STAND FAST, CRAIG-ROYSTON! (VOLUME I)

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STAND FAST, CRAIG-ROYSTON!

A Novel

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF

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

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

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STAND FAST, CRAIG-ROYSTON!

CHAPTER I.
THE WANDERERS.

On a certain sunny afternoon in May, when all the world and his wife were walking or driving in Piccadilly, two figures appeared there who clearly did not belong to the fashionable crowd. Indeed, so unusual was their aspect that many a swift glance, shot from carefully impassive faces, made furtive scrutiny of them as they passed. One of the strangers was an old man who might have been a venerable Scandinavian scald come to life again—a man thick-set and broad-shouldered, with features at once aquiline and massive, and with flowing hair and beard almost silver-white. From under his deeply lined forehead and shaggy eyebrows gleamed a pair of eyes that were alert and confident as with the audacity of youth; and the heavy white moustache and beard did not quite conceal the cheerful firmness of the mouth. For the rest, he wore above his ordinary attire a plaid of shepherd's tartan, the ends loosely thrown over his shoulders.

By his side there walked a young girl of about seventeen, whose singular, if somewhat pensive and delicate beauty, could not but have struck any passer-by who happened to catch sight of her. But she rarely raised her eyes from the pavement. What was obvious to every one was, first of all, the elegance of her walk—which was merely the natural expression of a perfectly moulded form; and then the glory of her hair, which hung free and unrestrained down her back, and no doubt added to the youthfulness of her look. As to the colour of those splendid masses—well, it was neither flaxen, nor golden, nor brown, nor golden-brown, but apparently a mixture of all these shades, altering in tone here and there according to sunshine or shadow, but always showing a soft and graduated sheen rather than any definite lustre. Her face, as has been said, was mostly downcast; and one could only see that the refined and sensitive features were pale; also that there was a touch of sun-tan over her complexion, that spoke of travel. But when, by inadvertence, or by some forced overcoming of her native diffidence, she did raise her eyes, there flashed a revelation upon the world; for these blue-grey deeps seemed to hold light; a mild-shining light, timid, mysterious, appealing almost; the unconsciousness of childhood no longer there, the self-possession of womanhood not yet come: then those beautiful, limpid, pathetic eyes, thus

tremblingly glancing out for a second, would be withdrawn, and again the dark lashes would veil the mystic, deep-shining wells. This was Maisrie Bethune; the old man beside her was her grandfather.

The young girl seemed rather to linger behind as her companion went up the steps towards a certain door and rang the bell; and her eyes were still downcast as she followed him across the hall and into an ante-room. When the footman came back with the message that his lordship was disengaged and would see Mr. Bethune, and when he was about to show the way upstairs, the girl hung back, and said, with almost a piteous look—

"I will stay here, grandfather."

"Not at all," the old man answered, impatiently. "Not at all. Come along!"

There were two persons in this large and lofty room on the first floor; but just as the visitors arrived at the landing, one of these withdrew and went and stood at a front window, where he could look down into the street. The other—a youngish-looking man, with clear eyes and a pleasant smile—remained to receive his guests; and if he could not help a little glance of surprise—perhaps at the unusual costume of his chief visitor, or perhaps because he had not expected the young lady—there was at all events nothing but good-nature in his face.

"My granddaughter, Maisrie, Lord Musselburgh," the old man said, by way of introduction, or explanation.

The young nobleman begged her to be seated; she merely thanked him, and moved away a little distance, to a table on which were some illustrated books; so that the two men were left free to talk as they chose.

"Well now, that seems a very admirable project of yours, Mr. Bethune," Lord Musselburgh said, in his frank and off-hand way. "There's plenty of Scotch blood in my own veins, as you know; and I am glad of any good turn that can be done to poor old Scotland. I see you are not ashamed of the national garb."

"You remember what was said on a famous occasion," the old man made answer, speaking methodically and emphatically, and with a strong northern accent, "and I will own that I hoped your lordship's heart would 'warm to the tartan.' For it is a considerable undertaking, after all. The men are scattered; and their verses are scattered; but, scattered or no scattered, there is everywhere and always in them the same sentiment—the sentiment of loyalty and gratitude and admiration for the land of the hills and the glens. And surely, as your lordship says, it is doing a good turn to poor old Scotland to show the world that wherever her sons may be—in Canada, in Florida, out on the plains, or along the Californian coast—they do not forget the mother that bore them—no, but that they are proud of her, and think always of her, and regard her with an undying affection and devotion."

He was warming to his work. There was a vibration in his voice, as he

proceeded to repeat the lines—

"From the lone shieling on the misty island,
Mountains divide them and a world of seas;
But still their hearts are true, their hearts are Highland,
And they in dreams behold the Hebrides."

"Is that by one of your Scotch-American friends?" Lord Musselburgh asked,

with a smile; for he was looking curiously, and not without a certain sympathetic interest, at this old man.

"I do not know, your lordship; at the moment I could not tell you," was the answer. "But this I do know, that a man may be none the less a good Canadian or American citizen because of his love for the heather hills that nourished his infancy, and inspired his earliest imagination. He does not complain of the country that has given him shelter, nor of the people who have welcomed him and made him one of themselves. He only says with Crichton's emigrant shepherd—

"'Wae's me that fate us twa has twined'

—'twined' is severed: perhaps your lordship is not so familiar with the dialect—

"'Wae's me that fate us twa has twined;
And I serve strangers ower the sea;
Their hearts are leal, their words are kind,
But, lass, it isna hame to me!'

Good men they are and true," he went on, in the same exalted strain; "valued and respected citizens—none more so; but cut their hearts open, and you will find *Scotland* written in every fibre. It is through no ingratitude to their adopted country that a spray of white heather, a few bluebells, a gowan or two, anything sent across the seas to them to remind them of the land of their birth, will bring hot tears to their eyes. As one of them has written—

'What memories dear of that cot ye recall,
Though now there remains neither rooftree nor wall!
Alack-a-day! lintel and threshold are gone,
While cold 'neath the weeds lies the hallowed hearthstone!
'Twas a straw-roofed cottage, but love abode there,
And peace and contentment aye breathed in its air;

With songs from the mother, and legends from sire,
How blithe were we all round the cheery peat-fire!
—Caledonia's blue-bells, O bonnie blue-bells!'"

"You have an excellent memory," Lord Musselburgh said, good-naturedly. "Those patriotic effusions seem to have impressed you."

"That was written by the Bard of Amulree, your lordship," continued the garrulous old man; "and a truer Scotchman does not breathe, though America has been his home nearly all his life. And there is many another, both in Canada and the United States. They may be in happier circumstances than they would have been in the old country; they may have plenty of friends around them: but still their hearts turn back to

'Where I've watched the gloamin' close
The long bright summer days;
And doubted not that fairies dwelt
On Cathkin's bonnie braes;
Auld Ruglin Brig and Cathkin braes
And Clyde's meandering streams,
Ye shall be subject of my lays
As ye are of my dreams.'

Nor are they ashamed of their Scottish way of speech—ye may observe, my lord, that I've kept a twang of it myself, even among all my wanderings; and loth would I be to lose it. But I'm wearying your lordship," the old man said, in a suddenly altered tone. "I would just say that a collection of what the Scotch poets in America have written ought to be interesting to Scotchmen everywhere, and perhaps to others as well; for patriotism is a virtue that commands respect. I beg your pardon for encroaching on your lordship's time——"

"Oh, that's nothing," Lord Musselburgh said, easily; "but we must not keep the young lady waiting." He glanced in the direction of the girl who was standing by the table. She was turning over the leaves of a book. Then he resumed the conversation—but in a much lower key.

"I quite understand, Mr. Bethune," he said, so that she should not overhear, "what you wrote to me—that the bringing out of such a volume will require time, and expense. And—and you must allow me to join in, in the only way I can. Now what sum——?"

He hesitated. Mr. Bethune said—

"Whatever your lordship pleases."

The young man went into the front portion of the long apartment (where his friend was still discreetly standing behind the window curtains) and opened a despatch-box and sat down. He drew out a cheque for £50, enclosed it in an envelope, and, coming back, slipped it into the old man's hands.

"I hope that will help; and I shall be glad to hear of the progress of the work."

"I thank your lordship," Mr. Bethune said, without any obsequiousness, or profusion of gratitude.

And then he turned to his granddaughter.

"Maisrie!"

The girl came away at once. She bowed to Lord Musselburgh in passing, without lifting her eyes. He, however, put out his hand, and said "Good-bye!" Nay, more than that, although he had previously rang the bell, he accompanied them both downstairs, and stood at the door while a four-wheeled cab was being called for them. Then, when they had left, he returned to the room above, and called lightly to his friend who was still standing at the window:

"Ready, Vin? Come along, then! Did you hear the old man and his poetry?—a harmless old maniac, I think. Well, let's be off to Victoria; we'll get down to the Bungalow in time for a good hour's lawn-tennis before dinner."

Meanwhile old George Bethune and his granddaughter were being driven away eastward in the cab; and he was chatting gaily to her, with the air of one who had been successful in some enterprise. He had doffed his Scotch plaid; and, what is more, he had also abandoned the Scotch accent in which he had addressed 'his loardship.' It was to be a great book, this collection of Scotch-American poetry. It would enable him to pay a well-deserved compliment to many an old friend of his in Toronto, in Montreal, in New York. He was warm in his praises of this young Lord Musselburgh; and predicted a great future for him. Then he put his head out of the window and bade the driver stop—opposite the door of a wine-merchant's office.

"Grandfather," said the girl, "may I wait for you in the cab?"

"Certainly not," he answered with decision. "I wish you to see men and things as part of your education. Live and learn, Maisrie—every moment of your life."

Leaving the Scotch plaid in the cab, he crossed the pavement and went into the office, she meekly following. The wine-merchant was sent for, and presently he made his appearance.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Glover," old George Bethune said, with something of an air of quiet patronage, "I wish to order some claret from you."

The tall, bald, bland-looking person whom he addressed did not seem to receive this news with any joy; but the young lady was there, and he was bound

to be courteous; so he asked Mr. Bethune to be kind enough to step into the back-premises where he could put some samples before him. Maisrie was for remaining where she stood; but her grandfather bade her come along; so she also went with them into the back portion of the establishment, where she was accommodated with a chair. At this table there were no illustrated books to which she could turn; there were only bottles, glasses, corkscrews, and a plateful of wine-biscuits; so that she kept her eyes fixed on the floor—and was forced to listen.

"Claret, Mr. Glover," said the old man, with a certain sententiousness and assumption of importance that he had not displayed in speaking to Lord Musselburgh, "claret was in former days the national drink of Scotland—owing to the close alliance with France, as you know—and the old Scotch families naturally preserve the tradition. So that you can hardly wonder if to one of the name of Bethune a sound claret is scarcely so much a luxury as a necessity. Why, sir, my ancestor, Maximilien de Bethune, duc de Sully, had the finest vineyards in the whole of France; and it was his privilege to furnish the royal table——"

"I hope he got paid," the bland wine-merchant said, with a bit of a laugh; but happening to glance towards the young girl sitting there, and perceiving that the pale and beautiful face had suddenly grown surcharged with colour, he, instantly, and with the greatest embarrassment, proceeded to stumble on—

"Oh, yes, of course," he said, hastily: "a great honour—naturally—the royal table—a great honour indeed—I quite understand—the duc de Sully, did you say?—oh, yes—a great statesman——"

"The greatest financier France has ever possessed," the old man said, grandly. "Though he was by profession a soldier, when he came to tackle the finances of the country, he paid off two hundred millions of livres—the whole of the king's debts, in fact—and filled the royal treasury. It is something to bear his name, surely; I confess I am proud of it; but our family goes far further back than the duc de Sully and the sixteenth century. Why, sir," he continued, in his stately manner, "when the royal Stewarts were known only by their office—*Dapifer* or *Seneschallus* they were called—the Beatons and Bethunes could boast of their territorial designation. In 1434, when Magister John Seneschallus, Provost of Methven, was appointed one of the Lords Auditors, it was Alexander de Beaton who administered the oath to him—the same Alexander de Beaton who, some two years thereafter, accompanied Margaret of Scotland to France, on her marriage with the Dauphin. Yes, sir, I confess I am proud to bear the name; and perhaps it is the more excusable that it is about the last of our possessions they have left us. Balloray——" He paused for a second. "Do you see that child?" he said, pointing with a trembling forefinger to his granddaughter. "If there were any right or justice, there sits the heiress of Balloray."

"It was a famous lawsuit in its time," the wine-merchant observed—but not looking in Maisrie's direction.

"It killed my father, and made me a wanderer on the face of the earth," the old man said; and then he raised his head bravely. "Well, no matter; they cannot rob me of my name; and I am Bethune of Balloray—whoever has the wide lands."

Now perhaps there still dwelt in the breast of the suave-looking wine-merchant some remorse of conscience over the remark that had caused this pale and sensitive-looking young creature to flush with conscious shame; at all events he had quite abandoned the somewhat grudging coldness with which he had first received his customer; and when various samples of claret had been brought from the cellar and placed on the table, it was the more expensive that he frankly and fully recommended. Nay, he was almost pressing. And again he called to his assistant, and bade him fetch a particular bottle of champagne; and when that was opened, he himself poured out a glass and offered it to the young lady, with a biscuit or two, and seemed concerned and distressed when she thanked him and declined. The end of this interview was that old George Bethune ordered a considerable quantity of claret; and carried away with him, for immediate use, a case of twelve bottles, which was put into the four-wheeled cab.

Park Street, Mayfair, occupies a prominent position in the fashionable quarter of London; but from it, at intervals, run one or two smaller thoroughfares—sometimes ending in stables—the dwellings in which are of a quite modest and unpretentious appearance. It was to one of these smaller thoroughfares that George Bethune and his granddaughter now drove; and when they had entered the quiet little house, and ascended to the first floor, they found that dinner was laid on the table, for the evening was now well advanced. When they were ready, the frugal banquet was also ready; and the old man, seated at the head of the table, with Maisrie on his right, soon grew eloquent about the virtues of the bottle of claret which he had just opened. The girl—who did not take any wine—seemed hardly to hear. She was more thoughtful even than usual—perhaps, indeed, there was a trace of sadness in the delicate, pensive features. When the fresh-coloured servant-lass brought in the things, and happened to remain in the room for a second or two, Maisrie made some pretence of answering her grandfather; then, when they were left alone again, she relapsed into silence, and let him ramble on as he pleased. And he was in a satisfied and garrulous mood. The evening was fine and warm—the window behind them they had left open. He approved of the lodging-house cookery; he emphatically praised the claret, with the conviction of one who knew. Dinner, in fact, was half way over before the girl, looking up with her beautiful, clear, limpid eyes—beautiful although they were so strangely wistful—ventured to say anything.

"Grandfather," she asked, with obvious hesitation, "did—did Lord

Musselburgh—give you—something towards the publication of that book?"

"Why, yes, yes, yes, certainly," the old man said, with much cheerfulness. "Certainly. Something substantial too. Why not?"

The hot blood was in her face again—and her eyes downcast.

"Grandfather," she said, in the same low voice, "when will you set about writing the book?"

"Ah, well," he made answer, evasively, but with perfect good humour, "it is a matter to be thought over. Indeed, I heard in New York of a similar volume being got together; but I may be first in the field after all. There is no immediate hurry. A thing of that kind must be thought over and considered. And indeed, my dear, I cannot go back to America at present; for my first and foremost intention is that you should begin to learn something of your native country. You must become familiar with the hills and the moorlands, with the roaring mountain-torrents, and the lonely islands amid the grey seas. For of what account is the accident of your birth? Omaha cannot claim you. There is Scotch blood in your veins, Maisrie—the oldest in the land; and you must see Dunfermline town, where the King sate 'drinking the blood-red wine'; and you must see Stirling Castle, and Edinburgh, and Holyrood, and Melrose Abbey. Nebraska has no claim over you—you, a Bethune of Balloray. And you have some Highland blood in your veins too, my dear; for if the Grants who intermarried with the Bethunes were not of the northern Grants whose proud motto is 'Stand fast, Craigellachie!' none the less is Craig-Royston wild and Highland enough, as I hope to show you some day. And Lowland or Highland, Maisrie, you must wear the snood when you go north; a young Scotch lass should wear the snood; yes, yes, the bit of blue ribbon will look well in your hair. Melrose," he rambled on, as he filled his glass again, "and Maxwellton Braes; Yarrow's Banks; and fair Kirkconnel Lea: a storied country: romance, pathos, tragic and deathless music conjured up at every footstep. Instead of the St. Lawrence, you shall have the murmur of the Tweed: instead of Brooklyn—the song-haunted shores of Colonsay! But there is one place that with my will you shall never visit—no, not while there are strangers and aliens there. You may wander all over Scotland—north, south, east, and west—but never, never while I am alive, must you ask to see 'the bonny mill-dams o' Balloray.'"

She knew what he meant; she did not speak. But presently—perhaps to draw away his thoughts from that terrible law-suit which had had such disastrous consequences for him and his—she said—

"I hope, grandfather, you won't think of remaining in this country on my account. Perhaps it is better to read about those beautiful places, and to dream about them, than to see them—you remember 'Yarrow Unvisited.' And indeed, grandfather, if you are collecting materials for that book, why should we not go back at once? It would be dreadful if—if—the other volume were to come

out first—and you indebted to Lord Musselburgh, or any one else; but if yours were written and published—if you could show them you had done what you undertook to do, then it would be all perfectly right. For you know, grandfather," she continued, in a gently persuasive and winning voice, "no one could do it as well as you! Who else has such a knowledge of Scotland and Scottish literature, or such a sympathy with Scottish music and poetry? And then your personal acquaintance with many of those writers—who used to welcome you as one of themselves—who else could have that? You could do it better than any one, grandfather; and you have always said you would like to do something for the sake of Scotland; and here is the very thing ready to your hand. Some other time, grandfather," she pleaded, with those beautiful clear eyes turned beseechingly upon him, "some other time you will take me to all those beautiful places. It is not as if I had come back home; I have hardly ever had a home anywhere; I am as well content in Montreal or Toronto as anywhere else. And then you could get all the assistance you might need over there—you could go to your various friends in the newspaper offices, and they would give you information."

"Yes, yes; well, well," he said, peevishly; "I am not a literary hack, to be driven, Maisrie. I must have my own time. I made no promise. There, now, get me my pipe; and bring your violin; and play some of those Scotch airs. Yes, yes; you can get at the feeling of them; and that comes to you through your blood, Maisrie—no matter where you happen to be born."

Twilight had fallen. At the open window, with a long clay pipe, as yet unlit, in his fingers, old George Bethune sate and stared out into the semi-darkness, where all was quiet now, for the carriages from the neighbouring mews had long ago been driven away to dinner-parties and operas and theatres. And in the silence, in the dusky part of the room, there arose a low sound, a tender-breathing sound of most exquisite pathos, that seemed to say, as well as any instrument might say—

"I'm wearin' awa', Jean,
Like snaw-wreaths in thaw, Jean,
I'm wearin' awa',
To the land o' the leal;
There's nae sorrow there, Jean,
There's neither cauld nor care, Jean,
The day's aye fair
In the land o' the leal."

Most tenderly she played, and slowly; and with an absolute simplicity of tone.

"There's Scotch blood in your veins, Maisrie—Scotch blood," he said, approvingly, as the low-vibrating notes ceased.

And then again in the darkness another plaintive wail arose—it was the Flowers o' the Forest this time—and here the old man joined in, singing in a sort of undertone, and with a sufficiently sympathetic voice:

"I've heard the liltin' at our yowe-milkin',
Lasses a-liltin, before the dawn o' day;
But now there's a moanin' on ilka green loanin';
The Flowers o' the Forest are a' wede away.

* * * * *

"We hear nae mair liltin' at our yowe-milkin',
Women and bairns are dowie and wae;
Sighin' and moanin', on ilka green loanin'—
The Flowers o' the Forest are a' wede away."

"Yes, yes," he said, as he rose and came away from the window, "it is the Scotch blood that tingles, it is the Scotch heart that throbs. 'Yestreen, when to the trembling strings, the dance gaed through the lichted ha'——' Who but a Scotchman could have written that? Well, now, Maisrie, we'll have the gas; and you can get out the spirits; and we'll try some of the livelier airs. There's plenty of them, too, as befits a daring and energetic people—a nation of fighters. They were not always bewailing their losses in the field." And therewith the old man, pacing up and down before the empty fire-place, began to sing, with upright head and gallant voice—

"London's bonnie woods and braes,
I maun leave them a', lassie;
Wha can thole when Britain's faes
Would gie Briton law, lassie?
Wha would shun the field o' danger?
Wha to fame would live a stranger?
Now when freedom bids avenge her,
Wha would shun her ca', lassie?"

Maisrie Bethune had laid aside her violin; but she did not light the gas. She

stood there, in the semi-darkness, in the middle of the room, timidly regarding her grandfather, and yet apparently afraid to speak. At last she managed to say—

"Grandfather—you will not be angry—?"

"What's this, now?" he said, wheeling round and staring at her, for the peculiarity of her tone had caught his ear.

"Grandfather," she continued, in almost piteous embarrassment. "I—I wish to say something to you—I have been thinking about it for a long while back—and yet afraid you mightn't understand—you might be angry—"

"Well, well, what is it?" he said, impatiently. "What are you dissatisfied with? I don't see that you've much to complain of, or I either. We don't live a life of grandeur; nor is there much excitement about it; but it is fairly comfortable. I consider we are very well off."

"We are too well off, grandfather," she said, sadly.

He started at this, and stared at her again.

"What do you mean?"

"Grandfather," she said, in the same pathetic voice, "don't you see that I am no longer a child? I am a woman. And I am doing nothing. Why did you give me so careful an education if I am not to use it? I wish to earn something—I—I wish to keep you and me, grandfather—"

The stammering sentences ceased: he replied slowly, and perhaps a trifle coldly.

"Why did I have you carefully educated? Well, I should have thought you might have guessed—might have understood. But I will tell you. I have given you what education was possible in our circumstances in order to fit you for the station which some day you may be called upon to fill. And if not, if it is fated that injustice and iniquity are to be in our case perpetual, at all events you must be worthy of the name you bear. But it was not as an implement of trade," he continued, more warmly, "that I gave you such education as was possible in our wandering lives. What do you want to do? Teach music? And you would use your trained hand and ear—and your trained soul, which is of more importance still—to drum mechanical rudiments into the brats of some bourgeois household? A fit employment for a Bethune of Balloray!"

She seemed bewildered—and agonised.

"Grandfather, I must speak! I must speak! You may be angry or not—but—but I am no longer a child—I can see how we are situated—and—and if it is pride that causes me to speak, remember who it is that has taught me to think of our name. Grandfather, let us begin a new life! I can work—I am old enough to work—I would slave my fingers to the bone for you! Grandfather, why should you accept assistance from any one?—from Lord Musselburgh or any one? No, I do not blame you—I have always thought that everything you did was right—and

kind and good; but I cannot be a child any longer—I must say what I think and feel. Grandfather—–"

But here the incoherent appeal broke down; she fell on her knees before him, and clasped her hands over her face; and in the dark the old man—stern and immovable—could hear the sound of her violent sobbing.

"I will work—oh, I will work night and day, grandfather," she continued, wildly, "if only you will take my money and not from any one else! I will go on the stage—I will turn dressmaker—I will go anywhere or do anything—and work hard and hard—if only you will consent! There would not be so much sacrifice, grandfather—a little, not much—and don't you think we should be all the happier? I have spoken at last, grandfather—you will forgive me! I could not keep silent any longer. It has been weighing on my heart—and now—now you are going to say yes, grandfather—and to-morrow—to-morrow we begin differently. We are so much alone—let us live for each other—let us be independent of every one! Now you are going to say yes, grandfather—and indeed, indeed I will work for both of us, oh, so gladly!—–"

"Have you finished?" he asked.

She rose, and would have seized his hand to enforce her appeal, but he withdrew a step, and motioned her to be seated.

"I am glad of this opportunity," he said, in a formal and measured fashion. "You say you have become a woman; and it is natural you should begin and think for yourself; hitherto I have treated you as a child, and you have obeyed and believed implicitly. As for your immediate wish, I may say at once that is impossible. There is no kind of work for which you are fitted—even if I were prepared to live on your earnings, which I am not. The stage? What could you do on the stage! Do you think an actress is made at a moment's notice? Or a dress-maker either? How could you turn dressmaker to-morrow?—because you can hem handkerchiefs? And as for making use of your education, do you know of the thousands of girls whose French and Italian and music are as good as yours, and who can barely gain their food by teaching?—–"

He altered his tone; and spoke more proudly.

"But what I say is this, that you do not understand, you have not yet understood, my position. When George Bethune condescends to accept assistance, as you call it, he receives no favour, he confers an honour. I know my rights, and stand on them; yes, and I know my wrongs—and how trifling the compensations ever likely to be set against them. You spoke of Lord Musselburgh; but Lord Musselburgh—a mushroom peer—the representative of a family dragged from nothingness by James VI.—Lord Musselburgh knew better than you—well he knew—that he was honouring himself in receiving into his house a Bethune of Balloray. And as for his granting me assistance, that was his privilege, his oppor-

tunity, his duty. Should not I have done the like, and gladly, if our positions had been reversed? *Noblesse oblige.* I belong to his order—and to a family older by centuries than his. If there was a favour conferred to-day at Musselburgh House, it was not on my shoulders that it fell."

He spoke haughtily, and yet without anger; and there was a ring of sincerity in his tones that could not be mistaken. The girl sate silent and abashed.

"No," said he, in the same proud fashion; "during all my troubles, and they have been more numerous than you know or need ever know, I have never cowered, or whimpered, or abased myself before any living being. I have held my head up. My conscience is clear towards all men. 'Stand fast, Craig-Royston!' it has been with me—and shall be!"

He went to the window and shut it.

"Come, light the gas, Maisrie; and let us talk about something else. What I say is this, that if anyone, recognising the injustice that I and mine have suffered, should feel it due to himself, due to humanity, to make some little reparation, why, that is as between man and man—that ought to be considered his privilege; and I take no shame. I ask for no compassion. The years that I can hope for now must be few; but they shall be as those that have gone before. I abase myself before no one. I hold my head erect. I look the world in the face; and ask which of us has the greater cause to complain of the other. 'Stand fast, Craig-Royston!'—that has been my motto; and so, thank God, it shall be to the end!"

Maisrie lit the gas, and attended to her grandfather's other wants—in a mechanical sort of way. But she did not take up the violin again. There was a strangely absent look on the pale and beautiful and pensive face.

CHAPTER II.

NEIGHBOURS.

The young man whom Lord Musselburgh had hailed came into the middle of the room. He was a handsome and well-made young fellow of about three or four-and-twenty, with finely-cut and intelligent features, and clear grey eyes that had a curiously straightforward and uncompromising look in them, albeit his manner was modest enough. At the present moment, however, he seemed somewhat perturbed.

"Who were those two?" he said, quickly.

"Didn't you listen while the old gentleman was declaiming away?" Lord Musselburgh made answer. "An enthusiastic Scot, if ever there was one! I suppose you never heard of the great Bethune lawsuit?"

"But the other—the girl?"

"His granddaughter, I think he said."

"She is the most beautiful human creature I ever beheld!" the young man exclaimed, rather breathlessly.

His friend looked at him—and laughed.

"That's not like you, Vin. Take care. The Hope of the Liberal Party enmeshed at four-and-twenty—that wouldn't do! Pretty—oh, yes, she was pretty enough, but shy: I hardly saw anything of her. I dare say her pretty face will have to be her fortune; I suspect the poor old gentleman is not overburdened with worldly possessions. He has his name, however; he seems proud enough of that; and I shouldn't wonder if it had made friends for him abroad. They seem to have travelled a good deal."

While he was speaking his companion had mechanically lifted from the table the card which old George Bethune had sent up. The address in Mayfair was pencilled on it. And mechanically the young man laid down the card again.

"Well, come along, Vin—let's get to Victoria."

