mean enough to come here, to live in the house of his enemies."

"Oh, Margaret! Margaret! you have ruined your father," said poor Miss Sheckleton, pale as a ghost, and with her trembling fingers in the air.

"I assure you, Miss Fanshawe," said Cleve, "you do me a cruel injustice, when you class me with Sir Booth Fanshawe's *enemies*. There have been those miserable money matters, in which *I* never

had, nor *could* have had, any influence whatsoever. And there has been political hostility, in which I have been the victim rather than the aggressor. Of course, I've had to fight my battles as best I could; but I've never done anything unfair or unmanly. You plainly think me a personal enemy of Sir Booth's. It pains me that you do so. In the sense in which you seem to think it, I never was, nor in any sense could I continue to be so, in his present—his present—"

The young man hesitated for a word or a paraphrase to convey a painful meaning without offence.

"His present ruin, and his approaching exile," said the young lady.

"I'm sure, sir, what you say is exactly so," pleaded poor Miss Sheckleton, nervously. "It was, as you say, all about elections, and that kind of thing, which, with him, you know, never can be again. So, I'm sure, the feeling is all over. *Is*n't it, Mr. Verney?"

"I don't think it matters much," said the young lady, in the same tone of haughty defiance. "*I* don't—girls, I believe, never *do* understand business and politics. All I know is this—that my father has been ruined. My father has been ruined, and that, I hope, will satisfy his enemies. I know *he* thinks, and *other* people think—people in no way mixed up in his affairs—people who are *impartial*—that it was the cruelty and oppression of Mr. Kiffyn Verney, your uncle, I think you say—that drove him to ruin. Well, you now know that my father is at Malory."

"He does, darling. We may be overheard," said Miss Sheckleton in an imploring tremor.

But the young lady continued in the same clear tone—

"I can't say what is considered fair and manly, as you say, in political enmity; but, seeing what it has done, I have no reason to believe it very scrupulous or very merciful; therefore, with some diffidence, I ask only, whether you can promise that he shall not be molested for a few days, until some other refuge shall have been provided for us? And when we shall have left England for ever, you will have no more to fear from my father, and can afford, I think, to forget his name."

There was a kind of contradiction here, or rather one of those discords which our sense of harmony requires, and mysteriously delights in—for while her language was toned with something of the

anguish of pleading, her mien and look were those of a person dictating terms to the vanquished. Had she but known all, they might have been inspired by the workings of his heart. Her colour had returned more brilliantly, her large eyes gleamed, and her beautiful eyebrow wore that *anguine* curve which is the only approach to a scowl which painters accord to angels. Thus, though her tones were pathetic, she stood like a beautiful image of Victory.

In the silence that followed, Cleve stood before her for a moment confounded. Too many feelings were on a sudden set in motion by this girl's harangue, to find a distinct resultant in words. His pride was stung—something of anger was stirred within him; his finer sympathies, too, were moved, and a deeper feeling still.

"I'm afraid you think me a very mean person, indeed," said Cleve. "To no one, not to my uncle, not to any living person, will I so much as hint that I know anything of Sir Booth Fanshawe's present place of abode. I don't think that we men are ever quite understood by *you*. I hope *that* is it. I *hope* it is not that you entertain a particularly ill opinion of *me*. I haven't deserved it, you'll find I *never* shall. I hope you will employ me. I hope, Miss Sheckleton, *you* will employ me, whenever, in *any* way, you think I can be of use. Your having, although I know it is perfectly accidental, come to Malory, places me under a kind of obligation, I wish you would allow me to think so, of hospitality; there is no room for generosity here; it would be a misplaced phrase; but I wish, *very* much, that you would put my goodwill to the proof, and rely upon my fidelity; only give me a trial."

I believe that every one who is speaking all in earnest, and, for the moment, quite from a good impulse, looks more beautiful in that momentary light of paradise, and certainly no handsomer young fellow, to my mind, could have been imagined than Cleve Verney, as he stood uncovered before the beautiful stranger, and pleaded for her good opinion.

The young lady was silent, and looked at Miss Sheckleton, as if deputing her to answer, and then looked away.

"You're very kind. I *know* you won't deceive us, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, with an imploring look, and laying her hand unconsciously upon his arm. "I am sure you won't disappoint us; but it is a great difficulty; you've no idea, for Sir Booth feels very strongly, and in fact we don't mention the name of your family to

him; and I'm sure—indeed I *know*—if he were aware that Malory was Verney property, he would never have come here, and if I were to tell him, he would leave it at once. It was a very old friend, Lord Hammerdon, who employed a clergyman, a Mr. Dixie, I think, a friend of his, to look out a suitable place in a very quiet neighbourhood; and so, without making—without, indeed, the *power* of making inquiry, we came down here, and have just made the discovery—two discoveries, indeed—for not only does the place belong to your family, but you, Mr. Verney are aware that Sir Booth is here."

"Sir Booth will do me the justice to trust my word. I assure you—I swear to you—no mortal shall learn the secret of his residence from me. I hope Miss Fanshawe believes me. I'm sure *you* do, Miss Sheckleton," said Cleve.

"We are *both very* much obliged," said the old lady.

The girl's eyes were lowered. Cleve thought she made just a perceptible inclination to intimate her acquiescence. It was clear, however, that her fears were satisfied. She raised her eyes, and they rested on him for a moment with a grave and even melancholy gaze, in which—was there confidence? That momentary, almost unconscious glance, was averted, but Cleve felt unaccountably happy and even proud.

"It is then understood," said he, "that I am not to charge myself with having caused, however unintentionally, any disturbance or embarrassment of your plans. Do you think—it would give me so much pleasure—that I might venture to call upon Sir Booth Fanshawe, to make him in person that offer of my humble services, in any way in which he might please to employ me, which I have already tendered to you?"

He saw the young lady turn an alarmed glance upon her companion, and press her hand slightly on her arm, and the old lady said quickly—

"Not for the world! Nothing would vex him more. That is, I mean, it is better he should not think that he has been recognised; he is impetuous, and, as you *must* know, a little fiery, and just now is suffering, and, in fact, I should not venture, although I need not say, I quite appreciate the feeling, and thank you very much."

A silence followed this little speech. The subject that had engrossed and excited the little party, was for the present exhausted, and no one was ready at the moment to start another.

"We have detained you here, most unreasonably, Mr. Verney, I'm afraid," said Miss Sheckleton, glancing towards the door. "The evenings have grown so short, and our boatman said we should be longer returning; and I think we should have been on our way home before now."

"I only wish you would allow me to set you down at Malory, in my boat, but I know that would not do, so you must allow me to see you on board your own."

More time had passed, a great deal, during this odd scene, than it takes to read this note of it. When they stepped forth from the door of the tenebrous little church, the mellow light of sunset was streaming along the broken pavement and grass, and glowing on the gray walls and ivy of the old building.

Margaret Fanshawe was very silent all the way down to the little stone pier, at which the boat was moored. But the old lady had quite recovered her garrulous good spirits and energy. There was something likeable and even winning in Miss Anne Sheckleton, sixty years though she looked. She did not hide her gray locks; they were parted smoothly over her intelligent forehead, and in her clear, pleasant face you could see at times a little gleam of waggery, and sometimes the tenderness of sentiment. So that there remained with her that inextinguishable youth of spirit that attracts to the last.

Cleve was not one of those fellows who don't understand even so much self-denial as is necessary to commend them to old ladies on occasion. He was wiser. He walked beside her slight figure and light firm step, talking agreeably, with now and then a stolen glance at the silent girl. Miss Sheckleton was an old woman such as I love. Such as remains young at three score, and is active still with youthful interests, and a vein of benevolent romance.

And now they stood at the gunwale of the boat, and Miss Sheckleton smiling a little anxiously, gave him her hand at parting.

"May I?" said he, in a tone respectful and even melancholy, at the same time, extending his hand with hesitation toward the young lady beside him.

There was a little motion in her hand, as if she would have shut or withdrawn it, but she looked at him with grave eyes; was there doubt in them, or was there confidence? and gave him her hand too, with a sad look. There was one strong violent throb at his heart as he pressed that slender gauge; and then it seemed to stand still for a moment; and he heard the evening breeze among the leaves, like a sigh along the shore. Was it an omen?

The next moment he was standing alone, with his hat in his hand, smiling and waving an adieu over the glittering waves to the receding boat.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH CLEVE VERNEY WAYLAYS AN OLD LADY.

CLEVE visited the old Priory next day, but there had been no one to look at it since. He took a walk in the warren and killed some innocent rabbits, and returned an hour later. Still no one. He loitered about the ruins for some time longer, but nothing came of it. The next day in like manner, he again inspected the Priory, to the wonderment of Mrs. Hughes, who kept the keys, and his yacht was seen till sunset hovering about Penruthyn. He drove into the town also now and then, and looked in on the shop-keepers, and was friendly as usual; and on these occasions always took a ramble either over the hill or by the old Malory road, in the direction of the Dower House.

But the Malory people seemed to have grown still more cautious and reserved since the adventure of Penruthyn Priory. Sunday came, and Miss Anne Sheckleton sat alone in the Malory pew.

Cleve, who had been early in his place, saw the old lady enter alone and the door shut, and experienced a pang of disappointment—more than disappointment, it amounted to pain.

If in the dim light of the Malory seat he had seen, once more, the Guido that haunted him, he could with pleasure have sat out three services; with three of the longest of good Mr. Splayfoot's long sermons. But as it was, it dragged wofully—it made next to no way; the shrilly school-children and the deep-toned Mr. Bray sang more verses than ever to the solemn drone of the organ, and old Splayfoot preached as though he'd preach his last. Even Cleve's watch, which he peeped at with a frequency he grew ashamed of, limped and loitered over the minutes cruelly.

The service would not have seemed so nearly interminable if Cleve had not resolved to waylay and accost the lady at the other side—even at the risk of being snubbed for his pains; and to him, full of this resolve, the interval was miserable.

When the people stood up after the blessing, Cleve Verney had vanished. From the churchyard he had made his exit, by the postern door, from which he and his enamoured friend, Sedley, had

descended a week before to the narrow road, under the town wall, leading to Malory.

Down this he walked listlessly till he reached that lonely part of the road which is over-arched by trees; and here, looking over the sloping fields toward the sea, as if at the distant mountains, he did actually waylay Miss Sheckleton.

The old lady seemed a little flurried and shy, and would, he fancied, have gladly been rid of him. But that did not weigh much with Cleve, who, smiling and respectful, walked by her side after he had made his polite salutation. A few sentences having been first spoken about indifferent things, Cleve said—

"I have been to the old Priory twice since I met you there."

"Oh!" said Miss Anne Sheckleton, looking uneasily toward Malory. He thought she was afraid that Sir Booth's eye might chance to be observing them.

Cleve did not care. He rather enjoyed her alarm, and the chance of bringing matters to a crisis. *She* had not considered *him* much in the increased jealousy with which she had cloistered up her beautiful recluse ever since that day which burned in his memory, and cast a train of light along the darkness of the interval. Cleve would have been glad that the old man had discovered and attacked him. He thought he could have softened and even made him his friend.

"Do you never purpose visiting the ruin again?" asked Cleve. "I had hoped it interested you and Miss Fanshawe too much to be dropped on so slight an acquaintance."

"I don't know. Our little expeditions have been very few and very uncertain," hesitated Miss Sheckleton.

"Pray, don't treat me *quite* as a stranger," said Cleve, in a lone and earnest tone; "what I said the other day was not, I assure you, spoken upon a mere impulse. I hope, I am sure, that Miss Fanshawe gives me credit at least for sincerity."

He paused.

"Oh! certainly, Mr. Verney, we do."

"And I so wish you would tell her that I have been ever since thinking how I can be of any real use—ever so little—if only to prove my anxiety to make her trust me even a little."

"I think, Mr. Verney, it is quite enough if we don't *dis*trust you; and I can assure you we do not," said the spinster.

"My uncle, though not the sort of man you may have been led to suppose him—not at all an unkind man—is, I must allow, a little odd and difficult sometimes—you see I'm not speaking to you as a stranger—and he won't do things in a moment; still if I knew exactly what Sir Booth expected from him—if you think I might venture to ask an interview——"

"Quite *impossible*! You must not *think* of it," exclaimed the lady with a look almost of terror, "just now, while all is so fresh, and feelings so excited, he's in no mood to be reasonable, and no good *could* come of it."

"Well, *you* know best, of course. But I expect to be called away, my stay at Ware can't be much longer. My uncle writes as if he wants me; and I wish so much, short as it is, that I could improve it to any useful purpose. I can't tell you how very much I pity Miss Fanshawe, immured in that gloomiest of all gloomy places. Such an unnatural and terrifying seclusion for one so very young."

"It is certainly very *triste*," said Miss Sheckleton.

"She draws, you told me, and likes the garden, and reads; you must allow me to lend you some books, won't you? *you* I say; and *you* can lend them to her," he added, seeing a hesitation, "and you need take no trouble about returning them. Just lock them up anywhere in the house when you've done with them, and I'll get them when you leave Malory, which I hope won't be for a long time, unless it be for a very much pleasanter residence."

Here came a pause; the eyes of the two pedestrians were directed toward Malory as they descended the road, but no sign of life was visible in that quarter.

"You got home very well that day from the Priory; I watched you all the way," said he at last.

"Oh! yes; the distance is nothing."

Another little pause followed.

"*You*'re not afraid, Miss Sheckleton, of venturing outside the walls. I fear, however, I've a great deal to answer for in having alarmed Miss Fanshawe, though quite unintentionally, for the safety of Sir Booth's incognito. The secret is known to *no* one but to *me* and the persons originally entrusted with it; I *swear* to you it's *so*. There's no reason on earth for your immuring yourselves as you do within those melancholy precincts; it excites curiosity, on the contrary, and people begin to pry and ask questions; and I trust you believe that I would not trifle or mislead you upon such a subject."

"You are very good," answered Miss Sheckleton, looking down. "Yes, we *are* obliged to be very careful; but it is hardly worth breaking a rule; we may possibly be here for so very short a time, you know. And about the books——"

"Oh! about the books I'll hear nothing; there are books coming for me to Ware, and I shan't be there to receive them. And I shall be, I assure you, ever so much obliged if you'll only just give them house-room—they'll be so much safer—at Malory; and you won't deny me the pleasure of thinking that you and Miss Fanshawe will look over them?"

He fancied she did not like this; and thought she seemed embarrassed to find an evasion; but before she could speak, he continued, "and how is the little squirrel I saw in the boat the other day; Miss Fanshawe's, I suppose? Such a pretty little thing!"

"Oh! poor little Whisk. There has been a tragedy: some horrid thing, a wild cat or an owl, killed him the other night, and mangled him so; poor little, dear thing, you must not ask."

"Oh dear! I'm *so* sorry; and Miss Fanshawe can so ill spare a companion just now."

"Yes, it has been a great blow; and—and I think, Mr. Verney, I should prefer bidding you good-bye *here*," said Miss Sheckleton, stopping resolutely, and holding out her fingers for him to take; for she was on odd terms of suspicion and confidence—something more than mere chance acquaintance.

He looked towards the wood of Malory—now overlooking them, almost in the foreground; and, I think, if he had seen Miss Fanshawe under its shadows, nothing would have prevented his going right on—perhaps very rashly—upon the chance of even a word from her. But the groves were empty; neither "Erl King" nor his daughter were

waiting for them. So, for simply nothing, it would not do to vex the old lady, with whom, for many reasons, it was desirable that he should continue upon good terms, and with real regret he did *there*, as she desired, take his leave, and slowly walk back to Cardyllian, now and then stealing a glance over the old side-walk of the steep road, thinking that just possibly his Guido might appear in the shadow to greet the old lady at the gate. But nothing appeared—she went in, and the darkness received her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BOY WITH THE CAGE.

AT Ware a letter awaited Cleve, from his uncle, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney. He read it after dinner, with his back to the fire, by a candle, placed on the corner of the chimney-piece. He never was in any great haste to open his uncle's letters, except when he expected a remittance. I must allow they were not entertaining, and did not usually throw much light upon anything. But it was not safe to omit a single line, for his uncle knew them by rote, and in their after meetings asked him questions upon some passages, and referred pointedly to others. Uncle Kiffyn was in fact thin-skinned in his vanities, and was a person with whom it would have been highly inconvenient to have been on any but the very best terms.

Cleve had, therefore, to read these closely written despatches with more attention than even his friend Dixie read his Bible. They were a sore trouble, for their length was at times incredible.

As he read these letters, moans, and even execrations, escaped him, such as poets describe as issuing from the abode of torment—"Good heavens! mightn't he have said that in five words?" Then a "Pish!"—"Always grumbling about that executorship. Why did he take it? I do believe he likes it."

And then Cleve read,—"I see no reason why, with respect to you, I may not exercise—as between ourselves, at least—an absolute unreserve with relation to a fact of which, through a channel not necessary to particularise, I have just received an authentic assurance, to the effect, namely, that Sir Booth Fanshawe, whose ruin has been brought about, partly by his virtual insanity in opposing me with an insensate pertinacity and an intense ill feeling, on which I offer no observation, but involving an expense to which his impaired means were obviously inadequate, and partly by early follies, profligacies, and vices, is now living concealed in the Rue de——, in Paris." Cleve laughed. "He is a person to whom neither courtesy nor forbearance, as it appears to me, can reasonably be held to be in any respect due from me. There has been a recent order, charging him, as you may have seen by the public papers, with £2,317 costs in the collateral suit connected with the trust cause, in which I was, though I by no means sought the position, the plaintiff, to foreclose the mortgage over Wycroft. I have written to apprise

Milbanke of the fact, that he may take such steps as the nature of the case may suggest." "Well for Sir Booth he does not know he's so near! What's this? A postscript! well"—"P.S.—I have opened my letter to introduce this postscript, in consequence of a letter which has just reached me in course of post from Mr. Jos. Larkin, a solicitor, who was introduced to my notice about two years since by a member of the Brandon family, and who is unquestionably a man of some ability in his position in life. His letter is accompanied by a note from Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, and the two documents involve considerations so sudden, complicated, and momentous, that I must defer opening them, and request your presence at Verney House on the 15th proximo, when I mean to visit town for the purpose of arriving at a distinct solution of the several reports thus submitted upon a subject intimately connected with my private feelings, and with the most momentous interests of my house."

So abruptly ended the postscript, and for a moment Cleve was seriously alarmed. Could those meddling fellows who had agents everywhere have fished up some bit of Cardyllian gossip about his Malory romance?

He knew very well what the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney would think of that. His uncle could make or mar him. He knew that he had dangerous qualities, being a narrow man, with obstinate resentments. He was stunned for a moment; but then he reflected that all the romance in which he was living had been purely psychologic and internal, and that there was no overt act to support the case which he might not confess and laugh at.

"On the 15th proximo"—Very well; on the 15th he would be in town, and hear his uncle upon this subject, involving his "private feelings" and "the most momentous interests of his house." Could it be that his out-cast uncle, who had been dragging out a villanous existence in Turkey, under the hospitable protection of the Porte—who was said to have killed the captain of a French man-of-war, in that contemplative retreat, and whom he was wont respectfully to call "the Old Man of the Mountains," was dead at last?

The postscript would bear this interpretation and a pompous liking for mystery, which was one of his uncle's small weaknesses, would account for his withholding the precise information, and nursing, and making much of his secret, and delivering it at last, like a Cabinet manifesto or a Sessional address.

"If the Old Man of the Mountains be really out of the way, it's an important event for us!"

And a dark smile lighted the young man's face, as he thought of the long train of splendid consequences that would awake at his death-bed, and begin to march before his funeral.

Ambition, they say, is the giant passion. But giants are placable and sleep at times. The spirit of emulation—the lust of distinction—*hominum volitare per ora—digito monstrarier*—in a wider, and still widening sphere—until all the world knows something about you—and so on and on—the same selfish aspiration, and at best, the same barren progress, till at last it has arrived—you are a thoroughly advertised and conspicuous mediocrity, still wishing, and often tired, in the midst of drudgery and importance and *éclat*, and then—on a sudden, the *other* thing comes—the first of the days of darkness which are many.

"Thy house shall be of clay,
A clot under thy head;
Until the latter day,
The grave shall be thy bed."

But nature has her flowers and her fruits, as well as those coarse grains and vegetables on which overgrown reputations are stall-fed. The Commons lobby, the division list, the bureau, Hansard, the newspapers, the dreary bombast of the Right Hon. Marcus Tullius Countinghouse, the ironies of Mr. Swelter, the jokes of Mr. Rasp,—enjoy these shams while your faith is great—while you may, now, in the days of thy youth, before your time comes, and knowledge chills, and care catches you, and you are drawn in and ground under the great old machine which has been thundering round and round, and bruising its proper grist, ever since Adam and Eve walked out of Eden.

But beside all this delicious rape-cake and man-gold of politics, Cleve Verney had his transient perceptions of the flowers and fruits, as we say, that spring elsewhere. There are fancy, the regrets, the yearnings—something recluse in the human soul, which will have its day, a day, though brief it may be, of entire domination.

Now it came to pass, among the trees of lonely Malory, at eventide, when the golden air was flooded with the vesper songs of small birds, and the long gray shadows were stretching into distance, that a little brown Welsh boy, with dark lively eyes, and a wire cage in

his hand, suddenly stood before Miss Margaret Fanshawe, who awaking from a reverie, with a startled look—for intruders were there unknown—fixed her great eyes upon him.

"You've climbed the wall, little gipsy," said the beautiful lady, with a shake of her head and a little frown, raising her finger threateningly. "What! You say nothing? This is a lonely place; don't you know there are ghosts here and fairies in Malory? And I'm one of them, perhaps," she continued, softening a little, for he looked at her with round eyes of wonder and awe.

"And what do you want here? and what have you got in that cage? Let me see it."

Breaking through an accidental cleft among the old trees, one sunset ray streamed on the face of this little Welsh Murillo; and now through the wires of the cage, gilding them pleasantly as he raised it in his hand, and showed two little squirrels hopping merrily within.

"Squirrels! How curious! My poor little Whisk, there's none like you, funny little Whisk, kind little Whisk, true little thing; you loved your mistress, and no one else, no one else. He's buried there, under that large rose-bush; I won't cry for you, little Whisk, any more, I said I wouldn't."

She looked wistfully toward the rose-bush, and the little headstone she had girlishly placed at her favourite's grave, and the little boy saw two great crystal tears glittering in her large eyes as she gazed; and she turned and walked a hasty step or two toward it. I don't know whether they fell or were dried, but when she came back she looked as at first.

"I'll buy one of these little things, they *are* very pretty, and I'll call it Frisk; and I'll please myself by thinking it's little Whisk's brother; it *may* be, you know," she said, unconsciously taking the little boy into the childish confidence. "What would you sell one of those little things for? perhaps you would not like to part with it, but I'll make it very happy, I shall be very kind to it."

She paused, but the little fellow only looked still silently and earnestly in her face.

"Is he deaf or dumb, or a sprite—who are you?" said the girl, looking at him curiously.

A short sentence in Welsh, prettiest of all pretty tongues, with its pleasant accent, was the reply.

"Then all my fine sentences have been thrown away, and not one word has he understood!"

Looking at his impenetrable face, and thus speaking, she smiled; and in that sudden and beautiful radiance he smiled merrily also.

All this happened under the trees close by the old Refectory wall, at the angle of which is a small door admitting into the stable-yard. Opening this she called "Thomas Jones!" and the Cardyllian "helper," so called, answered the invocation quickly.

"Make out from that little boy, what he is willing to take for one of his squirrels," said she, and listened in suspense while the brief dialogue in Welsh proceeded.

"He says, my lady, he does not know, but will go home and ask; and if you give him a shilling for earnest, he'll leave the cage here. So you may look at them for some time, my lady—yes, sure, and see which you would find the best of the two."

"Oh, that's charming!" said she, nodding and smiling her thanks to the urchin, who received the shilling and surrendered the cage, which she set down upon the grass in triumph; and seating herself upon the turf before them, began to talk to the imprisoned squirrels with the irrepressible delight with which any companionable creature is welcomed by the young in the monotony and sadness of solitude.

The sun went down, and the moon rose over Malory, but the little brown boy returned not. Perhaps his home was distant. But the next morning did not bring him back, nor the day, nor the evening; and, in fact, she saw his face no more.

"Poor little deserted squirrels!—two little foundlings!—what am I to think? Tell me, cousin Anne, was that little boy what he seemed, or an imp that haunts these woods, and wants to entangle me by a bargain uncompleted; or a compassionate spirit that came thus disguised to supply the loss of poor little Whisk; and how and when do you think he will appear again?"

She was lighting her bed-room candle in the faded old drawing-room of Malory, as, being about to part for the night, she thus

addressed her gray cousin Anne. That old spinster yawned at her leisure, and then said—

"He'll *never* appear again, dear."

"I should really say, to judge by that speech, that you knew something about him," said Margaret Fanshawe, replacing her candle on the table as she looked curiously in her face.

The old lady smiled mysteriously.

"What is it?" said the girl; "you must tell me—you *shall* tell me. Come, cousin Anne, I don't go to bed to-night till you tell me all you know."

The young lady had a will of her own, and sat down, it might be for the night, in her chair again.

"As to knowing, my dear, I really *know nothing*; but I have my *suspicions*."

"H-m!" said Margaret, for a moment dropping her eyes to the table, so that only their long silken fringes were visible. Then she raised them once more gravely to her kinswoman's face. "Yes, I *will* know *what* you suspect."

"Well, I think that handsome young man, Mr. Cleve Verney, is at the bottom of the mystery," said Miss Sheckleton, with the same smile.

Again the young lady dropped her eyes, and was for a moment silent. "Was she pleased or *dis*-pleased? Proud and sad her face looked.

"There's no one here to tell him that I lost my poor little squirrel. It's quite impossible—the most unlikely idea imaginable."

"*I* told him on Sunday," said Miss Sheckleton, smiling.

"He had no business to talk about me."

"Why, dear, unless he was a positive brute, he could not avoid asking for you; so I told him you were *désolé* about your bereavement—your poor little Whisk, and he seemed so sorry and kind; and I'm perfectly certain he got these little animals to supply its place."

"And so has led me into taking a present?" said the young lady, a little fiercely—"he would not have taken that liberty——"

"*Liberty*, my dear?"

"Yes, *liberty*; if he did not think that we were fallen, ruined people——"

"Now, my dear child, your father's *not* ruined, I maintain it; there will be more left, I'm very certain, than he supposes; and I could have almost beaten you the other day for using that expression in speaking to Mr. Verney; but you *are* so *impetuous*—and then, could any one have done a more thoughtful or a kinder thing, and in a more perfectly delicate way? He *has*n't made you a present; he has only contrived that a purchase should be thrown in your way, which of all others was exactly what you most wished; he has not appeared, and never *will* appear in it; and I know, for my part, I'm very much obliged to him—*if* he has done it—and I think he admires you too much to run a risk of offending you."

"What?"

"I do—I think he admires you."

The girl stood up again, and glanced at the mirror, I think, pleased, for a moment—and then took her candle, but paused by the table, looking thoughtfully. Was she paler than usual? or was it only that the light of the candle in her hand was thrown upward on her features? Then she said in a spoken meditation—

"There are dreams that have in them, I think, the germs of insanity; and the sooner we dissipate them, don't you think, the better and the wiser?"

She smiled, nodded, and went away.

Whose dreams did she mean? Cleve Verney's, Miss Sheckleton's, or—could it be, her own?

CHAPTER XIV.

NEWS ABOUT THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS.

NEXT morning Margaret Fanshawe was unusually silent at breakfast, except to her new friends the squirrels, whose cage she placed on a little table close by, and who had already begun to attach themselves to her. To them she talked, as she gave them their nuts, a great deal of that silvery nonsense which is pleasant to hear as any other pleasant sound in nature. But good old Miss Sheckleton thought her out of spirits.

"She's vexing herself about my conjectures," thought the old lady. "I'm sorry I said a word about it. I believe *I* was a fool, but *she's* a greater one. She's young, however, and has that excuse."

"*How* old are you, Margaret?" said she abruptly, after a long silence.

"Twenty-two, my last birth-day," answered the young lady, and looked, as if expecting a reason for the question.

"Yes; so I thought," said Miss Sheckleton. "The twenty-third of June—a midsummer birth-day—your poor mamma used to say—the glow and flowers of summer—a brilliant augury."

"Brilliantly accomplished," added the girl; "don't you think so, Frisk, and you, little Comet? Are you not tired of Malory already, my friends? *My* cage is bigger, but so am I, don't you see; you'd be happier climbing and hopping among the boughs. What am *I* to you, compared with liberty? I did not *ask* for you, little fools, did I? You came to me; and I will open the door of your cage some day, and give you back to the unknown—to chance—from which you came."

"You're sad to-day, my child," said Miss Sheckleton, laying her hand gently on her shoulder. "Are you vexed at what I said to you last night?"

"What did you say?"

"About these little things—the squirrels."

"No, darling, I don't care. Why should I? They come from Fortune, and that little brown boy. They came no more to *me* than to *you*,"

said the girl carelessly. "Yes, another nut; you shall, you little wonders!"

"Now, that's just what I was going to say. *I* might just as well have bought them as *you*; and I must confess I coloured my guess a little, for I only mentioned poor Whisk in passing, and I really don't know that he heard me; and I think if he had thought of getting a squirrel for us, he'd have asked leave to send it to *me*. I could not have objected to that, you know; and that little boy may be ill, you know; or something may have happened to delay him, and he'll turn up; and you'll have to make a bargain, and pay a fair price for them yet."

"Yes, of course; I never thought anything else—eventually; and I knew all along you were jesting. I told these little creatures so this morning, over and over again. If they could speak they would say so. Would not you, you two dear little witches?"

So she carried out her pets with her, and hung their cage among the boughs of the tree that stood by the rustic seat to which she used to take her book.

"Well, I've relieved her mind," thought Miss Sheckleton.

But oddly enough, she found the young lady not sad, but rather cross and fierce all that afternoon—talking more bitterly than ever to her squirrels, about Malory, and with an angry kind of gaiety, of her approaching exile to France.

"It is not always easy to know how to please young ladies," thought Miss Sheckleton. "They won't always take the trouble to know their own minds. Poor thing! It *is* very lonely—very lonesome, to be sure;—and this little temper will blow over."

So, full of these thoughts, Miss Sheckleton repaired to that mysterious study door within which Sir Booth, dangerous as a caged beast, paced his floor, and stormed and ground his teeth, over—not his own vices, prodigalities, and madness, but the fancied villanies of mankind—glared through his window in his paroxysms, and sent his curses like muttered thunder across the sea over the head of old Pendillion—and then would subside, and write long, rambling, rubbishy letters to his attorneys in London, which it was Miss Sheckleton's business to enclose and direct, in her feminine hand, to her old friend Miss Ogden, of Bolton Street, Piccadilly, who saw after the due delivery of these missives, and made herself generally useful during the mystery and crisis of the Fanshawe affairs.

Outside the sombre precincts of Malory Margaret Fanshawe would not go. Old Miss Sheckleton had urged her. Perhaps it was a girlish perversity; perhaps she really disliked the idea of again meeting or making an acquaintance. At all events, she was against any more excursions. Thus the days were dull at Malory, and even Miss Sheckleton was weary of her imprisonment.

It is a nice thing to hit the exact point of reserve and difficulty at which an interest of a certain sort is piqued, without danger of being extinguished. Perhaps it is seldom compassed by art, and a fluke generally does it. I am absolutely certain that there was no design here. But there is a spirit of contrariety—a product of pride, of a sensitiveness almost morbid, of a reserve gliding into duplicity, a duplicity without calculation—which yet operates like design. Cleve was piqued—Cleve was angry. The spirit of the chase was roused, as often as he looked at the dusky woods of Malory.

And now he had walked on three successive days past the old gateway, and on each of them, loitered long on the wind-beaten hill that overlooks the grounds of Malory. But in vain. He was no more accustomed to wait than Louis XIV. Now wonder he grew impatient, and meditated the wildest schemes—even that of walking up to the hall-door, and asking to see Sir Booth and Miss Sheckleton, and, if need be, Miss Fanshawe. He only knew that, one way or another, he *must* see her. He was a young man of exorbitant impatience, and a violent will, and would control events.

There are consequences, of course, and these subjugators are controlled in their turn. Time, as mechanical science shows us, is an element in power; and patience is in durability. God waits, and God is might. And without patience we enter not into the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of power, and the kingdom of eternity.

Cleve Verney's romance, next morning, was doomed to a prosaic interruption. He was examining a chart of the Cardyllian estuary, which hangs in the library, trying to account for the boat's having touched the bank at low water, at a point where he fancied there was a fathom to spare, when the rustic servant entered with—

"Please, sir, a gentleman which his name is Mr. Larkin, is at the door, and wishes to see you, sir, on partickler business, please."

"Just wait a moment, Edward. Three fathom—two—four feet—by Jove! So it is. We might have been aground for five hours; a shame

there isn't a buoy there—got off in a coach, by Jove! *Larkin*? Has he no card?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Oh! yes—very good. Mr. Larkin—The Lodge. Does he look like a gatekeeper?"

"No, sir, please; quite the gentleman."

"What the devil can he want of me? Are you certain he did not ask for my uncle?"

"Yes, sir—the Honourable Mr. Verney—which I told him he wasn't here."

"And why did not you send him away, then?"

"He asked me if you were here, and wished to see you partickler, sir."

"Larkin—The Lodge; what is he like—tall or short—old or young?" asked Cleve.

"Tall gentleman, please, sir—not young—helderley, sir, raythe r."

"By Jove! Larkin? I think it *is*.—Is he bald—a long face, eh?" asked Cleve with sudden interest.

"Yes, sir, a good deal in that way, sir—raythe r."

"Show him in," said Cleve; "I shall hear all about it, now," he soliloquised as the man departed. "Yes, the luckiest thing in the world!"

The tall attorney, with the tall bald head and pink eyelids, entered simpering, with hollow jaws, and a stride that was meant to be perfectly easy and gentlemanlike. Mr. Larkin had framed his costume upon something he had once seen upon somebody whom he secretly worshipped as a great authority in quiet elegance. But every article in the attorney's wardrobe looked always new—a sort of lavender was his favourite tint—a lavender waistcoat, lavender trowsers, lavender gloves—so that, as the tall lank figure came in, a sort of blooming and vernal effect, in spite of his open black frock-coat, seemed to enter and freshen the chamber.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Larkin? My uncle is at present in France. Sit down, pray—can I be of any use?" said Cleve, who now recollected his appearance perfectly, and did not like it.

The attorney, smiling engagingly, more and more, and placing a very smooth new hat upon the table, sat himself down, crossing one long leg over the other, throwing himself languidly back, and letting one of his long arms swing over the back of his chair, so that his fingers almost touched the floor, said—

"Oh?" in a prolonged tone of mild surprise. "They quite misinformed me in town—not at Verney House—I did not allow myself time to call there; but my agents, they assured me that your uncle, the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, was at present down here at Ware, and a most exquisite retreat it certainly is. My occupations, and I may say my habits, call me a good deal among the residences of our aristocracy," he continued, with a careless grandeur and a slight wave of his hand, throwing himself a little more back, "and I have seen nothing, I assure you, Mr. Verney, more luxurious and architectural than this patrician house of Ware, with its tasteful colonnade, and pilastered front, and the distant view of the fashionable watering-place of Cardyllian, which also belongs to the family; nothing certainly lends a more dignified charm to the scene, Mr. Verney, than a distant view of family property, where, as in this instance, it is palpably accidental—where it is at all forced, as in the otherwise highly magnificent seat of my friend Sir Thomas Oldbull, baronet; so far from elevating, it pains one, it hurts one's taste"—and Mr. Jos. Larkin shrugged and winced a little, and shook his head—"Do *you* know Sir Thomas?—*no*—I dare say—he's quite a new man, Sir Thomas—we all look on him in that light in our part of the world—a—in fact, a *parvenu*," which word Mr. Larkin pronounced as if it were spelled *pair vennew*. "But, you know, the British Constitution, every man may go up—we can't help it—we can't keep them down. Money is power, Mr. Verney, as the old Earl of Coachhouse once said to me—and so it is; and when they make a lot of it, they come up, and we must only receive them, and make the best of them."

"Have you had breakfast, Mr. Larkin?" inquired Cleve, in answer to all this.

"Thanks, yes—at Llwynan—a very sweet spot—one of the sweetest, I should say, in this beauteous country."

"I don't know—I dare say—I think you wished to see me on business, Mr. Larkin?" said Cleve.

"I must say, Mr. Verney, you will permit me, that I really have been taken a little by surprise. I had expected confidently to find your uncle, the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney, here, where I had certainly no hope of having the honour of finding you."

I must here interpolate the fact that no person in or out of England was more exactly apprised of the whereabout of the Verneys, uncle and nephew, at the moment when he determined to visit Ware, with the ostensible object of seeing the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke, and the real one of seeing Mr. Cleve, than was my friend Mr. Larkin. He was, however, as we know, a gentleman of ingenious morals and labyrinthine tastes. With truth he was, as it were, on bowing terms, and invariably spoke of her with respect, but that was all. There was no intimacy, she was an utterly impracticable adviser, and Mr. Larkin had grown up under a more convenient tuition.

"The information, however, I feel concerns you, my dear sir, as nearly, in a manner, as it does your uncle; in fact, your youth taken into account, more momentously than it can so old a gentleman. I would, therefore, merely venture to solicit one condition, and that is, that you will be so good as not to mention me to your uncle as having conveyed this information to you, as he might himself have wished to be the first person to open it, and my having done so might possibly induce in his mind an unpleasant feeling."

"I shan't see my uncle before the fifteenth," said Cleve Verney.

"A long wait, Mr. Verney, for such intelligence as it falls to my lot to communicate, which, in short, I shall be most *happy* to lay before you, provided you will be so good as to say you desire it on the condition I feel it due to all parties to suggest."

"You mean that my uncle need not be told anything about this interview. I don't see that he *need*, if it concerns *me*. What concerns *him*, I suppose you will tell him, Mr. Larkin."

"Quite so; that's quite my meaning; merely to avoid unpleasant feeling. I am most anxious to acquaint you—but you understand the delicacy of my position with your uncle—and that premised, I have now to inform you"—here he dropped his voice, and raised his hand a little, like a good man impressing a sublime religious fact—"that your uncle, the Honourable Arthur Verney, is no more."

The young man flushed up to the very roots of his hair. There was a little pink flush, also, on the attorney's long cheeks; for there was something exciting in even making such an announcement. The consequences were so unspeakably splendid.

Mr. Larkin saw a vision of permanent, confidential, and lucrative relations with the rich Verney family, such as warmed the cool tide of his blood, and made him feel for the moment at peace with all mankind. Cleve was looking in the attorney's eyes—the attorney in his. There was a silence for while you might count three or four. Mr. Larkin saw that his intended client, Cleve—the future Viscount Verney—was dazzled, and a little confounded. Recollecting himself, he turned his shrewd gaze on the marble face of Plato, who stood on his pedestal near the window, and a smile seraphic and melancholy lighted up the features and the sad pink eyes of the godly attorney. He raised them; he raised his great hand in the lavender glove, and shook his long head devoutly.

"Mysterious are the dealings of Providence, Mr. Verney; happy those who read the lesson, sir. How few of us so favoured! Wonderful are his ways!"

With a little effort, and an affectation of serenity, Cleve spoke—

"No very great wonder, however, considering he was sixty-four in May last." The young man knew his vagabond uncle Arthur's age to an hour, and nobody can blame him much for his attention to those figures. "It might not have happened, of course, for ten or twelve years, but it might have occurred, I suppose, at any moment. How did it happen? Do you know the particulars? But, is there—is there no" (he was ashamed to say hope) "no chance that he may still be living?—is it quite certain?"

"Perfectly certain, *perfectly*. In a family matter, I have always made it a rule to *be* certain before speaking. No trifling with sacred feelings, that has been my rule, Mr. Verney, and although in this case there are mitigations as respects the survivors, considering the life of privation and solitude, and, as I have reason to know, of ceaseless self-abasement and remorse, which was all that remained to your unhappy relative, the Honourable Arthur Verney, it was hardly to be desired that the event should be very much longer deferred."

Cleve Verney looked for a moment on the table, in the passing contagion of the good attorney's high moral tone.

Cleve just said "*yes*," in a low tone, and shook his head. But rallying, he remarked—

"You, of course, know how the title is affected by this event—and the estates?" And as he raised his eyes, he encountered the attorney's fixed upon him with that peculiar rat-like vigilance, concentrated and dangerous, which, as we know, those meek orbs sometimes assume when his own interests and objects were intensely present to his mind.

Cleve's eye shrank for a second under the enigmatic scrutiny which as instantly gave way, in turn, before *his* glance.

"Oh, certainly," said the attorney, "the public know always something of great houses, and their position; that is, *generally*, of course—details are quite another affair. But everyone knows the truly magnificent position, Mr. Verney, in which the event places your uncle, and I may say you. At the same time the House of Lords, *your* house, I may call it now, are, very properly, particular in the matter of evidence."