"No, if you don't mind, Musselburgh," said the other, with downcast eyes, and something of embarrassment, "I would rather—not go down to the Bungalow to-night. Some other time—it is so good of you to be always asking me down——"

"My dear fellow," the young nobleman said, looking at his friend curiously, "what is the matter with you? Are you in a dream? Are you asleep? Haven't I told you that —— is coming down by a late train to-night; and isn't all the world envying you that the great man should make such a protégé and favourite of you? Indeed you must come down; you can't afford to lose such a chance. We will sit up for him; and you'll talk to him during supper; and you'll listen to him for hours after if he is in the humour for monologues. Then to-morrow morning you'll take him away bird's-nesting—he is as eager for any new diversion as a school-boy; and you'll have him all to yourself; and one of these days, before you know where you are, he'll hand you a Junior Lordship. Or is it the Under-Secretaryship at the Home Office you're waiting for? You know, we're all anxious to see how the new experiment will come off. The young man unspoiled by Oxford or Cambridge—untainted by landlord sentiment—trained for public life on first principles: one wants to see how all this will work in practice. And we never dictate—oh, no, we never dictate to the constituencies; but when the public notice from time to time in the newspapers that Mr. Vincent Harris was included in ——'s dinner-party on the previous evening, then they think; and perhaps they wonder when that lucky young gentleman is going to take his seat in the House of Commons. So

really, my dear Vin, you can't afford to throw away this chance of having —— all to yourself. I suppose he quite understands that you are not infected with any of your father's Socialistic theories? Of course it's all very well for an enormously rich man like your father to play with Communism—it must be an exciting sort of amusement—like stroking a tiger's tail, and wondering what will happen in consequence; but you must keep clear of that kind of thing, my boy. Now, come along——"

"Oh, thank you, Musselburgh," the young man said, in the same embarrassed fashion, "but if you'll excuse me—I'd rather stay in town to-night."

"Oh, very well," the other said, good-naturedly, "I shall be up in a day or two again. By the way, the Four-in-Hand Club turns out on Saturday. Shall I give you a lift—and we'll go down to Hurlingham for the polo? Mrs. Ellison is coming."

"Oh, thanks—awfully good of you—I shall be delighted," the young man murmured; and a few seconds thereafter the two friends had separated, Lord Musselburgh driving off in a hansom to Victoria-station.

This young Vincent Harris who now walked away along Piccadilly towards Hyde Park was in a sort of waking trance. He saw nothing of the people passing by him, nor of the carriages, nor of the crowd assembled at the corner of the Row, expecting the Princess. He saw a pale and pathetic face, a dimly-outlined figure standing by a table, a chastened splendour of girlish hair, an attitude of meekness and diffidence. Once only had he caught a glimpse of the beautiful, clear, blue-grey eyes—when she came in at the door, looking startled almost; but surely a man is not stricken blind and dumb by a single glance from a girl's wondering or enquiring eyes? Love at first sight?—he would have dismissed the suggestion with anger, as an impertinence, a profanation. It was not love at all: it was a strange kind of interest and sympathy she had inspired—compassionate almost, and yet more reverent than pitiful. There appeared to be some mysterious and subtle appeal in her very youth: why should one so young be so solitary, so timid, sheltering herself, as it were, from the common gaze? Why that touch of pathos about a mouth that was surely meant to smile?—why the lowered eyelashes?—was it because she knew she was alone in this great wilderness of strangers, in this teeming town? And he felt in his heart that this was not the place for her at all. She ought to have been away in sunny meadows golden with buttercups, with the laughter of young children echoing around her, with the wide air fragrant with the new-mown hay, with thrushes and blackbirds piping clear from amidst the hawthorn boughs. Who had imprisoned this beautiful child, and made a white slave of her, and brought her into this great roaring market of the world? And was there no one to help?

But it was all a perplexity to him; even as was this indefinable concern and

anxiety about one to whom he had never even spoken a word. What was there in that pensive beauty that should so strangely trouble him? She had made no appeal to him; their eyes could scarcely be said to have met, even in that brief moment; her cruel fate, the tyranny of her surroundings, her pathetic resignation, were all part and parcel of a distracted reverie, that seemed to tear his heart asunder with fears, and indignation, and vows of succour. And then—somehow—amidst this chaos and bewilderment—his one desire was that she should know he wished to be her friend—that some day—oh, some wild white day of joy!—he should be permitted to take her hand and say "Do not be so sad! You are not so much alone. Let me be by your side for a little while—until you speak—until you tell me what I can do—until you say 'Yes, I take you for my friend!'"

He had wandered away from the fashionable crowd—pacing aimlessly along the unfrequented roadways of the Park, and little recking of the true cause of the unrest that reigned in his bosom. For one thing, speculations about love or marriage had so far concerned him but slightly; these things were too remote; his aspirations and ambitions were of another sort. Then again he was familiar with feminine society. While other lads were at college, their thoughts intent on cricket, or boating, or golf, he had been kept at home with masters and teachers to fit him for the practical career which had been designed for him; and part of the curriculum was that he should mix freely with his kind, and get to know what people of our own day were thinking, not what people of two thousand years ago had been thinking. One consequence of this was that 'Vin' Harris, as he was universally called, if he did not know everything, appeared to know everybody; and of course he was acquainted with scores on scores of pretty girls—whom he liked to look at when, for example, they wore a smart lawn tennis costume, and who interested him most perhaps when they were saucy; and also he was acquainted with a considerable number of young married ladies, who were inclined to pet him, for he was good-natured, and easy-mannered, and it may be just a little careless of their favour. But as for falling seriously in love (if there were such a thing) or perplexing himself with dreams of marriage—that was far from his scheme of life. His morning companions were Spencer, Bain, John Mill, Delolme, Hallam, Freeman, and the like; during the day he was busy with questions relating to food supply, to the influence of climate on character, the effect of religious creeds on mental development, the protection and cultivation of new industries, and so forth; then in the evening he was down at the House of Commons a good deal, especially when any well-known orator was expected to speak; and again he went to all kinds of social festivities, particularly when these were of a political cast, or likely to be attended by political people. For Vin Harris was known to be a young man of great promise and prospects; he was received everywhere; and granted a consideration by his elders which was hardly justified by his years.

That he remained unspoiled—and even modest in a degree unusual at his age—may be put down to his credit, or more strictly to the fortunate accident of his temperament and disposition.

How long he walked, and whither he walked, on this particular evening, he hardly knew; but as daylight waned he found himself in Oxford-street, and over there was Park-street. Well enough he remembered the address pencilled on the visiting-card; and yet he was timorous about seeking it out; he passed and went on—came back again—glanced nervously down the long thoroughfare—and then resumed his aimless stroll, slowly and reluctantly. To these indecisions and hesitations there came the inevitable climax: with eyes lowered, but yet seeming to see everything around him and far ahead of him, he went down Park-street until he came to the smaller thoroughfare named on the card; and there, with still greater shamefacedness, he paused and ventured to look at the house that he guessed to be the abode of the old man and his granddaughter. Well, it was a sufficiently humble dwelling; but it was neat and clean; and in the little balcony outside the first floor were a number of pots of flowers—lobelias, ox-eye daisies, and musk. The window was open, but he could hear nothing. He glanced up and down the small street. By this time the carriages had all been driven away to dinner-party and theatre; a perfect silence prevailed everywhere; there was not a single passer-by. It was a quiet corner, a restful haven, these two lonely creatures had found, after their varied buffetings about the world. And to this young man, who had just come away from the roar of Oxford-street and its surging stream of human life, there seemed something singularly fascinating and soothing in the stillness. He began to think that he, too, would like to escape into this retreat. They would not object to a solitary companion?—to a neighbour who would be content to see them, from the other side of the way, at the window now and again, or perhaps to say "Good morning!" or "Good evening!" as they passed him on the pavement? He could bring his books; here would be ample opportunity for study; there were far too many distractions and interruptions at his father's house. And then—after weeks and weeks of patient waiting—then perhaps—some still evening—he might be invited to cross over? In the hushed little parlour he would take his seat—and—oh! the wonder and enhancement of it—be privileged to sit and listen, and hear what the wanderers, at rest at last, had to say of the far and outer world they had left behind them. He did not know what she was called; but he thought of several names; and each one grew beautiful—became possessed of a curious interest—when he guessed that it might be hers.

Suddenly the silence sprung into life; some one seemed to speak to him; and then he knew that it was a violin—being played in that very room. He glanced up towards the open window; he could just make out that the old man was sitting there, within the shadow; therefore it must be the girl herself who was playing,

in the recess of the chamber. And in a sort of dream he stood and listened to the plaintive melody—hardly breathing—haunted by the feeling that he was intruding on some sacred privacy. Then, when the beautiful, pathetic notes ceased, he noiselessly withdrew with bowed head. She had been speaking to him, but he was bewildered; he hardly could tell what that trembling, infinitely sad voice had said.

He walked quickly now; for in place of those vague anticipations and reveries, a more definite purpose was forming in his brain; and there was a certain joyousness in the prospect. The very next morning he would come up to this little thoroughfare, and see if he could secure lodgings for himself, perhaps opposite the house where the old man and his granddaughter lived. It was time he was devoting himself more vigorously to study; there were too many people calling at the big mansion in Grosvenor Place; the frivolities of the fashionable world were too seductive. But in the seclusion of that quiet little quarter he could give himself up to his books; and he would know that he had neighbours; he might get a glimpse of them from time to time; that would lighten his toil. Then when Mary Bethune—he had come to the conclusion that Mary was her name, and had made not such a bad guess, after all—when Mary Bethune played one of those pathetic Scotch airs, he would have a better right to listen; he would contentedly put down Seaman's "Progress of Nations," and go to the open window, and sit there, till the violin had ceased to speak. It was a most excellent scheme; he convinced himself that it would work right well—because it was based on common sense.

When he arrived at the great house in Grosvenor Place, he went at once into the dining-room, and found, though not to his surprise, that dinner was just about over. There were only three persons seated at the long table, which was sumptuously furnished with fruit, flowers, and silver. At the bead was Vin Harris's father, Mr. Harland Harris, a stout, square-set, somewhat bourgeois-looking man, with a stiff, pedantic, and pompous manner, who nevertheless showed his scorn of conventionalities by wearing a suit of grey tweed; on his right sate his sister-in-law, Mrs. Ellison, a remarkably pretty young widow, tall and elegant of figure, with wavy brown hair, shrewd blue eyes, and a most charming smile that she could use with effect; the third member of the group being Mr. Ogden, the great electioneerer of the north, a big and heavy man, with Yorkshire-looking shoulders, a bald head, and small, piggish eyes set in a wide extent of face. Mr. Ogden was resplendent in evening dress, if his shining shirt-front was somewhat billowy.

"What's this now?" said the pretty Mrs. Ellison to the young man, as he came and pulled in a chair and sate down by her. "Haven't you had any dinner?"

"Good little children come in with dessert," said he, as he carelessly helped

himself to some olives and a glass of claret. "It's too hot to eat food—unusual for May, isn't it? Besides I had a late luncheon with Lord Musselburgh."

"Lord Musselburgh?" put in Mr. Ogden. "I wonder when his lordship is going to tell us what he means to be—an owner of racehorses, or a yachtsman, or a statesman? It seems to me he can't make up his own mind; and the public don't know whether to take him seriously or not."

"Lord Musselburgh," said Vincent, firing up in defence of his friend, "is an English gentleman, who thinks he ought to support English institutions:—and I dare say that is why he does not find saving grace in the caucus."

Perhaps there was more rudeness than point in this remark; but Mrs. Ellison's eyes laughed—decorously and unobserved. She said aloud—

"For my part, I consider Lord Musselburgh a very admirable young man: he has offered me the box-seat on his coach at the next Meet of the Four-in-Hand Club."

"And are you going, aunt?" her nephew asked.

"Yes, certainly."

"Rather rash of Musselburgh, isn't it?" he observed, in a casual sort of way.

"Why?"

"What attention is he likely to pay to his team, if you are sitting beside him?"

"None of your impertinence, sir," said she (but she was pleased all the same). "Boys must not say such things to their grandmothers."

Now the advent of Master Vin was opportune; for Mr. Harris, finding that his sister-in-law had now some one of like mind to talk to, left those two frivolous persons alone, and addressed himself exclusively to his bulky friend from the north. And his discourse took the form of pointing out what were the practical and definite aims that Socialism had to place before itself. As to general principles, all thinking men were agreed. Every one who had remarked the signs of the times knew that the next great movement in modern life must be the emancipation of the wage-slave. The tyranny of the capitalist—worse than any tyranny that existed under the feudal system—must be cribbed and confined: too long had he gorged himself with the fruits of the labours of his fellow-creatures. The most despicable of tyrants, he; not only robbing and plundering the hapless beings at his mercy, but debasing their lives, depriving them of their individualism, of the self-respect which was the birthright of the humblest handicraftsman of the middle ages, and making of them mere machines for the purpose of filling his pockets with useless and inordinate wealth. What was to be done, then?—what were the immediate steps to be taken in order to alter this system of monstrous and abominable plunder. It was all very well to make processions to Père Lachaise, and wave red flags, and wax eloquent over the graves of the Communists; but

there was wanted something more than talk, something more than a tribute to the memory of the martyrs, something actual to engage our own efforts, if the poor man was not to be for ever ground to the dust, himself and his starving family, by the relentless plutocrat and his convenient freedom of contract. Let the State, then—that engine of oppression which had been invented by the rich—now see whether it could not do something for all classes under its care: let it consider the proletariat as well as the unscrupulous landlords and the sordid and selfish bourgeoisie. Already it was working the Telegraphs, the Post Office, the Parcels Post, the Dockyards, and Savings Banks; and if it regulated the wages it paid by the wage-rate of the outside market, that was because it followed the wicked old system of unequal distribution of profit that was soon to be destroyed. That would speedily be amended. What further, then? The land for the people, first of all. As clear as daylight was the right of the people to the land: let the State assume possession, and manage it—its mines and minerals, its agriculture, its public grounds and parks—for the benefit of all, not for the profit of a pampered few. The State must buy and own the railways, must establish Communal centres of distribution for the purchase and exchange of goods, must establish systems of credit, must break down monopoly everywhere, and the iron power of commercialism that was crushing the life out of the masses of the population. The State must organise production, so that each man shall do his share of work demanded by the community, and no more——

But here Mrs. Ellison, who had doubtless heard or read all this before, turned away altogether. She asked her nephew to give her some more strawberries.

"I say, Vin," she remarked, incidentally, "what very beautiful dessert-plates these are. I don't remember them. Where did you get them?"

"I thought you would admire them," said he. "They are my father's own design."

"Really! I call them very handsome—and so quaint and unusual. He must tell me where I can get some of them: when I go back to Brighton I should like to take a few with me for my small establishment."

"But you can't, aunt," he said.

"Why?"

"Because my father had the moulds broken."

She looked at him for a moment and then sniggered—yes, sniggered, but discreetly, so that the two perfervid politicians should not see.

"That is pretty well," she observed in an undertone, "for a Socialist and Communist—to have the moulds broken so that nobody else should have any!"

Presently she said, in the same undertone—

"I'm going to catch your eye in a minute, Vin. Are you coming upstairs to

the drawing-room with me?"

"Yes, of course, aunt," said he, instantly. "Get up now, and let's be off."

She rose: so did her brother-in-law. Mr. Ogden remained in his chair—perhaps through inattention, or perhaps he was bewildered by the consciousness that he ought to make, as a relic of his ancient worship of *laissez faire*, some protest against this wholesale intervention of the State. Then Vincent opened the door for the tall and bright-eyed young widow; and he and she passed out and went upstairs together.

When they entered the spacious and richly-furnished room, the atmosphere of which was heavy with the scent of flowers, Mrs. Ellison seated herself in a low lounging-chair, while her nephew stood some little way off, his hands behind his back, his eyes absently staring into a rose-shaded lamp as if he could see pictures there. When she spoke, no doubt he heard; but he did not answer or interrupt: he allowed her to ramble on. And she was in a talkative and vivacious mood.

"I'm going to the Drawing Room to-morrow, Vin," said she, "to present Louie Drexel; and if you were kind and civil you would come down to St. James's Park and find out our brougham and talk to us while we are waiting. I do so want you to get to know Miss Drexel well; it would be worth your while, I can tell you. You see, those American girls have such excellent good sense. This evening, before you came in, your father was treating us to a dissertation on the iniquity of riches—or rather the absurdity of people revelling in wealth, and at the same time professing to be Christians. He asked—and I'm sure I couldn't answer him—how a Bishop can reconcile his enjoyment of £10,000 a year with Christ's plain injunction, 'Sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor.' And while I was listening to the sermon, I was thinking of you, Vin. I don't know how far you have accepted your father's theories—which he himself takes precious good care not to put into practice. But some day—for young men are so impulsive and wilful and uncertain—you might suddenly take it into your head to do some wild thing of that kind; and then don't you see how well it would be for you to be married to a sensible American girl; for if you were to sell all that you have and give to the poor, she would make pretty certain you didn't sell all that she had—so long as the Married Women's Property Act was in force. There's no mad Quixotism about a girl like that—level-headed, isn't that what they call it over there? Then think what a help such a wife as that would be to you in public life. Think of an election, for example—why, Louie Drexel could talk the voters out of their five senses—bamboozle the women, and laugh the men into good humour. I wonder you didn't pick up one of those bright American girls when you were over in the States: I suppose you were too busy examining the political machine, and the machinists. But I'm glad you didn't; I couldn't trust you; and I'm going to do

it for you myself. You are my boy: I'm going to provide for you. And I haven't fixed on Louie Drexel yet; but at the same time you might come down to-morrow to St. James's Park and talk to her."

He withdrew his eyes from the crimson lamp, and came and took a chair near her.

"I am thinking of making a little change in my arrangements," said he. "There is too much distraction here; especially at this time of the year, when everybody's in town. I am going to take rooms elsewhere."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the pretty young widow, with a smile. "Is that it? The restraint of home has been found too much at last—we must have freedom, and wine-parties, and cards? Well, who can wonder at it? I warned your father years ago of the folly of not sending you to college; you would have had all that over by this time, like other young men; but no, the future Champion of the Proletariat was not to have his mind contaminated by the sons of squires. Well, and where have the princely apartments been chosen? In Piccadilly, of course—yellow satin and golden goblets."

"You are quite mistaken, aunt," he said, simply. "The rooms I hope to get to-morrow are in a quiet little street that I dare say you never heard of: if you saw it, you might probably call it shimmy."

"Oh, is that it?" she said again, for her brain was nimble and swift in the construction of theories. "Then you are really going to put some of your father's principles into practice, and to consort with the masses? I've often wondered when he was going to begin himself. You know how he declares it to be monstrous that there should be people of your own race, and colour, and religion, whom you would hesitate to ask to sit down at the same table as yourself; but I have not heard him as yet invite Jack the crossing-sweeper or Tom from the stable-yard to come in and dine with him. And if they came in without an invitation, taking him at his word, as it were, I'm afraid their reception wouldn't be warm—yes, it would be remarkably warm—they'd be thrown out of the front-door in a couple of seconds. So you are going slumming, is that it? You want to understand the great heart of the people—before you lead them on to anarchy and universal plunder?"

"Aunt," said he, with a smile, "you mustn't say such things to me; you mustn't pour reactionary poison into my young mind. No; I am going to retire into that quiet little corner of London simply to get on with my books; and as I shan't let anybody know where it is, I can't be disturbed."

"Do you mean to live there altogether?" she asked, glancing quickly at him. "Shall you sleep there?"

"Oh, no. I shall come home here each evening."

"To dinner? But it is no use asking you that; for you never seem to care

where you dine, or whether you dine at all. Have you told your father of this scheme?"

"No, not yet," he made answer; and he could say nothing further just then, for at this moment Harland Harris and his guest came upstairs from the dining-room, and Mr. Ogden proceeded to engage the young widow in ponderous conversation.

As good luck would have it, when Vincent went up next morning to the little thoroughfare leading from Park-street, he found exactly the rooms he wanted, and engaged them there and then, paying a fortnight's rent in advance in order to calm the good landlady's mind, for he had not a scrap of luggage with him. The sitting-room was all he really required, to be sure; but he did not wish to be disturbed by having the adjoining bedroom occupied; so he took that too, money not being of much consequence to this young man. And then, when the landlady left, he sate down to look at his new possessions. The apartments must have looked poorly furnished to eyes familiar with the splendour of Grosvenor Place; but at all events they seemed clean. Cheap German lithographs adorned the walls; the fireplace was gay with strips of pink paper. But when he approached the window—which he did stealthily—there was more to interest him: the opposite two windows, behind the balcony filled with flowers, were both open: at any moment a figure might appear there—perhaps looking out absently and vaguely with those beautiful and wistful eyes. Or perchance he might hear the tender strains of the unseen violin? He remained there for some time, rather breathless and nervous, until he recollected that he had come hither for the purposes of study; and then he thought he would go away down to Grosvenor Place and seek out such books and writing-materials as he might want, and bring them along forthwith.

He went downstairs and was just about to step outside when he caught sight of something across the way which caused him instantly to shrink back and shelter himself within the shadow of the door—his heart beating quickly. He had nearly been face-to-face with the pensive-eyed young girl, for she had come forth from the opposite house, and was waiting for her grandfather to follow. He remained concealed—fearful of being seen, and yet scarcely knowing why. Then, when he heard the door on the other side shut, and when he had allowed them a few seconds' grace, he stepped forth from his hiding, and saw that they were just turning the corner into Park-street.

Why this perturbation that caused his hands to tremble, that caused his eyeballs to throb, as he looked and looked, and yet hardly dared to look? He was doing no harm—he was thinking no harm. These thoroughfares were open to all; the May morning was warm and fine and clear; why should not he take his way to Hyde Park as well as another? Even in furtively watching whither they

went—in keeping a certain distance between them and him—there was no sort of sacrilege or outrage. If they had turned and confronted him, they could not have recognised him: it was almost impossible they could have observed the young man who was half concealed by the curtains of the room in Musselburgh House. And yet—yet—there was some kind of tremulous wonder in his being so near her—in his being allowed, without let or hindrance, to gaze upon the long-flowing masses of hair, that caught a sheen of light here and there, and stirred with the stirring of the wind. And then the simple grace and ease of her carriage: she held her head more erect in these quiet thoroughfares; sometimes she turned a little to address the old man, and then her refined and sensitive profile became visible, and also the mysterious charm of the long and drooping lashes. He noticed that she never looked at any passer-by; but she did not seem so sad on this fresh morning; she was talking a good deal—and cheerfully, as he hoped. He wished for more sunlight—that the day might brighten all around her—that the warm airs might be sweet with the blossoms of the opening summer.

For now they were nearing Hyde Park; and away before them stretched the pale blue vistas of atmosphere under the wide-swaying branches of the maples. They crossed to Grosvenor Gate; they left the dull roar of Park Lane behind them; they passed beneath the trees; and emerged upon the open breadths of verdure, intersected by pale pink roads. Though summer had come prematurely, this was almost an April-like day: there was a south-west wind blowing, and flattening the feathery grasses; there were shafts of misty sunlight striking here and there; while a confusion of clouds, purple and grey and silver, floated heavily through the surcharged sky. The newly-shorn sheep were quite white—for London. A smart young maidservant idly shoving a perambulator had a glory of Spring flowers in her bonnet. The mild air blowing about brought grateful odours—was it from the green-sward all around, or from the more distant masses of hawthorn white and red?

The old man, marching with uplifted head, and sometimes swinging the stick that he carried, was singing aloud in the gaiety of his heart, though Vincent, carefully keeping at a certain distance, could not make out either the words or the air. The young girl, on the other hand, was simply looking at the various objects, animate and inanimate, around her—at the birds picking up straws or shreds of wool for the building of their nests, at the wind shivering through the grey spikelets of the grass, at the ever-changing conformation of the clouds, at the swaying of the branches of the trees; while from time to time there came floating over from Knightsbridge the sound of a military band. No, she did not appear so sad as she had done the day before; and there was something cheerful, too, about her costume—about the simple dress of dark blue-and-white-striped linen and the sailor's hat of cream-white with a dark blue band. Mary, he made sure her name

was—Mary Bethune. Only a name to him; nothing more: a strange, indefinable, immeasurable distance lay between them; not for him was it to draw near to her, to breathe the same air with her, to listen to the low tones of her voice, to wait for the uplifting of the mysteriously shaded eyes. And as for fancies become more wildly audacious?—what would be the joy of any human being who should be allowed to touch—with trembling fingertips—with reverent and almost reluctant fingertips—the soft splendour of that shining and beautiful hair?

George Bethune and his granddaughter made their way down to the Serpentine, and took their places on a bench there, while the old man proceeded to draw from his pocket a newspaper, which he leisurely began to read. The girl had nothing to do but sit placidly there and look around her—at the shimmering stretch of water, at the small boys sailing their mimic yachts, at the quacking ducks and yelping dogs, at the ever-rustling and murmuring trees. Vincent Harris had now dared to draw a little nearer; but still he felt that she was worlds and worlds away. How many yards were there between him and her?—not yards at all, but infinities of space! They were strangers to each other; no spoken word was possible between them; they might go through to the end of life with this impalpable barrier for ever dividing them. And yet it seemed a sort of miraculous thing that he was allowed to come so close—that he could almost tell the individual threads of that soft-shining hair. Then, more than once, too, he had caught a glimpse of her raised eyes, as she turned to address her grandfather; and that was a startling and bewildering experience. It was not their mere beauty; though, to be sure, their clear and limpid deeps seemed all the more clear and limpid because of the touch of sun-tan on her complexion; it was rather that they were full of all ineffable things—simplicity, submission, gratitude, affection, and even, as he rejoiced to think, some measure of mild enjoyment. For the moment there was little of that pensive and resigned look that had struck him in the figure standing with bowed head at Lord Musselburgh's table. She appeared to be pleased with the various life around her and its little incidents; she regarded the sailing of the miniature yachts with interest. When a brace of duck went whirring by overhead, she followed their flight until they were lost to view; she watched two small urchins furtively fishing for minnows, with an eye on the distant park-keeper. There was a universal rustling of leaves in the silence; and sometimes, when the wind blew straight across, the music of the military band became more distinct.

How long they remained there, the young man did not know; it was a golden morning, and all too brief. But when at last they did rise to go he was very nearly caught; for instead of returning by the way they had come, they struck westward; and he suddenly saw with alarm that there was no time for him to get behind one of the elms. All he could do was to turn aside, and lower

his eyes. They passed within a few yards of him; he could distinctly hear the old man singing, with a fine note of bravado in his voice, "The standard on the braes o' Mar, is up and streaming rarely"; then, when he was sure they were some way off, he made bold to raise his eyes again. Had she taken any notice of him? He hoped not. He did not wish her to think him a spy; he did not wish to be known to her at all. He should be her constant neighbour, her companion almost, without any consciousness on her part. And again and again he marvelled that the landlady in the little thoroughfare should have given him those treasures of rooms—should have put such happiness within his reach—for so trivial a sum. Seventeen shillings a week!—when each moment would be a diamond, and each evening hour a string of diamonds!

But nevertheless there were his studies to be thought of; so now he walked away down to Grosvenor Place, gathered his books together, and took them up in a hansom to his newly-acquired lodgings. That afternoon he did loyally stick to his work—or tried to do so, though, in fact, his ears were alert for any sound coming from the other side of the way. He had left his window open; one of the windows of the opposite house was also left open. Occasionally he would lay down Draper's Civil War in America, and get up and stretch his legs, and from a convenient shelter send a swift glance of scrutiny across the street. There was no sign. Perhaps they had gone out again, shopping, or visiting, or, as likely as not, to look at the people riding and driving in the Park. He returned to Draper, and to President Jackson's Proclamation—but with less of interest: his annotations became fewer. He was listening as well as reading.

Then all of a sudden there flashed into his brain a suggestion—a suggestion that had little to do with Clay's Compromise, or the project to arrest Mr. Calhoun. On the previous evening it had seemed to him as though the unseen violinist were speaking to him: why, then, should he not answer, in the same language? There could be no offence in that—no impertinence: it would be merely one vague voice responding to the other, the unknown communicating in this fleshless and bloodless way with the unknown. And now he was abundantly grateful to his aunt for having insisted on his including music among his various studies and accomplishments: a use had come for his slight proficiency at last: most modern languages he knew, but he had never expected to be called upon to speak in this one. And yet what more simple, as between neighbours? He was not thrusting his society on any one; he was invading no privacy; he was demanding no concession of friendship or even acquaintance. But at least the dreadful gulf of silence would be bridged over by this mystic means.

It was nearly six o'clock; London was busy when he went out on this hot evening. He walked along to a music-publisher's place in Regent-street; and hired a piano on the express stipulation that it was to be in his rooms within

one hour. Then, as he had only had a biscuit for lunch, and wished to leave himself untrammelled later on, he turned into a restaurant, and dined there, simply enough, and had a cigarette and a look at the evening papers. Thereafter he strolled back to his lodgings, and took to his book, though his thoughts were inclined to wander now and again.

Twilight had fallen; but he did not light the gas. Once, for a brief second or two, he had quietly run his fingers over the keys of the piano, to learn if it was tolerably in tune; then the room relapsed into silence again. And was there to be silence on the other side as well? He waited and listened, and waited and listened, in vain. Perhaps, while he was idling away his time in the Regent-street restaurant, they had come out from the house and gone off to some theatre. The street was so still now that he could almost have heard any one speaking in that room on the other side; but there was no sound.