"Our consul, I suppose," said Cleve——

"If he were cognisant of all the points necessary to put in proof, the case would be a very simple one indeed," said Mr. Larkin, with a sad smile, slowly shaking his tall head.

"Where, Mr. Larkin, did my poor uncle die?" inquired Cleve, with a little effort at the word "uncle."

"In Constantinople, sir—a very obscure quarter. His habits, Mr. Verney, were very strange; he lived like a rat—I beg pardon, I should say a *rabbit* in a burrow. Darkness, sir, obscurity—known, I believe, personally to but two individuals. Strange fate, Mr. Verney, for one born to so brilliant an inheritance. Known to but two individuals, one of whom died—what a thing life is!—but a few months before him, leaving, I may say, but one reliable witness to depose to his death; and, for certain reasons, that witness is most reluctant to leave Constantinople, and not very easily to be discovered, even there. You see, Mr. Verney, now, probably, something of the difficulty of the case. Fortunately, I have got some valuable information, confidential, I may say, in its nature, and with the aid of a few valuable local agents, providentially at this moment at my disposal, I think the difficulty may be quite overcome."

"If old Arthur Verney is dead, I'll find proof of the fact," said Cleve; "I'll send out people who will know how to come at it."

"You must be well advised, and very cautious, Mr. Verney—in fact, I may tell you, you can't be *too* cautious, for I happen to know that a certain low firm are already tampering with the witness."

"And how the devil can it concern any firm to keep us—my uncle Kiffyn Verney out of his rights?" said Mr. Cleve Verney, scornfully.

"Very true, Mr. Verney, in one sense, *no* motive; but I am older in the sad experience of the world than you, Mr. Verney. At your age I *could* not believe it, much later I *would* not. But, ah! Mr. Verney, in the long-run, the facts are too strong for us. Poor, miserable, fallen human nature, it is capable of *anything*. It is only too true, and too *horrible*. It sticks at *nothing*, my dear Mr. Verney, and their object is to command the witness by this means, and to dictate terms to you—in fact, my dear Mr. Verney, it is shocking to think of it—to *extort money*."

"I hope you over-estimate the difficulty. If the death *has* occurred I wager my life we'll *prove* it, and come what will I hope my uncle will never be persuaded to give those scoundrels a shilling."

"Certainly not—not a shilling—not a farthing—but I have taken prompt, and I trust decisive steps to check-mate those gentlemen. I am not at liberty, just at present, to disclose all I know; I don't say that I could exactly undertake the management of the case, but I shall be very happy to volunteer all the assistance in my power; and as I say, some accidental circumstances place me in a position to undertake that you shall not be defeated. A break down, I may mention, would be a more serious matter than you seem to suppose; in fact, I should prefer the Honourable Arthur Verney's living for twelve years more, with clear proof of his death at the end of that time, than matters as they stand at present, with a failure of the necessary proof."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Larkin; my uncle, I am sure, will also be *very* much obliged. I understand, of course, the sort of difficulty you apprehend."

"It's not conjectural, Mr. Verney, I wish it were—but it's past *that*; it *exists*," said the attorney, sadly.

"Well, I can only say, we are very much obliged," said Cleve, quite honestly. "I shan't forget your wish, that I should not mention our conversation to my uncle, and if you should learn anything further——"

"*You* shall certainly hear it, Mr. Verney. I must now take my leave. Sweet day, and a beauteous country! How blest are you, Mr. Verney, in your situation! I allude to your scenery, and I may add, the architectural magnificence of this princely residence. What a row of windows as I approached the house! What a number of bed-rooms you must have! Hardly so many, let us hope, as there are mansions, Mr. Verney, in that house to which we humbly trust we are proceeding." Mr. Larkin, who, on his way had called professionally upon a subscriber to the Gylingden Chapel—an "eminent Christian"—and talked accordingly—perceived that his meat was a little too strong for a babe of Mr. Verney's standing, and concluded more like an attorney of this world.

"Splendid and convenient residence, and in all respects suitable, Mr. Verney, to the fine position of usefulness, and, I may say, splendour, to which you are about being called," and he smiled round upon the book-cases and furniture, and waved his hand gently, as if in the act of diffusing a benediction over the chairs and tables.

"Won't you take something, Mr. Larkin, before you go?" asked Cleve.

"No—thanks—no, Mr. Verney—many thanks. It is but an hour since I had my modest *déjeuner* at that sweet little inn at Llwynan."

So on the door-steps they parted; the attorney smiling quite celestially, and feeling all a-glow with affability, virtue, and a general sense of acceptance. In fact he was pleased with his morning's work for several reasons—pleased with himself, with Cleve Verney, and confident of gliding into the management of the Verney estates, and in great measure of the Verneys themselves; now seeing before him in the great and cloudy vista of his future, a new and gorgeous castle in the air. These *châteaux*, in the good man's horizon had, of late, been multiplying rapidly, and there was now quite a little city of palaces in his perspective—an airy pageant which, I think, he sometimes mistook for the New Jerusalem, he talked and smiled so celestially when it was in view.

CHAPTER XV.

WITHIN THE SANCTUARY.

"So the old man of the mountains is dead at last," thought Cleve. "Poor old sinner—what a mess he made of it—uncle Arthur! Fine cards, uncle, ill played, sir. I wonder what it all was. To judge by the result he must have been a precious fool. Of what sort was your folly, I wonder—weak brains, or violent will. They say he was clever,—a little bit mad, I dare say; an idea ran away with him, whip and spurs, but no bridle—not unlike me, I sometimes think, headstrong—headlong—but I'll never run in *your* track, though I may break my neck yet. And so this Viscount Verney, *de jure*—outlaw and renegade, *de facto*—has died in one of those squalid lanes of Constantinople, and lies among poor Asiatics, in a Turkish cemetery! This was the meaning of my uncle Kiffyn's letter—never was mortal in such a fuss and flurry about anything, as he is at this moment; and yet he must practise his affectation of indifference, and his airs of superiority—*what* a fool my uncle Kiffyn is!"

Cleve walked back to the study. Things looked changed, somehow. He had never perceived before how old and dingy the furniture was, and how shabby the paint and gilding had grown.

"This house must be made habitable, one of the first things," said he, "and we must take our right place in the county. The Hammerdons have been everything here. It must not be so."

Cleve went to the window and looked out. The timber of Ware is old and magnificent. The view of Malory and Cardyllian and all that Verney sea-board does make an imposing display across the water. The auctioneering slang of the attorney, had under its glare and vulgarity a pleasant foundation of truth, and as the young man viewed this landscape the sun seemed to brighten over it, and he smiled with a new and solemn joy swelling at his heart.

"I hope that attorney fellow, Larkin, will go on and work this thing properly. It would be too bad that any delay should occur for want of proof—another name for want of energy—after the unfortunate old fellow has actually died."

Mr. Larkin's card was upon the table, and with the providence which in all small matters distinguished him, he had written under

"The Lodge" his post-town, "Gylingden." So Cleve Verney wrote forthwith to tell him that although he had no authority to direct inquiries in the matter, and that his uncle would, of course, undertake *that*, he was yet so strongly of opinion that *no time* should be wasted, and that Mr. Larkin's services might be of the greatest possible value, that he could not forbear writing to say so; and also that he would take the first opportunity of pressing that view upon his uncle. So the letter found the good attorney that evening at "The Lodge." He needed no such spur. He was, in fact, very deep in the business already, and, with his own objects in view, was perhaps quite as much excited as either Cleve Verney or his uncle.

When Cleve had dispatched this note, the restlessness and fever of this new and great suspense were upon him. It was impossible to sit down and read his magazines and newspapers. Had he been a fisherman he might have taken his rod and fly-hook, and becalmed his excited spirit in that mysterious absorption. But he had never possessed patience enough for the gentle craft. It ought to be cultivated early for its metaphysical virtues—neither transient like music nor poisonous like opium. For a harassed or excited mind, priceless is the resource of being able to project itself into the condition of the otter or the crane, and think of *nothing* but fish.

Two sedatives, however, were at his disposal—cigars and the sea—and to them he betook himself. Away went the *Wave* over the sparkling sea, with a light breeze, toward the purple dome of Pendillion, streaked with dull yellow rock and towering softly in the distance. Delightful sea-breeze, fragrant cigars, and gently rising, misty woods of Malory with their romantic interest—and all seen under the glory of this great news from the East. The cutter seemed to dance and writhe along the waves in elation and delight, and the spray flew up like showers of brilliants from the hands of friendly Undines sporting round her bows. Trance-like it seemed, all musical and dreamy; and Cleve felt, for the hour, he could have lived and died in that luxurious fascination.

Away for Pendillion ran the cutter. He did not choose idle tongues in Cardyllian to prate of his hovering about Malory. He knew his yacht would be seen from the pier. Active Captain Shrapnell frequented it, and would forthwith report her course in the billiard and reading rooms, with such conjectures as might strike his ingenious mind. So the cutter should run for that remote headland for nearly an hour, and then with a change of tack for Penruthyn Priory, which was

hidden from Cardyllian eyes by intervening promontories; and not one of the wiseacres could tell or guess where he had been.

When the sail of the yacht had grown like a gray speck in the distance, she was put about, and at a sharp angle ran to the rude pier of Penruthyn Priory, whence taking his gun as if for a ramble in the warren, he told his men to expect him in about two hours, at the turn of the tide.

Across the Warren there is a wild pathway which leads toward Malory, coming out upon the old road close by Llanderris churchyard, and within a few minutes' walk of the wooded grounds of the ancient Dower House of the Verneys.

Approached from this point, there is a peculiar melancholy in the old wood. The quiet little church of Llanderris, and the graveyard with its old yew tree, and the curve of the narrow road overhung by ivy-mantled ash trees form the foreground, as you approach the wildest side of the woodlands, which lie at the foot of the gentle descent.

The little by-road making a sweep skirts the rear of the Malory grounds. Here the great hawthorn hedges have, time out of mind, been neglected, and have grown gigantic and utterly irregular, stooping from the grassy bank like isolated trees, and leaving wide gaps through which you may see the darkened sward, the roots and stems of the forest trees within, and the vistas that break dimly into the distance.

Hours had passed since the *Wave* had left the jetty of Ware, and the autumnal sun was already declining in the early evening. There is no hour and no light, not even night and moonlight—so favourable to a certain pensive and half saddened vein of fancy, as that at which the day gives signs of approaching farewell, and gilds the landscape with a funereal splendour.

When Cleve reached the old road that descends by the churchyard, and through its double hedgerows looked down upon the enchanted grounds of Malory, he slackened his pace, and fell into a sort of reverie and rapture.

There are few of the impostures we commit more amusing, than that which we habitually practise upon ourselves in assigning the highest moral motives for doing what pleases us best.

"If my uncle Arthur had married some one whom he really loved, how differently all might have gone with him! Here am I, with more money ultimately awaiting me than I shall really care to spend. One thousand pounds with me will do more than two thousand with most other men. I don't play. I'm not on the turf. Why should I sacrifice my chance of happiness for the sake of a little more money, which I really don't want, or for the sake of party connection? If I can't make my way without the aid of a wife, I'm not fit for politics, and the sooner I turn to something else the better. Every man ought to consult his affections, and to make his home the centre of them. Where is the good of fortune, and money, and all that, if it does not enable one to do so? How can you love your children if you don't love their mother—if you hate her, by Jove—as I know fellows that do. Settlements, and political influence—all very fine—and we expect happiness to come of itself, when we have sold our last chance of it."

In this vein was Cleve Verney's contemplation—and even more virtuous and unworldly as he proceeded—in the elation of his new sense of omnipotence and glory. Had he been a little franker with himself he might have condensed it thus, "A fancy has taken possession of me, and I don't choose to deny myself."

Troubling his visions, however, was the image of his uncle, and the distant sound of his cold uncomfortable voice, and a sense of severity, selfishness, and danger, under his feeble smile. Against this teasing phantom with its solemn prattle, however, he closed his eyes and shook his ears. He had never enjoyed a sail or a walk so in all his life. Was nature ever so glorious before, or romance so noble and tender? What a pensive glow and glory was over everything! He walked down the steep little curve of the old road, and found himself on the path that follows the low bank and thorn trees which fence in the woods of Malory.

Walking slowly, and now and then pausing, he looked among the glittering trunks and down the opening aisles of the wood. But there was no sign of life. The weeds trembled and nodded in the shadow, and now and then a brown leaf fell. It was like the wood of the "Sleeping Beauty." The dusky sunlight touched it drowsily, and all the air was silent and slumbrous.

The path makes a turn round a thick clump of trees, and as he passed this, on a sudden he saw the beautiful young lady standing near the bank, her hat thrown on the ground, the thick folds of her

chestnut hair all golden in the misty sunlight. Never so like the Guido before. The large eyes, the delicate, oval, and pearly tints, and the small vermilion mouth, its full lips parted, he could see the sunlight glitter on the edge of the little teeth within.

A thrill—a kind of shiver—passed through him, as if at sight of a beautiful spectre. She saw him stop, and in the momentary silence, he thought—was it fancy?—he saw a blush just tinge her cheeks. On the bank, glimmering in the sunlight, was the cage with the little squirrels hopping inside.

"What a sweet evening!" said he, "I've been down to Penruthyn Priory—I've grown so fond of that old place. I used not to care about it; but one changes—and now it seems to me the most interesting place in the world, except, perhaps, one. *You* tired of it very quickly, Miss Fanshawe. You have not half seen it, you know. Why don't you come and see it again?"

"I suppose we ought," said the young lady, "and I dare say we shall."

"Then do to-morrow, pray," said he.

She laughed, and said—

"An excursion like that must always depend on the whim of the hour, don't you think, to be the least pleasant? It loses its charm the moment it loses the air of perfect liberty and caprice; and I don't know whether we shall ever see the old Priory again."

"I'm very sorry," said Cleve. There was honest disappointment in his tone, and his dark soft eyes looked full in hers.

She laughed again a little, and looking at the pretty old Church of Llanderris, that stands among nodding ash trees on the near upland, she said—

"That old church is, I think, quite beautiful. I was exploring these woods with my little squirrels here, when I suddenly came upon this view, and here I stood for nearly ten minutes."

"I'm very much obliged, I know, to Llanderris Church, and I'm glad you admire it, for I like it very much myself," said Cleve. "And so you have got two squirrels. I was so sorry to hear last Sunday that you had lost your little pet, Whisk. Wasn't that his name?"

"Yes. Poor little Whisk!"

"And you're not going to leave Malory?"

"Not immediately, I believe," said Miss Fanshawe.

"That makes me very happy for *three* reasons," he said, lowering his voice.—"First, it proves that you have some confidence, after all, in me; and next, because it shows that you are not so troubled here as you feared you might be; and the third reason—perhaps you shall never know until, at least, you can guess it."

"Yes; papa is not talking of leaving immediately, and I'm glad of it, for I know it was important that he should be able for a little time longer to remain in England. And now, I think my little squirrels want their nuts, and I must go."

"Poor little prisoners! You're all prisoners here. You shut yourselves up so jealously," said Cleve. "The monastic spirit still haunts this place, I think. It must be that old convent ground. Almost every day I walk by this old place, and never have seen you once, even through the grille, until to-day."

She stooped to pick up the cage.

"I'm sure you'll shake hands before you go, Miss Fanshawe, won't you, through the grille—the hedge, I mean?"

"Well, I wish you good-bye," she said, merrily, but without coming nearer.

"And we are good friends?"

"Oh, yes."

"And—and I'll tell you a secret, but you must forgive me." As he spoke, Cleve Verney, with a step or two, mounted the bank and stood beside the young lady within the precincts of Malory.

"Don't mind coming in, pray," said she.

"Only for a moment—only one word," besought Cleve.

"Well," laughed Miss Fanshawe, though he thought a little uneasily, for she glanced toward the house, and he fancied was thinking of Sir Booth. "If you *will*, I can't help it, only you must remember there are

dogs in the yard, and," she added, more gravely, "papa has so many notices up to keep people away, I think he'd be vexed."

"Here I'm almost on neutral ground. It is only a step, and I'm gone. I want to tell you—you must forgive me—but it was I who ventured to send that little boy with those squirrels there. I knew how lonely you were, and I was selfish enough to wish to give you even so small an evidence of the sincerity of my professions—my anxiety to be employed."

"That little boy promised to return, but has never come back," said Miss Fanshawe, throwing back her head a little, and pushing back her rich tresses. He thought there was a brighter colour in her cheeks, and that she looked a little haughty.

"He could not help it, poor little fellow. He lives at Pendillion, nine miles across the water, and nearly thirty by the road. You must lay the whole blame upon me—you must, indeed. It's all my fault."

Miss Fanshawe was looking down upon the unconscious squirrels. There was something of disdain in this glance that fell from under her long silken lashes askance upon them, hopping and frisking within their wires, as if she meditated sending them away in disgrace.

"You must not be vexed with *them* either, it is all my doing, my fault, let me confess. I ran down in my boat to Pendillion, and looked up that little fellow who always has half-a-dozen squirrels. I had to go twice to find him, and then brought him here, and he met a lady in the wood. There was no mistaking the description, and so these little creatures are your happy captives—and—I hope you are not very angry with me."

The colour was brilliant in her cheeks, and gave a corresponding brilliancy to her great eyes; how were they so mysterious and yet so frank? She looked on him gravely in silence for a moment, and then down upon the little prisoners in the cage. Was she angry—was she embarrassed—was she secretly pleased? That odd, beautiful girl—he could not quite understand her.

But Mr. Cleve Verney was an impetuous orator; when he took fire upon a theme he ran on daringly—

"And I've done more—I'm even *more* guilty; I'll hide nothing—I've taken a great reward—I've got a talisman that I prize above

anything—this little coin;" and there was a bright shilling fixed like a "charm" to his watch-guard. "It is *mine*—you only can guess; no one shall ever know why I wore it next my heart, and you may blame, but you won't *quite* condemn me; and won't you make it up with these poor little squirrels, and tell me it's all forgiven, and—by Jove, here's Miss Sheckleton."

And so she was approaching with her firm light step, and pleasant smile, in the shadow of the great trees, and near enough already to greet Mr. Verney with—

"How d'ye do? What a charming evening?" and having arrived at the hawthorn tree beside which they were standing, she added, in the low tone in which she habitually spoke of the Baronet—"Sir Booth is not very well this evening—he's in his room, and he'll stay at home reading the newspapers, at all events for an hour or so."

There was a want of tact in this little intimation which had an effect quite different from that which the good-natured spinster intended; for Miss Fanshawe said, lifting the little cage, and looking in upon its tiny inhabitants in the sunlight—

"Then I had better run in and see him." And with a gay slight "Good-bye," she nodded to Mr. Cleve Verney. The smile was only a momentary light, and the great hazel eyes looked thoughtfully as she turned away; and as she disappeared among the old trees, it seemed to him that a dull shadow suddenly descended upon the trees, and the grass, and the landscape.

"We are always, Mr. Verney, in a fuss here; that is, we never know exactly what a post may bring us any morning or evening, or how suddenly we may have to go. You may guess what it is to *me*, who have to arrange everything," said the old lady, lifting her thin fingers and shaking her head. "As for Margaret there, she's both clever and energetic—but *no* experience; and therefore, I don't allow her to take her share. Poor thing, it is a sad thing for her, and this place so very solitary."

"You must make her come to-morrow," said Cleve, "and see the Priory; you only *half* saw it the other day, and I assure you it *is* really well worth looking at; and it will make an excuse to tempt her outside this gloomy place. I can't conceive anything worse than being shut up week after week in this solitude and darkness; you really *must* persuade her; at what hour do you think you will be there?"

"Well now, I really *will* try," said good-natured Miss Sheckleton, "positively I will; and I think about three o'clock—I'll make an effort; and I'll send for the boat without asking her, and she can hardly refuse me, then. You have not been here very long, Mr. Verney?" she added, with a not unnatural curiosity.

"Only a minute or two before you came," he answered, a little inaccurately, I think. "Well, then, to-morrow, I hope to tempt her out a little, as you advise; and—and"—she glanced over her shoulder towards the house—"perhaps I had better bid you good-bye for the present, Mr. Verney; good-bye! How beautiful everything looks!"

She gave him her hand very cordially. Was there a sort of freemasonry and a romantic sympathy in that kindly farewell? Cleve felt that she at least half understood him. Even in reserved natures, there is an instinctive yearning for a confidant in such situations, and a friendly recognition, even at a distance, of one that promises to fill that place of sympathy.

So there they parted, with friendly looks, in a friendly spirit. Romantic and simple Miss Sheckleton, he felt that you were a true denizen of those regions in which of late, he had been soaring, unworldly, true. It is well for a time to put off the profound attorney-nature of man—we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out—and to abandon ourselves for a few happy moments, to the poetry and kindness which are eternal.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR VISITOR.

IN romances, it is usual for lovers to dream a great deal, and always of the objects of their adorations. We acquiesce gravely and kindly in these conventional visions; but, on reflection, we must admit that lovers have no faculty of dreaming, and of selecting the subjects of their dreams, superior to that of ordinary persons. Cleve, I allow, sat up rather late that night, thinking, I venture to say, a great deal about the beautiful young lady who, whether for good or ill, now haunted his thoughts incessantly; and with this brilliant phantom, he walked romantically in the moonlight, by the chiming shingle of the sea. But I don't know what his dreams were about, or that he had any dreams at all; and, in fact, I believe he slept very soundly, but awoke in the morning with a vague anticipation of something very delightful and interesting. Why is it that when we first awake the pleasures or the horrors of the coming day seem always most intense?

Another bright autumnal day, with just breeze enough to fill the sails of the cutter. On his breakfast-table, from the post-office of Ware, lay a letter, posted over-night, at Gylingden, by his newly revealed good angel, "very truly, his," Jos. Larkin. It said—

"MY DEAR SIR,—The interview with which you this morning honoured me, conveyed more fully even than your note implies your wishes on the subject of it. Believe me, I needed no fresh incentive to exertion in a matter so pregnant with serious results, and shall be only too happy to expend thought, time, and money, in securing *with promptitude* a successful termination of what in dilatory or inexperienced hands might possibly prove a most tedious and distressing case. I have before me directions of proofs on which I have partially acted, and mean in the sequel to do so completely. I may mention that there awaited me on my arrival a letter from my agent, to whom I more particularly referred in the conversation, which you were pleased to invite this morning, conveying information of very high importance, of which I shall be happy to apprise you in detail, when next I have the honour of a conference. I am not quite clear as to whether I mentioned this morning a person named Dingwell?—"

"No, you did not," interpolated Cleve.

"Who," continued the letter, "resides under circumstances of considerable delicacy on his part, at Constantinople, and who has hitherto acted as the correspondent and agent of the Jewish firm, through whom the Dowager Lady Verney and your uncle, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, were accustomed, with a punctuality so honourable to their feelings, to forward the respective annuities, which they were so truly considerate, as mutually to allow for the maintenance of the unfortunate deceased. This gentleman, Mr. Dingwell, has been unhappily twice a bankrupt in London, in early life, and there are still heavy judgments against him; and as he is the only witness discoverable, competent from his habits of regular communication with your lamented uncle for years, to depose to his identity and his death; it is unfortunate that there should exist, for the special reasons I have mentioned, considerable risk and difficulty in his undertaking to visit London, for the purpose of making the necessary depositions; and I fear he cannot be induced to take that step without some considerable pecuniary sacrifice on your part. This will necessarily form one of the topics for discussion at the proposed conference of the 15th prox.; and it is no small point in our favour satisfactorily to be assured that a witness to the cardinal points to which I have referred, is actually produceable, and at this moment in communication with me.

"I have the honour to be, dear Sir,

"Very truly yours,

"JOS. LARKIN.

"The Lodge, Gylingden.

"P.S. I may mention that the Jewish firm to which I have referred, have addressed to me a letter, apprising me of the decease of the Hon. Arthur Verney, a step which, as terminating the annuities on which they received an annual percentage, they would not, I presume, have adopted, had they not been absolutely certain of the event, and confident also that we must, if they were silent, be otherwise apprised of it."

I think our old friend, Jos. Larkin, wrote this letter with several views, one of which was that, in the event of his thinking proper, some years hence, notwithstanding his little flourishes of gratuitous service, to unmuzzle the ox who had trod out the corn, and to send in his little bill, it might help to show that he had been duly instructed to act in this matter at least by Mr. Cleve Verney. The

other object, that of becoming the channel of negotiating terms with Mr. Dingwell, offered obvious advantages to a gentleman of acquisitive diplomacy and ingenious morals.

Cleve, however, had not yet learned to suspect this Christian attorney, and the letter on the whole was highly satisfactory.

"Capital man of business, this Mr. Larkin! Who could have expected an answer, and so full an answer, so immediately to his letter? That is the kind of attorney the world sighed for. Eager, prompt, clear, making his clients' interests his own"—more literally sometimes than Cleve was yet aware—"disinterested, spirited, for was he not risking his time, skill, and even money, without having been retained in this matter, and with even a warning that he might possibly never be so? Did he not also come in the livery of religion, and discuss business, as it were, in a white robe and with a palm in his hand? And was it not more unlikely that a man who committed himself every hour to the highest principles should practise the lowest, than a person who shirked the subject of virtue, and thought religion incongruous with his doings?" Perhaps, Cleve thought, there *is* a little too much of that solemn flam. But who can object if it helps to keep him straight?

This was a day of surprises. Cleve had gone up to his room to replenish his cigar-case, when a chaise drove up to the hall door of Ware, and looking out he beheld with a sense of dismay his uncle's man, Mr. Ridley, descending from his seat on the box, and opening the door of the vehicle, from which the thin stiff figure of the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney descended, and entered the house.

Could the devil have hit upon a more ill-natured plan for defeating the delightful hopes of that day? Why could not that teasing old man stay where he was? Heaven only knows for how many days he might linger at Ware, lecturing Cleve upon themes on which his opinion was not worth a pin, directing him to write foolish letters, and now and then asking him to *obleege* him by copying papers of which he required duplicates, benumbing him with his chilly presence, and teasing him by his exactions.

Cleve groaned when he saw this spectacle from his window, and muttered something, I don't care what.

"Let him send for me if he wants me. I shan't pretend to have seen him," was Cleve's petulant resolve. But a knock at his room door,

with an invitation from his uncle to visit him in the library, settled the question.

"How d'ye do, Cleve?" and his uncle, who was sitting in a great chair at the table, with some letters, noted, and folded into long slim parallelograms, already before him, put forth a thin hand for him to shake, throwing back his head, and fixing his somewhat dull grey eyes with an imperious sort of curiosity upon him, he said, "Yes—yes—recruiting. I was always in favour of making the most of the recess, about it. You make the most of it. I saw Winkledon and your friend Colonel Tellerton at Dyce's yesterday, and talked with 'em about it, and they both agreed with me, we are pretty sure of a stormy session, late sittings, and no end of divisions, and I am glad you are taking your holiday so sensibly. The *Wave's* here, isn't she? And you sail in her a good deal, I dare say, about it, and you've got yourself a good deal sunburnt. Yes, the sun does that; and you're looking very well, about it, I think, very well indeed."

To save the reader trouble, I mention here, that the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney has a habit of introducing the words "about it," as everybody is aware who has the honour of knowing him, without relation to their meaning, but simply to caulk, as it were, the seams of his sentences, to stop them where they open, and save his speech from foundering for want of this trifling half-pennyworth of oakum.

"Very lonely, sir, Ware is. You've come to stay for a little time perhaps."

"Oh! no. Oh, dear no. My view upon that subject is very decided indeed, as you know. I ask myself this question,—What good can I possibly do, about it, by residing for any time at Ware, until my income shall have been secured, and my proper position ascertained and recognised? I find myself, by the anomalous absurdity of our existing law, placed in a position, about it, of so much difficulty and hardship, that although the people must feel it very much, and the county regret it, I feel it only due to myself, to wash my hands about it, of the entire thing for the present, and to accept the position of a mere private person, which the existing law, in its wisdom, imposes upon me—don't you see?"

"It certainly is," acquiesced Cleve, "a gross absurdity that there should be no provision for such a state of things."

"Absurdity! my dear sir, I don't call it *absurdity* at all, I call it rank injustice, and a positive *cruelty*," said the feeble voice of this old

gentleman with an eager quaver in it, while, as always occurred when he was suddenly called on for what he called his "sentiments" upon this intolerable topic, a pink flush suffused his thin temples and narrow forehead. "Here I am, about it, invested by opinion, don't you see, and a moral constraint, with the liabilities of a certain position, and yet excluded from its privileges and opportunities. And what, I ask myself, can come of such a thing, except the sort of thing, about it, which we see going on? Don't you see?"

"Any news of any kind from the East, sir?" asked Cleve.

"Well, now, wait—a—a—I'll come to it—I'm coming to that. I wrote to you to say that you were to meet me in town, d'ye see, on the fifteenth, and I mean to have a Mr. Larkin, an attorney, a very proper person in his rank of life—a very proper person—about it, to meet us and produce his papers, and make his statement again. And I may tell you that he's of opinion, and under the impression, that poor Arthur is *dead*, about it; and now you'll read this letter—very good, and now this—very good, and now this."

As he handed these papers over to Cleve in succession, the young gentleman thought his uncle's air a little grander than usual, and fancied there was a faint simper of triumph discernible under the imposing solemnity of his looks.

"A—well, that's all, at present; and immediately on receiving the first of these I wrote to the consul there—a very proper man, very well connected; I was, I may say, instrumental in getting his appointment for him—saying he'd obleege me by instituting inquiry and communicating the result, and possibly I may hear before the fifteenth; and I should be very glad, about it, to learn or know something definite, in which case, you see, there would be a natural solution of the complication, and poor Arthur's death, about it, would clear up the whole thing, as in fact it does in all such cases, don't you see?"

"Of course, sir, perfectly."

"And as to mourning and all that, about it, I don't quite see my way; no, I don't; because, d'ye see, I rather think there should be nothing of the kind: but it's time enough to decide what the house of Verney are to do when I shall have all the circumstances, don't you see, and everything."

Cleve acquiesced.

"And if the dissolution comes next autumn—as they apprehend it may—you'll have no annoyance from the old quarter—Sir Booth Fanshawe—he's quite ruined—about it; and he's been obliged to leave the country; he's in France, I understand, and I've directed our people in town to follow up the proceedings as sharply as possible. He has never spared me, egad, and has often distressed me very seriously by his malevolent and utterly wanton opposition where he had absolutely no chance whatever, and knew it, nor any object, I give you my honour, except to waste my money, when, owing to the absurd and cruel position I was placed in, he knew very well I could not have a great deal to throw away. I look upon a person of that kind as a mere nuisance; and I look upon it as a matter of dooty and of principle, about it, which one owes to society, don't you see, to exterminate them like vermin. And if you want to stop it, you mustn't let him off when you've got the advantage at last, don't you see? You must follow it up, and show evil-disposed people that if they choose to play that game they *may*, but that you won't let 'em off, about it, and that."

These were not very pleasant words in Cleve's ears.

"And, egad, sir, I'll make an example of that person—I owe it to the principle of fair political warfare, about it. What business had he to run me into six thousand pounds expense for nothing, when he had not really a hundred pounds at the time he could call his own? And I ask myself, where's the good of laws if there's no way of reaching a person who commits, from the worst possible motives, an outrage like that, and goes on doing that sort of thing, about it?"

Here the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney paused for a minute, and then looked at his watch.

"Just ten minutes still left me. I'll ask you to touch the bell, Cleve. I'm going to the railway—to Llwynan, about it, and to see the people at Heathcote Hall; and I've been thinking you ought to turn over in your mind what I said last Easter, when we were at Dawling Hill. If this affair of poor Arthur's should turn out to be quite true, I think the connection would recommend itself to most people," he said, grandly, "and in fact you might strengthen yourself very materially, about it. You could not do better than marry Ethel; depend upon it, the connection will serve you. Her uncle, you know—always some of that family—in the Cabinet; and Dorminster, they say—every one says it—Winkledon, for instance, and Colonel Tellers, about it—they both said the other day he'll very probably be Minister. Every one

says that sort of thing, about it; and it has been my opinion a long time before people generally began to say so, and things of that sort, don't you see?"

As a general rule, Cleve knew that there was no use in fighting any favourite point with his uncle. He acquiesced and relied upon dilatory opportunities and passive resistance; so now he expressed himself most gratefully for the interest he had always taken in him, and seemed to lend an attentive ear, while the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney rambled on upon this theme in his wise and quietly dictatorial way. It was one of his pleasantest occupations, and secretly pleased his self-love, this management of Cleve Verney—really a promising young man—and whom he magnified, as he did everything else that belonged to him, and whose successes in the House, and growth in general estimation, he quietly took to himself as the direct consequence of his own hints and manipulations, and his "keeping the young man straight about it."

"He has an idea—the young man has—that I know something about it—that I have seen some public life, and known people—and things of that sort. He is a young man who can take a hint, and, egad, I think I've kept him pretty straight about it up to this, and put him on a right track, and things; and if I'm spared, I'll put him on, sir. I know pretty well about things, and you see the people talk to me, and they listen to me, about it, and I make him understand what he's about, and things."

And then came the parting. He gave Cleve ten pounds, which Mrs. Jones, the draper's wife, used to distribute for him among certain poor people of Cardyllian. So his small soul was not destitute of kindliness, after its fashion; and he drove away from Ware, and Cleve stood upon the steps, smiling, and waving his hand, and repeating, "On the fifteenth," and then suddenly was grave.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEY VISIT THE CHAPEL OF PENRUTHYN AGAIN.

VERY grave was Cleve Verney as the vehicle disappeared. His uncle's conversation had been very dismal. "Ethel, indeed! What an old bore he is, to be sure! Well, no matter; we shall see who'll win the game. He is so obstinate and selfish." There was, indeed, an enemy in front—an up-hill battle before him. He prayed heaven, at all events, that the vindictive old gentleman might not discover the refuge of Sir Booth Fanshawe. Were he to do so, what a situation for Cleve! He would talk the matter over with his uncle's attorneys, who knew him, with whom he had often been deputed to confer on other things; who, knowing that he stood near the throne, would listen to him, and they would not be over zealous in hunting the old Baronet down. With those shrewd suspicious fellows, Cleve would put it all on election grounds. Sir Booth was in a kind of way popular. There would be a strong feeling against any extreme or vindictive courses being taken by his uncle, and this would endanger, or at all events embarrass Cleve very seriously.

Away shadows of the future—smoke and vapours of the pit! Let us have the sun and air of heaven while we may. What a charming day! how light and pleasant the breeze! The sails rattle, quiver and fill, and stooping to the breeze, away goes the *Wave*—and, with a great sigh, away go Cleve's troubles, for the present; and his eye travels along the sea-board, from Cardyllian on to Malory, and so to the dimmer outline of Penruthyn Priory.

As usual, they ran for Pendillion—the wind favouring—and at two o'clock Cleve stood on the sea-rocked stones of the rude pier of Penruthyn, and ordered his men to bring the yacht, seaward, round the point of Cardrwydd, and there to await him. There was some generalship in this. His interview of the morning had whetted his instincts of caution. Round Cardrwydd the men could not see, and beside he wanted no one—especially not that young lady, whom the sight might move to he knew not what capricious resolve, to see the *Wave* in the waters of Penruthyn.

Away went the yacht, and Cleve strolled up to the ancient Priory, from the little hillock beyond which is a view of the sea half way to Malory.

Three o'clock came, and no sail in sight.

"They're not coming. I shan't see her. They must have seen our sail. Hang it, I knew we tacked too soon. And she's such an odd girl, I think, if she fancied I were here she'd rather stay at home, or go anywhere else. Three o'clock!" He held his watch to his ear for a moment. "By Jove! I thought it had stopped. That hour seems so long. I won't give it up yet, though. That"—he was going to call him *brute*, but even under the irritation of the hypothesis he could not—"that oddity. Sir Booth, may have upset their plans or delayed them."

So, with another long look over the lonely sea toward Malory, he descended from his post of observation, and sauntered, rather despondingly, by the old Priory, and down the steep and pretty old road, that sinuously leads to the shore and the ruinous little quay, for which boats of tourists still make. He listened and lingered on the way. His mind misgave him. He would have deferred the moment when his last hope was to go out, and the chance of the meeting, which had been his last thought at night, and his first in the morning, should lose itself in the coming shades of night. Yes, he would allow them a little time—it could not be much—and if a sail were not in sight by the time he reached the strand he would give all up, and set out upon his dejected walk to Cardrwydd.

He halted and lingered for awhile in that embowered part of the little by-road which opens on the shore, half afraid to terminate a suspense in which was still a hope. With an effort, then, he walked on, over the little ridge of sand and stones, and, lo! there was the boat with furled sails by the broken pier, and within scarce fifty steps the Malory ladies were approaching.

He raised his hat—he advanced quickly—not knowing quite how he felt, and hardly recollecting the minute after it was spoken, what he had said. He only saw that the young lady seemed surprised and grave. He thought she was even vexed.

"I'm so glad we've met you here, Mr. Verney," said artful Miss Sheckleton. "I was just thinking, compared with our last visit, how little profit we should derive from our present. I'm such a dunce in ancient art and architecture, and in all the subjects, in fact, that help one to understand such a building as this, that I despaired of enjoying our excursion at all as I did our last; but, perhaps you are

leaving, and once more is too much to impose such a task as you undertook on our former visit."

"Going away! You could not really think such a thing possible, while I had a chance of your permitting me to do the honours of our poor Priory."

He glanced at Miss Fanshawe, who was at the other side of the chatty old lady, as they walked up the dim monastic road; but the Guido was looking over the low wall into the Warren, and his glance passed by unheeded.

"I'm so fond of this old place," said Cleve, to fill in a pause. "I should be ashamed to say—you'd think me a fool almost—how often I take a run over here in my boat, and wander about its grounds and walls, quite alone. If there's a transmigration of souls, I dare say mine once inhabited a friar of Penruthyn—I feel, especially since I last came to Ware, such an affection for the old place."

"It's a very nice taste, Mr. Verney. You have no reason to be ashamed of it," said the old lady, decisively. "Young men, now-a-days, are so given up to horses and field games, and so little addicted to anything refined, that I'm quite glad when I discover any nice taste or accomplishment among them. You must have read a great deal, Mr. Verney, to be able to tell us all the curious things you did about this old place and others."

"Perhaps I'm only making a great effort—a show of learning on an extraordinary occasion. You must see how my stock lasts to-day. You are looking into that old park, Miss Fanshawe," said Cleve, slily crossing to her side. "We call it the Warren; but it was once the Priory Park. There is a very curious old grant from the Prior of Penruthyn, which my uncle has at Ware, of a right to pasture a certain number of cows in the park, on condition of aiding the verderer in keeping up the green underwood. There is a good deal of holly still there, and some relics of the old timber, but not much. There is not shelter for deer now. But you never saw anything like the quantity of rabbits; and there are really, here and there, some very picturesque fragments of old forest—capital studies of huge oak trees in the last stage of venerable decay and decrepitude, and very well worthy of a place in your sketch-book."

"I dare say; I should only fear my book is hardly worthy of them," said Miss Fanshawe.

"I forgot to show you this when you were here before." He stopped short, brushing aside the weeds with his walking-cane. "Here are the bases of the piers of the old park gate."

The little party stopped, and looked as people do on such old-world relics. But there was more than the conventional interest; or rather something quite different—something at once sullen and pensive in the beautiful face of the girl. She stood a little apart, looking down on that old masonry. "What is she thinking of?" he speculated; "is she sad, or is she offended? is it pride, or melancholy, or anger? or is it only the poetry of these dreamy old places that inspires her reverie? I don't think she has listened to one word I said about it. She seemed as much a stranger as the first day I met her here;" and his heart swelled with a bitter yearning, as he glanced at her without seeming to do so. And just then, with the same sad face, she stooped and plucked two pretty wild flowers that grew by the stones, under the old wall. It seemed to him like the action of a person walking in a dream—half unconscious of what she was doing, quite unconscious of everyone near her.

"What shall we do?" said Cleve, as soon as they had reached the enclosure of the buildings. "Shall we begin at the refectory and library, or return to the chapel, which we had not quite looked over when you were obliged to go, on your last visit?"

This question his eyes directed to Miss Fanshawe; but as she did not so receive it. Miss Sheckleton took on herself to answer for the party. So into the chapel they went—into shadow and seclusion. Once more among the short rude columns, the epitaphs, and round arches, in dim light, and he shut the heavy door with a clap that boomed through its lonely aisles, and rejoiced in his soul at having secured if it were only ten minutes' quiet and seclusion again with the ladies of Malory. It seemed like a dream.

"I quite forgot, Miss Fanshawe," said he, artfully compelling her attention, "to show you a really curious, and even mysterious tablet, which is very old, and about which are ever so many stories and conjectures."

He conveyed them to a recess between two windows, where in the shade is a very old mural tablet.

"It is elaborately carved, and is dated, you see, 1411. If you look near you will see that the original epitaph has been chipped off near the

middle, and the word '*Eheu*,' which is Latin for 'alas!' cut deeply into the stone."

"What a hideous skull!" exclaimed the young lady, looking at the strange carving of that emblem, which projected at the summit of the tablet.