Then his heart leapt and his brain grew giddy. Here was that low-breathing and vibrating wail again:—and was she alone now?—in the gathering darkness? He recognised the air; it was "Auld Robin Gray;" but never before had he known that it was so beautiful and so ineffably sad as well. Slowly she played and simply; it was almost like a human voice; only that the trembling strings had a penetrating note of their own. And when she ceased, it seemed to him that it would be profanation to break in upon the hushed and sacred stillness.

And yet was he not to answer her, in the only speech that could not offend? Was he to act the coward, when there offered a chance of his establishing some subtle link with, her, of sending a message, of declaring his presence in this surely unobtrusive fashion? Quickly he sat down to the piano; and, in rather a nervous and anxious fashion, began. He was not a brilliant performer—anything but that; but he had a light touch and a sensitive ear; and he played with feeling and grace. It was "Kathleen Mavourneen"—and a sort of appeal in its way, did she but remember the words. He played the melody over only once, slowly and as sympathetically as he could; then he rose and retired from the piano; and stood in the darkness, listening.

Alas! there was no response. What had he done? He waited, wondering; but all was still in the little street. It was as if some bird, some mellow-throated thrush or nightingale, had been warbling to itself in the dim security of the leaves, and been suddenly startled and silenced by an alien sound, not knowing what that

might portend.

CHAPTER III.
AN APPROACH.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" called out old George Bethune.

There appeared a middle-aged man, of medium height, who looked like a butler out of employment; he was pale and flabby of face, with nervous eyes expressive of a sort of imbecile amiability.

"Ah, Hobson!" said Mr. Bethune, in his lofty manner. "Well?"

The landlady's husband came forward in the humblest possible fashion; and his big, prominent, vacuous eyes seemed to be asking for a little consideration and goodwill.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, in the most deplorable of Cockney accents, "I 'umbly beg your pardon for making so bold; but knowing as you was so fond of everything Scotch, I took the liberty of bringing you a sample of something very special—a friend of mine, sir, recommended it—and then says I to him, 'Lor bless ye, I don't know nothing about Highland whiskey; but there's a gentleman in our 'ouse who is sure to be a judge, and if I can persuade him to try it, he'll be able to say if it's the real sort.'"

"All right, Hobson," said George Bethune, in his grand way. "Some other time I will see what it is like."

"Thank you, sir, thank you!" said the ex-butler, with earnest gratitude; and he went and placed the bottle on the sideboard. Then he came back, and hesitatingly took out an envelope from his pocket. "And if I might ask another favour, sir. You see, sir, in this 'ot weather people won't go to the theatres; and they're not doing much; and my brother-in-law, the theatrical agent, he's glad to get the places filled up, to make a show, sir, as you might say. And I've got two dress-circle seats, if you and the young lady was thinking of going to the theatre to-morrow night. It's a great favour, sir, as my brother-in-law said to me as he was a-giving me the tickets and arsking me to get 'em used."

He lied; for there was no brother-in-law and no theatrical agent in the case. He himself had that very afternoon honestly and straightforwardly purchased the tickets at the box-office, as he had done on more than one occasion before, out of

the money allowed him for personal expenses by his wife; so that he had to look forward to a severe curtailment of his gin and tobacco for weeks to come.

"Thanks—thanks!" said George Bethune, as he lit his long clay pipe. "I will see what my granddaughter says when she comes in—unless you would like to use the tickets yourself."

"Oh, no, sir, begging your pardon, sir," was the instant rejoinder. "When I 'ave a evening out I go to the Oxbridge music-'all—perhaps it's vanity, sir—but when Charley Coldstream gets a hangcore, I do like to hear some on 'em call out, 'Says Wolseley, says he!' Ah, sir, that was the proudest moment of my life when I see Charley Coldstream come on the stage and begin to sing verse after verse, and the people cheering; and I owed it all to you, sir; it was you, sir, as advised me to send it to him——"

"A catching refrain—a catching refrain," said the old gentleman, encouragingly. "Just fitted to get hold of the public ear."

"Why, sir," said Hobson, with a fatuous little chuckle of delight, "this werry afternoon, as I was coming down Park-street, I 'eard a butcher's boy a-singing it—I did indeed, sir—as clear as could be I 'eard the words,

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

—every word I 'eard. But would you believe it, sir, when I was in the Oxbridge music-'all I could 'ardly listen, I was so frightened, and my ears a-buzzin, and me 'ardly able to breathe. Lor, sir, that was a experience! Nobody looked at me, and that was a mercy—I couldn't ha' stood it. Even the chairman, as was not more than six yards from me, 'e didn't know who I was, and not being acquainted with him, I couldn't offer him somethink, which I should have considered it a proud honour so to do on sich an occasion. And if I might make so bold, sir——"

He was fumbling in his breast-pocket.

"What—more verses?" said Mr. Bethune, good-naturedly. "Well, let's see them. But take a seat, man, take a seat."

Rather timidly he drew a chair in to the table; and then he said with appealing eyes:

"But wouldn't you allow me, sir, to fetch you a little drop of the whiskey—I assure you it's the best!"

"Oh, very well—very well; but bring two tumblers; single drinking is slow work."

In a few seconds those two curiously-assorted companions—the one massive and strong-built, impressive in manner, measured and emphatic of speech,

the other feeble and fawning, at once eager and vacuous, his face ever ready to break into a maudlin smile—were seated in confabulation together, with some sheets of scribbled paper between.

"And if you will excuse my being so bold, sir," continued Hobson, with great humility, "but I 'ave been reading the little volume of Scotch songs you lent me, and—and——"

"Trying your hand at that, too?"

"Only a verse, sir."

Mr. Bethune took up the scrap of paper; and read aloud:

"O leese me on the toddy,
the toddy,
the toddy,
O leese me on the toddy,
We'll hae a willie-waught!"

"Well, yes," he said, with rather a doubtful air, "you've got the phrases all right—

except the willie-waught, and that is a common error. To tell you the truth, my friend, there is no such thing as a willie-waught. *Waught* is a hearty drink; a richt gude-willie waught is a drink with right good will. *Willie-waught* is nothing—a misconception—a printer's blunder. However, phrases do not count for much. Scotch phrases do not make Scotch song. It is not the provincial dialect—it is the breathing spirit that is the life"—and therewith he repeated, in a proud manner, as if to crush this poor anxious poet by the comparison,

"I see her in the dewy flower,
Sae lovely, sweet, and fair;
I hear her voice in ilka bird
Wi' music charm the air;
There's not a bonnie flower that springs
By fountain, shaw, or green,
Nor yet a bonnie bird that sings
But minds me o' my Jean."

"Beg pardon, sir—Miss Bethune?" said Hobson, enquiringly; for he evidently

thought these lines were of the old gentleman's own composition. And then, as he received no answer, for Mr. Bethune had turned to his pipe, he resumed, "Ah, I see, sir, I 'ave not been successful. Too ambitious—too ambitious. It was you

yourself, sir, as advised me to write about what I knew; and—and in fact, sir, what I see is that there is nothing like patriotism. Lor, sir, you should see them young fellers at the Oxbridge—they're as brave as lions—especially when they've 'ad a glass. Talk about the French! The French ain't in it, when we've got our spirit up. We can stand a lot, sir, yes, we can; but don't let them push us too far. Not *too* far. It will be a bad day for them when they do. An Englishman ain't given to boasting; but he's a terror when his back's up—and a Scotchman too, sir, I beg your pardon—I did not mean anything—I intended to include the Scotchman too, I assure you, sir. There's a little thing here, sir," he continued modestly, "that I should like to read to you, if I may make so bold. I thought of sending it to Mr. Coldstream—I'm sure it would take—for there's some fight in the Englishman yet—and in the Scotchman too, sir," he instantly added.

"A patriotic poem?—Well?"

Thus encouraged the pleased poet moistened his lips with the whiskey and water he had brought for himself and began—

"Where's the man would turn and fly?
Where's the man afraid to die?
It isn't you, it isn't I.
No, my lads, no, no!"

Then his voice had a more valiant ring in it still:

"Who will lead us to the fray?
Who will sweep the foe away?
Who will win the glorious day?
Of England's chivalry?"

It is true he said, "Oo will sweep the foe awye?" but these little peculiarities were lost in the fervour of his enthusiasm.

"Roberts—Graham—Buller—Wood—"

He paused after each name as if listening for the thunderous cheering of the imaginary audience.

"And many another 'most as good:
They're the men to shed their blood
For their country!"

Then there was a touch of pathos:

"*Fare thee well, love, and adieu!*"

But that was immediately dismissed:

"*Fiercer thoughts I have than you;*
We will drive the dastard crew
Into slavery!"

And then he stretched forth his right arm, and declaimed in loud and portentous tones—

"*See the bloody tented-field;*
Look the foe—they yield!—they yield!
Hurrah! hurrah! our glory's sealed!
Three cheers for victory!"

Suddenly his face blanched. For at this moment the door opened: a tall woman appeared—with astonishment and indignation only too legible in her angular features.

"Hobson!" she exclaimed; and at this awful sound the bold warrior seemed to collapse into a limp rag. "I am surprised—I am *indeed* surprised! Really, sir, how can you encourage him in such impudence? Seated at your own table and drinking too, I declare," she went on, as she lifted up the deserted tumbler—for her bellicose husband had hastily picked up his MSS. and vanished from the room. "Really, sir, such familiarity!"

"In the republic of letters, my good Mrs. Hobson," said Mr. Bethune with a smile, "all men are equal. I have been much interested in some of your husband's writings."

"Oh, sir, don't put sich things in his 'ead!" she said, as she proceeded to lay the cloth for dinner. "He's a fool, and that's bad enough; but if so be as you put things in his 'ead, and he giving of hisself airs, it'll be hawful! What good he is to anybody, I don't know. He won't clean a winder or black a boot even."

"How can you expect it?" George Bethune said, in perfect good humour. "Manual labour would be a degradation. Men of genius ought to be supported by the State."

"In the workus, I suppose," she said, sharply—but here Maisrie Bethune came upstairs and into the room, carrying some parcels in her hand, and instantly

the landlady's face changed its expression, and became as amiable and smiling as the gaunt features would allow.

At dinner the old man told his granddaughter that he had procured (he did not say how) places at the —— Theatre for the following evening, and seemed to be pleased about this little break in their quiet lives.

"But why did you go to such expense, grandfather?" Maisrie said. "You know I am quite happy enough in spending the evening at home with you. And every day now I ask myself when I am to begin copying the poems—for the volume, you know. You have sent for them to America, haven't you? But really you have such a wonderful memory, grandfather, I believe you could repeat them all—and I could write them down—and let the printers have them. I was so glad when you let me help you with the book you published in Montreal; and you know my writing is clear enough; you remember what the foreman printer said? Don't you think we could begin to-night, grandfather? It pleases you to repeat those beautiful verses—you are so fond of them—and proud of them because they are written by Scotchmen—and I am sure it would be a delight to me to write them out for you."

"Oh, yes, yes," he said, fretfully, "but not to-night. You're always in such a hurry, Maisrie." And then he added, in a gentler way, "Well, it is a wonderful blessing, a good memory. I never want for a companion, when I've a Scotch air or a Scotch song humming through my brain. On the darkest and wettest day, here in this big city, what have you to do but think of

'The broom, the yellow, yellow broom,
The broom o' the Cowdenknowes,'

and at once you have before you golden banks, and meadows, and June skies, and all else is forgotten. Indeed, lass, Scotland has become for me such a storehouse of beautiful things—in imagination—that I am almost afraid to return to it, in case the reality might disappoint me. No, no, it could not disappoint me: I treasure every inch of the sacred soil: but sometimes I wonder if you will recognise the magic and witchery of hill and glen. As for me, there is naught else I fear now; there are no human ties I shall have to take up again; I shall not have to mourn the 'Bourocks o' Bargeny.'"

"What is that, grandfather?"

"If you had been brought up in Scotland, Maisrie, you would know what the bigging o' bourocks is among children—play-houses in the sand. But sometimes the word is applied to huts or cottages, as it is in the title of Hugh Ainslie's poem. That poem is one that I shall be proud to give a place to in my collection," he continued, with an air of importance. "Hugh Ainslie is no more with us; but

his countrymen, whether in America or at home, are not likely to forget the 'Bourocks o' Bargeny.'"

"Can you remember it, grandfather?"

"Can I not?" said he; and therewith he repeated the lines, never faltering once for a phrase—

"I left ye, Jeanie, blooming fair
'Mang the bourocks o' Bargeny;
I've found ye on the banks o' Ayr,
But sair ye're altered, Jeanie.
I left ye like the wanton lamb
That plays 'mang Hadyed's heather;
I've found ye noo a sober dame—
A wife and eke a mither.

I left ye 'mang the leaves sae green
In rustic weed befittin';
I've found ye buskit like a queen,
In painted chaumer sittin'.
Ye're fairer, statelier, I can see,
Ye're wiser, nae doubt, Jeanie;
But oh! I'd rather met wi' thee
'Mang the bourocks of Bargeny!"

"It's very sad, grandfather," she said, wistfully.

"The way of the world—the way of the world," said he; and observing that she had finished and was waiting for him, he forthwith rose and went to the mantelpiece for his pipe. "There's many a true story of that kind. Well, Maisrie, you'll just get your violin, and we'll have the 'Broom o' the Cowdenknowes?'" And while she went to fetch the violin, and as he cut his tobacco, he sang in a quavering voice—

"O the broom, the bonnie, bonnie broom,
The broom o' the Cowdenknowes,
I wish I were at hame again
Where the broom sae sweetly grows!"

And then he went to the window, to smoke his pipe in peace and quiet, while Maisrie, seated further back in the shadow of the room, played for him the well-

known air. Did she guess—and fear—that she might have an audience of more than one? At all events her doubts were soon resolved: when she had ceased, and after a second or so of silence, there came another sound into the prevailing hush—it was one of the Songs without Words, and it was being played with considerable delicacy and charm.

"Hallo," said Mr. Bethune, when he heard the first low-rippling notes, "have we a musical neighbour now?"

"Yes, grandfather," Maisrie replied, rather timidly. "Last night, when you were out, some one played."

"Ah, a music-mistress, I dare say. Poor thing—perhaps all alone—and wishing to be friendly in this sort of fashion."

They listened without further speech until the last notes had gradually died away.

"Now, Maisrie, it is your turn!"

"Oh, no, grandfather!" she said, hastily.

"Why not?"

"It would be like answering—to a stranger."

"And are we not all strangers?" he said, gently. "I think it is a very pretty idea, if that is what is meant. We'll soon see. Come, Maisrie; something more than the plashing of a southern fountain—something with northern fire in it. Why not 'Helen of Kirkconnell'?"

The girl was very obedient; she took up her violin; and presently she was playing that strangely simple air that nevertheless is about as proud and passionate and piteous as the tragic story to which it is wedded. Perhaps the stranger over there did not know the ballad; but George Bethune knew it only too well; and his voice almost broke into a sob as he said, when she had finished—

"Ah, Maisrie, it was no music-master taught you that; it was born in your nature. Sometimes I wonder if a capacity for intense sympathy means an equal capacity for suffering; it is sad if it should be so; a thick skin would be wholesomer—as far as I have seen the world; and few have seen more of it. Well, what has our neighbour to say?"

Their unseen companion on the other side of the little thoroughfare responded with a waltz of Chopin's—a mysterious, elusive sort of a thing, that seemed to fade away into the dark rather than to cease. Maisrie appeared disinclined to continue this *do ut des* programme; but her grandfather overruled her; and named the airs for her to play, one by one, in alternation with those coming from the open window opposite. At last she said she was tired. It was time for the gas to be lit, and the hot water brought up for her grandfather's toddy. So she closed the window and pulled down the blind; lit up the room; rang the bell for the hot water; and then placidly sate down to her knitting, whilst her

grandfather, brewing himself an unmistakable gude-willie waught, and lighting another pipe, proceeded to entertain her with a rambling disquisition upon the world at large, but especially upon his own travels and experiences therein, his philosophical theories, and his reminiscences of the Scotch countryside ballads of his youth.

That mystic and enigmatic conversation with their neighbour over the way was not continued on the following evening, for the old man and his granddaughter went to the theatre; but on the next night again it was resumed; and thereafter, on almost every evening, the two windows replied to each other, as the twilight deepened into dusk. And Maisrie was less reluctant now—she almost took this little concert *à deux* as a matter of course. For one thing, the stranger, whoever he or she might be, did not seem in any way anxious to push the acquaintance any further; no one ever appeared at that open window; nor had she ever encountered any one coming out as she stood on the doorstep waiting for her grandfather. As for him, he still maintained that the new occupant of those rooms must be a woman—perhaps some shy creature, willing to think that she had friendly neighbours, and yet afraid to show herself. Besides, the music that came in response to Maisrie's Scotch airs was hardly what a man would have chosen. The stranger over there seemed chiefly fond of Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Mozart; though occasionally there was an excursion into the *Volkslieder* domain—"*Zu Strassburg auf der Schanz*," "*Es ritten drei Reiter zum Thore hinaus*," "*Von meinetn Bergli muss i scheiden*," or something of that kind; whereas, if it had been a man who occupied those rooms, surely they would have heard—during the day, for example—a fine bold ditty like "Simon the Cellarer," "The Bay of Biscay," or "The Friar of Orders Gray," with a strident voice outroaring the accompaniment? Maisrie answered nothing to these arguments; but in spite of herself, when she had to cross the room for something or other, her eyes would seek that mysteriously vacant window, with however rapid and circumspect a glance. And always in vain. Moreover, the piano was never touched during the day: the stranger invariably waited for the twilight before seeking to resume that subtle link of communication.

Of course this state of things could not go on for ever—unless the person over there possessed the gift of invisibility. One morning as Maisrie and her grandfather were going out as usual for a stroll in the Park, she went downstairs first, and along the lobby, and opened the door, to wait for him. At the very same instant the door opposite was opened, and there, suddenly presented to her view, was a young man. He was looking straight across; she was looking straight across; their eyes met without the slightest chance of equivocation or denial; and each knew that this was recognition. They regarded each other but for a swift second; but as plainly as possible he had said to her "Do you guess? Are you angry? No, do not be angry!"—and then his glance was averted; he shut

the door behind him; and slowly proceeded on his way. Was she surprised? No. Perhaps she was startled by the unexpectedness of the meeting; perhaps her heart was beating a little more quickly than usual; but a profound instinct had already told her that it was no woman who had spoken to her in those dusky twilights, evening after evening. A woman would not have wrapped herself up in that mysterious secrecy. A woman who wished to make friends with her neighbours over the way would have come to the window, would have smiled, would have made some excuse for calling. Maisrie did not ostensibly look after the young man—but she could see him all the same, until he turned the corner. She was vaguely troubled. The brief glance she had met had in it a kind of appeal. And she wished to say in return that she was not offended; that, being strangers, they must remain strangers; but that she had not taken his boldness ill. She wished to say—she did not know what. Then her grandfather came down; and they went away together; but she uttered not a syllable as to what had just occurred. It was all a bewilderment to her—that left her a little breathless when she tried to think of it.

That night, when the customary time arrived, she refused to take up her violin; and when her grandfather remonstrated, she had no definite excuse. She hesitated and stammered—said they had not played chess for ever so long—or would he rather have a game of draughts?—anything but the violin.

"Are you forgetting your good-natured neighbour over there?" her grandfather asked. "It will be quite a disappointment for her. Poor thing, it appears to be the only society she has; we never hear a sound otherwise; there seems to be no one ever come to talk to her during the day, or we should hear a voice now and again."

"Yes, but, grandfather," said Maisrie, who seemed much embarrassed, "don't you think it a little imprudent to—to encourage this kind of—of answering each other—without knowing who the other person is?"

"Why, what can be more harmless!" he protested, cheerfully, and then he went on: "More harmless than music?—nothing, nothing! Song is the solace of human life; in joy it is the natural expression of our happiness—in times of trouble it refreshes the heart with thoughts of other and brighter days. A light heart—a heart that can sing to itself—that is the thing to carry you through life, Maisrie!" And he himself, as he crossed the room to fetch a box of matches, was trolling gaily, with a fine bravura execution—

"The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith,
Fu' loud the wind blows frae the ferry;
The ship rides by the Berwick Law,
And I maun leave my bonnie Mary."

Maisrie was not to be moved; but she appeared down-hearted a little. As time went on the silence in the little street seemed somehow to accuse her; she knew she was responsible. She was playing draughts with her grandfather, in a perfunctory sort of way. She remembered that glance of appeal—she could not forget it—and this had been her answer. Then all of a sudden her hand that hovered over the board trembled, and she had almost dropped the piece that was in her fingers: for there had sprang into the stillness a half-hushed sound—it was an air she knew well enough—she could almost recognise the words—

"Nachtigall, ich hör' dich singen;
S'Herz thut mir im Leibe springen,
Komm nur bald und sag mir's wohl,
Wie ich mich verhalten soll."

Her grandfather stopped the game to listen; and when the soft-toned melody had ceased, he said——

"There, now, Maisrie, that is an invitation: you must answer."

"No, no, grandfather," she said, almost in distress. "I would rather not—you don't know—you must find out something about—about whoever it is that plays. I am sure it will be better. Of course it is quite harmless, as you say—oh, yes, quite harmless—but I should like you to get to know first—quite harmless, of course—but I am frightened—about a stranger—not frightened, of course—but—don't ask me, grandfather!"

Well, it was not of much concern to him; and as he was winning all along the line, he willingly returned to the game. It had grown so dark, however, that Maisrie had to go and light the gas—having drawn down the blinds first, as was her invariable habit. When she came back to the table she seemed to breathe more freely; though she was thoughtful and pre-occupied—not with the game. The music on the other side of the way was not resumed that evening, as far as they could hear.

Several days passed; and each evening now was silent. Maisrie saw nothing more of the young man; indeed, she studiously refrained from glancing across to the other side of the street—except when she was going out, and wanted to make sure there was no one there. But something was now about to happen that entirely altered this disposition of affairs.

One morning George Bethune and his granddaughter had gone for their accustomed stroll in Hyde Park, and in course of time had taken their places on a bench near the Serpentine, while the old man had pulled out a newspa-

per and began to read it. The day was sultry, despite an occasional stirring of wind; and Maisrie sitting there, and having nothing to do but look at the water, and the trees, and the sky, observed that all the world around them was gradually growing darker. In the south, especially, the heavens were of a curious metallic hue—a livid grey, as it were; while across that hung two horizontal belts of deepest purple that remained motionless, while other and lighter tags of vapour were inter-twisting with each other or melting away into nothingness. Those two clouds were not of the usual cloud-form at all—they were rather like two enormous torpedoes lying one above the other; and there was a sombre deadness of hue about them that looked ominous. Suddenly, as she was thus vaguely regarding those long purple swathes, there ran across them—springing vertically upwards—a quivering line of yellow flame—so thin it was, it appeared like a thread of golden wire—and when that had vanished, there was a second or two of silence, followed by a dull, low, rumbling noise that seemed to come from a considerable distance. She was not much alarmed. There were no signs of a terrific thunderstorm; probably a few more flashes would serve to loosen and disperse those lowering clouds, and allow the day to clear.

It was at this moment that a young man came up and addressed Mr. Bethune—with a certain courteous hesitation, and yet in frank and ingenuous tones.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, "but may I claim the privilege of a neighbour to offer you this umbrella—I'm afraid there's a shower coming—and the young lady may get wet."

It was a pleasant voice; George Bethune looked up well-disposed towards the stranger, whoever he might be. And the face of the young man was also prepossessing; it was something more than handsome; it was intelligent and refined; and the honest and straightforward eyes had a certain confidence in them, as if they were not used to having their friendly advances repulsed.

"I thank you—I thank you," said George Bethune, with much dignity. "I had not observed. But you will want the umbrella for yourself—we can get shelter under one of the trees."

"Would that be wise, sir, in a thunderstorm?" said the young man. "Oh, no, let me give you the umbrella—I don't mind a shower—and it won't be more than that, I fancy."

George Bethune accepted the proffered courtesy.

"Here, Maisrie, since this young gentleman is so kind; you'd better be prepared. A neighbour did you say, sir?" he continued.

"A very near neighbour," answered the young man, with a smile, and he seated himself by the side of Mr. Bethune without more ado. "I have often thought of speaking to you, and asking to be allowed to make your acquaintance;

for you seem to have very few visitors—you will pardon my curiosity—while I have none at all."

"Oh, really, really," the old man said, somewhat vaguely; perhaps he was wondering how so faultlessly attired a young gentleman (his patent-leather boots, for example, were of the most approved pattern) should have chosen lodgings in so humble a thoroughfare.

"It is a very quiet little corner, is it not?" the young man said—almost as if answering that unspoken question. "That is why it suits me so well; I can get on with my books without interruption. The street is so small that it isn't worth an organ-grinder's while to waste time in it."

"Music is a sad thing for interrupting study; I know that," the old gentleman observed. "By the way, I hope we do not disturb you—my granddaughter plays the violin sometimes—"

"I could listen to that kind of music all day long," was the response. "I never heard such violin-playing—most beautiful!—most beautiful!"

"Then you are not far away from us?"

"Right opposite," was the straightforward answer.

George Bethune glanced at the young man with a look of quiet amusement; he was thinking of the pale music-mistress—the solitary widow of his imagination.

"And you—you also play a little in the evenings sometimes?"

"I hope you didn't think it rude, sir," the young man said, humbly. "I thought it permissible, as between neighbours."

"Oh, they were pretty little concerts," said George Bethune, good-naturedly. "Very pretty little concerts. I don't know why they were stopped. I suppose Maisrie had some fancy about them—my granddaughter Maisrie—"

It was a kind of introduction. The young man, modestly veiling the quick flash of delight in his eyes at this unexpected happiness, respectfully bowed. Maisrie, with her beautiful pale face suffused with unusual colour, made some brief inclination also; then she seemed to retire again from this conversation—though she could not but overhear.

"My name is Harris," the young man said, as though these confidences were all as a matter of course between neighbours. "It isn't a very distinguished name; but one has to take what is given one. It is not of much consequence."

"I am not so sure about that," the older man rejoined, somewhat sententiously. "A good name is a good thing; it is an honour not to be purchased. It may be the only one of your possessions remaining to you; but of that they cannot rob you."

"Oh, of course, of course," Vincent said, quickly, for he perceived the mistake he had made. "An old historic name is certainly something to be proud of.

By the way, sir, did your family originally take their name from Bethon on the Sarthe or from Bethune in the Department of Calais?"

"Bethune—Bethune," said the old man, who appeared to be pleased by this question, which spoke of previous enquiries; and then he added, with a lofty air: "The Duc de Sully, Marquis de Rosny, Sovereign Prince of Enrichemont and Boisbel, Grand Master of the Artillery and Marshal of France, was Maximilien de Bethune—Maximilien de Bethune."

"Oh, really," said the young man, who seemed much impressed.

"The name," continued old George Bethune, in the same oracular vein, "was often spelt Beaton and Beton—especially in Scotland—as everybody knows. Whether James, Archbishop of Glasgow, and his nephew David, Archbishop of St. Andrews, had any immediate relationship with France—beyond that David was consecrated Bishop of Mirepoix when he was negotiating the marriage of James V. at the French Court—I cannot at the moment precisely say; but of this there can be no doubt, that from Bethune in the north came the original territorial designation of the family, not from Bethon in the west. Maximilien de Bethune—Bethune in the Department of the Straits of Calais."

"Oh really," the young man said again, quite humbly.

Now by this time it had become manifest that there was to be no thunderstorm at all. There had been a few more of those quivering strokes of yellow fire (that dwelt longer on the retina than in the clouds) accompanied by some distant mutterings and rumblings; and at one point it seemed as if the dreaded shower were coming on; but all passed off gradually and quietly; the sky slowly brightened; a pale sunshine began here and there to touch the greensward and the shivering elms. This young man had no excuse for remaining here; but he seemed to forget; he was so busy talking—and talking in a very pleased and half-excited fashion, with an occasional glance across at the young lady.

"Grandfather," said Maisrie Bethune, presently, handing him the umbrella as a sort of hint.

But even when Vincent received his property back, he appeared to take no heed. He had observed that the newspaper lying on the old man's knee was the *Toronto Globe*; he drew attention to the circumstance; and now all his conversation was of Queen's Park, Lake Ontario, of King Street, Queen Street, Church Street, of the Exhibition Grounds, of Park Island, and Block House Bay, and the Royal Canadian Yacht Club. So he had been there too? Oh, yes, he had been all over Canada and America. He was as familiar with Idaho as with Brooklyn. He had fished in the Adirondacks and shot mountain sheep in the Rockies.

"You have been to Omaha, then?" the old man asked.

"Oh, yes, of course."