"Yes, what a diabolical expression! Isn't it?" said Cleve.

"Are not those *tears*?" continued Miss Fanshawe, curiously.

"No, look more nearly and you will see. They are worms—great worms—crawling from the eyes, and knotting themselves, as you see," answered Cleve.

"Yes," said the lady, with a slight shudder, "and what a wicked grin the artist has given to the mouth. It is wonderfully powerful! What rage and misery! It is an awful image! Is that a tongue?"

"A tongue of fire. It represents a flame issuing from between the teeth; and on the scroll beneath, which looks, you see, like parchment shrivelled by fire are the words in Latin, 'Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;' and here is the epitaph—'Hic sunt ruinæ, forma letifera, cor mortuum, lubrica lingua dæmonis, digitus proditor, nunc gehennæ favilla. Plorate. Plaudite.' It is Latin, and the meaning is, 'Here are ruins, fatal beauty, a dead heart, the slimy tongue of the demon, a traitor finger, now ashes of gehenna. Lament. Applaud.' Some people say it is the tomb of the wicked Lady Mandeville, from whom we have the honour of being descended, who with her traitor finger indicated the place where her husband was concealed; and afterwards was herself put to death, they say, though I never knew any evidence of it, by her own son. All this happened in the Castle of Cardyllian, which accounts for her being buried in the comparative seclusion of the Priory, and yet so near Cardyllian. But antiquarians say the real date of that lady's misdoings was nearly a century later; and so the matter rests an enigma probably to the day of doom."

"It is a very good horror. What a pity we shall never know those sentences that have been cut away," said Miss Fanshawe.

"That skull is worth sketching; won't you try it?" said Cleve.

"No, not for the world. I shall find it only too hard to forget it, and I don't mean to look at it again. Some countenances seize one with a tenacity and vividness quite terrible."

"*Very* true," said Cleve, with a meaning she understood, as he turned away with her. "We are not rich in wonders here, but the old church chest is worth seeing, it is curiously carved."

He led them towards a niche in which it is placed near the communion rails. But said Miss Sheckleton—

"I'm a little tired, Margaret; you will look at it, dear; and Mr. Verney will excuse me. We have been delving and hoeing all the morning, and I shall rest here for a few minutes." And she sat down on the bench.

Miss Margaret Fanshawe looked at her a little vexed, Cleve thought; and the young lady said—

"Hadn't you better come? It's only a step, and Mr. Verney says it is really curious."

"I'm a positive old woman," said cousin Anne, "as you know, and really a little tired; and you take such an interest in old carving in wood—a thing I don't at all understand, Mr. Verney; she has a book quite full of really beautiful drawings, some taken at Brussels, and some at Antwerp. Go, dear, and see it, and I shall be rested by the time you come back."

So spoke good-natured Miss Sheckleton, depriving Margaret of every evasion; and she accordingly followed Cleve Verney as serenely as she might have followed the verger.

"Here it is," said Cleve, pausing before the recess in which this antique kist is placed. He glanced towards Miss Sheckleton. She was a good way off—out of hearing, if people spoke low; and besides, busy making a pencilled note in a little book which she had brought to light. Thoughtful old soul!

"And about the way in which faces rivet the imagination and haunt the memory, I've never experienced it but once," said Cleve, in a very low tone.

"Oh! it has happened to me often, very often. From pictures, I think, always; evil expressions of countenance that are ambiguous and

hard to explain, always something demoniacal, I think," said the young lady.

"There is nothing of the demon—never was, never could be—in the phantom that haunts me," said Cleve. "It is, on the contrary—I don't say angelic. Angels are very good, but not interesting. It is like an image called up by an enchanter—a wild, wonderful spirit of beauty and mystery. In darkness or light I always see it. You like to escape from yours. I would not lose mine for worlds; it is my good genius, my inspiration; and whenever that image melts into air, and I see it no more, the last good principle of my life will have perished."

The young lady laughed in a silvery little cadence that had a sadness in it, and said—

"Your superstitions are much prettier than mine. My good cousin Anne, there, talks of blue devils, and my familiars are, I think, of that vulgar troop; while yours are all *couleur de rose*, and so elegantly got up, and so perfectly presentable and well bred, that I really think I should grow quite tired of the best of them in a five-minutes' *tête-à-tête*."

"I must have described my apparition very badly," said Cleve. "That which is lovely beyond all mortal parallel can be described only by its effects upon one's fancy and emotions, and in proportion as these are intense, I believe they are incommunicable."

"You are growing quite too metaphysical for me," said Miss Margaret Fanshawe. "I respect metaphysics, but I never could understand them."

"It is quite true," laughed Cleve. "I *was* so. I hate metaphysics myself;' and they have nothing to do with this, they are so dry and detestable. But now, as a physician—as an exorcist—tell me, I entreat, in my sad case, haunted by a beautiful phantom of despair, which I have mistaken for my good angel, how am I to redeem myself from this fatal spell."

A brilliant colour tinged the young lady's cheeks, and her great eyes glanced on him for a moment, he thought, with a haughty and even angry brilliancy.

"I don't profess the arts you mention; but I doubt the reality of your spectre. I think it is an *illusion*, depending on an undue excitement in the organ of self-esteem, quite to be dispelled by restoring the

healthy action of those other organs—of common sense. Seriously, I'm not competent to advise gentlemen, young or old, in their perplexities, real or fancied; but I certainly would say to any one who had set before him an object of ambition, the attainment of which he thought would be injurious to him,—be manly, have done with it, let it go, give it to the winds. Besides, you know that half the objects which young men set before them, the ambitions which they cherish, are the merest castles in the air, and that all but themselves can see the ridicule of their aspirations."

"You must not go, Miss Fanshawe; you have hot seen the carving you came here to look at. Here is the old church chest; but—but suppose the *patient*—let us call him—knows that the object of his—his *ambition* is on all accounts the best and noblest he could possibly have set before him. What then?"

"What then!" echoed Miss Fanshawe. "How can any one possibly tell—but the patient, as you call him, himself—what he should do. Your patient does not interest me; he wearies me. Let us look at this carving."

"Do you think he should despair because there is no present answer to his prayers, and his idol vouchsafes no sign or omen?" persisted Cleve.

"I don't think," she replied, with a cold impatience, "the kind of person you describe is capable of despairing in such a case. I think he would place too high a value upon his merits to question the certainty of their success—don't you?" said the young lady.

"Well, no; I *don't* think so. He is not an unreal person; I know him, and I know that his good opinion of himself is humbled, and that he adores with an entire abandonment of self the being whom he literally worships."

"Very adoring, perhaps, but rather—that's a great dog like a wolf-hound in that panel, and it has got its fangs in that pretty stag's throat," said Miss Fanshawe, breaking into a criticism upon the carving.

"Yes—but you were saying 'Very adoring, but rather'—what?" urged Cleve.

"Rather silly, don't you think? What business have people adoring others of whom they know nothing—who may not even like *them*—

who may possibly *dis*like them extremely? I am tired of your good genius—I hope I'm not very rude—and of your friend's folly—tired as *you* must be; and I think we should both give him very much the same advice, *I* should say to him, pray don't sacrifice yourself; you are much too precious; consider your own value, and above all, remember that even should you make up your mind to the humiliation of the altar and the knife, the ceremonial may prove a fruitless mortification, and the opportunity of accomplishing your sacrifice be denied you by your divinity. And I think that's a rather well-rounded period: don't you?"

By this time Miss Margaret Fanshawe had reached her cousin, who stood up smiling.

"I'm ashamed to say I have been actually amusing myself here with my accounts. We have seen, I think, nearly everything now in this building. I should so like to visit the ruins at the other side of the court-yard."

"I shall be only too happy to be your guide, if you permit me," said Cleve.

And accordingly they left the church, and Cleve shut the door with a strange feeling both of irritation and anxiety.

"Does she dislike me? Or is she engaged? What can her odd speeches mean, if not one or other of these things? She warns me off, and seems positively angry at my approach. She took care that I should quite understand her ironies, and there was no mistaking the reality of her unaccountable resentment."

So it was with a weight at his heart, the like of which he had never experienced before, that Cleve undertook, and I fear in a rather spiritless way performed his duties as cicerone, over the other parts of the building.

Her manner seemed to him changed, chilled and haughty. Had there come a secret and sudden antipathy, the consequence of a too hasty revelation of feelings which he ought in prudence to have kept to himself for some time longer? And again came with a dreadful pang the thought that her heart was already won—the heart so cold and impenetrable to him—the passionate and docile worshipper of another man—some beast—some fool. But the first love—the only love worth having; and yet, of all loves the most ignorant—the insanest.

Bitter as gall was the outrage to his pride. He would have liked to appear quite indifferent, but he could not. He knew the girl would penetrate his finesse. She practised none herself; he could see and feel a change that galled him—very slight but intolerable. Would it not be a further humiliation to be less frank than she, and to practise an affectation which she despised.

Miss Sheckleton eyed the young people stealthily and curiously now and then, he thought. She suspected perhaps more than there really was, and she was particularly kind and grave at parting, and, he thought, observed him with a sort of romantic compassion which is so pretty in old ladies.

He did touch Miss Fanshawe's hand at parting, and she smiled a cold and transient smile as she gathered her cloaks about her, and looked over the sea, toward the setting sun. In that clear, mellow glory, how wonderfully beautiful she looked! He was angry with himself for the sort of adoration which glowed at his heart. What would he not have given to be indifferent, and to make her feel that he was so!

He smiled and waved his farewell to Miss Sheckleton. Miss Fanshawe was now looking toward Malory. The boat was gliding swiftly into distance, and disappeared with the sunset glittering on its sides, round the little headland, and Cleve was left alone.

His eyes dropped to the shingle, and broken shells, and seaweed, that lay beneath his feet, in that level stream of amber light. He thought of going away, thought what a fool he had been, thought of futurity and fate, with a sigh, and renounced the girl, washed out the portrait before which he had worshipped for so long, with the hand of defiance—the water of Lethe. Vain, vain; in sympathetic dyes, the shadow stained upon the brain, still fills his retina, glides before him in light and darkness, and will not be divorced.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLEVE AGAIN BEFORE HIS IDOL.

CLEVE could not rest—he could not return to Ware. He would hear his fate defined by her who had grown so inexpressibly dear by being—unattainable! Intolerant of impediment or delay, this impetuous spirit would end all, and know all that very night.

The night had come—one that might have come in June. The moon was up—the air so sweetly soft—the blue of heaven so deep and liquid.

His yacht lay on the deep quiet shadow, under the pier of Cardyllian. He walked over the moonlighted green, which was now quite deserted. The early town had already had its tea and "pikelets." Alone—if lovers ever *are* alone—he walked along the shore, and heard the gentle sea ripple rush and sigh along the stones. He ascended the steep path that mounts the sea-beaten heights, overlooking Cardyllian on one side, and Malory on the other.

Before him lay the landscape on which he had gazed as the sun went down that evening, when the dull light from the gold and crimson sky fell softly round. And now, how changed everything! The moon's broad disk over the headland was silvering the objects dimly. The ivied castle at his left looked black against the sky. The ruins how empty now! How beautiful everything, and he how prodigious a fool! No matter. We have time enough to be wise. Away, to-morrow, or at latest, next day; and in due course would arrive the season—that tiresome House of Commons—and the routine of pleasure, grown on a sudden so insupportably dull.

So he had his walk in the moonlight toward Malory—the softest moonlight that ever fell from heaven—the air so still and sweet: it seemed an enchanted land. Down the hill toward Malory he sauntered, looking sometimes moonward, sometimes on the dark woods, and feeling as five weeks since he could not have believed himself capable of feeling, and so he arrived at the very gate of Malory.

Here stood two ladies, talking low their desultory comments on the beautiful scene, as they looked across the water toward the headland of Pendillion. And these two ladies were the same from whom he

had parted so few hours since. It was still very early everywhere except at Cardyllian, and these precincts of Malory, so entirely deserted at these hours that there seemed as little chance of interruption at the gate, as if they had stood in the drawing-room windows.

Cleve was under too intense and impetuous an excitement to hesitate. He approached the iron gate where, as at a convent grille, the old and the young recluse stood. The moonlight was of that intense and brilliant kind which defines objects clearly as daylight. The ladies looked both surprised; even Miss Anne Sheckleton looked grave.

"How very fortunate!" said Cleve, raising his hat, and drawing near. Just then, he did not care whether Sir Booth should chance to see him there or not, and it was not the turn of his mind to think, in the first place, of consequences to other people.

Happily, perhaps, for the quiet of Malory, one of Sir Booth's caprices had dispensed that night with his boat, and he was at that moment stretched in his long silk dressing-gown and slippers, on the sofa, in what he called his study. After the first instinctive alarm, therefore, Miss Anne Sheckleton had quite recovered her accustomed serenity and cheer of mind, and even interrupted him before he had well got to the end of his salutation to exclaim—

"Did you ever, anywhere, see such moonlight? It almost dazzles me."

"Quite splendid; and Malory looks so picturesque in this light." He was leaning on the pretty old gate, at which stood both ladies, sufficiently far apart to enable him, in a low tone, to say to the younger, without being overheard—"So interesting in every light, now! I wonder your men don't suspect me of being a poacher, or something else very bad, I find myself prowling about here so often, at this hour, and even later."

"I admire that great headland—Pendillion, isn't it?—so very much; by this light one might fancy it white with snow," said Miss Sheckleton.

"I wish you could see Cardrwydd Island *now*; the gray cliffs in this light are so white and transparent, you can hardly imagine so strange and beautiful an effect," said Cleve.

"I dare say," said Miss Sheckleton.

"You have only to walk about twenty steps across that little road towards the sea, and you have it full in view. Do let me persuade you," said Cleve.

"Well, I don't mind," said Miss Sheckleton. "Come, Margaret, dear," and these latter words she repeated in private exhortation, and then aloud she added—"We have grown so much into the habit of shutting ourselves up in our convent grounds, that we feel like a pair of runaway nuns whenever we pass the walls; however, I *must* see the island."

The twenty steps toward the sea came to be a hundred or more, and at last brought them close under the rude rocks that form the little pier; in that place, the party stopped, and saw the island rising in the distant sheen, white and filmy; a phantom island, with now and then a gleam of silvery spray, from the swell which was unfelt within the estuary, shooting suddenly across its points of shadow.

"Oh! how beautiful!" exclaimed Miss Fanshawe, and Cleve felt strangely elated in her applause. They were all silent, and Miss Sheckleton, still gazing on the distant cliffs, walked on a little, and a little more, and paused.

"How beautiful!" echoed Cleve, in tones as low, but very different. "Yes, how beautiful—how fatally beautiful; how beloved, and yet how cold. Cold, mysterious, wild as the sea; beautiful, adored and *cruel*. How *could* you speak as you did to-day? What have I done, or said, or thought, if you could read my thoughts? I tell you, ever since I saw you in Cardyllian church I've thought only of you; you haunt my steps; you inspire my hopes. I adore you, Margaret."

She was looking on him with parted lips, and something like fear in her large eyes, and how beautiful her features were in the brilliant moonlight.

"Yes, I *adore* you; I don't know what fate or fiend rules these things; but to-day it seemed to me that you hated me, and yet I adore you; *do* you hate me?"

"How wildly you talk; you can't love me; you don't know me," said this odd girl.

"I don't know you, and yet I love you; you don't know *me*, and yet I think you *hate* me. You talk of love as if it were a creation of reason and calculation. You don't know it, or you could not speak so; antipathies perhaps you do not experience; is there no caprice in *them*? I love you *in defiance* of calculation, and of reason, and of hope itself. I can no more help loving you than the light and air without which I should die. You're not going; you're not *so* cruel; it may be the last time you shall ever hear me speak. You won't believe me; no, not a word I say, although it's all as true as that this light shines from heaven. You'd believe one of your boatmen relating any nonsense he pleases about people and places here. You'll believe worse fellows, I dare say, speaking of higher and dearer things, *perhaps*—I can't tell; but *me*, on *this*, upon which I tell you, *all* depends for me, you won't believe. I never loved any mortal before. I did not know what it was, and now here I stand, telling you my bitter story, telling it to the sea, and the rocks, and the air, with as good a chance of a hearing. I read it in your manner and your words to-day. I felt it intuitively. You don't care for me; you can't like me; I see it in your looks. And now, will you tell me; for God's sake, Margaret, do tell me—is there not some one—you *do* like? I know there is."

"That's *quite* untrue—I mean there is *nothing* of the kind," said this young lady, looking very pale, with great flashing eyes; "and one word more of this kind to-night you are not to say to me. Cousin Anne," she called, "come, I'm going back."

"We are so much obliged to you, Mr. Verney," said Miss Sheckleton, returning; "we should never have thought of coming down here, to look for this charming view. Come, Margaret, darling, your papa may want me."

An inquisitive glance she darted furtively at the young people, and I dare say she thought that she saw something unusual in their countenances.

As *they* did not speak, Miss Sheckleton chatted on unheeded, till, on a sudden, Cleve interposed with—

"There's an old person—an old lady, I may call her—named Rebecca Mervyn, who lives in the steward's house, adjoining Malory, for whom I have a very old friendship; she was so kind to me, poor thing, when I was a boy. My grandmother has a very high opinion of her; and *she* was never very easily pleased. I suppose you have seen Mrs. Mervyn; you'd not easily forget her, if you have. They tell me in

the town that she is quite well; the same odd creature she always was, and living still in the steward's house."

"I know—to be sure—I've seen her very often—that is, half-a-dozen times or more—and she *is* a very odd old woman, like that benevolent enchantress in the 'Magic Ring'—don't you remember? who lived in the castle with white lilies growing all round the battlements," answered Miss Sheckleton.

"I know," said Cleve, who had never read it.

"And if you want to see her, *here* she is, oddly enough," whispered Miss Sheckleton, as the old woman with whom Sedley had conferred on the sea-beach came round the corner of the boundary wall near the gateway by which they were now standing, in her grey cloak, with dejected steps, and looking, after her wont, seaward toward Pendillion.

"No," said Cleve, getting up a smile as he drew a little back into the shadow; "I'll not speak to her now; I should have so many questions to answer, I should not get away from her for an hour."

Almost as he spoke the old woman passed them, and entered the gate; as she did so, looking hard on the little party, and hesitating for a moment, as if she would have stopped outright. But she went on without any further sign.

"I breathe again," said Cleve; "I was so afraid she would know me again, and insist on a talk."

"Well, perhaps it is better she did not; it might not do, you know, if she mentioned your name, for *reasons*," whispered Miss Sheckleton, who was on a sudden much more intimate with Cleve, much more friendly, much more kind, and somehow pitying.

So he bade good-night. Miss Sheckleton gave him a little friendly pressure as they shook hands at parting. Miss Fanshawe neither gave nor refused her hand. He took it; he held it for a moment—that slender hand, all the world to him, clasped in his own, yet never to be his, lodged like a stranger's for a moment there—then to go, for ever. The hand was carelessly drawn away; he let it go, and never a word spoke he.

The ladies entered the deep shadow of the trees. He listened to the light steps fainting into silent distance, till he could hear them no more.

Suspense—still suspense.

Those words spoken in her clear undertone—terrible words, that seemed at the moment to thunder in his ears, "loud as a trumpet with a silver sound"—were they, after all, words of despair, or words of hope?

"*One word more of this kind, to-night, you are not to say to me.*"

How was he to translate the word "to-night" in this awful text? It seemed, as she spoke it, introduced simply to add peremptoriness to her forbiddance. But was that its fair meaning? Did it not imply that the prohibition was limited only to that night? Might it not mean that he was free to speak more—possibly to hear more—at a future time?

A riddle? Well! he would read it in the way most favourable to his hopes; and who will blame him? He would have no oracles—no ambiguities—nothing but sharply defined certainty.

With an insolent spirit, instinct with an impatience and impetuosity utterly intolerant of the least delay or obstruction, the interval could not be long.

CHAPTER XIX.

CLEVE VERNEY TAKES A BOLD STEP.

WHEN we seek danger he is sometimes—like death—hard to find. Cleve would not have disliked an encounter with Sir Booth Fanshawe; who could tell what might come of such a meeting? It was palpably so much the interest of that ruined gentleman to promote his wishes, that, if he would only command his temper and listen to reason, he had little doubt of enlisting him zealously in his favour. It was his own uncle who always appeared to him the really formidable obstacle.

Therefore, next night, Cleve fearlessly walked down to Malory. It was seven o'clock, and dark. It was a still, soft night. The moon not up yet, and all within the gate, dark as Erebus—silent, also, except for the fall of a dry leaf now and then, rustling sadly through the boughs.