"For my granddaughter here," he continued, with a smile, "is an Omaha

girl."

"Oh, indeed," said Vincent, rather breathlessly, and again he ventured to look across to Maisrie Bethune and her downcast eyes.

"Yes, but only by the accident of birth," said George Bethune, instantly, as if he must needs guard against any misapprehension. "Every drop of blood in her veins is Scotch—and of a right good quality too. Well, you have heard—you have heard. Do you think any one could understand those old Scotch airs who was not herself Scotch in heart and soul?"

"I never heard anything so beautiful," the young man answered, in an undertone; indeed, he seemed hardly capable of talking about her, any more than he could fix his eyes steadily on her face. His forced glances were timorous and fugitive. There was something sacred—that kept him at a distance. It was enough to be conscious that she was there; his only prayer was that she should remain; that he and she should be together, if a little way apart, looking at the same skies and water and trees, breathing the same air, hearkening to the same sounds. So he kept on talking to the old man, in rather a nervous and eager fashion, fearful all the time that either of them should propose to go.

And thus it came about that Vincent Harris seemed to have a good deal to say for himself; he appeared to forget that he was speaking to two strangers; rather he was chatting with two neighbours, whom he wished to be his friends. And the old man, in his self-sufficient and dignified way, was quite content to encourage this new acquaintance. His conversation was something to pass the time withal; he was modest, well-mannered, intelligent; there was an air of distinction about him that showed good up-bringing as well as some decision of character. No doubt he was of a wealthy family, or he could not have spent so much of his time in travel; by accident he had mentioned one or two well-known people as though he were in the habit of familiarly meeting with them; from some passing hint as to the nature of his studies, Mr. Bethune gathered that this pleasant-spoken, pleasant-smiling neighbour was destined for a public career. There was even something interesting, to one who had grown old and callous of the world's shows, in noting the bright enthusiasm of the young man, the clear light in his eyes, the general air of strength and ease and courage that sate lightly on him, as befitting one who was in the very May-morn of his youth.

But at last, for shame's sake, Vincent had himself to rise and break up this all too-attractive companionship. He said, with great humility:

"I am sure I ought to apologise to Miss Bethune for having taken up so much of your time. Rather an unwarrantable intrusion; but I don't think there is any chance of the rain coming now—and—and—so I will say good-bye."

"Good-bye—glad to have made your acquaintance," said old George Bethune, with a grave courtesy.

And Maisrie made him a little bow—for he was looking at her rather supplicatingly—as he raised his hat and withdrew. Their eyes had met once more: she could not well have avoided that. And of course she saw him as he walked away southward, across the bridge, until he disappeared.

"A very agreeable young man, that," said Mr. Bethune, with decision, as he rose to his feet and intimated to his granddaughter that they had better set forth again. "Frank in manner, gentle, courteous, intelligent, too—very different from most of the young men of the day."

His granddaughter was silent as she walked by his side.

"What—don't you think so, Maisrie?" he said, with a touch of impatience, for he was used to her assent.

"I think," she answered, a little proudly, "that he showed a good deal of confidence in coming to speak to you without knowing you; and as for his playing those airs in the evening, and in such a way—well, I don't like to use the word impertinence—but still——"

He was surprised; perhaps a trifle vexed.

"Impertinence? Nonsense! Nonsense! Frankness and neighbourliness—that was all; no intrusion, none: a more modest young man I have never met. And as for his coming up to speak to me, why, bless my life, that merely shows the humanizing effects of travel. It is like people meeting at a table d'hôte; and what is the world but a big table d'hôte, where you speak with your neighbour for a little while, and go your way, and forget him? Confidence?—impertinence?—nonsense! He was natural, unaffected, outspoken, as a young man should be: in fact, I found myself on such friendly terms with him that I forgot to thank him for the little service he did us—did you, I should say. Bashfulness, Maisrie," he continued, in his more sententious manner, "bashfulness and stiffness are among the worst characteristics of the untravelled and untaught. Who are we—whatever may be our lineage and pride of birth—that we should fence ourselves round with a palisade of suspicion or disdain?"

And thus he went on; but he met with no response. And he did not like it; he grew all the more emphatic about this young man; and even hinted that women were curiously perverse creatures, who evinced no toleration, or sympathy, or good nature in their judgment of their fellow beings. What was her objection? To his appearance?—he was remarkably good-looking, and refined in aspect, without a trace of effeminacy. To his manner?—he was almost humble in his anxiety to please. To his talk?—but he had shown himself most bright, good-humoured, alert, and well-informed.

"He had no right to come up and speak to you, grandfather," was all she would say, and that with a quite unusual firmness.

In the evening, after dinner, when the time came at which Maisrie was

accustomed to take up her violin, there was obviously a little embarrassment. But George Bethune tried to break through that by a forced display of geniality.

"Come, now, Maisrie," said he, in a gay fashion, "our neighbour over the way was straightforward enough to come up and offer us his hand; and we must return the compliment. One good turn deserves another. Get your violin, and play something: he will understand."

"Grandfather, how can you ask me?" she said, almost indignantly; and there was that in the tone of her voice that forbade him to press her further.

But perhaps the universal stillness that prevailed thereafter conveyed some kind of reproach to her; or perhaps her heart softened a little; at all events she presently said, in rather a low voice, and with a diffident manner—

"Grandfather, if you—if you really think the young gentleman wished to be kind and obliging—and—and if you would like to show him some little politeness in return—couldn't you step across the way—and—and see him, and talk to him for a few minutes? Perhaps he would be glad of that, if he is quite alone."

"A capital idea, Maisrie," the old man said, rising at once. "A capital idea." And then he added, with an air of lofty complacency and condescension, as he selected a couple of volumes from a heap of books on the sideboard: "Perhaps I might as well take over the *Mémoires* with me; it is not at all unlikely he may wish to know something further about Maximilien de Bethune. I am not surprised—not at all surprised—that a young man called Harris should perceive that there is something in the grandeur of an old historical name."

CHAPTER IV.

STALLED OX AND A DINNER OF HERBS.

But on this particular evening, as it happened, Vincent had promised to dine at home; for his aunt was returning to Brighton on the following day; and there was to be a little farewell banquet given in her honour. Of course aunt and nephew sate together; Mrs. Ellison had arranged that; knowing that at these semi-political dinner-parties the company was frequently a trifle mixed, she took care that on one side at least she should have a pleasant neighbour. And indeed when the guests had taken their places—there were about thirty in all—the table presented a pretty sight. From end to end it was a mass of flowers; at intervals there were pyramids of ice, draped with roses, blush-red and yellow; but the

candles in the tall candelabra were not lit—the softly-tinted globes of the electric light shed a sufficient and diffused lustre. It was a sumptuous entertainment; and yet there prevailed an air of elegance and refinement. When soup was served, it was not the aldermanic turtle, but a clear golden fluid with gems of crimson and green; and it was handed round in silver dishes. No one thought of a thick soup on this hot June night.

As soon as the hum of conversation became general, the tall and handsome young widow turned to her companion—who was only a year or two her junior, by the way—and with her demure and mischievous eyes grown full of meaning she said—

"Vin, what has happened to you to-day?"

"What do you mean, aunt?" he answered, with some surprise.

"Something has happened to you to-day," she went on, confidently. "You can't hoodwink me. Why have you been so radiant, so complaisant, this afternoon—why are you here, for example—when you haven't shown up at this dinner-table for weeks past?"

"And you going away to-morrow, aunt!" he exclaimed.

"No use, Vin. All of a sudden you want to be magnanimous to the whole human race; your amiability becomes almost burdensome; your eyes are full of pride and joy; and you think you can hide the transformation from me! Well, then, I will tell you, since you won't tell me: to-day you were introduced to her."

He was startled—and no wonder: had his aunt, by some extraordinary chance, witnessed that interview in Hyde Park? Mrs. Ellison's shrewd, quick eyes noticed his alarm, and laughed.

"The story is as clear as noonday," she continued, in the same undertone. "You come home every night between nine and ten. Why? Because she is an actress, playing in the first piece only; and of course the theatre loses its attraction for you the moment she has left. Now, my dear Vin, that is not the kind of thing for you at all! You'd better stop it—even although you have experienced the wild joy of being introduced to her. What do you know about her? You have been investing her with all the charming qualities of her stage heroines; you haven't learnt yet that she is a little slatternly in her dress, that her tastes in eating and drinking are rather coarse, that her tastes in literature and art aren't any—worse still, that she is already provided with a husband, a lounger about Strand public-houses, only too ready to accept your patronage and the price of a glass of gin—"

He was immensely relieved.

"Oh, you're all wrong, aunt!" he said, cheerfully. "I haven't been inside a theatre for six months!"

"You haven't?" she said, glancing at him with a kind of amused suspicion. "You are really playing the good boy with Parliamentary reports and blue books?

A very admirable diligence. Other young men would be strolling in the Park, in this hot weather." And then all of a sudden she asked: "What subject were you studying to-day, Vin?"

"Thompson's Distribution of Wealth," he made answer, with equal promptitude.

"Oh. What does he say?"

"You don't want to know, aunt!"

"Yes, I do: I'm used to hearing all sorts of theories at this table—though I seldom see them put in practice."

Well, he on his side was glad enough to get away from that other and dangerous topic; and whether or not he believed in her innocent desire for knowledge, he began to discourse on the possibility of universal human happiness being reached by a voluntary equality in the distribution of the products of labour.

"Voluntary, do you see, aunt?—that is the very essence of the scheme," he rambled on, while she appeared to be listening gravely. "Thompson will have nothing to do with force; he himself points out that if you once bring in force to redress the inequalities of wealth, you leave it open for every succeeding majority to employ the same means, so that industry would be annihilated: the capitalists would not lend, the workers would not work. No, it is all to be done by mutual consent. Those who have wealth at present are not to be disturbed; what they have amassed is but a trifle compared with what the millions can produce; and it is this product of universal co-operation that is to constitute the real wealth of the world. Well, I suppose it is only a dream," he proceeded. "On the other hand, take my father's way of looking at it. He is all for State interference; the State is to appropriate everything and manage everything; and to keep on managing it, I suppose, or else things would revert to their former condition. That's where the trouble comes in, of course. The moment you allow anything like freedom of contract, how can you prevent the former condition of affairs coming into existence again? You know, after all, aunt, there is generally a reason for the institutions and social arrangements of any country; they don't spring out of nothing; they grow, and their growth is a necessity—"

"Vincent Harris," said the young widow, solemnly, "I perceive the seeds of a rabid Toryism beginning to sprout in your young mind. Wouldn't your father say that the reason for the monstrous condition of affairs now existing—I don't consider them monstrous; not I; I'm pretty well content, thank you—but wouldn't he say the reason was simply the ignorance of the people who produce and the unscrupulous greed of the other people who take the lion's share of the profits? Of course he would; and so he wants to educate the producer; and protect him by the State; and see that he isn't swindled. Go to; thou art Didymus, and an unbeliever; I suspect Lord Musselburgh has been corrupting you. Tell me," she

said, irrelevantly, "who is the woman with the black curls—I did not catch her name when she was introduced to me—"

He was delighted that she showed no sign of returning to that awkward topic.

"Goodness gracious me, aunt," said he, glancing in the direction indicated, where sat an elderly lady, thin and gaunt and pale, with large lustrous black eyes, and black hair clone up in the fashion of a generation ago, "do you mean to say you don't know Madame Mikucsek?"

"Who is Madame—What-is-it?"

"You never even heard of her!" he exclaimed, in affected astonishment. "Madame Mikucsek—the discoverer of the Mystery of the East—the Prophetess of the New Religion—who has her followers and disciples all over the world—from Syria to the Himalayas—from New York to Sacramento. Really, aunt, you surprise me: you will be saying next you never heard of *Bô*."

"What is Bô—or who is he?" she demanded, impatiently.

"*Bô*," he repeated, as if he were too puzzled by her appalling ignorance to be able to explain, "why, *Bô—Bô* is the equivalent of the Chinese *Tá*. It is the principle of life; it is the beginning and the end of all things; it is the condition of the soul—and yet not quite the condition of the soul, for the soul can live outside *Bô* until the miracle of initiation happens. Then the soul is received into *Bô*, and finds that the present is non-existent, and that only the past and the future exist, the future being really the past, when once the soul has entered *Bô*—"

"Vin, I believe you are making a fool of me," the pretty Mrs. Ellison said, severely.

"Oh, I assure you, aunt," he said, with eyes innocent of guile, "it is the great discovery of the age—the great discovery of all time—the Sacred—the Ineffable. When you enter into *Bô* you lose your individuality—or rather, you never had any individuality—for individuality was a confusion of thought, a product of the present, and the present, as I have explained to you, my dear aunt, ceases to exist when you have entered *Bô*. Did I tell you that *Bô* is sentient? Yes, but yet not a being; though there are manifestations, mysterious and ecstatic; and the disciples write to each other on the first day of each month, and tell each other what trances they have been in, and what spiritual joy they have received. These reports are sent to Madame Mikucsek; and they are published in a journal that circulates among the initiated; but the phraseology is hieratic, the outside world could make nothing of it. As for her, she is not expected to reveal anything—what she experiences transcends human speech, and even human thought—"

"I saw the woman mopping up gravy with a piece of bread," said Mrs. Ellison, with frowning eyebrows.

"*Bô*," continued the young man, very seriously, "as far as I have been able to

make it out, consists of a vast sphere; elliptical, however: the zenith containing all human aspiration, the base consisting of forgotten evil. When you once enter this magic circle, you are lost, you are transformed, you are here and yet not here; to be does not signify to be but not to be; and not to be is the highest good except not to have been. *Bô*, when once you have received the consecration, and bathed in the light, and perceived the altitudes and the essential deeps and cognisances—"

"Ought to be written Bosh," said she, briefly. "I will not hear any more of that nonsense. And I believe you are only humbugging me: Madame What's-her-name looks more like the widow of a French Communist. Now listen to me, Vin, for I am going away to-morrow. I am glad I was mistaken about the actress; but take care; don't get into scrapes. I shan't be happy till I see you married. Ordinarily a man should not marry until he is thirty or five-and-thirty—if he is five-and-forty so much the better—but even at five-and-thirty, he may have acquired a little judgment; he may be able to tell how much honesty there is in the extreme amiability and unselfishness and simplicity that a young woman can assume, or whether she is likely to turn out an ill-conditioned, cross-grained, and sulking brute. Oh, you needn't laugh: it's no laughing matter, as you'll find out, my young friend. But you—you are different; you are no schoolboy; you've seen the world—too much of it, for you've learnt disrespect for your elders, and try to bamboozle them with accounts of sham systems of philosophy or religion or whatever it is. I say you ought to marry young; but not an elderly woman, as many a young man does, for money or position. Good gracious, no! You'll have plenty of money; your father isn't just yet going to sell this silver dinner-service—which I detest, for it always looks more greasy than china, and besides you feel as if you were scoring it with the edge of your knife all the time—I say he isn't going to sell his silver and distribute unto the poor just yet. As for position, you've got to make that for yourself: would you owe it to your wife? Very well," proceeded his pretty monitress, in her easy and prattling fashion; "come down to Brighton for a week or two. I will ask the Drexel girls; you will have them all to yourself, to pick and choose from, but Louie is my favourite. You have no idea how delightful Brighton is in June—the inland drives are perfect, so cool and shaded with trees, when you know where to go, that is. If you come down I'll make up a party and take you all to Ascot: Mrs. Bourke has offered me her house for the week—isn't that good-natured, when she could easily have let it?—and I have to telegraph yes or no to-morrow. I hadn't intended going myself; but if you say you will come down, I will accept; and I know I can get the Drexel girls."

"It is so kind of you, aunt; so very kind," he said; "but I really can't get away. You know I don't care much about racing—

"But Louie Drexel isn't racing."

"I'm very sorry, but you must excuse me, aunt," he said contritely.

"Oh—distribution of wealth—supply and demand—sugar-bounties and blue-books—is that it? Well, well, what the young men of the present day are coming to—"

She could say no more; for at this moment her neighbour, an elderly and learned gentleman from Oxford, addressed her. He had not hitherto uttered a word, having paid strict attention to every dish and every wine (albeit he was a lean and famished-looking person); but now he remarked that the evenings were hot for the middle of June. He spoke of the danger of having recourse to iced fluids. Then he went on to compare the bathing of the Greeks and Romans with the ablutions of the English—until he was offered strawberries, whereupon, having helped himself largely, he fell into a business-like silence again.

When at length the ladies had gone upstairs, Lord Musselburgh came and took the seat just vacated by Mrs. Ellison.

"I have a commission from your father, Vin," said he. "I am to persuade you of the sweet reasonableness of his project—that you should for a time become the private secretary of Mr. Ogden."

"The private secretary of a man who hasn't an *h*!" retorted Master Vin, with scorn.

"What has that to do with it?" the young nobleman said, coolly. "No. After all, there is something in what your father says. He believes that the next great political and social movement will be the emancipation of the wage-earner—the securing to the producer his fair share of the products of his labour. If that is so, it will be a big thing. It will be years before it comes off, no doubt; but then there will be a great wave of public opinion; and if you are prepared—if you are there—if you are identified with this tremendous social revolution, why, that magnificent wave will peacefully and calmly lift you into the Cabinet. I think that's about his notion. Very well. If you are willing to take up this work, how could you begin better than by becoming private secretary to Josiah Ogden? There you would come into direct touch with the masses; you would get to know at first hand what they are thinking of, what they are hoping for; subsequently, you could speak with authority. Then there's another thing, Vin. If you want to become a figure in public life in England, if you want to build a splendid monument for yourself, you should begin at the base. Capture the multitude; be as red-hot a Radical as they can desire; and they won't mind what you do afterwards. You may accept office; you may be petted by Royalty; but they will rather like it—they will look on it as a compliment paid to one of themselves. And that is where Ogden would come in. He, too, is one of themselves—though he has his hired brougham when he comes to town, and his big dinners at the Menagerie Club. What have you got to do with his *h*'s? If I want to back a horse, or order a pair

of boots, or have my hair cut, what does it matter to me whether the man has an *h*, or a superfluity of *h*'s? You make him useful to you; you get what you want; isn't that enough?"

"Oh, no, it is not," Vincent rejoined—but respectfully, for he never forgot that Lord Musselburgh was his senior by very nearly five years. "You see, you don't go into partnership with your hairdresser, and you don't put your name over the bootmaker's shop. And I shouldn't learn much from Mr. Ogden, for I don't believe in his machine-made politics—everything to be done by committees, and resolutions, and majorities. I expect to find him starting a Society for the Suppression of Punch and Judy Shows, so that the infantile mind of England may not be corrupted by exhibitions of brutality."

"He is a very able man, let me tell you that," said Musselburgh, with decision. "And a capital speaker—a slogger, of course, but that is wanted for big crowds. And sometimes he turns out a neat thing. Did you notice what he said at Sheffield the other day—telling the working men not to be too grateful for rich men's charities—for recreation grounds, drinking fountains, and the like? What he said was this—'When the capitalist has robbed Peter, it is easy for him to salve his conscience by throwing a crust to Paul'—not bad. I think you might do worse, Vin, than become Ogden's private secretary. Pretty hard work, of course; but the modern young man, in politics, is supposed to be thoroughly in earnest: if he isn't he will have to reckon with the evening papers, for they don't like to be trifled with."

The subject was not a grateful one, apparently; Vincent changed it.

"Do you remember," he said, with some little diffidence, "that—that I was in your house one afternoon a few weeks ago when an old gentleman called—and—and his granddaughter—"

"The perfervid old Scotchman—yes!"

"How did you come to know him?" the young man asked, with downcast eyes.

"I hardly recollect. Let me see. I think he first of all wrote to me, enclosing a note of introduction he had brought from a friend of mine in New York—a brother Scot. Then, as you saw, he called, and told me something further about a book he is going to bring out; and I gave him some little assistance—I don't think he is above accepting a few sovereigns from any one to help him on his way through the world."

Vin Harris flushed hotly—and he raised his head and looked his friend straight in the face as he put the next question.

"But—but he is a gentleman!—his name—his family—even his bearing—"

"Oh, yes, yes, I suppose so," Lord Musselburgh said, lightly. "Poor old fellow, I was glad to lend him a helping hand. I think his enthusiasm, his patriotism,

was genuine; and it is a thing you don't often meet with nowadays."

"Yes—but—but—-" Vincent said, with a good deal of embarrassment, and yet with some touch of half-indignant remonstrance, "the money you gave him—that was to aid him in bringing out the book, wasn't it?"

"Certainly, certainly!" the other made answer—he did not happen to notice the expression on his friend's face. "Something about Scotland—Scotch poetry—I think when he wrote he said something about a dedication, but that is an honour I hardly covet."

"In any case," observed the young man, "you have no right to say he would accept money from—from anyone—from a stranger."

Then Lord Musselburgh did look up—struck by something in his companion's tone.

"Did I say that? I'm sure I don't know. Of course it was on account of the book that I ventured to give him some little help—oh, yes, certainly—I should not have ventured otherwise. If he had been offended, I dare say he would have said so; but I fancy the old gentleman has had to overcome his pride before now. He seems to have led a curious, wandering life. By the way, Vin, weren't you very much impressed by the young lady—I remember your saying something—"

Fortunately there was no need for Vincent to answer this question; for now there began a general movement on the part of the remaining guests to go upstairs to the drawing-room; and in this little bit of a bustle he escaped from further cross-examination.

When at the end of the evening all the people had gone away, and when Harland Harris had shut himself up in his study to finish his correspondence—for he was going down the next morning to a Congress of Co-operative Societies at Ipswich—Mrs. Ellison and her nephew found themselves alone in the drawing-room; and the fair young widow must needs return to the subject she had been discoursing upon at dinner—namely, that this young man, in order to guard against pitfalls and embroilments, should get married forthwith.

"You seem anxious that I should marry," said he, bluntly; "why don't you get married yourself?"

"Oh, no, thank you!" she replied, with promptitude. "I know when I have had—" Apparently she was on the point of saying that she knew when she had had enough; but that would not have been complimentary to the memory of the deceased; so she abruptly broke off—and then resumed. "It isn't necessary for me to make any further experiments in life; but for you, with such a splendid future before you, it is a necessity. As for me, I mean to let well alone. And it is well—very well. I do believe, Vin, that I am the only woman on this earth—"

"What?" he said.

"—who is really contented. I am too happy. Sometimes I'm afraid; it seems

as if I had no right to it. Why, when I come downstairs in the morning, and draw an easy-chair to the open windows—especially when there is a breeze coming off the sea, and the sun-blinds are out, and the balcony nicely shaded, you know—I mean at home, in Brunswick Terrace—well, when I take up the newspaper and begin to read about what's going on—as if it was all some kind of a distant thing—I feel so satisfied with the quiet and the coolness and the sea-air that I am bound to do a little kindness to somebody, and so I turn to the columns where appeals are made for charity. I don't care what it is; I'm so well content that I must give something to somebody—distressed Irish widows, sailors' libraries, days in the country, anything. I dare say I sometimes give money where I shouldn't; but how am I to know?—and at any rate it pleases me."

"But why shouldn't you be happy, aunt?" said the young man. "You are so good-humoured, and so kind, and so nice to look at, that it is no wonder you are such a favourite, with men especially."

"Oh, yes," she said, frankly. "Men are always nice to you—except the one you happen to marry; and I'm not going to spoil the situation. At present they're all sweetness, and that suits me: I'm not going to give any one of them the chance of showing himself an ungrateful brute. When I come downstairs at Brighton, I like to see only one cup on the breakfast-table, and to feel that I have the whole room to myself. Selfish?—then you can make amends by sending something to the Children's Hospital or the People's Palace or something of that kind."

"Do you know, aunt," he observed, gravely, "what Mr. Ogden says of you? He says that, having robbed Peter, you try to salve your conscience by throwing a crust to Paul."

"When did I rob Peter?—what Peter?" she said, indignantly.

"You are a capitalist—you have more than your own share—you possess what you do not work for—therefore you are a robber and a plunderer. I am sorry for you, aunt; but Mr. Ogden has pronounced your doom—

"Mr. Ogden——!" she said, with angry brows—and then she stopped.

"Yes, aunt?" he said, encouragingly.

"Oh, nothing. But I tell you this, Vin. You were talking of the proper distribution of wealth. Well, when you come to marry, and if I approve of the girl, I mean to distribute a little of my plunder—of my ill-gotten gains—in that direction: she shan't come empty-handed. That is, if I approve of her, you understand. And the best thing you can do is to alter your mind and come down to Brighton for a week or two; and I'll send for the Drexel girls and perhaps one or two more. If you can't just at present, you may later on. Now I'm going off to my room; and I'll say good-bye as well as good-night; for I don't suppose I shall see you in the morning.

"Good-night, then, and good-bye, aunt!" said he, as he held her hand for a

second; and that was the last that he saw of her for some considerable time.

For a great change was about to take place in this young man's position and circumstances, in his interests, and ambitions, and trembling hopes. He was about to enter wonderland—that so many have entered, stealthily and almost fearing—that so many remember, and perhaps would fain forget. Do any remain in that mystic and rose-hued region? Some, at least, have never even approached it; for its portals are not easily discoverable, are not discoverable at all, indeed, except by the twin torches of imagination and abolition of self.

When he went up to his chambers the next morning he was surprised to find a card lying on the table; he had not expected a visitor in this secluded retreat. And when he glanced at the name, he was still more perturbed. What an opportunity he had missed! Perhaps Mr. Bethune had brought an informal little invitation for him—the first overture of friendliness? He might have spent the evening in the hushed, small parlour over the way, with those violin strains vibrating through the dusk; or, with the lights ablaze, he might have sate and listened to the old man's tales of travel, while Maisrie Bethune would be sitting at her needle-work, but looking up from time to time—each glance a world's wonder! And what had he had in exchange?—a vapid dinner-party; some talk about socialism; an invitation that he should descend into the catacombs of North of England politics and labour mole-like there to no apparent end; finally, a promise that if he would only marry the young lady of Mrs. Ellison's choice—presumably one of her American friends—his bride should have some additional dowry to recommend her. What were all those distant schemes, and even the brilliant future that everybody seemed to prophesy for him, to the bewildering possibilities that were almost within his reach? He went to the window. The pots of musk, and lobelia, and ox-eye daisies, in the little balcony over there, and also the Virginia creeper intertwisting its sprays through the iron bars, seemed fresh: no doubt she had sprinkled them with water before leaving with her grandfather. And had they gone to Hyde Park as usual? He was sorely tempted to go in search; but something told him this might provoke suspicions; so he resolutely hauled in a chair to the table and set to work with his books and annotations—though sometimes there came before his eyes a nebulous vision, as of a sheet of silver-grey water and a shimmering of elms.

In the afternoon he went out and bought a clothes-brush, a couple of hair-brushes, some scented soap, and other toilet requisites—of which he had not hitherto known the need in these chambers; and about five o'clock or a little thereafter, having carefully removed the last speck from his coat-sleeve, he crossed the way, and rather timidly knocked at the door. It was opened by the landlady's daughter, who appeared at once surprised and pleased on finding who this visitor was.

"Is Mr. Bethune at home?" he demanded—with some vaguely uncomfortable feeling that this damsel's eyes looked too friendly. She seemed to understand everything—to have been expecting him.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"May I go upstairs?"

He gave no name; but she did not hesitate for a moment. She led the way upstairs; she tapped lightly; and in answer to Mr. Bethune's loud "Come in!" she opened the door, and said—

"The young gentleman, sir,"—a form of announcement that might have struck Vincent as peculiar if he had not been much too occupied to notice.

"Ah, how do you do—how do you do?" old George Bethune (who was alone) called out, and he pushed aside his book and came forward with extended hand. "Nothing like being neighbourly; solitary units in the great sea of London life have naturally some interest in each other: you would gather that I looked in on you last night—"

"Yes," said the young man, as he took the proffered chair. "I am very sorry I happened to be out—I had to dine at home last evening—"

"At home?" repeated Mr. Bethune, looking for the moment just a trifle puzzled.

"Oh, yes," said his visitor, rather nervously. "Perhaps I didn't explain. I don't *live* over there, you know. I only have the rooms for purposes of study; the place is so quiet I can get on better than at home; there are no interruptions—"

"Except a little violin-playing?" the old man suggested, good-naturedly.

"I wish there were more of that, sir," Vincent observed, respectfully. "That was only in the evenings; and I used to wait for it, to tell you the truth, as a kind of unintentional reward after my day's work. But of late I have heard nothing; I hope that Miss Bethune was not offended that I ventured to—to open my piano at the same time—"

"Oh, not at all—I can hardly think so," her grandfather said, airily. "She also has been busy with her books of late—it is Dante, I believe, at present—and as I insist on her always reading aloud, whatever the language is, she goes upstairs to her own room; so that I haven't seen much of her in the evenings. Now may I offer you a cigar?"

"No, thank you."

"Or a glass of claret?"

"No, thanks."

"Then tell me what your studies are, that we may become better acquainted."

And Vincent was about to do that when the door behind him opened. Instinctively he rose and turned. The next instant Maisrie Bethune was before

him—looking taller, he thought, than he had, in Hyde Park, imagined her to be. She saluted him gravely and without embarrassment; perhaps she had been told of his arrival; it was he who was, for the moment, somewhat confused, and anxious to apologise and explain. But, curiously enough, that was only a passing phase. When once he had realised that she also was in the room—not paying much attention, perhaps, but listening when she chose, as she attended to some flowers she had brought for the central table—all his embarrassment fled, and his natural buoyancy and confidence came to his aid. She, on her side, seemed to consider that she was of no account; that she was not called upon to interfere in this conversation between her grandfather and his guest. When she had finished with the flowers, she went to the open window, and took her seat, opening out some needlework she had carried thither. The young man could see she had beautiful hands—rather long, perhaps, but exquisitely formed: another wonder! But the truly extraordinary thing—the enchantment—was that here he was in the same room with her, likely to become her friend, and already privileged to speak so that she could hear!

For of course he was aware that he had an audience of two; and very well he talked, in his half-excited mood. There was no more timidity; there was a gay self-assertion—a desire to excel and shine; sometimes he laughed, and his laugh was musical. He had skillfully drawn from the old man a confession of political faith (of course he was a Conservative, as became one of the Bethunes of Balloray), so all chance of collision was avoided on that point; and indeed Vin Harris was ready to have sworn that black was white, so eager was he to make an impression, on this his first, and wondrous visit.

The time went by all too quickly; but the young man had become intoxicated by this unexpected joy; instead of getting up and apologising, and taking his hat, and going away, he boldly threw out the suggestion that these three—these solitary units in the great sea of London life, as George Bethune had called them—should determine to spend the evening together. He did not seem to be aware of the audacity of his proposal; he was carrying everything before him in a high-handed fashion; the touch of colour that rose to Maisrie Bethune's cheek—what of that? Oh, yes, maiden shyness, no doubt; but of little consequence; here were the golden moments—here the golden opportunity: why should they separate?

"You see," said he, "I don't care to inconvenience our people at home by my uncertain hours; and so of late I have taken to dining at a restaurant, just when I felt inclined; and I have got to know something of the different places. I think we might go out for a little stroll, as the evening will be cooler now, and wander on until we see a quiet and snug-looking corner. There is something in freedom of choice; and you may catch sight of a bay window, or of a recess with flowers

in it, and a bit of a fountain that tempts the eye—"

"What do you say, Maisrie?" the old gentleman inquired.

"You go, grandfather," the girl replied at once, but without raising her head. "It will be a pleasant change for you. I would rather remain at home."

"Oh, but I should never have proposed such a thing," Vincent interposed, hastily, "if it meant that Miss Bethune was to be left here alone, certainly not! I—I decline to be a party to any such arrangement—oh, I could not think of such a thing!"

"You'd better come, Maisrie," said the old man, with some air of authority.

"Very well, grandfather," she said, obediently; and straightway she rose and left the room.

Master Vin's heart beat high; here were wonders upon wonders; in a short space he would be walking along the pavements of London town with Maisrie Bethune by his side (or practically so) and thereafter he and she would be seated at the same table, almost within touch of each other. Would the wide world get to hear of this marvellous thing? Would the men and women whom they encountered in Oxford-street observe and conjecture, and perhaps pass on with some faint vision of that beautiful and pensive face imprinted on their memory? By what magic freak of fortune had he came to be so favoured? Those people in Oxford-street were all strangers to her, and would remain strangers; he alone would be admitted to the sacred privacies of her companionship and society; but a few minutes more, and he would be instructing himself in her little ways and preferences, each one a happy secret to be kept wholly to himself. But the entranced young man was hardly prepared for what now followed. When the door opened again, and Maisrie Bethune reappeared (her eyes were averted from him, and there was a self-conscious tinge of colour in her pale and thoughtful face) she seemed to have undergone some sudden transformation. The youthful look lent to her appearance by the long and loose-flowing locks and by her plain dress of blue and white linen had gone; and here was a young lady apparently about twenty, tall, self-possessed (notwithstanding that tinge of colour) and grave in manner. A miracle had been wrought!—and yet she had only plaited up her hair, tying it with a bit of blue ribbon, and donned a simple costume of cream-coloured cashmere. She was putting on her gloves now; and he thought that long hands were by far the most beautiful of any.

Well, it was all a bewilderment—this walking along the London streets under the pale saffron of the evening sky, listening to the old man's emphatic monologue, but far more intent on warning Miss Bethune of the approach of a cab, when she was about to cross this or the other thoroughfare. Once he touched her arm in his anxiety to check her; he had not intended to do so; and it was he who was thunderstruck and ashamed; she did not appear to have noticed.

And then again he was afraid lest she should be tired before they reached the particular restaurant he had in mind; to which old George Bethune replied that his granddaughter did not know what fatigue was; he and she could walk for a whole day, strolling through the parks or along the streets, with absolute ease and comfort, as became vagrants and world-wanderers.

"Though I am not so sure it is altogether good for Maisrie here," he continued. "It may be that that has kept her thin—she is too thin for a young lass. She is all spirit; she has no more body than a daddy long-legs."

Vincent instantly offered to call a cab—which they refused; but he was not beset by wild alarms; he knew that, however slight she might be, the natural grace and elegance of her carriage could only be the outcome of a symmetrical form in conjunction with elastic health. That conclusion he had arrived at in the Park; but now he noticed another thing—that, as she walked, the slightly-swaying arms had the elbow well in to the waist, and the wrist turned out, and that quite obviously without set purpose. It was a pretty movement; but it was more than merely graceful; it was one mark of a well-balanced figure, even as was her confident step. For her step could be confident enough, and the set of her head proud enough—if she mostly kept her eyes to the ground.

It was an Italian restaurant they entered at last; and Vincent was so fortunate as to find a recess-compartment, which he knew of, vacant. They were practically dining in a private room; but all the same they could when they chose glance out upon the large saloon, with its little white tables, and its various groups of olive-complexioned or English-complexioned guests. The young man assumed the management of this small festivity from the outset. He ordered a flask of Chianti for Mr. Bethune and himself; and then he would have got something lighter—some sparkling beverage—for the young lady, but that she told him that she drank no wine. Why, he said to himself, he might have known!—

> 'for in her veins
> Ran blood as pure and cool as summer rains.'

And as this modest little repast went on, perhaps Vincent was comparing it with the banquet of the night before. Ah, there had been no enhancement, no enthralling ecstacy and delight, about that entertainment, sumptuous as it was. Here was some food—he hardly looked at it—he did not know what it was, and did not care—which would have to be paid for at the rate of 3/6 per head; but as compared with this frugal festivity, the splendours of the preceding evening—the masses of roses, the pyramids of ice, the silver candelabra, and all the rest—shrank into insignificance. 'Here there was a nameless glamour filling all the air; a palpitation of hope, and a curious dumb sense of gratitude as if for favours

unexpected and undeserved; all the coming years of his life seemed to be shining there in her eyes—so that he hardly dared to look, so full of fear, and yet of a breathless joy and wonder, was the revelation, when she happened to glance towards him. And on her side, she appeared to be a little less reserved and distant than she had hitherto been. She seemed grateful for the trouble the young man had taken on behalf of her grandfather and herself; sometimes, when in his eager talk he said something that interested her, she raised her head, with a smile in her eyes. A wonderful banquet, truly, though not so imposing as that of the previous night. He learned that she was immensely fond of propelling a gondola (the forward oar only; she wanted another oar astern to steer) and here was another amazingly interesting fact, to be for ever and ever remembered.

As for the old man (for the world was not created solely for young folk) he was at once gay and oracular.

"These little breaks and diversions," he was saying, as he stirred his coffee—the time of cigarettes having now arrived, "are useful things—useful things; an affair of the moment, truly; but the wise man makes of the passing moment as much as he possibly can. Why, the real curse of modern life—the ineradicable disease—is the habit of continually looking before and after. We none of us think enough of the present moment; we are anxiously speculating as to the future; or, what is worse still, fretting over the memory of past injuries and past mistakes. That is where the uneducated, the unimaginative, have their consolation; we are not half so happy and content as the stolid ploughman or the phlegmatic bricklayer who thinks only of the present heat, or the present cold, or, at furthest, of the next pint of beer, and of the prospect of getting to bed, with the knowledge that he will sleep sound. The actual and immediate things before them are the things that interest them; not the unknown future, or the useless past. But I have schooled myself, thanks in a great measure to Horace—and my granddaughter knows her Horace too—and I think I keep as stout a heart as most. *Dum loquimur*, of course, *fugerit invida ætas*; but even while I know that the night presses down upon me, and the shadowy fathers, and the empty halls of Pluto, I put the knowledge away from me; I am content with the present moment; I am more than content, for example, with this very excellent cigarette—"

"Would you allow me to send you a few boxes?" interposed Vincent, at once and eagerly. "I think the cork mouthpiece is a great improvement. I know where they are to be got. May I send you some?"

"I thank you; but they are not much in my way," the old man said, with a certain loftiness of demeanour. "As I was remarking, the time has gone by for unavailing regrets over what has been done to me and mine. I think I may say that throughout we have shown a bold front. '*Stand fast, Craig-Royston!*' has not been our watchword for nothing. And as for the future—why, 'to the gods

belongs to-morrow!' The anticipation of evil will not remove it: the recalling of bygone injuries provides no compensation. 'The present moment is our ain; the neist we never saw;' and so, as we have had a pleasant evening so far, I think we may as well get away home again; and, Maisrie, you will get out your violin, and we'll have some Scotch songs, and my young friend and I will taste just a drop of Scotch whisky; and if there's any better combination than that in the world, I do not know of it."

But here a very awkward incident occurred. Old George Bethune, in his grand manner, called to the waiter to bring the bill. Now Vincent had intended to steal out and arrange this little matter without allowing the young lady to have any cognisance of it; but of course the waiter, when summoned, came up to the table, and proceeded to pencil out the account.

"I think, sir," put in the young man, modestly, "you'd better let me have that. It was my proposal, you know."

"Oh, very well," said Mr. Bethune, carelessly; and as carelessly he handed over the slip of paper he had just taken from the waiter.

But the quick look of pain and humiliation that swept over the girl's face stabbed the young man to the heart.

"Grandfather!" she said, with a burning flush.

"Oh, well," her grandfather said, petulantly; "I have just discovered that I have left my purse behind. Some other time—it is all the same—it is immaterial—the next time will be my turn—"

"Here is my purse, grandfather," she said; and she turned with an air of quiet firmness to her younger neighbour, and merely said "If you please!" He was too bewildered to refuse: there was something in her manner that compelled him to accede without a word of protest. She pushed her purse and the slip of paper across the table to her grandfather; and then she rose, and turned to seek her sun-shade, which Vincent forthwith brought to her. The curious mingling of simplicity and dignity with which she had interposed impressed him strangely: perhaps she was not so much of a school-girl as she had seemed when he first saw her walking through Hyde Park? Then the three of them left the restaurant together; and quietly made their way home through the gathering twilight.

But he would not go in when they arrived at their door, though the old man again put Scotch music and Scotch whisky before him as an inducement. Perhaps he dreaded to outstay his welcome. He bade them both good-night; and Maisrie Bethune, as she parted from him, was so kind as to say "Thank you so much!" with the briefest, timid glance of her all-too-eloquent eyes.

He went across to his own rooms—merely for form's sake. He did not light the gas when he got upstairs. He carefully shut the window; then he sate down to the piano; and very gently and quietly he played a graceful little air. It was

"*Dormez, dormez, ma belle!*"; and it was a kind of farewell message for the night; but he had made sure that she should not hear.

CHAPTER V.

QU' MON COEUR EN MARIAGE.

When Maisrie Bethune and her grandfather returned home after the little dinner at the restaurant she went upstairs to her own room, while he proceeded to summon the landlady's husband from the lower deeps. Forthwith the pallid-faced and nervous-eyed Hobson appeared; and he seemed to be more obsequious than ever towards the great man who had deigned to patronise his humble literary efforts, and had even got some of his verses printed in the Edinburgh *Weekly Chronicle*.

"Very hot evening, sir—yes, sir—would you like me to go and fetch you a little hice, sir?" said he, in his eager desire to please. "No trouble, sir, if agreeable to you—remarkably 'ot for June, sir—theatres doing nothing, sir—only the ballet: you see, sir, the young ladies have so little on that they look cool and airy-like, and I suppose, sir, that's why the ballet is so popular—yes, sir, my brother-in-law, the theatrical agent—"

"Look here, Hobson," Mr. Bethune observed, as if he had not heard a word, "you have no doubt noticed a young gentleman who occupies rooms over the way?"

"Oh, yes, sir—a very handsome young man," he answered—or rather, what he actually did say was "a werry ensome young men."

"I have just made his acquaintance." Mr. Bethune continued, in his lofty fashion, "and naturally I should like to know something more of him, though I could not be guilty of the rudeness of asking him questions about himself. For example, I should be glad to know where he lives—he only uses those rooms during the day, you understand; and I presume that would be a simple thing for you to ascertain—discreetly, I mean, discreetly—without any impertinent intrusion."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Hobson, his dull face lighting up with pleasure at the notion of being able to do his patron a service. "Yes, yes, sir; I can find out; what more simple?"

At this very moment there was the sound of a door being shut on the opposite side of the street. Hobson stepped to the open window; and instantly

withdrew his head again.

"He has just gone out, sir—I will follow him."

"But discreetly, Hobson, discreetly," was the old gentleman's final injunction, as his humble and zealous emissary departed.

When Maisrie Bethune came downstairs again, she was in her ordinary dress of striped linen; and she seemed pleased with the evening's adventure; and was more talkative than usual.

"It will be very pleasant for you, grandfather," said she, "to have so intelligent and interesting a neighbour—don't you think so? For though he is young, he seems to know everything, and to have been everywhere; and I am sure, you and he, grandfather, found plenty of things to talk about. I have just been wondering whether it is possible he could have come to Toronto while we were living there. Wouldn't that have been strange? Perhaps we have passed him while we were walking along King-street; perhaps he may have come round the corner by the Bank of Montreal when we were going into Yonge-street—and not a yard between us! But no," she continued, musingly, "I hardly imagine it could have been. I think I should have noticed him, and remembered. Don't you think you would have noticed him, grandfather? He is not like any one else—I mean he is not the kind of person you would pass in the street without remarking—I don't think you would forget. Oh, yes, I am very glad for your sake, grandfather, that you have made his acquaintance; and I hope you will become good friends—although he is young. You want some one to talk to—and not that dreadful Hobson—I can't bear your talking to Hobson, grandfather—"

"I am no respecter of persons, Maisrie," said the old man, pompously, "so long as people know their place, and keep it."

"But that is just the worst of Hobson, grandfather!" she exclaimed. "His fawning and cringing is so despicable. He is not a man at all. And you should tell him the truth about those verses of his, grandfather: I can't imagine how you see anything in them—"

"There have been worse—there have been worse," said Mr. Bethune, with a magnanimous toleration. "And on the two occasions on which I got the *Chronicle* to let him see himself in print, the gratitude of the poor creature was quite pathetic. A little act of kindness is never thrown away, Maisrie, my dear. So now you'll just get out your violin, and for a little while we will cross the Border, and forget that we are here in the heart of this stifling London."

But Maisrie begged to be excused. She said she was rather tired, and was going back to her own room very soon. And indeed, when she had brought her grandfather his accustomed hot water, and sugar, and spirits, and generally made everything comfortable for him, she kissed him and bade him good night and went away upstairs.

It was not to go to bed, however. Having lit the gas, she proceeded to hunt among her books until she discovered a little album entitled "Views of Toronto;" and having spread that open on her dressing-table, she drew in a chair, and, with her elbows resting on the table, and her head between her hands, began to pore over those pictures of the long thoroughfares and the pavements and the public buildings. She seemed to find the rather ill-executed lithographs interesting—so interesting that we may leave her there with her eyes fixed intently on the brown pages.

Meanwhile Hobson had fulfilled his mission, and returned with the address of the house into which he had seen the young man disappear; and not only that, but he volunteered to gain any further information that Mr. Bethune might wish; it would be easy for him, he said, to make the acquaintance of one of the menservants in Grosvenor Place.

"Not at all—not at all!" the old man made response, with an affectation of indifference. "I have no wish to pry. Indeed, I cannot say that I have any particular curiosity in the matter. And you need not mention to any one that I know even as much as that. I cannot recall now what made me ask—a momentary impulse—nothing of any consequence—for in truth it matters little to me where the young man lives. Well, good-night, Hobson—and thank you."

"Good-night, sir," said Hobson, with his eyes dwelling lingeringly on the hot water and whisky. But he received no invitation (for old George Bethune was more amenable to his granddaughter's remonstrances than he himself was aware) and so, with another effusive "*Good*-night!" the landlady's husband humbly withdrew.

Sometimes, after Maisrie had gone to bed, or, at least, retired to her own room, her grandfather would wander away out in the streets by himself. The night air was cool; there were fewer passers-by to impede his aimless peregrinations; sheltered by the dark and the dull lamp-light, he could lift up his voice and sing "London's bonnie woods and braes," or "Cam' ye by Athol," or "There's nae Covenant now, lassie," when he happened to be in the mood, as he generally was. And on this particular evening he sallied forth; but the straight-forward direction of his steps showed that he had an objective point. He went along Oxford-street, and down Regent-street; and eventually, by way of Garrick-street, Covent Garden, and the Strand, reached Fleet-street, where he stopped at a building almost wholly consisting of offices of country newspapers. At this time of the night the place was at its busiest—a hive of industry: messengers coming and going, the operators assiduous at the special wires, the London correspondents constructing their letters out of the latest news, with a little imagination thrown in here and there to lend colour. Old George Bethune ascended to the first floor, passed into the premises owned by the Edinburgh *Chronicle* (*Daily* and *Weekly*) and was

admitted to an inner room, where he found Mr. Courtnay Fox. Now Mr. Fox—a heavy and somewhat ungainly person, who rolled from side to side as he crossed the room, and whose small blue eyes twinkled behind his spectacles with a sort of easy and ready sarcasm—did not like being interrupted; but, on the other hand, Mr. Bethune was a friend, or at least a favoured acquaintance, of the chief proprietor of the *Chronicle*, and the London correspondent was therefore bound to be civil; so he asked the old man what he could do for him.

"If you have anything for the *Weekly*," he observed, "you'd much better send it on direct to Edinburgh, instead of sending it down here. That will save one postage—a point which I should have thought would occur to a Scotch mind," he added, with a bit of a half-concealed grin.

"You are always girding at Scotland, Mr. Fox," George Bethune said, good-naturedly.

"I? Oh, not I. I'm sure no one admires the virtues of economy and frugality more than I do. That is why I am pretty certain Shakespeare must have lived in Scotland—I don't mean 'The rain it raineth every day'—but 'a tanner will last you nine year.' Now how could he have learned that money could be made to go so far but by observation of the Scotch?"

"I know this," said the old man, with some dignity, "that few have seen so much of the world as I have, in various countries and climes; and the most generous and hospitable people—generous and hospitable to the point of extravagance—I have ever met with have invariably been the Scotch. It may suit you to revile the country from which you get your living—"

"Oh, I meant nothing so serious, I assure you," the ponderous journalist said at once. "Come, tell me what I can do for you."

"I should like to look at the Post Office Directory first, if I may."

Courtnay Fox waddled across the room and returned with the heavy volume: Mr. Bethune turned to the street and number that had been furnished him by his spy, and discovered that the name given was Harland Harris—no doubt Vincent Harris's father.

"Ah, yes," the old man said. "Now I can tell you what I want; and I am certain I have come to the right place for information. For while you revile my countrymen, Mr. Fox, because you don't know them, I wonder whom amongst your own countrymen—who have any position at all—you don't know?"

This was an adroit piece of flattery: for it was a foible of the fat correspondent to affect that he knew everybody—and knew no good of anybody.

"Of course the man I mean may be a nobody—or a nonentity—and a very respectable person as well," continued Mr. Bethune, "but his son, whose acquaintance I have made, talks as if his name were familiar to the public. Mr. Harland Harris—"

"Harland Harris!" the journalist exclaimed—but with much complacency, for he might have been found wanting. "Don't you know Harland Harris?—or, at least, haven't you heard of him?"

"I have lived much out of England," the old man said.

"And you want me to tell you who and what Harland Harris is? Is that it? Well, then, I will. To begin with," proceeded Mr. Courtnay Fox, with a baleful light in his small twinkling eyes, "he is a solemn and portentous ass—a pedantic prig—a combination of a drill sergeant and a schoolmaster, with the self-sufficiency of—of—I don't know what. He is an enormously wealthy man—who preaches the Divine Beauty of Poverty; a socialist—who would abolish the income-tax, and have all taxation indirect; a Communist—who can eat only off gold plate. This sham Jean Jacques would not only abandon his children, he would let the whole human race go to the mischief, as long as you left him on a pinnacle, with a M.S. lecture in his hand. Harland Harris! Do you want to know any more? Well, I will tell you this, that long ago his vanity would have inflated and burst him only that he was defeated in his candidature for the Lord Rectorship of Edinburgh University—and that let out a little of the gas. But even now his inconsistencies are colossal—almost a madness; I think he must be drunk with a sense of his own superiority, as George Sand says—"

"He does not seem to have made a very favourable impression on you," said Mr. Bethune slowly and thoughtfully.

"Did he ever on any human being?" the other retorted. "Not any one that ever I heard of!"

"And his son—do you know anything of him?"

Mr. Courtnay Fox was not likely to admit that he knew nothing.

"Oh," said he, scornfully, "the *enfant gâté* of the political world. —— has made a pet of him; and so people imagine there is something in him. Of course he'll talk for a few years about universal brotherhood and the advancement of humanity and that kind of stuff; and then, when he succeeds to his father's money, he'll make a bid for a peerage, or else marry a widowed and withered Countess, and subside into a solid, substantial, beef-headed bulwark of the Tory party. That's the way they all go!"

"Well, I'm very much obliged," said old George Bethune, rising. "And sorry to have interrupted you. Good-night—and thanks."

"Good-night," said the journalist, curtly, as he turned to his desk again, and its litter of reports and telegrams.

Next morning, when they were about to set forth on their accustomed stroll, Maisrie paused at the door for a second, and said—with a very curious hesitation, and a face grown rose-red—

"Grandfather, what shall I tell Mrs. Hobson you would like for dinner?"

He did not notice her confusion; he answered, carelessly—

"Oh, never mind just now. Later on we will see. Food is not of much importance in this hot weather."

Thereafter she was silent for some considerable time. It was not until they had got down to the Serpentine, and when he was about to take out his newspaper, that she ventured again to address him.

"Grandfather," she said, timidly, "do you think—Mr. Harris—expects us—expects that we should dine together again this evening? He did ask if we had no engagement—and—and perhaps he may imagine there is some understanding—"

"Well, Maisrie," the old man made answer, with a playful irony, "if your way of it is to be carried out, the arrangement wouldn't last very long. I don't suppose our little income could comfortably support three for any great space of time."

"Oh, but, grandfather," she said, persuasively, "you know it was but right you should pay; we were two, and he only one; of course, if we were to dine together again—and he wished it to be his turn—you might divide—"

"I think, Maisrie," said he, somewhat sententiously, "it would be better for you to leave our small financial affairs in my hands. These things are well understood as between men; it is easy to make an arrangement. Especially easy if you are the only son of a very wealthy man—what are a few shillings or a few sovereigns one way or the other to him? And I wish you to remember that a young lady's purse is not usually produced at a restaurant."

"I am sorry if I did anything wrong, grandfather," she said humbly; "but—but I thought—before a stranger—or almost a stranger—it was a pity you had forgotten—"

He had opened the newspaper, so that the subject was dismissed; and Maisrie was left to her absent dreams and reveries.

All that day there came no message from the other side of the street; and likewise the afternoon wore away in silence; while Maisrie, whatever she hoped or feared, had not again asked her grandfather what arrangements he proposed for the evening. About six o'clock, however, there came a rap at the door below. Maisrie was in her room upstairs. Her grandfather was seated at the little table in the parlour, drawing out in water-colour a coat of arms; and he had already finished the Bethune part of it—that is to say, the first and fourth quarters of the shield were argent, with a fesse between three mascles, or; and likewise he had surmounted it with the crest—an otter's head, erased, ppr.; but as the second and third quarters were still vacant it was impossible to say with which other family he proposed to claim alliance. At this moment Vincent made his appearance at the door, looking very cheerful and good-humoured, and modest withal; and he came into the room as if he already felt quite at home there.

"I have taken a little liberty," said he, "with regard to this evening. I understood that you and Miss Bethune had no engagement, and might think of going to that same restaurant again; but then I thought you might prefer a change; and so I have ordered dinner at the——" And he named a well-known hotel in the neighbourhood of Burlington Gardens.

"Oh, you have ordered dinner?"

"Yes, sir," said Vincent, respectfully; and then seeing there was no objection, he went on with a gayer air: "It does seem absurd that when people want to meet each other, and to talk, and get thoroughly acquainted, they must needs sit down and eat together; but there is some sense in it too; for of course we have all of us our different occupations during the day; and dinner-time is the time at which we all find ourselves free, so that the meeting is easily arranged. I hope Miss Bethune wasn't fatigued after her long walk of last evening—"

"Oh, no, no," said her grandfather, rising and going to the door. "I must call and tell her we are going out by and bye—"

"Yes, but of course she is coming too!" the young man said quickly.

"If she likes—if she likes. I myself should prefer it. I will ask her."

And on this occasion also, when she came downstairs, Maisrie Bethune appeared in that simple dress of cream-coloured cashmere; and again he was struck by the alteration in her aspect; she was no longer the shy and timid schoolgirl he had at first imagined her to be, but a young woman, of quite sufficient self-possession, tall, and elegant of bearing, and with more than a touch of graceful dignity in her manner. This time she smiled as she gave him her hand for a moment; and then she turned away; always she seemed to assume that this newly-found relationship existed only as between her grandfather and the young man, that she was outside of it, and only to be called in as an adjunct, now and again when it happened to suit them.

Nevertheless, as they by-and-bye walked away down to Burlington Gardens, she was much more animated and talkative than he had before seen her; and he observed, too, that her grandfather paid heed to her opinions. Nay, she addressed the younger of her two companions also, occasionally; and now she was not afraid to let a smile dwell in her eyes, when she chanced to turn to him. He was bewildered by it all; it was more, far more, than he dared have hoped for; in fact he was the last person in the world to suspect that his own bearing—the buoyant unconscious audacity, the winning frankness, as well as a certain youthful modesty—was at the root of the mystery of this sudden friendship. For one thing, he had told them a good deal about himself and his circumstances, during that morning in Hyde Park and during the previous afternoon and evening; and there was something in the position of these three folk, now brought together after wide wanderings through the world, that seemed to invite confidence and

intimacy. Then old George Bethune had an excellent fund of good-fellowship, so long as the present moment was an enjoyable one.

And, as it turned out, this evening proved to be one of those enjoyable moments. The small festivity to which Vincent had invited his new acquaintances was not in the least the haphazard affair he had half-intimated it to be; he had arranged it with care; they found themselves in a pretty room, with plenty of flowers on the table; while the little banquet itself was far more elaborate, both as regards food and wine, than there was any call for. The old gentleman did not protest; anything that happened—so long as it was pleasant—was welcome to him; and he declared the claret to be as excellent as any he had met with for years back. He could not understand why their youthful host would not join him (as if it were likely that Vincent was going to drink wine, now that he discovered that Maisrie Bethune drank only water!) but he had all the more for himself; and he waxed eloquent and enthusiastic on his favourite theme.

"Why sir," said he, with a kind of proud elation in his tone, "I myself heard Henry Ward Beecher pronounce these words in the City Hall of Glasgow—'I have been reared in a country whose history is brief. So vast is it, that one might travel night and day for all the week, and yet scarcely touch historic ground. Its history is yet to be written; it is yet to be acted. But I come to this land, which, though small, is as full of memories as the heaven is full of stars, and almost as bright. There is not the most insignificant piece of water that does not make my heart thrill with some story of heroism, or some remembered poem; for not only has Scotland had the good fortune to have men who knew how to make heroic history, but she has reared those bards who have known how to sing their deeds. And every steep and every valley, and almost every single league on which my feet have trod, have made me feel as if I were walking in a dream. I never expected to find my eyes overflow with tears of gladness that I have been permitted, in the prime of life, to look upon this beloved land.' Well spoken—nobly spoken! When I take my granddaughter here to visit her native country—for to that country she belongs, in all the essentials of blood and tradition and descent—I hope she will be in a similarly receptive mood; and will see, not the bare hills, not the lonely islands, not the desolate moors, but a land filled with the magic of association, and consecrated by the love and devotion of a thousand song-writers, known and unknown. I will say with Johnson 'That man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Bannockburn, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona'—"

"Not Bannockburn: Marathon, wasn't it, grandfather?" said Maisrie, in her gentle way.