At the gate for a moment he hesitated, and then with a sudden decision, pushed it open, entered, and the darkness received him. A little confused were his thoughts and feelings as he strode through that darkness and silence toward the old house. So dark it was, that to direct his steps, he had to look up for a streak of sky between the nearly meeting branches of the trees.

This trespass was not a premeditated outrage. It was a sudden inspiration of despair. He had thought of writing to Sir Booth. But to what mischief might not that fierce and impracticable old man apply his overt act? Suppose he were to send his letter on to the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney? In that case Mr. Cleve Verney might moralise with an income of precisely two hundred a year, for the rest of his days, upon the transitory nature of all human greatness. At the next election he would say a compulsory farewell to the House. He owed too much money to remain pleasantly in England, his incensed uncle would be quite certain to marry, and with Cleve Verney—ex-M.P., and quondam man of promise, and presumptive Earl of Verney—*conclamatum foret*.

He had therefore come to the gate of Malory in the hope of some such happy chance as befel the night before. And now disappointed, he broke through all considerations, and was walking in a sort of desperation, right into the lion's mouth.

He slackened his pace, however, and bethought him. Of course, he could not ask at this hour to see Miss Anne Sheckleton. Should he go and pay a visit to old Rebecca Mervyn? Hour and circumstances considered, would not that, also, be a liberty and an outrage? What would they think of it? What would *he* say of it in another fellow's case? Was he then going at this hour to pay his respects to Sir Booth Fanshawe, whom he had last seen and heard in the thunder and dust of the hustings, hurling language and grammar that were awful, at his head.

Cleve Verney was glad that he had pulled up before he stood upon the door steps; and he felt like an awakened somnambulist.

"I *can't* do this. It's *impossible*. What a brute I am growing," thought Cleve, awaking to realities. "There's nothing for it, I believe, but patience. If I were now to press for an answer, she would say 'No;' and were I to ask admission at the house at this hour, what would she—what would Miss Sheckleton, even, think of me? If I had nerve to go away and forget her, I should be happier—quite happy and quite good-for-nothing, and perfectly at my uncle's disposal. As it is, I'm *miserable*—a miserable *fool*. Everything against it—even the girl, I believe; and I here—partly in a vision of paradise, partly in the torments of the damned, wasting my life in the dream of an opium-eater, and without power to break from it, and see the world as it is."

He was leaning with folded arms, like the melancholy Jacques against the trunk of a forest tree, as this sad soliloquy glided through his mind, and he heard a measured step approaching slowly from the house.

"This is Sir Booth coming," thought he, with a strange, sardonic gladness. "We shall see what will come of it. Let us hear the old gentleman, by all means."

The step was still distant.

It would have been easy for him to retrace his steps, and to avoid the encounter. But it seemed to him that to stir would have been like moving a mountain, and a sort of cold defiance kept him there, and an unspeakable interest in the story which he was enacting, and a longing to turn over the leaf, and read the next decisive page. So he waited.

His conjecture was right, but the anticipated dialogue did not occur. The tall figure of Sir Booth appeared; some wrappers thrown across

his arm. He stalked on and passed by Cleve, without observing, or rather, seeing him; for his eye had not grown like Cleve's accustomed to the darkness.

Cleve stood where he was till the step was lost in silence, and waited for some time longer, and heard Sir Booth's voice, as he supposed, hailing the boatmen from that solitary shore, and theirs replying, and he thought of the ghostly boat and boatmen that used to scare him in the "Tale of Wonder" beloved in his boyhood. For anything that remains to him in life, for any retrospect but one of remorse, he might as well be one of those phantom boatmen on the haunted lake. By this time he is gliding, in the silence of his secret thoughts, upon the dark sea outside Malory.

"Well!" thought Cleve, with a sudden inspiration, "he will not return for two hours at least. I *will* go on—no great harm in merely passing the house—and we shall see whether anything turns up."

On went Cleve. The approach to the old house is not a very long one. On a sudden, through the boughs, the sight of lighted windows met his eyes, and through the open sash of one of them, he heard faintly the pleasant sound of female prattle.

He drew nearer. He stood upon the esplanade before the steps, under the well-known gray front of the whole house. A shadow crossed the window, and he heard Miss Anne Sheckleton's merry voice speaking volubly, and then a little silence, of which he availed himself to walk with as distinct a tread as he could manage, at a little distance, in front of the windows, in the hope of exciting the attention of the inmates. He succeeded; for almost at the instant two shadowy ladies, the lights being within the room, and hardly any from without, appeared at the open window; Miss Sheckleton was in front, and Miss Fanshawe with her hand leaning upon her old cousin's shoulder, looked out also.

Cleve stopped instantly, and approached, raising his hat. This young gentleman was also a mere dark outline, and much less distinct than those he recognised against the cheery light of the drawing-room candles. But I don't think there was a moment's doubt about his identity. "Here I am, actually detected, trying to glide by unperceived," said Cleve, lying, as Mr. Fag says in the play, and coming up quickly to the open window. "You must think me quite mad, or the most impudent person alive; but what am I to do? I can't leave Ware, without paying old Rebecca—Mrs. Mervyn, you know—

a visit. Lady Verney blows me up so awfully about it, and has put it on me as a duty. She thinks there's no one like old Rebecca; and really poor old Mervyn was always very kind to me when I was a boy. She lives, you know, in the steward's house. I can't come up here in daylight. I'm in such a dilemma. I must wait till Sir Booth has gone out in his boat, don't you see? and so I did; and if I had just got round the corner there, without your observing me, I should have been all right. I'm really quite ashamed. I must look so like a trespasser—a poacher—everything that is suspicious; but the case, you see, is really so difficult. I've told you everything, and I do hope you quite acquit me."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Sheckleton. "We *must*, you know. It's like a piece of a Spanish comedy; but what's to be done? You must have been very near meeting. Booth has only just gone down to the boat."

"We did meet—that is, he actually passed me by, but without seeing me. I heard him coming, and just stood, taking my chance; it was very dark you know."

"Well, I forgive you," said Miss Sheckleton. "I must, you know; but the dogs won't. You hear them in the yard. What good dear creatures they are; and when they hear us talking to you, they'll grow quite quiet, and understand that all is well, they are *so* intelligent. And there's the boat; look, Margaret, through *that* opening, you can just see it. When the moon gets up, it looks so pretty. I suppose it's my bad taste, but those clumsy fishing boats seem to me so much more picturesque than your natty yachts, though, of course, *they* are very nice in their way. Do you hear how *furious* you have made our great dog, poor old Neptune! He looks upon us, Margaret and I, as in his special charge; but it does not do, making such an uproar."

I fancy she was thinking of Sir Booth, for she glanced toward the boat; and perhaps the kind old lady was thinking of somebody else, also.

"I'll just run to the back window, and quiet him. I shan't be away a moment, Margaret, dear."

And away went Miss Sheckleton, shutting the door. Miss Fanshawe had not said a word, but remained at the window looking out. You might have thought his being there, or not, a matter of entire indifference to her. She had not said a word. She looked toward the

point at which the rising splendour of the moon was already visible over the distant hills.

"Did you miss anything—I'm sure you did—yesterday? I found a pin at the jetty of Penruthyn. It is so pretty, I've been ever so much tempted to keep it; so very pretty, that somehow, I think it could not have belonged to any one but to you."

And he took the trinket from his waistcoat pocket.

"Oh! I'm so glad," said she; "I thought I had seen it this morning, and could not think what had become of it. I never missed it till this evening."

He touched the fingers she extended to receive it. He took them in his hand, and held them with a gentle force.

"For one moment allow me to hold your hand; don't take it from me yet. I *implore*, only while I say a few words, which you may make, almost by a look, a farewell—my eternal farewell. Margaret, I love you as no other man ever will love you. You think all this but the madness that young men talk. I know nothing of them. What I say is desperately true; no madness, but sad and irreparable reality. I never knew love but for you—and for you it is such idolatry as I think the world never imagined. You are never for one moment from my thoughts. Every good hope or thought I have, I owe to you. You are the good principle of my life, and if I lose you, I am lost myself."

This strange girl was not a conventional young lady. I don't pronounce whether she was better or worse for that. She did not drop her eyes, nor yet withdraw her hand. She left that priceless pledge in his, it seemed, unconsciously, and with eyes of melancholy and earnest inquiry, looked on the handsome young man that was pleading with her.

"It is strange," she said, in a dreamy tone, as if talking with herself. "I said it was strange, for he does not, and cannot, know me."

"Yes," he answered, "I do know you—intuitively I know you. We have all faith in the beautiful. We cannot separate the beautiful and the good; they come both direct from God, they resemble him; and I know your power—you can make of me what you will. Oh, Margaret, will you shut me out for ever from the only chance of good I shall ever know? Can you ever, ever like me?"

There was a little silence, and she said, very low, "If I *were* to like you, would you love me better than anything else in all the world?"

"Than all the world—than all the world," he reiterated, and she felt the hand of this young man of fashion, of ambition, who had years ago learned to sneer at all romance, quiver as it held her own.

"But first, if I were to allow any one to like me, I would say to him, you must know what you undertake. You must love me with your entire heart; heart and soul, you must give yourself altogether up to me. I must be everything to you—your present, your future, your happiness, your hope; for I will not bear to share your heart with anything on *earth*! And these are hard terms, but the only ones."

"I need make *no* vow, darling—*darling*. My life is what you describe, and I cannot help it; I adore you. Oh! Margaret, *can* you like me?"

Then Margaret Fanshawe answered, and in a tone the most sad, I think, that ever spoke; and to *him*, the sweetest and most solemn; like distant music in the night, funereal and plaintive, her words fell upon his entranced ear.

"If I were to say I could like you enough to *wait*, and *try* if I could like you more, it always seemed to me so awful a thing—try if I could like you more—would not the terms seem to you too hard?"

"Oh! Margaret, darling, say you *can* like me *now*. You know how I adore you," he implored.

"Here, then, is the truth. I do not like you well enough to say all that; no, I do *not*, but I like you too well to say *go*. I don't know how it *may* be, but if you choose to wait, and give me a very little time to resolve, I shall see clearly, and all uncertainty come to an end, *some*how, and God guide us all to good! That is the whole truth, Mr. Verney; and pray say no more at present. You shall not wait long for my answer."

"I agree, darling. I accept your terms. You don't know what delay is to me; but anything rather than despair."

She drew her hand to herself. He released it. It was past all foolish by-play with him, and the weight of a strange fear lay upon his heart.

This little scene took longer in speaking and acting, than it does in reading in this poor note of mine. When they looked up, the moon

was silvering the tops of the trees, and the distant peaks of the Welsh mountains, and glimmering and flashing to and fro, like strings of diamonds, on the water.

And now Miss Anne Sheckleton entered, having talked old Neptune into good humour.

"Is there a chance of your visiting Penruthyn again?" asked Cleve, as if nothing unusual had passed. "You have not seen the old park. *Pray*, come to-morrow."

Miss Sheckleton looked at the young lady, but she made no sign.

"*Shall* we? *I* see nothing against it," said she.

"Oh! *do*. I entreat," he persisted.

"Well, if it should be fine, and if nothing prevents, I think I may say, we *will*, about three o'clock to-morrow."

Margaret did not speak; but was there not something sad and even gentle in her parting? The old enigma was still troubling his brain and heart, as he walked down the dark avenue once more. How would it all end? How would she at last pronounce?

The walk, next day, was taken in the Warren, as he had proposed. I believe it was a charming excursion; as happy, too, as under the bitter conditions of suspense it could be; but nothing worthy of record was spoken, and matters, I dare say, remained, ostensibly at least, precisely as they were.

CHAPTER XX.

HIS FATE.

CLEVE VERNEY, as we know, was a young gentleman in whose character were oddly mingled impetuosity and caution. A certain diplomatic reserve and slyness had often stood him in stead in the small strategy of life, and here, how skillfully had he not managed his visits to Penruthyn, and hid from the peering eyes of Cardyllian his walks and loiterings about the enchanted woods of Malory.

Visiting good Mrs. Jones's shop next day to ask her how she did, and gossip a little across the counter, that lady, peering over her spectacles, received him with a particularly sly smile, which, being prone to alarms just then, he noted and did not like.

Confidential and voluble as usual, was this lady, bringing her black lace cap and purple ribbons close to the brim of Mr. Verney's hat, as she leaned over the counter, and murmured her emphatic intelligence and surmises deliberately in his ear. She came at last to say—

"You must be very *sol*itary, we all think, over there, at Ware, sir; and though you have your yacht to sail across in, and your dog-cart to trot along, and doesn't much mind, still it is not con*venient*, you know, for one that likes *this* side so much better than the other. We think, and *wonders*, we all do, you wouldn't stay awhile at the Verney Arms, over the way, and remain among us, you know, and be near everything you might like; the other side, you know, is very dull; we can't deny *that*, though its quite true that Ware is a very fine place—a really *beau*tiful place—but it *is* lonely, we must allow; *mustn't* we?"

"Awfully lonely," acquiesced Cleve, "but I don't quite see why I should live at the Verney Arms, notwithstanding."

"Well, they do say—you mustn't be angry with them, you know—but they do, that you like a walk to Malory," and this was accompanied with a wonderfully cunning look, and a curious play of the crow's-feet and wrinkles of her fat face, and a sly, gentle laugh. "But *I* don't mind."

"Don't mind *what*?" asked Cleve, a little sharply.

"*Well*, I don't mind what they *say*, but they *do* say you have made acquaintance with the Malory family—no harm in that, you know."

"No harm in the world, only a lie," said Cleve, with a laugh that was not quite enjoying. "I wish they would manage that introduction for me; I should like it extremely. I think the young lady rather pretty—don't you?—and I should not object to pay my respects, if you think it would not be odd. My Cardyllian friends know so much better than I what is the right thing to do. The fact is, I don't know one of our own tenants there, except for taking off my hat twice to the only sane one of the party, that old Miss Anne—Anne—*something*—you told me—"

"*Sheckleton* that will *be*," supplemented Mrs. Jones.

"Sheckleton. Very well; and my real difficulty is this—and upon my honour, I don't know how to manage it. My grandmother, Lady Verney, puts me under orders—and you know she does not like to be disobeyed—to go and see poor old Rebecca, Mrs. Mervyn, you know, at the steward's house, at Malory; and I am looking for a moment when these people are out of the way, just to run in for five minutes, and ask her how she does. And my friend, Wynne Williams, won't let me tell Lady Verney how odd these people are, he's so afraid of her hearing the rumour of their being mad. But the fact is, whenever I go up there and peep in through the trees, I see some of them about the front of the house, and I can't go up to the door, of course, without annoying them, for they wish to be quite shut up; and the end of it is, I say, that, among them, I shall get blown up by Lady Verney, and shan't know what to answer—by Jove! But you may tell my friends in Cardyllian, I am so much obliged to them for giving me credit for more cleverness than *they* have had in effecting an introduction; and talking of me about that pretty girl, Miss—oh!—what's her name?—at Malory. I only hope she's not mad; for if she is I must be also."

Mrs. Jones listened, and looked at him more gravely, for his story hung pretty well together, and something of its cunning died out of the expression of her broad face. But Cleve walked away a little disconcerted, and by no means in a pleasant temper with his good neighbours of Cardyllian; and made that day a long visit at Hazelden, taking care to make his approaches as ostentatiously as he could. And he was seen for an hour in the evening, walking on the green with the young ladies of that house, Miss Charity flanking the little line of march on one side, and he the other, pretty Miss Agnes,

of the golden locks, the pretty dimples, and brilliant tints, walking between, and listening, I'm afraid, more to the unphilosophic prattle of young Mr. Verney than to the sage conversation, and even admonitions and reminders, of her kind, but unexceptionable sister.

From the news-room windows, from the great bow-window of the billiard-room, this promenade was visible. It was a judicious demonstration, and gave a new twist to conjecture; and listless gentlemen, who chronicled and discussed such matters, observed upon it, each according to his modicum of eloquence and wisdom.

Old Vane Etherage, whose temperament, though squally, was placable, was won by the frank courtesy, and adroit flatteries of the artless young fellow who had canvassed boroughs and counties, and was master of a psychology of which honest old Etherage knew nothing.

That night, notwithstanding, Cleve was at the gate of Malory, and the two ladies were there.

"We have been looking at the boat ten minutes, just, since it left. Sir Booth is out as usual, and now see how far away; you can scarcely see the sail, and yet so little breeze."

"The breeze is rather from the shore, and you are sheltered here, all this old wood, you know. But you can hear it a little in the tops of the trees," Cleve answered, caring very little what way the breeze might blow, and yet glad to know that Sir Booth was on his cruise, and quite out of the way for more than an hour to come.

"We intended venturing out as far as the pier, there to enjoy once more that beautiful moonlight view, but Sir Booth went out to-night by the little door down there, and this has been left with its padlock on. So we must only treat this little recess as the convent parlour, with the grating here, at which we parley with our friends. *Do* you hear that foolish old dog again? I really believe he has got out of the yard," suddenly exclaimed good-natured Miss Anne, who made the irregularities of old Neptune an excuse for trifling absences, very precious to Cleve Verney.

So now, she walked some ten or twenty steps toward the house, and stood there looking up the avenue, and prattling incessantly, though Cleve could not hear a word she said, except now and then the name of "Neptune," when she ineffectually accosted that remote offender.

"You have not said a word, Miss Fanshawe. You are not offended with me, I hope?" he murmured.

"Oh, no."

"You have not shaken hands," he continued, and he put his hand between the bars; "won't you?"

So she placed hers in his.

"And now, can you tell me nothing?"

"I've been thinking that I may as well speak now," she said, in very low tones. "There must be uncertainty, I believe, in all things, and faith in those who love us, and trust that all may end in good; and so, *blindly*—almost *blindly*—I say, yes, if you will promise me—oh! *promise*, that you will always love me, as you do now, and never change. If you love me, I shall love you, *always*; and if you change, I shall *die*. Oh! won't you promise?"

Poor fluttering heart! The bird that prunes its wing for the untried flight over the sea, in which to tire is to die, lonely, in the cold waste, may feel within its little breast the instinct of that irrevocable venture, the irresistible impulse, the far-off hope, the present fear and danger, as she did.

Promises! What are they? Who can answer for the follies of the heart, and the mutations of time? We know what we are; we know not what we may be. Idlest of all idle words are these promises for the affections, for the raptures and illusions, utterly mortal, whose duration God has placed quite beyond our control. Kill them, indeed, we may, but add one hour to their uncertain lives, never.

Poor trembling heart! "Promise never to change. Oh! won't you promise?" Promises spoken to the air, written in dust—yet a word, a look, like a blessing or a hope—ever so illusive, before the wing is spread, and the long and untried journey begins!

What Cleve Verney swore, and all the music he poured into those little listening ears in that enchanting hour, I know not.

Miss Anne Sheckleton came back. Through the convent bars Cleve took her hand, in a kind of agitation, a kind of tumult, with rapture in his handsome face, and just said, "She has told me, she *will*" and Miss Sheckleton said nothing, but put her arms round Margaret's neck, and kissed her many times, and holding her hand, looked up

smiling, and took Cleve's also, and in the old spinster's eyes were glittering those diamond tears, so pure and unselfish that, when we see them, we think of those that angels are said to weep over the sorrows and the vanities of human life.

Swiftly flew the hour, and not till the sail was nearing the shore, and the voices of the boatmen were audible across the water, did the good old lady insist on a final farewell, and Cleve glided away, under the shadow of the trees that overhang the road, and disappeared round the distant angle of the wall of Malory.

CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTAIN SHRAPNELL.

THE next afternoon Miss Charity Etherage and her sister Agnes, were joined in their accustomed walk upon the green of Cardyllian by Captain Shrapnell, a jaunty half-pay officer of five-and-fifty, who represented to his own satisfaction, the resident youth and fashion of that quiet watering-place.

"I give you my honour, Miss Etherage," said he, placing himself beside Miss Agnes, "I mistook you yesterday, for Lady Fanny Mersey. Charming person she is, and I need not say, perfectly lovely." A little arch bow gave its proper point to the compliment. "She has gone, however, I understand; left Llwynan yesterday. Is that young Verney's boat? No, oh no—nothing like so sharp. He's a very nice fellow, young Verney."

This was put rather interrogatively, and Miss Agnes, thinking that she had blushed a little, blushed more, to her inexpressible chagrin, for she knew that Captain Shrapnell was watching her with the interest of a gossip.

"Nice? I dare say. But I really know him so very slightly," said Miss Agnes.

"Come, come; that won't do," said the Captain, very archly. "You forget that I was sitting in our club window, yesterday evening, when a certain party were walking up and down. Ha, ha, you do. We're tolerably clear-sighted up there, and old Rogers keeps our windows rubbed; and the glass is quite brilliantly transparent, ha, ha, ha! hey?"