"Well, well," he said, not heeding the interruption. "'Almost every single league,' said Ward Beecher; and that is true. I could make a pilgrimage through-

out the length and breadth of Scotland, guided by the finger of Scottish song. Indeed, I have often thought I should like, if the years were spared to me, to collect materials for a volume—a splendid and magnificent volume—on the Scotland of the Scotch songs and ballads. The words and the music are already there; and I would have the pencil add its charm; so that Scotland, in her noblest and fairest aspects, might be placed before the stranger, and might be welcomed once again by her own sons. I would have the lonely Braes o' Balwhidder, and Rob Roy's grave in the little churchyard on the hillside; I would have Tannahill's Arranteenie—that is on Loch Long side, I think; and the Bonnie House o' Airlie:

'It fell on a day, a bonnie summer's day,
When the corn grew green and fairly,
That the great Argyle, wi' a' his men,
Cam' to plunder the bonnie house o' Airlie.'

Then the Vale of Yarrow—well, perhaps that would have to be a figure subject—the grief-stricken maiden bending over the body of her slain lover—

'Pale though thou art, yet best, yet best beloved,
O could my warmth to life restore thee!—
Ye'd lie all night between my breasts;
No youth lay ever there before thee.'

And Colonsay—Leyden's Colonsay—the haunted island that mourns like a seashell—

'And ever as the year returns,
The charm-bound sailors know the day;
For sadly still the mermaid mourns
The lovely chief of Colonsay.'

Gala Water—" the old man continued, in a sort of exalted rhapsody; and his eyes were absent, as if he were beholding a succession of visions. "Hunting Tower—Craigie-burn Wood—the solitude sought out by Bessie Bell and her girl companion when they fled from the plague—Ettrick Banks—the bush aboon Traquair—in short, an endless series! And where the pencil may fail, imagination must come in—

'I see—but not by sight alone,

Loved Yarrow, have I won thee;
A ray of fancy still survives—
Her sunshine plays upon thee!'

It would be something to do for the sake of 'puir auld Scotland;' and think what an enchanted wandering that would be for both Maisrie and myself. Tweed and Teviot—the silver Forth—the stately Clyde: well, perhaps she would be better pleased to gather a flower or two—a lucken-gowan or a speedwell—on 'the bonnie banks o' Ayr.'"

"But, grandfather," Maisrie Bethune interposed, "before you can begin such a book, or even think of it, you know there is something else to be done."

"I suppose it would be an expensive volume to bring out?" Vincent suggested inquiringly.

"Oh, yes, yes," the old man said—and now he had relinquished that rhapsodical strain, and had assumed his usual dignified, not to say grandiose, demeanour. "The drawings must be done by the first artists; they must not fall below the poetic pitch of the old ballads and the still older airs. It would be an expensive book to bring out, no doubt; but then it would be a noble undertaking; it would be a sumptuous and valuable work. I should think, now," he went on, reflectively, "that there ought to be a large paper edition—and perhaps five guineas would not be too much to charge—quarto, I mean—quarto—and five guineas for such a handsome volume mightn't be too much—"

"Five guineas?" repeated Vincent. "Well, sir, if you choose to bring out the book by subscription, I will undertake to get you fifty subscribers for that edition." And then he added recklessly, "A hundred—I will assure you a hundred subscribers!"

"No, Mr. Harris," said Maisrie, and she addressed herself in a more direct manner than she had ever yet done to the young man. "It is not to be thought of. My grandfather has work to do that he must finish before entertaining any other schemes. It would be simply wasting time to begin and arrange about another book."

He felt himself silenced and humbled, he hardly knew why. Had she construed his proffered assistance into an offer of charity, and resented it accordingly? But he could find no trace of offended pride in the refined and gentle features when next he ventured to look at her. She had said her say; and that was enough. And her grandfather seemed to know she was in the right; nothing further was mentioned about the new proposal—at least at this particular time. Dessert had come; and the business of choosing from among those abundant fruits made a kind of break.

When at length they were about to depart, there was no confusion about

the bill, for Vincent intimated to the old man that he had already arranged about that; and Mr. Bethune seemed satisfied, while Maisrie had passed on in front and did not hear. She was very light-hearted and talkative as they walked away home. Her protest against the proposed publication, if it showed a little firmness at the time, had left no pained feeling behind it; she was now as blithe as a bird; to Vincent she seemed to shed a radiance around her, as if she were some supernatural being, as she passed through those twilight streets. Once she said something in French—in Canadian French—to her grandfather; and the young man thought that never in all his life had he heard anything so sweet and fascinating as the soft and blurred sound of the *r*'s. He was to hear a little more of that Canadian French on this evening. When they reached their lodgings, the old gentleman again asked his young friend to come in for a little while; the temptation was too great; he yielded; and followed them up into the dusky small parlour.

"Now we will have a serious smoke," said George Bethune, with decision, as he took down his long clay pipe. "A cigarette after dinner is a mere frivolity. Maisrie, lass, bring over that box of cigars for Mr. Harris."

But Mr. Harris firmly declined to smoke, even as he had declined to take any wine: what was he going to sacrifice next as a subtle tribute to the exalted character of this young creature? Maisrie Bethune seemed hardly to understand, and was a little surprised; but now she had to go away upstairs, to lay aside her things: so the two men were left alone, to chat about the affairs of the day until her return.

When she came down again, her grandfather said—

"Sing something, Maisrie."

"You know I can't sing, grandfather, but I never refuse you, for it is not of any use," said she, contentedly, as she took the violin out of its case. "But Mr. Harris has had enough of Scotch songs this evening. I must try something else. And perhaps you may have heard the air in Canada," she added, addressing the young man from out of the partial darkness.

And now what was this new enchantment she was about to disclose and practise? In plain truth, she had very little voice; but he did not notice that; it was the curiously naive, and simple, and sincere expression of tone that thrilled through his heart, as she proceeded to recite rather than to sing the well-known "*C' était une frégate,*" the violin aiding her with its low and plaintive notes:

C' était une frégate
(Mon joli coeur de rose)
Dans la mer a touché
(Joli coeur d' un rosier).

And here again were those softly slurred *r*'s—not sharply trilled, as in the English fashion—but gentle and half-concealed, as it were. The simple story proceeded—

Y avait une demoiselle
(Mon joli coeur de rose)
Su' l' bord d' la mer pleurait,
(Joli coeur d' un rosier).

—Dites-moi donc, la belle,
(Mon joli coeur de rose)
Qu' a' vous à tant pleurer?
(Joli coeur d' un rosier).

—Je pleur; mon anneau d' or,
(Mon joli coeur de rose)
Dans la mer est tombé,
(Joli coeur d' un rosier).

Then he asks the weeping damsel what she would give to any one who would find for her her ring of gold that has fallen into the sea.

—Je suis trop pauvre fille,
(Mon joli coeur de rose),
Je ne puis rien donner,
(Joli coeur d' un rosier).

Qu' mon coeur en mariage
(Mon joli coeur de rose)
Pour mon anneau doré
(Joli coeur d' un rosier).

But the young man sitting there in the twilight hardly heard further than that. The phrase '*qu' mon coeur en mariage*' had something more beautiful in it than even the soft sound of the *r*'s as she pronounced them; it dwelt in his heart with a mysterious charm; even as she went on to tell how the bold gallant who dived for the ring of gold was drowned, what he still seemed to hear was "*Je ne puis rien donner, qu' mon coeur en mariage;*" and when she had finished, and there was silence, he did not speak; there was a kind of bewilderment in the tones of her voice; and he could not offer her commonplace thanks.

"Now I am going to light the gas," she said, cheerfully, as she laid aside her

violin, "and, grandfather, you can challenge Mr. Harris to a game of chess, or draughts, or dominoes, whichever he likes best, so that I may get to my work, for it cannot always be playtime."

And so it was that, when the gas had been lit, she returned to her own corner and to her needlework, while her grandfather and Vincent took to dominoes, the old man having his hot water and whisky brought to him to accompany his second pipe. Dominoes is a mechanical game; you can play well enough even if there is the refrain of a song ringing through your memory; the young man did not care who won; and, indeed, he had quite forgotten who was the victor as he shortly thereafter made his way south through the lamp-lit streets, with his lips half-trying to re-pronounce that strangely fascinating phrase, "*qu' mon coeur en mariage—qu' mon coeur en mariage*."

Well, this was but the beginning of a series of evenings, until it came to be understood that these three dined together each night, subsequently returning to old George Bethune's rooms, for a little music or dominoes before parting. Vincent assumed the management of these modest little merry-makings; varied the scene of them as much as possible; and so arranged matters that no financial question came up to ask for Maisrie Bethune's interference. It is true, she sometimes seemed inclined to remain at home, so as to leave the two men greater freedom, perhaps; but he would not hear of that; and his ever increasing intimacy now lent him a franker authority. He was high-handed in his ways: she smiled, and yielded.

At last there came a proposition that was somewhat startling in its boldness. Cunningly he deferred bringing it forward until the very end of the evening, for then he knew that the old gentleman would be more inclined to welcome any gay and audacious scheme, without particularly weighing pros and cons. Accordingly having chosen his opportunity, he informed them that he had been offered the use of a house-boat during the Henley week (which was literally true: he had been offered it—for the sum of £30) and said that he had a great mind to accept if only he could persuade Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter to go down as his guests.

"I understood you to say," he continued, without giving either of them time to reply, "that you had never seen Henley at the regatta-time. But it is a thing you ought to see—it is the prettiest sight in England—it is perfectly unique—there is nothing else like it in the world. And then they make those house-boats so comfortable; it is simply a small floating home; or, on the other hand, you can sit outside, and be in the very midst of all the fun. There is no scramble—no crowd—no hustling—so far as we are concerned; and we shall have our own cook and steward. If you do not care to stay the whole week, we could go down on Tuesday afternoon—the races begin on Wednesday—and remain for the illuminations and

fireworks on Friday night. It would be awfully good-natured of you both; of course I could not think of going down and occupying a house-boat by myself. Now what do you say, Miss Bethune?—I appeal first to you."

"Yes, what do you say, Maisrie?" the old man said, seeing that his granddaughter hesitated; and then he added with a condescending smile: "A question of dress, is it? I have heard that the costumes at Henley are rather extravagant."

"Oh, I assure you, no," the young man protested (he would have sworn that the sky was pea-green if that would have helped.) "They are quite simple summer dresses—light in colour, of course—oh, yes—but quite plain and simple: who would take gorgeous gowns to go boating?"

"Very well, very well," Mr. Bethune said, with an easy good-nature. "I will answer for both Maisrie and myself: we shall be delighted. Let us know the conditions; let us know what may be expected of us; we are old travellers and ready for anything. And don't you be over particular about your preparations, my young friend; we can rough it; and indeed I'm afraid of late we've been falling into somewhat too luxurious ways. Not that I am an anchorite; no—God forbid; if the present moment commends itself, I welcome it; I see no wisdom in schooling one's self to bear hardships that may not arise. Yes, I have heard of Henley—the Thames in July—the brilliant company—"

"It is awfully kind of you," said Vincent, rising, and preparing to go. "I am sure you won't regret it; it is the very prettiest thing in England. And to-morrow night I will let you know all the arrangements."

Full of joy was the heart of this young man as he strode away down to Grosvenor Place; and reckless and extravagant were the projects crowding in upon his brain as to how he should play the part of host. For one thing, he had the wherewithal; apart from the allowance given him by his father, an uncle had died leaving him a considerable sum; while his own personal habits were of the most inexpensive kind; so that he had plenty of money—too much money—to spend when any whim entered his head. And now, for the first time, old George Bethune and the fair Maisrie were to be openly and ostensibly his guests; and what was he not going to do in the way of entertaining them? If only he could make sure that Maisrie's cream-coloured costume would go well with calceolarias?—then with masses of calceolarias that house-boat would be smothered from stem to stern!

Nor did the knowledge that Mrs. Ellison would very likely be at Henley trouble him one bit. He was not ashamed of this recently-formed friendship; no; rather he was ready to proclaim it to all the world. Supposing Mrs. Ellison, shrewd-eyed as she was, were to come and inspect them, where could she find two more interesting human beings—the old man with his splendid nerve and proud spirit; amidst all his misfortunes, and in his old age, too, still holding his head erect; firm and unyielding as his own Craig-Royston:—the young girl with

her pensive and mysterious beauty, her clear-shining, timid eyes, her maidenly dignity, her patience with the old man, and persuasive and affectionate guidance? Ashamed of this friendship?—he was more inclined to parade it, to boast of it; he would have scorned himself otherwise. Of course (as he could not hide from himself) Mrs. Ellison might be inclined to speculate upon ulterior motives, and might begin to ask what was to come of all this warmth of friendship and constant association. But any future possibilities Vincent put away even from himself; they were all too wild and strange as yet; he was content with the fascination he found in these pleasant little merry-makings, in the more intimate companionship of the small parlour, in listening, there or elsewhere and always, to Maisrie Bethune's voice. And perhaps it was only the sweetness of that voice, and the softly murmured *r*'s, that had vibrated through his heart when she sang "*Je ne puis rien donner, qu' mon coeur en mariage?*" What other charm could lie in so simple a phrase? At all events, he thought he would ask Maisrie to take her violin down to Henley with her, just in case Mrs. Ellison should some evening pay a visit to the *White Rose*.

CHAPTER VI.
FAIRY LAND.

It was a soft summer night, cool and fragrant after the heat of the long July day; and here, under an awning in the stern of the house-boat *White Rose*, were George Bethune, his granddaughter Maisrie, and Vincent Harris, looking out upon the magic scene that stretched away from them on each hand up and down the river. All the dusk was on fire with illuminations; the doors and windows of the house-boats sent forth a dull golden glow; there were coloured lamps, crimson, blue, and orange; there were strings of Chinese lanterns that scarcely moved in the faint stirring of wind; and now and again an electric launch would go by—stealthily and silently—with brilliant festoons of fierce white lights causing it to look like some gigantic and amazing insect irradiating the dark. The smooth surface of the stream quivered with reflections; here and there a rowing boat glided along, with a cool plash of oars; a gondola came into view and slowly vanished—the white-clad gondolier visionary as a ghost. Everywhere there was a scent of flowers; and on board this particular house-boat there was but the one prevailing perfume; for the sole decoration of the saloon consisted of deep crimson roses—a heavy

splendour against the white and gold walls. From some neighbouring craft came the tinkle of a banjo; there was a distant hum of conversation; the unseen reeds and waterlilies could be imagined to be whispering in the silence. Among the further woods and meadows there was an occasional moving light; no doubt the campers-out were preparing to pitch their tents.

"Mr. Talkative of Prating-row is hardly wanted here to-night," old George Bethune was saying, unmindful of his own garrulous habits. "Music is better. What is that they are singing over there, Maisrie?"

"'The Canadian Boat Song,' grandfather."

"Oh, yes, of course: I thought it was familiar. And very pretty it sounds, coming across the water—though I do not know whether the air is modern or old. What I am certain of," he continued, raising his voice slightly as he usually did when he was about to discourse, "is that the finest national airs are ancient beyond the imagination of man to conceive. No matter when words may have been tacked on to them; the original melodies, warlike, or pathetic, or joyous, were the voice of millions of generations that passed away leaving us only these expressions of what they had felt. And if one could only re-translate them!—if one could put back into speech all the human suffering that found expression in such an air as 'The Last Rose of Summer,' wouldn't that electrify the world? I wonder how many millions of generations must have suffered and wept and remembered ere that piteous cry could have been uttered; and when I come to Tom Moore's wretched trivialities—"

"Grandfather," interposed Maisrie Bethune, quickly (for there were certain subjects that angered him beyond endurance) "you must not forget to show Mr. Harris that old play you found—with the Scotch airs, I mean—"

"Yes, that is curious," said the old man, yielding innocently. "Curious, is it not, that long before either Burns or Scott was born, a Scotchman named Mitchell should have collected over fifty of the best-known Scotch airs, and printed them, with words of his own; and that he should have chosen for the scene of his play the Borders of the Highlands, so as to contrast the manners and customs of the Highland chieftains and their fierce clansmen with those of the Lowland lairds and the soldiery sent to keep the peace between them. The *Highland Fair* was produced at Drury Lane about 1730, if I remember aright; but I cannot gather whether Ewen and Colin, and Alaster and Kenneth, impressed the Londoners much. To me the book is valuable because of the airs—though I could wish for the original songs instead of Mitchell's—"

Here Maisrie, seeing that her grandfather was started on a safer subject, quietly rose; and at the first pause she said—

"I see some of them are putting out their lights, and that is a hint for me to be off. I suppose we shall be wakened early enough to-morrow morning by the

boats going by. Good-night, Mr. Harris! Good-night, grandfather!"

She shook hands with both, and kissed her grandfather; then she passed into the glow of that wonderful rose-palace, and made her way along to the ladies' cabin, into which she disappeared. Vincent now lit a cigar—the first during this day.

But when old George Bethune resumed his monologue, it was neither Highland clans nor Lowland songs that concerned him; it was something that proved to be a good deal more interesting to his patient listener. It was of Maisrie's youth that he spoke, and that in a far more simple and natural way than was his wont. There were no genealogical vauntings, no exalted visions of what she should be when she came in for her rights; there were reminiscences of her earlier years, and of his and her wanderings together; and there was throughout a certain wistfulness in his tone. For once he talked without striving for effect, without trying oratorically to convince himself; and it is to be imagined how entirely Vincent was engrossed by this simple recital. Not that there was any consecutive narrative. The young man could only vaguely gather that Maisrie's father had been a railway-engineer; that he had married a young Scotch lady in Baltimore before going out west; that Maisrie had been born in Omaha; that shortly thereafter her mother died; then came the collapse of certain speculations her father had been led into, so that the widower, broken in heart and fortune, soon followed his young wife, leaving their child to the care of her only surviving relative. Whether there were some remains of the shattered fortune, or whether friends subscribed to make up a small fund for them, it appeared that the old man and his granddaughter were not quite penniless; for he took credit to himself that he had spent nearly all their little income, arising from this unspecified source, on Maisrie's education.

"I wish to have her fitted for any sphere to which she might be called," he went on, in a musing kind of way. "And I hope I have succeeded. She has had the best masters I could afford; and something of her teaching I have taken upon myself. But, after all, that is not of the greatest importance. She has seen the world—far more than most of her years; and she has not been spoiled by the contact. I could have wished her, perhaps, to have had more of the companionship of her own sex; but that was not often practicable, in our wandering life. However, she has an intuitive sympathy that stands for much; and if in society—which is not much in our way—she might show herself shy and reserved, well, I, for one, should not complain: that seems to me more to be coveted than confidence and self-assertion. As for outward manner she has never wanted any school-mistress other than her own natural tact and her own refinement of feeling; she is a gentlewoman at heart; rudeness, coarseness, presumption would be impossible to her—"

"The merest stranger can see that," Vincent ventured to say, in rather a low voice.

"And thus so far we have come through the world together," the old man continued, in the same meditative mood. "What I have done I have done for the best. Perhaps I may have erred: what could I tell about the uprearing of a young girl? And it may be that what she is now she is in spite of what I have done for her and with her—who knows such mysteries? As for the future, perhaps it is better not to look to it. She is alone; she is sensitive; the world is hard."

"I know many who would like to be her friends," the young man said, breathlessly.

"Sometimes," old George Bethune continued, slowly and thoughtfully, "I wonder whether I have done my best. I may have built on false hopes—and taught her to do the same. I see young women better equipped for the battle of the world, if it is to come to that. Perhaps I have been selfish too; perhaps I have avoided looking to the time when she and I must in the natural course of things be separated. We have been always together; as one, I might say; the same sunlight has shone on us, we have met the same storms, and not much caring, so long as we were the one with the other. But then—the years that can be granted me now are but few; and she has no kinsman to whom she can go, even to glean in the fields and ask for a pitcher of water. And when I think of her—alone—among strangers—my Maisrie—"

His voice choked—but only for a moment. He suddenly sprang to his feet, and flung his arms in the air, as if he would free himself from this intolerable burden of despondency and doubt.

"Why," said he, in accents of scornful impatience, "have I gone mad, or what pestilent thing is this! *Sursum corda*! We have faced the world together, she and I, and no one has ever yet found us downhearted. 'We've aye been provided for, and sae will we yet': I do not mean as regards the common necessities of life—for these are but of small account—but the deeper necessities of sympathy and hope and confidence. Stand fast, Craig-Royston!—'this rock shall fly, from its firm base as soon as I!' Well, my young friend," he continued, quite cheerfully and bravely, "you have seen me in a mood that is not common with me: you will say nothing about it—to her, especially. She puts her trust in me; and so far, I think, I have not failed her. I have said to her 'Come the three corners of the world in arms, and we shall shock them'; ill fortune buffets uselessly against 'man's unconquerable mind.' She knows the race she comes of, and the motto of that race: Craig-Royston holds its front! Well, well, now, let me thank you for this beautiful evening; and on her behalf too; she is at the time when the mind should be stored with pleasant memories. Perhaps I have been over-communicative, and made you the victim of idle fears; but there will be no more of that; to-morrow

you shall find me in my right mind."

He held out his hand. The young man did not know what to say—there was so much to say! He could only make offer of some further little hospitalities, which Mr. Bethune declined; then the steward was summoned, to put out the lamps and make other preparations, so that the *White Rose* should fold its petals together, for the slumber of the night. And presently a profound peace reigned from stem to stern; and the last plashing of the oars outside had died away.

But it was not to sleep that Vincent devoted the early hours of this night and morning. His mind was tossed this way and that by all kinds of moods and projects, the former piteous and the latter wildly impracticable. He had never before fully realised how curiously solitary was the lot of these two wanderers, how strange was their isolation, how uncertain was their future. And while the old man's courage and bold front provoked his admiration, he could not help looking at the other side of the shield: what was to become of her, when her only protector was taken from her? He knew that they were none too well off, those two; and what would she do when left alone? But if on the very next day he were to go to Mrs. Ellison and borrow £10,000 from her, which he would have mysteriously conveyed to old George Bethune? He could repay the money, partly by the sacrifice of his own small fortune, and partly by the assigning over of the paternal allowance; while he could go away to Birmingham, or Sheffield, or wherever the place was, and earn his living by becoming Mr. Ogden's private secretary. They need never know from whom this bounty came, and it would render them secure from all the assaults of fortune. Away up there in the Black Country he would think of them; and it would lighten the wearisome toil of the desk if he could imagine that Maisrie Bethune had left the roar and squalor of London, and was perhaps wandering through these very Thames-side meadows, or floating in some white-garnitured boat, under the shade of the willows. There would be rest for the pilgrims at last, after their world-buffetings. And so he lay and dreamed and pitied and planned, until in the window of the small state-room there appeared the first blue-gray of the dawn, about which time he finally fell asleep.

But next morning all was briskness and activity around them—flags flying, coloured awnings being stretched, pale swirls of smoke rising from the stove-pipes, the pic-nickers in the meadows lighting their spirit-lamps for the breakfast tea. The sun was shining brightly, but there was a cool breeze to temper the heat; the surface of the stream was stirred into silver; the willows and rushes were shivering and swaying; a scent of new-mown hay was in the air. Already there were plenty of craft afloat, on business or on pleasure bent; early visits being paid, or masses of flowers, ferns, and palms being brought along for purchasers. Maisrie was the first to be up and out; then old George Bethune could be heard

gaily singing in his state-room, as an accompaniment to his toilet—

"Hey, Jonnie Cope, are ye waukin yet,
And are your drums a-beatin yet,
If ye were waukin, I would wait
To meet Jonnie Cope in the morning?"

Finally when Vincent, with many apologies for being late, made his appearance outside, he found the old man comfortably seated in the stern-sheets, under the pink and white awning, reading a newspaper he had procured somewhere, while Maisrie was on the upper-deck of the house-boat watering the flowers with a can that she had got from the steward.

And indeed to this young man it appeared a truly wonderful thing that these three, some little while thereafter, in the cool twilight of the saloon, should be seated at breakfast together; they seemed to form a little family by themselves, isolated and remote from the rest of the world. They forgot the crowded Thames outside and the crowded meadows; here there was quiet, and a charming companionship; a band that was playing somewhere was so distant as to be hardly audible. Then the saloon itself was charming; for though the boat was named the *White Rose*, there was a good deal of pale pink in its decorations: the flutings and cornice were pink where they were not gold, and pink were the muslin curtains drawn round the small windows; while the profusion of deep crimson roses all round the long room, and the masses of grapes and pineapples on the breakfast-table made up a picture almost typical of summer, in the height of its luxuriance and shaded coolness.

"This seems very nice," said the young host, "even supposing there were no river and no racing. I don't see why a caravan like this shouldn't be put on wheels and taken away through the country. There is an idea for you, Mr. Bethune, when you set out on your pilgrimage through Scotland; wouldn't a moveable house of this kind be the very thing for Miss Bethune and you?—you could set it afloat if you wanted to go down a river, or put it on a lorry when you wanted to take the road."

"I'm afraid all this luxury would be out of place in 'Caledonia, stern and wild,'" the old man said. "No, no; these things are for the gay south. When Maisrie and I seek out the misty solitudes of the north, and the graves of Renwick and Cargill, it will be on foot; and if we bring away with us some little trifle to remind us of Logan's streams and Ettrick's shaws, it will be a simple thing—a bluebell or a bit of yellow broom. I have been thinking that perhaps this autumn we might begin—"

"Oh, no, grandfather," Maisrie interposed at once. "That is impossible. You

know you have the American volume to do first. What a pity it would be," she went on, with an insidious and persuasive gentleness which the young man had seen her adopt before in humouring her grandfather, "if some one else were to bring out a book on the same subject before you. You know no one understands it so thoroughly as you do, grandfather: and with your extraordinary memory you can say exactly what you require; so that you could send over and get the materials you want without any trouble."

"Very well, very well," the old man said, curtly. "But we need not talk business at such a time as this."

Now there was attached to the *White Rose* a rowing boat; and a very elegant rowing-boat it was, too, of varnished pine; and by and bye Vincent proposed to his two guests that they should get into the stern-sheets, and he would take a short pair of sculls, and pull them up to the bridge, to show them the other house-boats, and the people, and the fun of the fair generally.

"But wouldn't you take the longer oars," said Maisrie, looking down into the shapely gig, "and let me have one?"

"Oh, would you like that?" he said, with pleasure in his eyes. "Yes, by all means, if you care to row. It is a light boat though it's long; you won't find it hard pulling. By the way, I hunted about everywhere to get a gondola for you, and I couldn't."

"But who told you I had ever tried an oar in a gondola?" she asked, with a smile.

"Why, you yourself: was I likely to forget it?" he said reproachfully.

And oh! wasn't he a proud young man when he saw this rare and radiant creature—clad all in white she was, save for a bunch of yellow king-cups in her white sailor hat, and a belt of dull gold satin at her waist—when he saw her step down into the boat, and take her place, and put out the stroke oar with her prettily shaped hands. Her grandfather was already in the stern-sheets, in possession of the tiller-ropes. When they moved off into mid-stream, it was very gently, for the river was already beginning to swarm; and he observed that she pulled as one accustomed to pulling, and with ease; while, as he was responsible for keeping time, they had nothing to be ashamed of as they slowly moved up the course. Indeed, they were only paddling; sometimes they had to call a halt altogether, when there was a confusion; and this not unwelcome leisure they devoted to an observation of the various crews—girls in the lightest of summer costumes, young men in violent blazers—or to a covert inspection of the other house-boats, with their parterres and festoons of flowers, their huge Japanese sun-shades and tinted awnings, and the brilliant groups of laughing and chatting visitors.

"Oh, Mr. Harris, do look—isn't that a pretty one!" Maisrie exclaimed, in an undertone.

He glanced in the direction indicated, and there beheld a very handsome house-boat, all of rich-hued mahogany, its chief decoration being flowerboxes in blue tiles filled with marguerites. At the same instant he found that a pair of eyes were fixed on him—eyes that were familiar—and the next moment he knew that Mrs. Ellison, from the upper deck of that mahogany house-boat, was regarding him and his companions with an intense curiosity. But so swift was her scrutiny, and so impassive her face, that ere he could guess at the result of her investigation she had made him a formal little bow and turned away to talk to her friends. Of course, with one hand on the oar he raised his hat with the other: but the effect of this sudden recognition was to leave him rather breathless and bewildered. It is true, he had half expected her to be there; but all the same he was not quite prepared; and—and he was wondering what she was thinking now. However, the officials were beginning to clear the course for the first race; so the gig was run in behind one of the tall white poles; and there the small party of three remained until the rival crews had gone swiftly by, when it was permitted them to return to the *White Rose*.