"I think your windows are made of multiplying glasses, and magnifying glasses, and every kind of glass that distorts and discolours," said Miss Agnes, a little pettishly. "I don't know how else it is that you all see such wonderful sights as you do, through them."

"Well, they *do*, certainly. Some of our friends do colour a little," said the Captain, with a waggish yet friendly grin, up at the great bow window. "But in this case, you'll allow there was no great opportunity for colour, the tints of nature are so beautiful," and

Shrapnell fired off this little saying, with his bow and smile of fascination. "Nor, by Jove! for the multiplying glasses either, for more than three in that party would have quite spoiled it; now, *would*n't it, hey? ha, ha, ha! The two principals, and a gooseberry, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is a *gooseberry*?" inquired Miss Charity, peremptorily.

"A delightful object in the garden, Miss Etherage, a delightful object everywhere. The delight of the young especially, hey, Miss Agnes? ha, ha! hey? and one of the sweetest products of nature Eh, Miss Agnes? ha, ha, ha! Miss Etherage, I give you my honour every word I say is true."

"I do declare, Captain Shrapnell, it seems to me you have gone *perfectly mad*!" said Miss Charity, who was out-spoken and emphatic.

"Always a mad fellow, Miss Etherage, ha, ha, ha! Very true; that's my character, hey? ha, ha, ha, egad! So the ladies tell me," said the gay, young Captain. "Wish I'd a guinea for every time they've called me mad, among them. I give you my honour I'd be a rich fellow this moment."

"Now, Captain Shrapnell," said Miss Charity, with a frank stare with her honest goggle eyes, "you are talking *the* greatest *nonsense I* ever heard in my life."

"Miss Agnes, here, does not think so, hey?" giggled the Captain. "Now, come, Miss Agnes, what do you think of young Verney, hey? There's a question."

How Miss Agnes hated the gibing, giggling wretch, and detested the club of whose prattle and gossip he was the inexhaustible spokesman; and would at that moment have hailed the appearance of a ship-of-war with her broadside directed upon the bow window of that haunt, with just, of course, such notice to her worthy father, whose gray head was visible in it, as was accorded to the righteous Lot—under orders, with shot, shell, rockets, and marlin-spikes, to blow the entire concern into impalpable dust.

It must be allowed that Miss Agnes was unjust; that it would not have been fair to visit upon the harmless and, on the whole, good-natured persons who congregated in that lively receptacle, and read the *Times* through their spectacles there, the waggeries and exaggerations of the agreeable captain, and to have reached that

incorrigible offender, and demolished his stronghold at so great a waste of human life.

"Come, now; I won't let you off, Miss Aggie. I say, *there's* a question. What do you say? Come, now, you really must tell us. What *do* you think of young Verney?"

"If you wish to know what *I* think," interposed Miss Charity, "I think he's *the very nicest* man I *ever* spoke to. He's *so* nice about religion. Wasn't he, Aggie?"

Here the Captain exploded.

"Religion! egad—do you really mean to tell me—ha, ha, ha! Upon my soul, that's the richest thing!—now, *really*!"

"My goodness! How frightfully wicked you are," exclaimed Miss Charity.

"True bill, egad! upon my soul, I'm afraid—ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, Captain Shrapnell, you *shall not* walk with us, if you swear," said Miss Charity.

"*Swear!* I didn't swear, did I? Very sorry if I did, upon my—I give you my word," said the Captain, politely.

"Yes, you *did*; and it's *extremely wicked*," said Miss Charity.

"Well, I won't; I swear to you I won't," vowed the Captain, a little inconsistently; "but now about Master Cleve Verney, Miss Agnes. I said I would not let you off, and I won't. I give you my honour, you shall say what you think of him, or, by Jove!—I conclude you can't trust yourself on the subject, ha, ha, ha! Hey?"

"You *are* mad, Captain Shrapnell," interposed Miss Charity, with weight.

"I can't say, really, I've formed any particular opinion. I think he is rather agreeable," answered Miss Agnes, under this pressure.

"Well, so do *I*" acquiesced the Captain.

"Master Cleve can certainly be agreeable when he chooses; and you think him devilish good-looking—don't you?"

"I really can't say—he has very good features—but——"

"But what? Why every one allows that Verney's as good-looking a fellow as you'll meet with anywhere," persisted the Captain.

"*I* think him *per*fectly *be-au*tiful!" said Miss Charity, who never liked people by halves.

"Well—yes—he may be handsome," said Miss Agnes. "I'm no very great critic; but I can't conceive any girl falling in love with him."

"Oh! as to *that*—but—*why*?" said Captain Shapnell.

"His face, I think, is so selfish—somehow," she said.

"Is it now, really?—*how*?" asked the Captain. "I'm *am-azed* at you!" exclaimed Miss Charity.

"Well, there's a selfish hook—no, not a hook, a *curve*—of his nose, and a cruel crook of his shoulder," said Miss Agnes, in search of faults.

"You're determined to hit him by hook or by crook—ha, ha, ha—I say," pursued the Captain.

"A *hook*!" exclaimed Miss Charity, almost angrily; "there's *no* hook! I *wonder* at you—I really think, sometimes, Agnes, you're the greatest *fool* I ever met in the whole course of my life!"

"Well, I can't help thinking what I think," said Agnes.

"But you *don't* think *that*—you *know* you don't—you *can't* think it," decided her elder sister.

"No more she does," urged the Captain, with his teazing giggle; "she *doesn't* think it. You always know, when a girl abuses a man, she *likes* him; she does, by Jove! And I venture to say she thinks Master Cleve one of the very handsomest and most fascinating fellows she ever beheld," said the agreeable Captain.

"I really think what I said," replied Agnes, and her pretty face showed a brilliant colour, and her eyes had a handsome fire in them, for she was vexed; "though it is natural to think in a place like this, where all the men are more or less old and ugly, that any young man, even tolerably good-looking, should be thought a wonder."

"Ha, ha, ha! very good," said the Captain, plucking out his whisker a little, and twiddling his moustache, and glancing down at his easy

waistcoat, and perhaps ever so little put out; but he also saw over his shoulder Cleve crossing the Green towards them from the jetty, and not perhaps being quite on terms to call him "Master Cleve" to his face, he mentioned a promise to meet young Owen of Henlwyd in the billiard-room for a great game of pyramid, and so took off his hat gracefully to the ladies, and, smirking, and nodding, and switching his cane, swaggered swiftly away toward the point of rendezvous.

So Cleve arrived, and joined the young ladies, and walked beside Agnes, chatting upon all sorts of subjects, and bearing some occasional reproofs and protests from Miss Charity with great submission and gaiety, and when Miss Charity caught a glimpse of "the Admiral's" bath-chair, with that used-up officer in it, *en route* for the Hazelden Road, and already near the bridge, she plucked her watch from her belt, with a slight pallor in her cheek, and "*declared*" she had not an idea how late it was. Cleve Verney accompanied the ladies all the way to Hazelden, and even went in, when bidden, and drank a cup of tea, at their early meal, and obeyed also a summons to visit the "Admiral" in his study.

"Very glad to see you, sir—very happy, Mr. Verney," said Mr. Vane Etherage, with his fez upon his head, and lowering his pipe with the gravity of a Turk. "I wish you would come and dine at three o'clock—the true hour for dinner, sir—I've tried every hour, in my time, from twelve to half-past eight—at three o'clock, sir, some day—any day—to-morrow. The Welsh mutton is the best on earth, and the Hazelden mutton is the best in Wales!" The "Admiral" always looked in the face of the person whom he harangued, with an expression of cool astonishment, which somehow aided the pomp of his delivery. "An unfortunate difference, Mr. Verney—a dispute, sir—has arisen between me and your uncle; but that, Mr. Verney, need not extend to his nephew; no, sir, it need *not*; no need it should. Shall we say to-morrow, Mr. Verney?"

I forget what excuse Mr. Verney made; it was sufficient, however, and he was quite unable to name an immediate day, but lived in hope. So having won golden opinions, he took his leave. And the good people of Cardyllian, who make matches easily, began to give Mr. Cleve Verney to pretty Miss Agnes Etherage.

While this marrying and giving in marriage was going on over many tea-tables, that evening, in Cardyllian, Mr. Cleve Verney, the hero of this new romance, had got ashore a little below Malory, and at nightfall walked down the old road by Llanderris church, and so

round the path that skirts the woods of Malory, and down upon the shore that winds before the front of the old house.

As he came full in sight of the shore, on a sudden, within little more than a hundred paces away, he saw, standing solitary upon the shingle, a tall man, with a Tweed rug across his arm, awaiting a boat which was slowly approaching in the distance.

In this tall figure he had no difficulty in recognizing Sir Booth Fanshawe, whom he had confronted in other, and very different scenes, and who had passed so near him, in the avenue at Malory.

With one of those sudden and irresistible impulses, which, as they fail or succeed, are classed as freaks of madness, or inspirations of genius, he resolved to walk up to Sir Booth, and speak to him upon the subject then so near to his heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

SIR BOOTH SPEAKS.

THE idea, perhaps, that sustained Cleve Verney in this move, was the sudden recurrence of his belief that Sir Booth would so clearly see the advantages of such a connexion as to forget his resentments.

Sir Booth was looking seaward, smoking a cigar, and watching the approach of the boat, which was still distant. As Cleve drew near, he saw Sir Booth eye him, he fancied, uneasily; and throwing back his head a little, and withdrawing his cheroot, ever so little from his lips, the Baronet demanded grimly—

"Wish to speak to *me*, sir?"

"Only a word, if you allow me," answered Cleve, approaching.

On ascertaining that he had to deal with a gentleman, Sir Booth was confident once more.

"Well, sir, I hear you," said he.

"You don't recognise me, Sir Booth; and I fear when I introduce myself, you will hardly connect my name with anything pleasant or friendly. I only ask a patient hearing, and I am sure your own sense of fairness will excuse me personally."

"Before you say, more, sir, I should like to know for whom you take me, and why; I don't recollect *you*—I *think*—I can't see very well—no one does in this sort of light; but I rather think, I never saw your face before, sir—nor you mine, I dare say—your guesses as to who I am, may be anything you please—and quite mistaken—and this is not a usual time, you know, for talking with strangers about business—and, in fact, I've come here for quiet and my health, and I can't undertake to discuss other people's affairs—I find my own as much as my health and leisure will allow me to attend to."

"Sir Booth Fanshawe, you must excuse me for saying I know you perfectly. I am also well aware that you seek a little repose and privacy here, and you may rely implicitly upon my mentioning your name to no one; in fact, I have been for some weeks aware of your residing at Malory, and never *have* mentioned it to any one."

"Ha! you're *very* kind, indeed—taking *great* care of me, sir; you are very obliging," said Sir Booth, sarcastically, "I'm sure; ha, ha! I ought to be very grateful. And to whom, may I ask, do I owe all this attention to my—my *interests* and comforts?"

"I am connected, Sir Booth, with a house that has unfortunately been a good deal opposed, in politics, to yours. There are reasons which make this particularly painful to me, although I have been by the direction of others, whom I had no choice but to obey, more in evidence in these miserable contests than I could wish; I've really been little more than a passive instrument in the hands of others, absolutely without power, or even influence of my own in the matter. You don't recognise me, but you have seen me elsewhere. My name is Cleve Verney."

Sir Booth had not expected this name, as his countenance showed. With a kind of jerk, he removed his cigar from his lips, sending a shower of red sparks away on the breeze, and gazing on the young man with eyes like balls of stone, ready to leap from their sockets. I dare say he was very near exploding in that sort of language which, on occasion, he did not spare. But he controlled himself, and said merely, clearing his voice first,—

"That will do, sir, the name's enough; I can't be supposed to wish to converse with any one of that name, sir—no more I do."

"What I have to say, Sir Booth, affects *you*, it interests you very *nearly*," answered Cleve.

"But, sir, I am going out in that boat—I wish to smoke my cigar—I've come down here to live to myself, and to be alone when I choose it," said Sir Booth, with suppressed exasperation.

"One word, I beg—you'll not regret it, Sir Booth," pleaded Cleve.

"Well, sir, come—I *will* hear it; but I tell you beforehand, I have pretty strong views as to how I have been used, and it is not likely to lead to much," said Sir Booth, with one of those sudden changes of purpose to which fiery men are liable.

So, as briefly and as persuasively as he could, Cleve Verney disclosed his own feelings, giving to the date of his attachment, skilfully, a retrospective character, and guarding the ladies of Malory from the unreasonable temper of this violent old man; and, in fact, from Cleve's statement you would have gathered that he was not

even conscious that the ladies were now residing at Malory. He closed his little confession with a formal proposal.

Was there something—ever so little—in the tone of this latter part of his brief speech, that reflected something of the confidence to which I have alluded, and stung the angry pride of this ruined man? He kept smoking his cigar a little faster, and looked steadily at the distant boat that was slowly approaching against the tide.

When Cleve concluded, the old man lowered his cigar and laughed shortly and scornfully.

"You do us a great deal of honour, Mr. Verney—too much honour, by—," scoffed the Baronet.

"Be so good at all events as to answer me this one question frankly—yes or no. Is your uncle, Kiffyn Verney, aware of your speaking to me on this subject?"

"*No*, Sir Booth, he is not," said Cleve; "he knows nothing of it. I ought, perhaps, to have mentioned that at first."

"So you ought," said Sir Booth, brusquely.

"And I beg that you won't mention the subject to him."

"You may be very sure I shan't, sir," said the Baronet, fiercely. "Why, d—n it, sir, what do you mean? Do you know what you're saying? You come here, and you make a proposal for my daughter, and you think I should be so charmed, that rather than risk your alliance I should practise any meanness you think fit. D—n you, sir, how dare you suppose I could fancy your aspiring to my daughter a thing to hide like a *mésalliance*?"

"Nothing of the kind, Sir Booth."

"*Every*thing of the kind, sir. Do you know who you are, sir? You have not a farthing on earth, sir, but what you get from your uncle."

"I beg your pardon—allow me, Sir Booth—I've six hundred a-year of my own. I know it's very little; but I've been thought to have some energies; I know I have some friends. I have still my seat in the House, and this Parliament may last two or three years. It is quite possible that I may quarrel with my uncle; I can't help it; I'm quite willing to take my chance of that; and I entreat, Sir Booth, that you

won't make this a matter of personal feeling, and attribute to me the least sympathy with the miserable doings of my uncle."

Sir Booth listened to him, looking over the sea as before, as if simply observing the approach of the boat, but he spoke this time in a mitigated tone.

"You're no young man," said he, "if you don't owe money. I never knew one with a rich old fellow at his back who didn't."

He paused, and Cleve looked down.

"In fact, you don't know how much you owe. If you were called on to book up, d'ye see, there might remain very little to show for your six hundred a-year. You're just your uncle's nephew, sir, and nothing more. When you quarrel with him you're a ruined man."

"I don't see *that*—" began Cleve.

"But I do. If he quarrels with you, he'll never rest till he ruins you. That's his character. It might be very different if you had a *gentleman* to deal with; but you must look the thing in the face. You may never succeed to the title. We old fellows have our palsies and apoplexies; and you, young fellows, your fevers and inflammations. Here you are quite well, and a fever comes, and turns you off like a gaslight the day after; and, besides, if you quarrel he'll marry, and, where are you *then*? And I tell you frankly, if Mr. Kiffyn Verney has objections to me, I've stronger to him. There's no brother of mine disgraced. Why, his elder brother—it's contamination to a gentleman to name him."

"He's dead, sir; Arthur Verney is dead," said Cleve, who was more patient under Sir Booth's bitter language than under any other circumstances he would have been.

"Oh! Well, that does not very much matter," said Sir Booth. "But this is the upshot: I'll have nothing underhand—all above board, sir—and if Mr. Kiffyn Verney writes a proper apology—by——, he owes me one—and puts a stop to the fiendish persecutions he has been directing against me, and himself submits the proposal you have—yes—done me the honour to make, and undertakes to make suitable settlements, I shan't stand in the way; I shan't object to your speaking to my daughter, though I can't the least tell how she'll take it! and I tell you from myself *I* don't like it—I *don't*, by——, I don't *like* it. He's a bad fellow—a nasty dog, sir, as any in England—but

that's what I say, sir, and I shan't alter; and you'll please never to mention the subject to me again except on these conditions. Except from him I decline to *hear* of it—not a word—and—and, sir, you'll please to regard my name as a secret; it has been hitherto; my liberty depends on it. Your uncle can't possibly know I'm here?" he added, sharply.

"When last I saw him—a very short time since—he thought you were in France. You, of course, rely upon my honour, Sir Booth, that no one living shall hear from me one syllable affecting your safety."

"Very good, sir. I never supposed you would; but I mean *every* one—these boatmen, and the people here. No one is to know who I am; and what I've said is my *ultimatum*, sir. And I'll have no correspondence, sir—no attempt to visit *any* where. You understand. By——, if you do, I'll let your uncle, Mr. Kiffyn Verney, know the moment I learn it. Be so good as to *leave* me."

"Good night, sir," said Cleve.

Sir Booth nodded slightly.

The tall old man went stalking and stumbling over the shingle, toward the water's edge, still watching the boat, his cigar making a red star in the dusk, by which Christmass Owen might have steered; and the boatmen that night heard their mysterious steersman from Malory, as he sat with his hand on the tiller, talking more than usual to himself, now and then d—— ing unknown persons, and backing his desultory babble to the waves, with oaths that startled those sober-tongued Dissenters.

Cleve walked slowly up that wide belt of rounded gray stones, that have rattled and rolled for centuries there, in every returning and retreating treating tide, and turned at last and looked toward the tall, stately figure of the old man now taking his place in the boat. Standing in the shadow, he watched it receding as the moonlight came out over the landscape. His thoughts began to clear, and he was able to estimate, according to his own gauges and rashness, the value and effect of his interview with the angry and embittered man.

He wondered at the patience with which he had borne this old man's impertinence—unparalleled impertinence; yet even now he could not resent it. He was the father of that beautiful Margaret. The interview was a mistake—a very mortifying ordeal it had proved—and its result was to block his path with new difficulties.

Not to approach except through the mediation of his Uncle Kiffyn! He should like to see how his uncle would receive a proposal to mediate in this matter. Not to visit—not to write—neither to see nor to hear of her! Submission to such conditions was not to be dreamed of. He trampled on them, and defied all consequences.

Cleve stood on the gray shingle looking after the boat, now running swiftly with the tide. A patch of seaweed, like an outstretched hand, lay at his feet, and in the fitful breeze lifted a warning finger, again, and again, and again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARGARET HAS HER WARNING.

NEXT evening, I believe, Cleve saw Margaret Fanshawe, by favour of that kindest of chaperons, Miss Anne Sheckleton, at the spot where by chance they had met before—at the low bank that fences the wood of Malory, near the steep road that descends by the old church of Llanderris.

Here, in the clear glow of sunset, they met and talked under the old trees, and the good old spinster, with her spectacles on, worked at her crochet industriously, and often peered over it this way and that, it must be confessed, nervously; and with a prudence with which Cleve would gladly have dispensed, she hurried this hazardous meeting to a close.

Not ten minutes later Margaret Fanshawe stood alone at the old refectory window, which commands through the parting trees a view of the sea and the distant headland, now filmed in the aerial lights of the sunset. I should not wonder if she had been drawn thither by the fanciful hope of seeing the passing sail of Cleve Verney's yacht—every sign and relic grows so interesting! Now is with them the season of all such things: romance has sent forth her angels; the woods, the clouds, the sea, the hills, are filled with them. Now is the play of fancy and the yearning of the heart—and the aching comes in its time.

Something sadder and gentler in the face than ever before. Undine has received a soul, and is changed. The boat has passed, and to catch the last glimpse of its white wing she crosses to the other side of the window, and stretches, with a long, strange gaze, till it is gone—quite gone—and everything on a sudden is darker.

With her hand still on the worn stone-shaft of the window, she leans and looks, in a dream, till the last faint tint of sunset dies on the gray mountain, and twilight is everywhere. So, with a sigh, a vague trouble, and yet a wondrous happiness at her heart, she turns to leave the stone-floored chamber, and at the head of the steps that lead down from its door she is startled.

The pale old woman, with large, earnest eyes, was at the foot of this stone stair, with her hand on the rude banister. It seemed to

Margaret as if she had been waiting for her. Her great vague eyes were looking into hers as she appeared at the door.

Margaret arrested her step, and a little frown of fear for a moment curved her eyebrows. She did fear this old Rebecca Mervyn with an odd apprehension that she had something unpleasant to say to her.

"I'm coming up to you," said the old woman, sadly, still looking at her as she ascended the steps.

Margaret's heart misgave her, but somehow she had not nerve to evade the interview, or rather, she had felt that it was coming and wished it over.

Once or twice in passing, the old woman had seemed to hesitate, as if about to speak to her, but had changed her mind and passed on. Only the evening before, just at the hour when the last ray of the sun comes from the west, and all the birds are singing their last notes, as she was tying up some roses, on the short terrace round the corner of the old mansion, she turned and raised her eyes, and in the window of the old building called the "Steward's House," the lattice being open, she saw, looking steadfastly upon her, from the shadows within, the pale face of this old woman. In its expression there was something ominous, and when she saw Margaret looking straight at her, she did not turn away, but looked on sadly, as unmoved as a picture, till Margaret, disconcerted, lowered her eyes, and went away.

As this old woman ascended the stairs, Margaret crossed the floor to the window—light is always reassuring—and leaning at its side, looked back, and saw Rebecca Mervyn already within the spacious chamber, and drawing near slowly from the shadow.

"You wish to speak to me, Mrs. Mervyn?" said the young lady, who knew her name, although now for the first time she spoke to her.

"Only a word. Ah!—yes—you *are—very* beautiful," she said, with a deep sigh, as she stood looking at her, with a strange sadness and compassion in her gaze, that partook of the past, and the prophetic.

A little blush—a little smile—a momentary gleam of that light of triumph, in beauty so beautiful—showed that the fair apparition was mortal.

"Beauty!—ah!—yes! If *it* were not here, neither would *they*. Miss Margaret!—poor thing! I've seen him. I knew him, although it is a great many years," said old Rebecca. "The moment my eyes lighted on him, I knew him; there is something about them all, peculiar—the Verneys, I mean. I should know a Verney anywhere, in any crowd, in any disguise. I've dreamt of him, and thought of him, and watched for him, for—how many years? God help me, I forget! Since I was as young as you are. Cleve Verney is handsome, but there were others, long before—oh! ever so much more beautiful. The Verney features—ah!—yes—thinking always, dreaming, watching, burnt into my brain; they have all some points alike. I knew Cleve by that; he is more like that than to his younger self; a handsome boy he was—but, I beg pardon, it is so hard to keep thoughts from wandering."

This old woman, from long solitude, I suppose, talked to others as if she were talking to herself, and rambled on, flightily and vaguely. But on a sudden she laid her hand upon Margaret's wrist, and closing it gently, held her thus, and looked in her face with great concern.

"Why does he come so stealthily? *death* comes so, to the young and beautiful. My poor sister died in Naples. No one knew there was danger the day before she was sent away there, despaired of. Well may I say the angel of death—beautiful, insidious—that's the way they come—stealthily, mysterious—when I saw his handsome face about here—I shuddered—in the twilight—in the dark."

Margaret's cheek flushed, and she plucked her wrist to disengage it from the old woman's hand.

"You had better speak to my cousin, Miss Sheckleton. It is she who receives Mr. Verney when he comes. She has known him longer than I; at least, made his acquaintance earlier," said the young lady. "I don't, I confess, understand what you mean. I've been trying, and I can't; perhaps *she* will?"

"I must say this; it is on my mind," said the old woman, without letting her hand go. "There is something horrible in the future. You do not know the Verneys. They are a *cruel* race. It would be better to suffer an evil spirit into the house. Poor young lady! To be another *innocent victim*! Break it off—expel him! Shut out, if you can, his face from your thoughts and memory. It is one who knows them well who warns you. It will not come to good."

In the vague warning of this old woman, there was an echo of an indefinite fear that had lain at her own heart, for days. Neither, apart, was anything; but one seconding the other was ominous and depressing.

"Let me go, please," she said, a little brusquely; "it is growing dark, and I *must* go in. I'm sure, however, you mean what you say kindly; and I thank you for the intention—thank you very much."

"Yes—go—I shall stay here; from here one can see across to Pendillion, and the sea there; it *will* come again, I know it will, some day or night. My old eyes are weary with watching. I should know the sail again, although it is a long, long time—I've lost count of the years."

Thus saying, she drew near the window, and without a word of farewell to Margaret, became absorbed in gazing; and Margaret left her, ran lightly down the steps, and in a minute more was in the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIR BOOTH IN A PASSION.

DAYS passed, during which Cleve Verney paid stolen visits at Malory, more cautiously managed than ever; and nearly every afternoon did the good people of Cardyllian see him walk the green, to and fro, with the Etherage girls, so that the subject began to be canvassed very gravely, and even Miss Charity was disposed to think that he certainly *did* like Agnes, and confided to her friend, Mrs. Brindley, of "The Cottage," that if Aggie married, *she* should *give up*. *Nothing* could induce *her*, Miss Charity, to marry, she solemnly assured her friends.

And I must do that spinster the justice to say, that there was not the faintest flavour of sour grapes in the acerbity with which she pronounced against the "shocking folly of girls marrying," for she might undoubtedly have been married, having had in her youth several unexceptionable offers, none of which had ever moved her.

I know not what hopes Sir Booth may have founded upon his conversation with Cleve Verney. Men in the Baronet's predicament nurse their hopes fondly, and their mustard seeds grow rapidly into great trees, in whose branches they shelter their families, and roost themselves. He grew gracious at times in the contemplation of brilliant possibilities, and one day, to her amazement and consternation, opened the matter briefly to Miss Sheckleton, who fancied that she was discovered, and he on the point of exploding, and felt as if she were going to faint.

Happily for her, he fancied that Cleve must have seen Margaret accidentally during some of his political knight-errantries in the county which he had contested with Sir Booth. We know, as well as Miss Sheckleton, how this really was.

Sir Booth's dreams, however, were broken with a crash. To Miss Anne Sheckleton came a letter from Sir Booth's attorneys, informing the Baronet that Mr. Kiffyn Fulke Verney had just served them with a notice which seemed to threaten a wantonly vexatious and expensive proceeding, and then desired to know what course, having detailed the respective consequences of each, he would wish them to take.

Now Sir Booth broke into one of his frenzies, called up Miss Sheckleton, damned and cursed the whole Verney family, excommunicated them, and made the walls of Malory ring with the storm and thunder he launched at the heads of the ancient race who had built them.

Scared and pale Miss Anne Sheckleton withdrew.

"My dear, something has happened: he has had a letter from his law people, and Mr. Kiffyn Verney has directed, I think, some unexpected proceedings. How I wish they would stop these miserable lawsuits, and leave your papa at peace. Your papa's attorneys think they can gain nothing by worrying him, and it *is* so unfortunate just now."

So spoke Miss Sheckleton, who had found Margaret, with her bullfinch and her squirrels, in that pretty but melancholy room which is darkened by the old forest, through whose shafted stems shadowy perspectives open, and there, as in the dimness of a monastic library, she was busy over the illumination of her vellum Psalter, with gold and ultramarine, and all other vivid pigments.

Margaret stood up, and looked in her face rather pale, and with her small hand pressed to her heart.

"He's *very* angry," added Miss Sheckleton, with a dark look, and a nod.

"Are we going to leave this?" inquired the girl in almost a whisper.

"He did not say; I fancy not. No, he'd have said so the first thing," answered the old lady.

"Well, we can do nothing; it can't be helped, I suppose?" said Miss Margaret, looking down very sadly on her mediæval blazonry.

"Nothing, my dear! nothing on earth. No one can be more anxious that all this kind of thing should cease, than Cleve Verney, as you know; but what can even *he* do?" said Miss Sheckleton.

Margaret looked through the window, down the sylvan glade, and sighed.

"His uncle, Kiffyn Verney," resumed Anne Sheckleton, "is such a disagreeable, spiteful man, and such a feud has been between them, I

really don't see how it is to end; but Cleve, you know, is so clever, and so devoted, I'm sure he'll find some way."

Margaret sighed again, and said,—

"Papa, I suppose, is *very* angry."

I think Sir Booth Fanshawe was the only person on earth whom that spirited girl really feared. I'm afraid there was not much good in that old man, and that most of the things I have heard of him were true. Unlike other violent men, he was not easily placable; and generally, when it was not very troublesome, remembered and executed his threats. She remembered dimly scenes between him and her dead mother. She remembered well her childish dread of his severity, and her fear of his eye and his voice had never left her.

Miss Sheckleton just lifted her fingers in the air, and raised her eyes to the ceiling, with a little shake of her head.

Margaret sighed again. I suppose she was thinking of that course of true love that never yet ran smooth, upon which the freightage of her life was ventured.

Her spinster friend looked on her sad, pale face, gazing dreamily into the forest. The solemn shadow of the inevitable, the sorrows of human life, had now for the first time begun to touch her young face. The old story was already telling itself to her, in those ominous musical tones that swell to solemn anthem soon; and sometimes, crash and howl at last over such wreck, and in such darkness as we shut our eyes and ears upon, and try to forget.

Old Anne Sheckleton's face saddened at the sight with a beautiful softness. She laid her thin hand on the girl's shoulder, and then put her arms about her neck, and kissed her, and said,—"All will come right, darling, you'll see;" and the girl made answer by another kiss; and they stood for a minute, hand locked in hand, and the old maid smiled tenderly, a cheerful smile but pale, and patted her cheek and nodded, and with another kiss, left the room, with a mournful presage heavy at her heart.

As she passed, the stern voice of Sir Booth called to her.

"Yes," she answered.

"A word or two," he said, and she went to his room.

"I've been thinking," said he, looking at her steadily and fiercely—had some suspicion lighted up his mind since he had spoken to her?—"that young man, Cleve Verney; I believe he's still at Ware. Do you know him?"

"I should know his appearance. I saw him two or three times during that contest for the county, two years since; but he did not see me, I'm sure."

This was an evasion, but the vices of slavery always grow up under a tyranny.

"Well, *Margaret*—does *she* correspond with any one?" demanded he.

"I can answer for it, positively. Margaret has no correspondence. She writes to *no* one," she answered.

"That fellow is still at Ware. So, Christmass Owen told me last night—a place of the Verneys, at the other side—and he has got a boat. I should not wonder if he were to come here, trying to see her."

So Sir Booth followed out his hypothesis, and waxed wroth, and more wroth as he proceeded, and so chafed himself into one of his paroxysms of temper. I know not what he said; but when she left him, poor Miss Sheckleton was in tears, and, trembling, told Margaret, that if it were not for *her*, she would not remain another day in his house. She related to Margaret what had passed, and said,—

"I almost hope Cleve Verney may not come again while we remain here. I really don't know what might be the consequence of your papa's meeting him here, in his present state of exasperation! Of course to Cleve it would be very little; but your existence, my poor child, would be made so miserable! And as for me, I tell you frankly, I should be compelled to leave you. Every one knows what Booth Fanshawe is when he is angry—how cruel he *can* be. I know he's your father, my dear, but we can't be blind to facts, and we both know that his misfortunes have not improved his temper."

Cleve nevertheless saw the ladies that day, talked with them earnestly and hurriedly, for Miss Anne Sheckleton was nervous, and miserable till the interview ended, and submitted to the condition imposed by that kindly and panic-stricken lady, which was on no account to visit Malory as heretofore for two or three days, by the

end of which time she hoped Sir Booth's anger and suspicions might have somewhat subsided.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH THE LADIES PEEP INTO CARDYLLIAN.

"My dear child," said Miss Sheckleton next day, "is not this a very wild freak, considering you have shut yourself up so closely, and not without reason? Suppose among the visitors at Cardyllian there should happen to be one who has seen and known you, how would it be if he or she should meet and recognise you?"

"Rely on me, dear old cousin; no one shall know me."

The young lady, in a heavy, gray, Highland shawl, was standing before the looking-glass in her room as she spoke.

"Girls look all alike in these great shawls, and I shall wear my thick lace veil, through which I defy anyone to see a feature of my face; and even my feet, in these strong, laced boots, are disguised. *Now—see!* I should not know myself in the glass among twenty others. I might meet you a dozen times in Cardyllian and you should not recognise me. Look and say."

"H-m—well! I must allow it would not be easy to see through all this," said Miss Sheckleton; "but don't forget and lift your veil, when you come into the town—the most unlikely people are there sometimes. Who do you think I had a bow from the other day, but old Doctor Bell, who lives in York; and the same evening in Castle Street whom should I see but my Oxford Street dressmaker! It does not matter, you know, where a solitary old maid like me is seen; but it would be quite different in your case, and who knows what danger to your papa might result from it?"

"I shan't forget—I really shan't," said the girl.

"Well, dear, I've said all I could to dissuade you; but if you *will* come, I suppose you must," said Miss Anne.

"It's just as you say—a fancy," answered Margaret; "but I feel that if I were disappointed I should die."

I think, and Miss Sheckleton thought so too, that this pretty girl was very much excited that day, and could not endure the terrible stillness of Malory. Uncertainty, suspense, enforced absence from the person who loved her best in the world, and who yet is very near;

dangers and hopes, quite new—no wonder if all these incidents of her situation did excite her.

It was near a week since the elder lady had appeared in the streets and shops of Cardyllian. Between the banks of the old sylvan road she and her mysterious companion walked in silence into steep Church Street, and down that quaint quarter of the town presenting houses of all dates from three centuries ago, and by the church, still older, down into Castle Street, in which, as we know, stands the shop of Jones, the draper. Empty of customers was this well-garnished shop when the two ladies of Malory entered it; and Mrs. Jones raised her broad, bland, spectacled face, with a smile and a word of greeting to Miss Anne Sheckleton, and an invitation to both ladies to "be seated," and her usual inquiry, as she leaned over the counter, "And what will you be pleased to want?" and the order, "John, get down the gray linseys—not *them*—those over yonder—yes, sure, you'd like to see the best—I *know* you would."

So some little time was spent over the linseys, and then,—

"You're to measure thirteen yards, John, for Miss Anne Sheckleton, and send it over, with trimmin's and linin's, to Miss Pritchard. Miss Anne Sheckleton will speak to Miss Pritchard about the trimmin's herself."

Then Mrs. Jones observed,—

"*What* a day this has been—hasn't it, miss? And such weather, *al*together, I really don't remember in Cardyllian, *I* think *ever*."

"Yes, charming weather," acquiesced Miss Sheckleton; and just then two ladies came in and bought some velvet ribbon, which caused an interruption.

"What a pretty girl," said Miss Anne, so soon as the ladies had withdrawn. "Is that her mother?"

"Oh, no—dear, no, miss; they are sisters," half laughed Mrs. Jones. "Don't you know who they are? No! Well, they are the Miss Etherages. There, they're going down to the green. She'll meet him there. She's going to make a *very great* match, ma'am—yes, indeed."

"Oh! But whom is she going to meet?" asked Miss Anne, who liked the good lady's gossip.

"Oh! you *don't know*! Well, dear me! I thought every one knew that. Why, Mr. Cleve, of course—young Mr. Verney. He meets her every afternoon on the green here, and walks home with the young ladies. It has been a *very* old liking—you understand—between them, and lately he has grown very pressing, and they do say—them that should know—that the Admiral—we call him—Mr. Vane Etherage—her father, has spoke to him. She has a good fortune, you know—yes, indeed—the two Miss Etherages has—we count them quite heiresses here in Cardyllian, and a very good old family too. Everybody here is pleased it is to be, and they do say Mr. Kiffyn—that is, the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney—will be very glad, too, he should settle at last, and has wrote to the young lady's father, to say how well pleased he is; for Mr. Cleve has been"—here she dropped her voice to a confidential murmur, approaching her spectacles to the very edge of her customer's bonnet, as she rested her fat arms upon the counter—"wild. Oh, dear! they do tell such *stories* of him! A pity, Miss Sheckleton—*is*n't it?—there should be so many stories to his prejudice. But, *dear* me! he *has* been wild, miss; and now, you see, on that account it is Mr. Kiffyn—the Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney—is so well pleased he should settle and take a wife that will be so liked by the people at Ware as well as at this side."

Miss Anne Sheckleton had been listening with an uneasiness, which the draper's wife fancied she saw, yet doubted her own observation; for she could not understand why her old spinster customer should care a farthing about the matter, the talk about his excursions to Malory having been quite suspended and abolished by the sustained and vigorous gossip to which his walks with Agnes Etherage, and his ostentatious attentions, had given rise.

"But Miss Etherage is hardly the kind of person—is she?—whom a young man of fashion, such as I suppose young Mr. Verney to be, would think of. She must have been very much shut up with her old father, at that quiet little place of his," suggested Miss Sheckleton.

"Shut up, miss! Oh, dear me! Nothing of *that* sort, miss. She is out with her sister, Miss Charity, every day, about the schools, and the Sunday classes, and the lending library, and the clothing charity, and all them things; very good of *her*, you know. I often say to her—'I *wonder*, Miss Agnes—that's her name—you're not *tired* with all your walks; I do, indeed;' and she only laughs. She has a very pretty laugh too, she has; and as Mr. Cleve said to me once—that's two years ago, now—the first year he was spoke of in Cardyllian about her. We did

think then there was something to be, and now it is all on again, and the old people—as we may call them—is well pleased it should."

"Yes, but I mean that Miss Etherage has seen nothing of the world—nothing of society, except what is to be met with at Hazelden—isn't that the name of the place?—and in her little excursions into this town. Isn't it so?" said Miss Sheckleton.

"Oh, no!—bless you, no. Miss Agnes Etherage—they pay visits—she and her sister—at all the great houses; a week here, and a fortnight there, round the two counties, this side and the other. She's a great favourite, is Miss Agnes. She can play and sing, dear me, very nice, she can: I have *heard* her. You would *wonder* now, what a bright little thing she is."

"But even so. I don't think that town-bred young men ever care much for country-bred young ladies. Not that they mayn't be a great deal better; but, somehow, they don't suit, I think—they don't get on."

"But, mark you this," said Mrs. Jones. "He always liked her. We always saw he liked her. There's property too—a good estate; and all goes to them two girls; and Miss Charity, we all know, will never marry; no more will the Admiral—I mean Mr. Etherage himself—with them legs of his; and Mr. Kiffyn—Master Cleve's uncle—spoke to our lawyer here once about it, as if it was a thing he would like—that the Hazelden property should be joined to the Ware estate."

"Joined together in holy wedlock," laughed Miss Sheckleton; but she was not particularly cheerful. And some more intending purchasers coming in and seizing upon the communicative Mrs. Jones, who had only time to whisper, "They do say—them that *should* know—that it will be in spring next; but I'm not to tell; so you'll please remember it's a secret."

"Shall we go, dear?" whispered Miss Sheckleton to her muffled companion, who forthwith rose and accompanied her from the shop, followed by the eyes of Mrs. Jones's new visitors, who were more interested on hearing that "it was Miss Anne Sheckleton and the other Malory lady," and they slipped out to the door-step, and under the awning peeped after the mysterious ladies, until an accidental backward glance from Miss Sheckleton routed them, and the *materfamilias* entered a little hastily but gravely, and with her head high, and her young ladies tittering.

As Cleve Verney walked to and fro beside pretty Agnes Etherage that day, and talked as usual, gaily and fluently, there seemed on a sudden to come a sort of blight over the harvest of his thoughts—both corn and flowers. He repeated the end of his sentence, and forgot what he was going to say; and Miss Charity said, "Well? go on; I want so much to hear the end;" and looking up she thought he looked a little pale.

"Yes, certainly, I'll tell you the end when I can remember it. But I let myself think of something else for a moment, and it has flown away—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Miss Charity, "just a moment. Look there, Aggie! Aren't those the Malory ladies?"

"Where?" said Cleve. "Oh! I see. Very like, I think—the old lady, I mean."

"Yes, oh certainly," replied Agnes, "it is the old lady, and I'm nearly certain the young lady also; *who else* can it be? It must be she."

"They are going over the hill to Malory," said Miss Charity. "I don't know what it is about that old lady that I think so *wonderfully* nice, and so perfectly charming; and the young lady is *the* most perfectly—beautiful—person, all to *nothing*, I ever saw in my life. Don't you think so, Mr. Verney?"

"Your sister, I'm sure, is very much obliged," said he, with a glance at Agnes. "But this Malory young lady is so muffled in that great shawl that there is very little indeed to remind one of the young lady we saw in church—"

"What o'clock is that?" interrupted Miss Charity, as the boom of the clock from the church tower sounded over the green.

So it seemed their hour had come, and the little demonstration on the green came to a close, and Cleve that evening walked with the Hazelden ladies only so far as the bridge; there taking his leave with an excuse. He felt uncomfortable somehow. That Margaret Fanshawe should have actually come down to Cardyllian was a singular and almost an unaccountable occurrence!

Cleve Verney had certainly not intended the pantomime which he presented to the window of the Cardyllian reading-room for the eyes that had witnessed it.

Cleve was uncomfortable. It is always unpleasant to have to explain—especially where the exculpation involves a disclosure that is not noble.

END OF VOL. I.