After luncheon he said he would leave his guests to themselves for a little while, as he wished to pay a visit to a friend he had seen on one of the other house-boats; then he jumped into the gig, made his way along to the *Villeggiatura*, got on board, went up the steps, and found himself among a crowd of people. Mrs. Ellison, noticing him, discreetly left the group she was with, and came to him, taking him in a measure apart.

"Wait a moment, Vin," she said, regarding the young man. "If you wish it—if you prefer it—I have seen nothing."

"What do you mean, aunt!" he said, with some haughty inclination to anger. "Why should I seek any concealment? I want you to come along that I may introduce to you two friends of mine."

Instinctively she seemed to draw back a little—almost as if she were afraid.

"Oh, no, thanks, Vin. No, thanks. Please leave me out."

"Why?" he demanded.

The pretty young widow was embarrassed and troubled; for she knew the fiery nature of young men; and did not want to provoke any quarrel by an unguarded expression.

"Well—it is simply this, you know—they are strangers—I mean—I suppose that neither your father nor any of the family have met them—they seemed somehow like strangers—unusual looking—and—and I shouldn't like to be the first. Leave me out, there's a good boy!"

"Why?" he demanded again.

So she was driven to confession.

"Well, look here, Vin; I may be wrong; but aren't these new friends some-

how connected with your being so much away from home of late—with your being in those lodgings? Was it there you made their acquaintance?"

"If you want to know, I saw them first at Lord Musselburgh's," said he with an amazing audacity; for although the statement was literally true, it was entirely misleading.

And apparently it staggered the pleasant-eyed young widow.

"Oh, at Lord Musselburgh's?" said she, with a distinct (but cautious) change of manner. "Oh, really. Lord Musselburgh's. But why should you want to introduce me to them, Vin?"

"Because," said he, "they have never met any member of our family: and as you are the most goodnatured and the prettiest, I want to produce a favourable impression at the outset."

She laughed and was not displeased.

"There are some other qualities that seem to characterise our family—impudence for one," she observed. "Well, come along, then, Vin: where are your friends?"

"In a house-boat down there—the *White Rose*."

"The *White Rose*? I noticed it yesterday—very pretty—whose is it?"

"Mine for the present; I rented it for the week," he replied.

"Who are the other members of your party?"

"None—only those two."

But here she paused at the top of the steps; and said in an undertone—

"Really, Vin, this is too much! You, a young man entertaining those two—and no lady chaperon—"

He turned and looked at her, with straight eyes.

"Oh, it's quite right," she said, hastily. "It's quite right, of course—but—but so much *en évidence*—so prominent—people might talk—"

"I never try to hinder people from talking," said he, with a certain scorn. "And if they busy themselves with my small affairs, they are welcome to ring their discoveries from the tops of the steeples. I did not ask anybody's permission when I invited two friends of mine, who had never been to Henley before, to be my guests during the regatta-week."

"Of course not, of course not," she said, gently; "but you are doing it in such a marked way—"

"Come, come, aunt," said he, "it isn't like you to niggle about nothing. You are not a prude; you have too much goodnature—and too much common sense. And I don't want you to go on board the *White Rose* with any kind of prejudice in your mind."

They could not get away just then, however, for the course was being cleared for the next race; so they lingered there until they saw, far away on the

open river, two small objects like water-insects, with slender quick-moving legs, coming rapidly along. The dull murmur of the crowd became a roar as the boats drew nearer. Then the needle-like craft shot by, almost neck and neck; and loud were the shouts that cheered this one or that; while straining eyes followed them along to the goal. The sudden wave of enthusiasm almost immediately subsided; the surface of the river was again being crowded by the boats that had been confined behind the white poles; and now Vincent got his fair companion down into the gig and, with some little difficulty and delay, rowed her along to the *White Rose*.

He was very anxious as he conducted her on board; but he affected a splendid carelessness.

"Mr. Bethune," said he, "let me introduce you to my aunt, Mrs. Ellison—Miss Bethune, Mrs. Ellison: now come away inside, and we'll get some tea or strawberries or something—racing isn't everything at Henley—

"It isn't anything at all, as far as I have seen," said Mrs. Ellison, goodhumouredly, as she followed her nephew into the saloon. "Well, this is very pretty—very pretty indeed—one of the simplest and prettiest—so cool-looking. I hear this is your first visit to Henley," she continued addressing the old man, when they had taken their seats: Vincent meanwhile, bustling about to get wine and biscuits and fruit, for the steward had gone ashore.

"It is," said he, "and I am glad that my granddaughter has seen it in such favourable circumstances. Although she has travelled much, I doubt whether she has ever seen anything more charming, more perfect in its kind. We missed the Student's Serenade at Naples last year; but that would have been entirely different, no doubt; this is a vast water picnic, among English meadows, at the fairest time of the year, and with such a brilliancy of colour that the eye is delighted in every direction."

He was self-possessed enough (whatever their eagerly solicitous young host may have been); and he went on, in a somewhat lofty and sententious fashion, to describe certain of the great public festivals and spectacles he had witnessed in various parts of the world. Mrs. Ellison was apparently listening, as she ate a strawberry or two; but in reality she was covertly observing the young girl (who sate somewhat apart) and taking note of every line and lineament of her features, and even every detail of her dress. Vincent brought Mr. Bethune a tumbler of claret with a lump of ice in it; he drained a deep draught; and resumed his story of pageants. Maisrie was silent, her eyes averted: the young man asked himself whether the beautiful profile, the fine nostrils, the sensitive mouth, would not plead for favour, even though she did not speak. It seemed a thousand pities that her grandfather should be in this garrulous mood. Why did not Mrs. Ellison turn to the girl direct?—he felt sure there would be an instant sympathy

between those two, if only Maisrie would appeal with her wonderful, true eyes. What on earth did anyone want to know about the resplendent appearance of the White Cuirassiers of the Prussian Guard, as they rode into Prague a week or two after the battle of Königgrätz, with their dusty and swarthy faces and their copper-hued breastplates lit up by the westering sun?

But, on the other hand, Mrs. Ellison was not displeased by this one-sided conversation; quite the contrary; she wanted to know all about these strange people with whom her nephew had taken up; and the more the old man talked the better she resented the intervention of a race which Master Vin dragged them all away to see; and as soon as it was over—they were now seated in the stern-sheets of the boat—she turned to Mr. Bethune with a question.

"I understand," she said, in a casual sort of way, "that you know Lord Musselburgh?"

At this Maisrie looked up startled.

"Oh, yes," said her grandfather, in his serene and stately fashion. "Oh, yes. A most promising young man—a young man who will make his mark. Perhaps he is riding too many hobbies; and yet it might not be prudent to interfere and advise; a young man in his position is apt to be hot-headed—"

"Mrs. Ellison," interposed Maisrie, "we are only slightly acquainted with Lord Musselburgh—very slightly indeed. The fact is, he was kind enough to interest himself in a book, that my grandfather hopes to bring out shortly."

"Ob, really," said the pretty widow with a most charming smile (perhaps she was glad of this opportunity of talking to the young lady herself) "and may I ask—pardon my curiosity—what the subject is."

"It is a collection of poems written by Scotchmen living in America and Canada," answered Maisrie, quite simply. "My grandfather made the acquaintance of several of them, and heard of others; and he thought that a volume of extracts, with a few short biographical notices, might be interesting to the Scotch people over here. For it is about Scotland that they mostly write, I think, and of their recollections—perhaps that is only natural."

"And when may we expect it?" was the next question.

Maisrie turned to her grandfather.

"Oh, well," the old man made answer, with an air of magnificent unconcern, "that is difficult to say. The book is not of such great importance; it may have to stand aside for a time. For one thing, I should most likely have to return to the other side to collect materials; whereas, while we are here in the old country, there are so many opportunities for research in other and perhaps more valuable directions, that it would be a thousand pities to neglect them. For example, now," he continued, seeing that Mrs. Ellison listened meekly, "I have undertaken to write for my friend Carmichael of the *Edinburgh Chronicle* a series of papers on

a branch of our own family that attained to great distinction in the Western Isles during the reign of the Scotch Jameses—the learned Beatons of Islay and Mull."

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Ellison, affecting much interest.

"Yes," resumed old George Bethune, with much dignified complacency, "it will be a singular history if ever I find time to trace it out. The whole of that family seem to have been regarded with a kind of superstitious reverence; all their sayings were preserved; and even now, when a proverb is quoted in the Western Isles, they add, 'as the sage of Mull said' or 'as the sage of Islay said.' For *ullahm*, I may inform you, Mrs.—Mrs.—"

"Ellison," she said, kindly.

"Mrs. Ellison—I beg your pardon—my hearing is not what it was. *Ullahm*, in the Gaelic tongue means at once a Doctor of Medicine and a wise man—"

"They distinguish between the terms in English," put in Vincent.

"—and doctors most of them appear to have been," continued the old man, quite oblivious of interruption: indeed he seemed to be reading something out of his memory, rather than addressing particularly any one of his audience. "A certain Hector Beaton, indeed, got a considerable grant in Islay for having cured one of the Jameses when all the Edinburgh Faculty had failed; and I myself have seen in the island of Iona the tombstone of the last of the Mull doctors of the name, who died so late as 1657. *Hic jacet Johannes Betonus Maclenorum familiæ Medicus*: no doubt there must be some mention of those Beatons in the archives of the various families of Maclean in Mull. Then I daresay I could get a drawing of the tombstone—though I can remember the inscription well enough. The coat of arms, too, has the three mascles of the Bethunes—"

"Of the Bethunes?—then you are of the same family?" said Mrs. Ellison, this time with a little genuine curiosity.

But the interruption had the effect of rousing him from his historical reverie.

"I would rather say," he observed, with some stiffness, "that they were originally of our family. The Norman de Bethune would easily be changed into the Scotch Beaton."

"Then there was Mary Beaton, of the Queen's Maries," Mrs. Ellison suggested.

But at this the old man frowned: he did not wish any fictitious characters brought into these authentic annals.

"An idle tale—a popular rhyme," said he. "There is no real foundation for the story of Mary Hamilton that ever I could get hold of. Of course there may have been a Mary Beaton at Queen Mary's court—what more likely?—and Mary Beaton would come trippingly to the popular tongue in conjunction with Mary Seton; but that is all. It is with real people, and important people, I shall have to

deal when I get to the Advocates Library in Edinburgh."

"Oh, yes, certainly—of course—I quite understand," she said, humbly. And then she rose. "Well, I must be getting back to my friends, Vin, or they will think I have slipped over the side and been drowned."

"But won't you stay to dinner, aunt?" said he. "I wish you would!"

"Oh, no, thanks, I really couldn't," she answered with a sudden earnestness that became more intelligible to him afterwards. "I couldn't run away from my hosts like that." Then she turned to Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter. "By the way," she said, "Lord Musselburgh is coming down to-morrow—merely for the day—and he will be on board the *Villeggiatura*. Would you all of you like to come along and have a look over the boat; or shall I send him to pay you a visit here?"

It was Maisrie who replied—with perfect self-composure.

"Our acquaintance with Lord Musselburgh is so very slight, Mrs. Ellison," said she, "that it would hardly be worth while making either proposal. I doubt whether he would even remember our names."

Whereupon the young widow bade good-bye to Maisrie with a pretty little smile; the old gentleman bowed to her with much dignity; and then she took her seat in the stern of the gig, while her nephew put out the sculls. When they were well out of hearing, Mrs. Ellison said—with a curious look in her eyes of perplexity and half-frightened amusement—

"Vin, who is that old man?"

"Well, you saw, aunt," he made answer.

"Ob, yes, I saw. I saw. But I am none the wiser. I could not make him out at all. Sometimes I thought he was a self-conceited old donkey, who was simply gabbling at random; and again he seemed really to believe what he was saying, about his connection with those Beatons and de Bethunes and the Scotch kings. But there's something behind it all, Vin; I tell you there is; and I can't make it out. There's something mysterious about him—"

"There's nothing mysterious at all!" he exclaimed, impatiently.

"But who is he, then?" she persisted. "What is he? Where is his family? Where are his relatives?"

"I don't think he has any, if it comes to that, except his granddaughter," her nephew replied.

"What does he do, then? How does he exist?"

He was beginning to resent this cross-examination; but yet he said civilly enough—

"I am not in the habit of making inquiries about the income of everyone I meet; but I understand they have some small sum of money between them—not much: and then he has published books; and he writes for the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle*. Is that enough?"

"Where does he live?"

"In Mayfair."

"I don't believe a word of it!" she said, and she even ventured to laugh in a half-embarrassed way. "I believe he dwells in a cave—he is a troglodyte—he comes out at dusk—and wanders about with a lantern and a pickaxe. Really, when I looked at his shaggy eyebrows, and his piercing eyes, and his venerable beard, I thought he must be some Druid come to life again—or perhaps one of those mythical island-doctors surviving from the fourteenth century—"

"At all events, aunt," Vincent said, with an ominous distinctness of tone, "his age and what he has come through might procure for him a little respect. It isn't like you to jeer and jibe simply because a man is old—"

"My dear boy, I am not jibing and jeering!" she protested. "I tell you I am puzzled. There's something about that old man I can't make out."

"How could you expect to understand anybody—in half-an-hour's talk at Henley Regatta!" he said, indignantly. "I gave you the opportunity of getting to know them both, if only you had come along this evening, and spent some time with them. I am not aware that either of them wants to conceal anything. They are not ashamed of their poverty. Perhaps the old man talks too much: you, at least, pretended to find what he said interesting. And as for the girl, no doubt she was silent: she isn't used to be stared at and examined by critical and unsympathetic eyes."

The young widow elevated her brows: here was something unexpected!

"Vin Harris," she said, solemnly, "are you quarrelling with me because—because I am not glamoured? Is it as bad as that? If so, then I am extremely glad I did not accept your invitation for this evening. I am compromised far enough already—"

"What do you mean by compromised?" he demanded.

But just at this moment she had to call to him to look out, for they had almost arrived at the *Villeggiatura*. He glanced over his shoulder, pulled a stroke with his right oar, shipped the other, and then, having gripped the stern of the house-boat, he affixed the painter of the gig, and, letting her back fall into the stream, returned to the thwart he had occupied.

"I wish to ask you, aunt," said he, in a sufficiently stiff and formal tone, "how you consider you have been compromised through meeting any friends of mine."

"Oh," said she, half inclined to laugh, yet a little bit afraid too, "don't ask me. It isn't as serious as that—I mean, I didn't think you would take it seriously. No doubt it's all right, Vin, your choosing your own friends; and I have nothing to say against them; only I would rather you left me out, if you don't mind. You see, I don't know your intentions—"

"Supposing I have none?" he demanded again.

"Well, no one can say what may happen," the young widow persisted; "and I should not like to be appealed to—Now, now, Vin, don't be so passionate!—have I said a single word against your new friends? Not one. I only confess that I'm a selfish and comfort-loving woman, and I don't wish to be drawn into any family strife. There may be no family strife? Very well; so much the better. But my having no further acquaintance with Mr. Bethune and Miss Bethune—my having no knowledge of them whatever, for it practically comes to that—cannot injure them; and leaves me free from responsibility. Now don't quarrel with me, Vin; for I will not allow it; I have been talking common sense to you—but I suppose that is what no man of twenty-five understands."

He hauled up the gig to the stern of the house-boat, as an intimation that she could step on board when she chose.

"There," said she, as she gave him her hand in parting, "I see I have offended you; but what I have said has been for your sake as well as mine."

Well, he was vexed, disappointed, and a little inclined to be angry. But all that darkness fled from his spirit—he forgot all about Mrs. Ellison's friendly monitions—he had no care for any speculations as to the future—when he was back again in the *White Rose*, sitting by Maisrie Bethune, he and she together looking abroad on the gay crowd, and the boats, and the trembling willows, and the slow-moving skies now growing warmer with the afternoon sun. Then, when the last of the races was over, came dinner; and as twilight stole over the river and the meadows, the illuminations began, the rows of coloured lanterns showing one after the other, like so many fire-flies in the dusk. Of course they were sitting outside now—on this placid summer night—in fairyland.

CHAPTER VII.

CLAIRE FONTAINE.

But something far more strange and wonderful happened to him the next morning; and that was his first *tête-à-tête* conversation with Maisrie Bethune. It was quite unexpected, and even unsought; nay, when he stepped outside and found that she was alone on deck, he would have shrank back, had that been possible, rather than break in upon her solitude. For even here at Henley, during the regatta-time, which may be regarded as the High Festival of Joyance and Flir-

tation, there was no thought of pretty and insidious love-making in this young man's head or heart. There was something mysteriously remote and reserved about this isolated young creature, whose very beauty was of a strangely pensive and wistful kind. Even the gentle self-possession and the wisdom beyond her years she showed at times seemed to him a pathetic sort of thing; he had a fancy that during her childhood she never had had the chance of playing with young children.

But it was too late to retreat; and indeed she welcomed him with a pleasant smile as she bade him good morning. It was he who was embarrassed. He talked to her about the common things surrounding them, while anxiously casting about for something better fitting such a rare opportunity. And at last he said—

"Yes, I am sure your grandfather and I get on very well. And I have been wondering whether, when you and he make that pilgrimage through Scotland, he would let me accompany you."

In her beautiful and child-like eyes there was a swift flash of joy that made his heart leap, so direct and outspoken an expression it was of her gladness to think of such a thing; but instantly she had altered her look, and a faint flush of colour had overspread her face—the pale wild-rose had grown pink.

"Your way of travelling and ours are so different," the said, gently.

"Oh, but," said he, with eagerness, "you don't understand how the idea of a long wandering on foot has fascinated me: why, that would be the whole charm of it! You don't know me at all yet. You think I care for the kind of thing that prevails here—that I can't get on without pine-apples and chairs with gilt backs? Why—but I don't want to talk about myself at all: if you would let me come with you on that pilgrimage you would find out a little. And what an opportunity it will be, to go with your grandfather: history, poetry, and romance all brought together: Scotland will be a wonderful country for you before you have done with it. And—and—you see—I have gone on pedestrian excursions before—I have a pretty broad back—I can carry things. You might engage me as porter; for even when you send your luggage on, there will be a few odds and ends to fill a knapsack with; and I can tramp like any gaberlunzie."

She smiled a little, and then said more seriously—

"I am glad to have the chance of speaking to you about that scheme of my grandfather's; because, Mr. Harris, you must try to dissuade him from it as much as possible."

"Dissuade him?"

"Yes," said she, quietly. "You must have seen how completely my grandfather lives in a world of imagination, and how one thing captivates him after another, especially if it is connected with Scotland and Scottish song. And I have no doubt he would write a beautiful book about such a tour as that; for who

knows more about all the places and the legends and ballads? It would be a pleasure for me too—I have dreamed of it many a time. But it is impossible for the present; and it will be a kindness to me, Mr. Harris, if you will not encourage him in it. For the fact is," she continued, with a little embarrassment, "my grandfather has undertaken to write something else—and—and he is under personal obligations about it—and he must not be allowed to forget them."

"Oh, yes, I quite understand," Vincent said. "I have heard of that volume about the Scotch poets in America. Well, you know what your grandfather says, that he would have to go to the other side to collect materials; while, being here in this country just now, he might as well take you to those scenes and places that would make up another book, to be written subsequently. However, I have no doubt you are right. The possibility of my going along with you two on such an excursion has been a wonderful thing for me to speculate on; but whatever you wish, that is enough. I am against the Scotch trip now, so far as I have any right to speak."

She was looking at him enquiringly, and yet diffidently, as if she were asking herself how far she might confide in him.

"Perhaps you have not noticed it, Mr. Harris," she added, still regarding him, "but my grandfather has a strange faculty for making himself believe things. I daresay, if he only planned the American book, he could convince himself that he had written it, and so got rid of those—those obligations. Well, you will help me, will you not?—for I am anxious to see it done; and he may say I am too young and too ignorant to give advice—as I am—"

"Why," said Vincent, almost indignantly, "do you think I cannot see how you guide and lead him always, and with such a tact and wisdom and gentleness as I never beheld anywhere!"

Maisrie flashed downright red this time; but she sought to conceal her confusion by saying quickly—

"Then again you must not misunderstand me, Mr. Harris; you must not think I am saying anything against my grandfather; I am only telling you of one little peculiarity he has. Saying anything against him!—I think I could not well do that; for he has been goodness itself to me since ever I can remember anything. There is nothing he would not sacrifice for my sake; sometimes it is almost painful to me to see an old man, who should be the petted one and the cared for, so ready to give up his own wants and wishes, to please a mere girl who is worthy of no consideration whatever. And consideration is not the word for what I have received from my grandfather always and always; and if I could forget all he has done for me and been to me—if I could be so ungrateful as to forget all those years of affection and sympathy and constant kindness—"

She never finished the sentence. He fancied her eyes were moist as she

turned her head away; anyhow he dared not break in upon the silence; these confidences had been sacred things. And indeed there was no opportunity for further speech on this subject; for presently old George Bethune made his appearance, radiant, buoyant, high-spirited, with a sonorous stanza from Tannahill to greet the awakening of the new day.

Now no sooner had Lord Musselburgh arrived on board the *Villeggiatura* on the same morning than Mrs. Ellison went to him and told him all her story, which very much surprised him, and also concerned him not a little, for it seemed as though he was in a measure responsible for what had happened to Vincent.

"My dear Mrs. Ellison," said he, "I can assure you of one thing: it is quite true that your nephew was in the room when Mr. Bethune and his granddaughter called on me, but I am positively certain that there was no introduction and that he did not speak a single word to them there. How he got to know them I cannot imagine; nor how they could have become so intimate that he should ask them to be his guests down here at Henley. And his sole guests, you say?—Yes, I admit, it looks queer. I hope to goodness there is no kind of entanglement—"

"Oh," said Mrs. Ellison, in sudden alarm; "don't imagine anything from what I have told you I There may be nothing in it: he as good as declared there was nothing in it: and he is so fiery and sensitive—on this one point—why, that is the most serious feature of it all! He looks you straight in the face, and dares you to suspect anything. But really—really—to have those two companions—and no others—on a house-boat at Henley: it is a challenge to the world!"

"Looks rather like it," said Lord Musselburgh; and then he added: "Of course you know that Vin has always been a Quixotic kind of chap—doing impossible things if he thought them right—and all that sort of thing. But it's very awkward just at this moment. There must be some powerful attraction, of one kind or another, to have made him give himself over so completely to these new friends; for he has not been near me of late; and yet here I have in my pocket a letter that concerns him very closely, if only he would pay attention to it. I don't mind telling you, Mrs. Ellison, for you are discretion itself—"

"I think you may trust me, Lord Musselburgh," she said, with a smile.

"Very well, then," said he, lowering his voice. "I hear that there will be a vacancy at Mendover—certainly at the next General Election, but more probably much sooner: old Gosford has become such a confirmed hypochondriac that he will hardly leave his room; and his constituents are grumbling as much as they dare—for he has got money, you know, and the public park he gave them wants further laying out, and statues, and things. Very well; now I have in my pocket a darkly discreet letter from the Committee of the Mendover Liberal Association asking me to go down and deliver an address at their next meeting, and hinting that if I could bring with me an acceptable candidate—"

He paused, and for a second a cynical but perfectly good-humoured laugh appeared in his eyes.

"My dear Mrs. Ellison," said he, "I am deeply grateful. I thought you might express some astonishment at my being consulted in so important an affair. But the fact is, I, also, am expected to do something for that park; and perhaps this invitation was only a little hint to remind me of my local responsibilities. However, that is how the case stands; and I had thought of taking your nephew down with me—

"A vacancy at Mendover," said Mrs. Ellison, in awe-struck tones, "where you are simply everybody! Oh, Lord Musselburgh, what a chance for Vin!"

"And then, you know," continued the young peer, "I want to bring him out as a Tory Democrat, for that is a fine, bewildering sort of thing, that provokes curiosity: you call yourself a Tory and can be as revolutionary as you like, so that you capture votes all round. Why, I've got Vin's programme all ready for him in my pocket: a graduated income-tax, free education, leasehold enfranchisement, compulsory insurance, anything and everything you like except disestablishment—disestablishment won't work at Mendover. Now, you see, Mrs. Ellison, if I could get Vin properly coached, he has all the natural fervour that unhappily I lack; and after I had made my few little jokes which they kindly take for a speech, I could produce him and say 'Here, now, is the young politician of the new generation; here's your coming man; this is the kind of member the next quarter-of-a-century must return to the House of Commons.' But if there is any Delilah in the way—"

Mrs. Ellison crimsoned.

"No, Lord Musselburgh," she said. "No. You need have no fear."

However, she seemed perturbed—perhaps in her anxiety that her nephew should not miss this great opportunity. Presently she said—

"Tell me, what do you know of this old man?—I can't make him out at all."

"I? I know nothing, or next to nothing," he said, lightly, as he gazed abroad on the busy river. "I remember Vin asking me the same question—I suppose out of curiosity about the girl. My recollection of her is that she was extremely pretty—refined-looking—lady-like, in fact—"

"She is, indeed," said Mrs. Ellison, with decision, "and that is what makes the situation all the more dangerous—assuming, of course, that there is any ground for one's natural suspicions. No, Vin is the last man in the world to be captured by any vulgar adventuress; he is at once too fastidious and too proud. But then, you see, he is well known to be the son of a very wealthy man; and there might be a design—" She hesitated for a moment: then she said, half impatiently: "Lord Musselburgh, tell me how you came to know this old man: he could not have sprung out of the earth all of a sudden."

He told her, as briefly as might be.

"That was all?" she repeated, eyeing him shrewdly.

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"What do you mean? That is really all I know of the old gentleman: isn't that what you asked?"

"But was that the whole of the interview, if I may be so impertinent as to inquire?" she demanded again.

"Ob, yes, it was," Lord Musselburgh said; and then he added, indifferently: "Of course I subscribed something towards the publication of a book he mentioned—he had written to me before about the project."

"Oh, there was money?" she said.

A slight tinge on Lord Musselburgh's forehead showed that he had not intended to make this admission.

"Oh, nothing—a trifle—it is usual when a book is coming out by subscription."

Mrs. Ellison sate silent for a little while: there was plenty going on on the river to interest her companion. Then by-and-bye she said slowly—

"Well, I had intended to keep clear of these new friends of Vin's. I thought it would be more prudent for me to know nothing. It is true, I was introduced to them yesterday afternoon; but I wished that to be all; I thought I would rather withdraw; and let things take their course. But I don't know that that would be honest and right. Vin is a young man with many fine and noble qualities—perhaps a little too fine and noble for the ordinary work-a-day world; and I think he ought to have the benefit of my sadly-earned experience and callous nature—"

Lord Musselburgh laughed: he did not take her too seriously.

"He is my own boy," she continued, "I would do anything for him. And I'm not going to let him be entrapped—if that is what all this means. I know he is very angry with me just now; probably he would not speak to me if he were to meet me this minute; but that won't prevent my speaking to him. I'm going to put my pride in my pocket, Lord Musselburgh. I'm going to find out something more about this picturesque old gentleman, who talks so grandly about the Beatons, and the de Bethunes, and their coats of arms, and who accepts a £10 note—or perhaps only a £5 note?—on account of a book that is not yet published. And if there is any sort of scheme on foot for getting hold of the son of so notoriously wealthy a man as Harland Harris, then I want to make a little inquiry. Yesterday Vin indignantly complained that I was prejudiced, and that I had no right to form any opinion about those friends of his because I would not go along and dine with him and them last evening. Very well, I will go to him, and make up the quarrel, and ask him to repeat the invitation for this evening—"

"For this evening?" repeated Lord Musselburgh, in tones of deep disappointment. "You don't mean you are going to leave all your friends here and go and dine somewhere else?"

"If I can procure an invitation. It is my duty. I'm not going to let my boy be made a fool of, even if I have to sacrifice a little of my own personal comfort."

"Yes, that's all very well," said Lord Musselburgh, gloomily, "but I did not bargain for your going away like that on the only evening I shall be here. If I had known—"

He was on the point of saying he would not have come down: but that would have been too bold an avowal. He suddenly hit upon another happy suggestion.

"You said that Vin had only those two on board with him? Well, if he asks you to dine with him, won't he ask me too?"

Mrs. Ellison laughed, and shook her head.

"No, no. Another stranger would put them on their guard. I must manage my Private Investigation all by myself. But you need not look so disconsolate. There are some really nice people here, as you'll find out by-and-bye; and the Drexel girls are driving over from Great Marlow—they are Americans, so you will be properly appreciated: they will try their best to make you happy."

"How late shall you stay on board Vin's boat?" he asked, heedless of these smaller attractions.

"I shall be back here by ten—perhaps by half-past nine."

"Is that a promise?"

"Yes, it is—ten at latest."

"Otherwise I should go back to town in the afternoon," said he, frankly.

"What nonsense!" the young widow exclaimed (but she did not seem resentful). "Well, now, I must go along to the *White Rose*, and make my peace, and angle for an invitation; and then, if I get it, I must concoct my excuses for Mrs. Lawrence. Anyhow I shall be on board the *Villeggiatura* all the afternoon; and then I hope to have the pleasure of introducing you to Louie Drexel—that is the young lady I have designed for Vin, when he has shaken off those adventurers and come to his right mind."

Almost immediately thereafter Mrs. Ellison had secured a boatman to pull her along to the *White Rose*; and as she drew near, she perceived that Maisrie Bethune was alone in the stern of the house-boat, standing upright on the steering-thwart, and with both hands holding a pair of field-glasses to her eyes—an unconscious attitude that showed the graceful figure of the girl to the best advantage.

The observant visitor could also remark that her costume was simplicity itself: a blouse of white soft stuff, with wide sleeves and tight cuffs; a belt of

white silk round her waist; and a skirt of blue serge. She wore no head-covering; and her neatly-braided hair caught several soft-shining hues from the sun—not a wonder and glory of hair, perhaps, (as Vin Harris would have deemed it) but very attractive all the same to the feminine eye, and somehow suggestive of girlhood, and making for sympathy. And then, when a "Good-morning!" brought round a startled face and a proud, clear look that was nothing abashed or ashamed, Mrs. Ellison's conscience smote her that she had made use of the word adventuress, and bade her wait and see.

"Good-morning!" Maisrie Bethune answered; and there came a touch of colour to the fine and sensitive features as she knew that the young matron was regarding her with a continuation of the curiosity of the preceding afternoon.

"Have the gentlemen deserted you? Are you all alone?" Mrs. Ellison said.

"Oh, no; they are inside," was the response. "Would you like to see Mr. Harris? Shall I call him?"

"If you would be so kind!"—and therewith Maisrie disappeared into the saloon, and did not return.

It was Vincent that came out—with terrible things written on his brow.

"Don't look at me like that, Vincent Harris!" Mrs. Ellison exclaimed, half-laughing and half-annoyed. "What have I done? It is you who are so hasty and inconsiderate. But I've come to make it all up with you; and to ask you to ask me to dine with you to-night."

"No, thank you, aunt," he said, civilly enough. "You are very kind; but the fact is you would come with a prejudice; and so you'd better not come at all."

Well, she had to be circumspect; for not only was her own boatman behind her, but there was a possibility of some stray sentence penetrating into the saloon.

"Come," she said, in a sort of undertone, to him; and she had a pretty, coaxing, goodnatured way with her when she chose, "I am not going to allow you to quarrel with me, Vin; and I bring a flag of truce; and honourable proposals. I saw you were offended with me last evening; and perhaps I was a little selfish in refusing your invitation; but you see I confess the error of my ways, for here I am begging you to ask me again."

"Oh, if you put it that way, aunt—"

"Oh, no, I don't put it that way!" she said. "Not if you speak like that. Come, be amiable! I've just been talking to Lord Musselburgh—"

"And, of course, you crammed all your wild ideas into his head!" he exclaimed.

"Whoever heard of poor me having ideas!" she said, with a winning good-humour to which he could not but yield. "It isn't for me to have ideas; but I may have prejudices; and I'm going to leave them, all on board the *Villeggiatura* this evening, if you say yes."

"Of course I say yes—when you are like yourself, aunt," he responded at once, "and I shall be very glad indeed. And what is more," said he, in a still lower tone, "when you have really met—certain people—and when you have to confess that you have been unjust, I don't mean to triumph over you. Not a bit. If you have done any injustice, you know yourself how to make it up—to them. Now that's all right and settled: and I'm really glad you're coming. Seven o'clock; and the dress you've got on."

"Oh, but, mind you," said she, "you don't seem to appreciate my goodness in humbling myself so as to pacify your honourable worship. Do you know what I shall have to do besides? How am I to explain to the Lawrences my running away from their party? And here is Lord Musselburgh come down; and the Drexel girls are expected; so you see what I am doing for you, Vin—"

"You're always good to me, aunt—when you choose to be reasonable and exercise your common-sense—"

"Common-sense!" she retorted, with a malicious laugh in her eyes. Then she said, quite seriously: "Very well, Vin: seven o'clock: that is an excellent hour, leaving us all a nice long evening; for I must get back to the *Villeggiatura* early."

And so that was all well and amicably settled. But Master Vin, though young in years, had not tumbled about the world for nothing; and a little reflection convinced him that his pretty aunt's change of purpose—her abandonment of her resolve to remain discreetly aloof—had not been prompted solely, if at all, by her wish to have that little misunderstanding between him and her removed. That could have been done at any time; a few words of apology and appeal, and there an end. This humble seeking for an invitation which she had definitely refused the day before meant more than that; it meant that she had resolved to find out something further about these strangers. Very well, then, she was welcome: at the same time he was resolved to receive this second visit not as he had received the first. He was no longer anxious about the impression these two friends of his might produce on this the first of his relatives to meet them. She might form any opinion she chose: he was indifferent. Nay, he would stand by them on every point; and justify them; and defy criticism. If he had dared he would have gone to Maisrie and said: "My aunt is coming to dinner to-night; but I will not allow you to submit yourself to any ordeal of inspection. You shall dress as you like, as carelessly or as neatly as you like; you shall wear your hair hanging down your back or braided up, without any thought of her; you shall be as silent as you wish—and leave her, if she chooses, to call you stupid, or shy, or sulky, or anything else." And he would have gone to the old man and said: "Talk as much and as long as ever you have a mind; you cannot babble o' green fields too discursively for me; I, at all events, am sufficiently interested in your claims of proud lineage, in your enthusiasm about Scotland and Scottish song, in your

reminiscences of many lands. Be as self-complacent and pompous as you please; fear nothing; fear criticism least of all." And perhaps, in like manner, he would have addressed Mrs. Ellison herself: "My dear aunt, it is not they who are on their trial, it is you. It is you who have to show whether you have the courage of honest judgment, or are the mere slave of social custom and forms." For perhaps he, too, had imbibed a little of the "Stand Fast, Craig Royston!" spirit? Bravado may be catching—especially where an innocent and interesting young creature of eighteen or so is in danger of being exposed to some deadly approach.

Of course this carelessly defiant attitude did not prevent his being secretly pleased when, as seven o'clock drew near, he perceived that Maisrie Bethune had arranged herself in an extremely pretty, if clearly inexpensive, costume; and also he was in no wise chagrined to find that Mrs. Ellison, on her arrival, appeared to be in a very amiable mood. There was no need to ask her "O come ye in peace here, or come ye in war?": her manner was most bland; in particular she was adroitly flattering and fascinating towards old George Bethune, who accepted these little attentions from the charming widow with a grave and consequential dignity. The young host refused to sit at the head of the table; he had the places arranged two and two—Mrs. Ellison, of course, as the greater stranger and the elder woman, on his right, and Maisrie opposite to him. During the general dinner-talk, which was mostly about the crowd, and the races, and the dresses, Mrs. Ellison casually informed her nephew that she had that afternoon won two bets, and also discovered that she and Lord Musselburgh were to meet at the same house in Scotland the coming autumn: perhaps this was the explanation of her extreme and obvious good humour.

And if any deep and sinister design underlay this excessive amiability on her part, it was successfully concealed; meantime all was pleasantness and peace; and the old gentleman, encouraged by her artless confidences, spoke more freely and frankly about the circumstances of himself and his granddaughter than was his wont.

"I see some of the papers are indignant about what they call the vulgar display of wealth at Henley regatta," the young widow was saying, in a very unconcerned and easy fashion; "but I wish those gentlemen would remember that there is such a thing as imputation of motives, and that imputing motives is a common resource of envy. If I have a house-boat, and try to make it as pretty as ever I can, both inside and out, why should that be considered display of wealth—display of any sort? I like nice things and comfortable things around me; I don't mind confessing it; I am a selfish woman—"

"There are some who know better, aunt," her nephew interposed.

"Young gentleman," said she, promptly, "your evidence isn't worth anything, for you have expectations. And I am not to be flattered. I admit that I

am a selfish and comfort-loving woman; and I like to see pretty things around me, and an abundance of them; and if I can only have these at the cost of being charged with ostentation and display, very well, I will pay the price. If it comes to that, I never saw anything beautiful or desirable in poverty. Poverty is not beautiful; never was, never is, never will be beautiful; it is base and squalid and sordid; it demeans men's minds, and stunts their bodies. I dare say poverty is an excellent discipline—for the rich, if they would only submit to a six mouths' dose of it now and again; but it is not a discipline at all for the poor; it is a curse; it is the most cruel and baleful thing in the world, destroying self-respect, destroying hope, ambition, everything. Oh, I know the heresy I'm talking. There's Master Vin's papa: he is never done preaching the divine attributes of poverty; and I have no doubt there are a good many others who would be content to fall down and worship *la bonne déesse de la pauvreté*—on £30,000 a year!"

Master Vin sniggered: he was aware that this was not the only direction in which the principles of the philosopher of Grosvenor Place were somewhat inconsistent with his practice. However, it was old George Bethune who now spoke—as one having experience.

"I quite agree," said he to Mrs. Ellison. "I can conceive of nothing more demoralising to the nature of man or woman than harsh and hopeless poverty, a slavery from which there is no prospect of escape. My granddaughter and I have known what it is to be poor; we know it now; but in our case every day brings possibilities—we breathe a wider air, knowing that at any moment news may come. Then fancy plays her part; and imagination can brighten the next day for us, if the present be dark enough. Hopeless poverty—that is the terrible thing; the weary toil leading to nothing; perhaps the unfortunate wretch sinking deeper and deeper into the Slough of Despond. Maisrie and I have met with trials; but we have borne them with a stout heart; and perhaps we have been cheered—at least I know I have been—by some distant prospect of the Bonnie Mill-dams o' Balloray, and a happier future for us both."

"Balloray?" she repeated, inquiringly.

"Balloray, in Fife. Perhaps you have never heard of the Balloray law-suit, and I will not inflict any history of it upon you at present," he continued, with lofty complaisance. "I was merely saying that poverty is not so hard to bear when there are brighter possibilities always before you. If, in our case, we are barred in law by the Statute of Limitations, there is no Statute of Limitations in the chapter of accidents. And some remarkable instances have occurred. I remember one in which a father, two sons, and a daughter were all drowned at once by the sinking of a ship, and the property went bodily over to the younger branch of the family, who had been penniless for years. It is the unexpected that happens, according to the saying; and so we move from day to day towards fresh possibilities; and

who can tell what morning may not bring us a summons to make straight for the Kingdom of Fife? Not for myself do I care; I am too old now; it is for my granddaughter here; and I should pass happily away and contented if I could leave her in sole and undisputed possession of the ancient lands of the Bethunes of Balloray."

What pang was this that shot through Vincent's heart? He suddenly saw Maisrie removed from him—a great heiress—unapproachable—guarded by this old man with his unconquerable pride of lineage and birth. *She* might not forget old friends; but *he*? The Harris family had plenty of money; but they had nothing to add to the fesse between three mascles, *or*, and the otter's head; nor had any of their ancestors, so far as was known, accompanied Margaret of Scotland on her marriage with the Dauphin of France, or taken arms along with the great Maximilien de Bethune, duc de Sully. In imagination the young man saw himself a lonely pedestrian in Fifeshire, regarding from a distance a vast baronial building set amid black Scotch firs and lighter larches, and not daring even to draw near the great gate with the otter's head in stone over the archway. He saw the horses being brought round to the front entrance—a beautiful white Arab and a sturdy cob: the hall door opens—the heiress of Balloray descends the wide stone steps—she is assisted to mount, and pats that beautiful white creature on the neck. And will she presently come cantering by—her long hair flowing to the winds, as fair as it used to be in the olden days when the shifting lights and mists of Hyde Park gave it ever-varying hues? Can he steal aside somewhere?—he has no desire to claim recognition! She has forgotten the time when, in the humble lodgings she used to sing "*Je ne puis rien donner, qu' mon coeur en mariage*"; she has wide domains now; and wears an ancient historic name. And so she goes along the white highway, and under the swaying boughs of the beeches, until she is lost in a confusion of green and gold...

"And in the meantime," said Mrs. Ellison (Vincent started: had that bewildering and far-reaching vision been revealed to him all in one brief, breathless second?) "in the meantime, Mr. Bethune, you must derive a great deal of comfort and solace from your literary labours."

"My literary labours," said the old man, slowly and absently, "I am sorry to say, are mostly perfunctory and mechanical. They occupy attention and pass the time, however; and that is much. Perhaps I have written one or two small things which may survive me for a year or two; but if that should be so, it will be owing, not to any merit of their own, but to the patriotism of my countrymen. Nay, I have much to be thankful for,", he continued, in the same resigned fashion. "I have been spared much. If I had been a famous author in my younger days, I should now be reading the things I had written then with the knowledge that I was their only reader. I should be thinking of my contemporaries and saying 'At

one time people spoke of me as now they are speaking of you.' It is a kind of sad thing for a man to outlive his fame; for the public is a fickle-minded creature, and must have new distractions; but now I cannot complain of being forgotten, for I never did anything deserving of being remembered."

"Grandfather," said Maisrie, "surely it is unfair of you to talk like that! Think of the many friends you have made through your writings."

"Scotch friends, Maisrie, Scotch friends," he said. "I admit that. The Scotch are not among the forgetful ones of the earth. If you want to be made much of," he said, turning to Mrs. Ellison, "if you want to be regarded with a constant affection and gratitude, and to have your writings remembered and repeated, by the lasses at the kirn, by the ploughman in the field, by gentle and simple alike, then you must contrive to be born in Scotland. The Scottish heart beats warm, and is constant. If there is a bit of heather or a blue-bell placed on my grave, it will be by the hand of a kindly Scot."

Dinner over, they went out and sate in the cool twilight and had coffee, while the steward was clearing away within. Mrs. Ellison, faithful to her promise to Lord Musselburgh, said she had not long to stay; but her nephew, having a certain scheme in his mind, would not let her go just yet; and by and bye, when the saloon had been lit up, he asked her, in a casual kind of fashion, whether before she went she would not like to hear Miss Bethune sing something.

"Oh, I should like it of all things!" she replied instantly, with a reckless disregard of truth.

Maisrie glanced at her grandfather.

"Yes, certainly—why not?" said he.

"Then," said their young host, "I propose we go in to the saloon again; it will be quieter." For there was still a plash of oars on the river, and an echoing call of voices in the meadows beyond.

When they had returned into the saloon, Maisrie took up her violin; and Mrs. Ellison bravely endeavoured to assume an air of interested expectancy. The fact was she disliked the whole proceeding; here would be some mere exhibition of a schoolgirl's showy accomplishments; she would have to say nice things; and she hated telling lies—when nothing was to be gained. Maisrie made some little apology; but said that perhaps Mrs. Ellison had not heard the *Claire Fontaine*, which is a favourite song of the Canadians. Then she drew her bow across the strings.

Vincent need not have been so anxious. Hardly had Maisrie begun with

"*A la claire fontaine,*
M'en allant promener—"

than Mrs. Ellison's air of forced attention instantly vanished; she seemed surprised; she listened in a wondering kind of way to the low, clear tones of the girl's voice that were so curiously sincere and penetrating and simple. Not a schoolgirl's showing off, this; but a kind of speech, that reached the heart.

"Sur la plus haute branche
Le rossignol chantait.
Chante, rossignol, chante,
Toi qui as le coeur gai.
Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."

Did she notice the soft dwelling on the *r*'s, Vincent asked himself; and had she ever heard anything so strangely fascinating? Then the simple pathos of the story—if there was any story—

"Chante, rossignol, chante,
Toi qui as le coeur gai;
Tu as le coeur à rire,
Moi je l'ai-t-à pleurer.

Tu as le coeur à rire,
Moi j'e l'ai-t-à pleurer:
J'ai perdu ma maîtresse
Sans l'avoir mérité.
Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne l'oublierai."

"That is enough," said Maisrie, with a smile, and she laid the violin in her lap.

"It is too long. You never hear it sung altogether in Canada—only a verse here and there—or perhaps merely the refrain—"

"But is there more?—oh, please sing the rest of it—it is delightful—so quaint, and simple, and charming!" Mrs. Ellison exclaimed; and Master Vin was a proud and glad young man; he knew that Maisrie had all unaided struck home.

The girl took up her violin again, and resumed:

"J'ai perdu ma maîtresse
Sans l'avoir mérité.
Pour un bouquet de roses

Que je lui refusai.

Pour un bouquet de roses
Que je lui refusai.
Je voudrais que la rose
Fût encore au rosier.

Je voudrais que la rose
Fût encore au rosier,
Et moi et ma maîtresse
Dans les mem's amitiés.
Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai!"

Well, when the singing, if it could be called singing, was over, Mrs. Ellison made the usual little compliments, which nobody minded one way or the other. But presently she had to leave; and while she was being rowed up the river by her nephew she was silent. When they reached the *Villeggiatura* (the people were all outside, amid the confused light of the lanterns in the dusk) she said to him, in a low voice, as she bade him good-bye—

"Vin, let me whisper something to you—a confession. *Claire Fontaine* has done for me. That girl is a good girl. She is all right, any way."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ALARM.

On a certain still, clear, moonlight night a dog-cart containing two young men was being driven away from the little town of Mendover, out into the wide, white, silent country. The driver was Lord Musselburgh, and he seemed in high spirits, talking to his companion almost continuously, while he kept the stout little cob going at a rattling pace.

"I am more pleased than I can tell you," he was saying. "Quite a triumph! Why, you took to it as a duck takes to water. Of course there's something in having a responsive audience; and you can always get a noble band of patriots to

cheer your proposal for a progressive income-tax when not one in ten of them has any income-tax to pay. I'm afraid they weren't quite so enthusiastic about your scheme of compulsory insurance; indeed they seemed a little disappointed and offended; the Champion of the Proletariat was playing it a little low down on them; but a heavily increasing income-tax—oh, yes, that was splendid!—they saw the Rothschilds caught at last, and had visions of a land in which there shall be no more poor-rates or police-rates, perhaps not even water-rates or gas-rates. But it was your confounded coolness that surprised me—no beating about the bush—walking straight into it—and without preparation, too—"

"I knew what I had to say," Vincent interposed, with a becoming modesty, "and it seemed simple enough to say it."

"Yes, and so it is—when you have acquired the knack of forgetting yourself," said the young nobleman, oracularly. "And that appears to have come naturally to you, my boy. However, this is why I am so particularly pleased with your successful first appearance," Lord Musselburgh proceeded, as the dog-cart went bowling along the silent, white highway, between the black hedges. "I am about to unfold to you a great idea, Vin—perhaps prematurely, but you will be discreet. The project is mine; but I want help to carry it through; you and I must work together; and years and years hence we shill be recognised as the Great Twin Brethren, who saved the falling fortunes of England."

Was he in jest or earnest? Vincent, knowing his friend's sub-cynical habit of speech, listened without interposing a word.

"We shall earn for ourselves a deathless renown, at very little cost—to us; it's the other people who will have to pay, and we shall have all the glory. Now what I propose is briefly this: I propose to give all those good folk who profess a warm regard for their native country a chance of showing what their patriotism is worth. I don't want them to fight; there isn't any fighting going on at present to speak of; and in any case the rich old merchants, and maiden ladies, and portly bishops, and ponderous judges—well, they'd make an awkward squad to drill; but I mean to give them an opportunity of testifying to their affection for the land of their birth; and you, my blazing young Tory-Democrat, if you can speak as freely as you spoke to-night, you must carry the fiery torch north, south, east, and west—till you've secured Westminster Abbey for both of us, or at least a tablet in St. Paul's. Then look what a subject for your eloquence you have—the guarding of England from any possible combination of her foes—the island-citadel made impregnable—'compass'd by the inviolate sea'—defence not defiance—you understand the kind of thing. But really, Vin, you know, there is going to be an awful stramash, as my old nurse used to say, in Europe before the century is out; and England's safety will lie in her being strong enough to remain aloof. And how? Why, by trebling her present navy."

"Trebling her present navy!" Vincent repeated, in a vague sort of way.

"Yes," Musselburgh went on, coolly. "And it can easily be done, without involving a single farthing of taxation. I want the people of this country to show what they can do voluntarily; I want them to make a tremendous effort to render Great Britain secure from attack for a century at least; and the manner of doing it is to form a National Patriotic Fund, to which everybody, man and woman, merchant and apprentice, millionaire and club-waiter, can subscribe, according to their means and the genuineness of their patriotism. Here is a chance for everybody; here is a test of all those professions of love of country. Why, it would become a point of honour, with the very meanest, if the nation were thoroughly aroused, and if a splendid example were set in high places. The Queen, now—who is more directly interested in the safety of the country than she is?—why should she not head the list with £100,000? I would call the fund the Queen's Fund; and I should not wonder if we were to get two or three maniacs—very useful maniacs—patriots they would have been called in other days—to cut their possessions in half, and hand the one half bodily over to Her Majesty: that would be something like an example!"

"But is it all a wild speculation, Musselburgh?" asked Vincent, who was puzzled. "Or do you mean it seriously?"

"Ha and hum," said the young peer, significantly. "That depends. I should want to sound some of the dukes about it. And first of all I must have some sort of scheme ready, to get rid of obvious objections. They might say 'Oh, you want to treble the Navy? Then in twenty years you'll find yourself with a crowd of obsolete ships, and all your money gone.' That is not what I mean at all. I mean the formation of an immense voluntary national fund, which will keep the Navy at double or treble its present strength, not by a sudden multiplication of ships, but by gradually adding vessels of the newest construction, as improvements are invented. An immense fund, doubtless; for of course there would be maintenance; but what couldn't a rich country like England do if she chose? And that's what I'm coming to, with regard to you, my young Demosthenes. It would be infinitely better—it would be safer—it would be building on securer foundations—if the demand for such a movement came from the country itself. If the Queen, and the dukes, and the millionaires were to subscribe as if in answer to an appeal from the people, the enthusiasm would be tremendous; it would be such a thing as never happened before in the history of England: talk about noble ladies flinging their jewels into the public treasury?—why, every school-girl would bring out her hoarded pocket-money, with her lips white with patriotic fervour. England can subscribe on all possible occasions for the benefit of other countries: for once let her subscribe on her own behalf!" Lord Musselburgh went on, though it might have been hard to say what half-mocking bravado intermingled with

his apparent enthusiasm. "And that's where you would come in. You would be the emissary, the apostle, the bearer of the fiery torch. You've done very well with the grocers' assistants of Mendover; but fancy having to wake up England, Canada, Australia, and the Cape to the necessity for making the Mother Country once for all invulnerable, in the interests of peace and universal freedom. Why, I could become eloquent about it myself. They cheered your graduated income-tax; but what would they say to this? Fancy what could be done if every man in this country were to pledge himself to give a year's income! We don't ask him to go out and have his legs or his arms amputated, or his head shot off; we only ask for a year's income—to secure peace and prosperity for himself and his children and his children's children. If there is any patriotism in the country at all, who would say no? And then when there is an iron belt round England, and when there is a floating mass of iron that could be sent at any moment to form a wall round any of her dependencies, then, I suppose, there might be a splendid assemblage in Westminster Hall; and you and I—as the instigators of this great national movement—but my imagination stops short: I don't know what they will make of us."

He himself had to stop short, for he was passing through a wide gateway into the grounds surrounding the Bungalow, and the carriage-drive was almost invisible under the overshadowing trees. Presently they had drawn up in front of the long, low, rambling house; and here were lit windows, and an open door, and servants. The two young men descended, and entered, and went into the billiard-room, where cigars and soda-water and similar things had been set out in readiness for them; and here Lord Musselburgh, lying back in a cane-bottomed chair, proceeded to talk in a less random fashion about this project of his, until he had almost persuaded his companion that there was something reasonable and practicable in it, if only it could be properly initiated.

"Anyhow," said he to his guest, as they were both retiring for the night, "it is some big movement like that, Vin, my lad, that you want to get identified with, if your aim is to make a position in English public life. You have advantages. You can speak well. You will have plenty of money. You are beginning with the proletariat—that is laying a foundation of popularity. You have youth and heaps of strength on your side. Then —— is known to be your friend. What more?"

What more, indeed? The future seemed to smile on this young man; and if his dreams, waking or sleeping, had been of great achievements and public triumphs, who could have wondered? But curiously enough, just at this time, the forecasts that came to him in moments of quiet were apt to be sombre. He dreaded he hardly knew what. And these vague forebodings of the day took a more definite shape in the far-reaching visions of the night; for again and again there recurred to him that phantasmal picture that had suddenly startled him

when old George Bethune was talking of the possibilities that might be lying in store for his granddaughter. Vin Harris had never seen Balloray—did not know where it was, in fact; but night after night he beheld with a strange distinctness the big baronial building, and the black firs, and the gate with the otter's head in stone. Had that been all! But as regularly there came forth the tall young girl with the long-flowing hair; and he was a poor wanderer, cowering away from recognition; and again she would ride by, along the white road, until she was lost in the dappled sun and shadow under the beeches. Then there was a song somewhere—perhaps it was the trembling leaves that whispered the refrain—but it was all about separation, and loneliness, and the sadness of remembrance and of loss. *Chante, rossignol, chante, toi qui as le coeur gai*—this was what he heard, or seemed to hear, away in that distant land, where he had been left alone ... *J'ai perdu ma maîtresse, sans l'avoir mérité* ... It was strange that no birds sang in these woods, that no lark hung quivering in those skies: all was silence—save for that continuous murmur of farewell.... *Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime, jamais je ne t'oublierai.* And sometimes the murmur rose into a larger monotone; the big grey building, and the black firs, and the highway, and the beeches, disappeared; and behold in their stead was a great breadth of sea, desolate, and rain-swept, and void of all sign of life. And was this the barrier now between him and her? Not merely that she was the heiress of Balloray, under the guardianship of her implacably proud old grandfather, but that she was away in some far land, beyond those never-ending myriad voices of the deep? ... *Pour un bouquet de roses, que je lui refusai* ... What wrong had he done her? What had he denied her, in the time when they were as boy and girl together—when there was no thought of her being the heiress of Balloray—when she used to walk down through Hyde Park, in her simple dress, and sit on the bench, while her grandfather read his newspaper? Then the grey dawn would come; and he would awake to the knowledge that he had been tortured by mere phantasies; and yet these left something in his mind, even during the actual and practical daylight hours. He begun to wish that there was some bond—of what nature he had not determined—for it was all a vague longing and wistful desire—a bond that could so bind Maisrie and him together that that great width of sea should not intervene. For it was a sorrowful kind of thing—even when the white hours of the daylight told him he had only seen it in a dream.

But apart from all these dim anxieties and this haunting unrest, came the strictly matter-of-fact consideration that within an appreciable time old George Bethune and his granddaughter would be returning to the United States. That was no spectral ocean that would then lie between Maisrie and him, but three thousand miles of the Atlantic; and who could tell when the two wanderers might ever see England again? Nay, had not he himself been implored to help in bring-

ing about this separation? Maisrie had begged of him to urge upon her grandfather the necessity of getting the American book done first, before setting out on the poetic pilgrimage through Scotland which was to yield fruit of another kind; and, of course, if the old man consented, the first step to be taken was a voyage to New York. Vincent had drawn many a fancy picture of a little group of three, wandering away through the rich-hued autumn days, by "lone St. Mary's silent lake," or by the banks of the silver Tweed; but now all that was to be sacrificed; and he himself was to do what he could towards sending the old man back to America, and Maisrie with him. Then there would be no more of the long, quiet days of study, made happy by anticipations of the evening; no more of the pleasant little dinners in this or that restaurant; no more of those wonderful twilights in the little parlour, with their enchantments of music and happy converse. London, with Maisrie Bethune three thousand miles away: that would be a strange thing—that he could even now hardly imagine to himself.

Nay, it was a thing that he looked forward to with such an unreasoning dread and dismay that he began to construct all sorts of mad schemes for defeating any such possibility; and at last he hit upon one that seemed more or less practicable, while it would in the meantime virtually absolve him from his promise to Maisrie. On the morning after the meeting of the Mendover Liberal Association, the two young men were returning to town by train; and Vincent said to his companion—

"You were telling me the other night of the Scotch newspaper-man whom you got to know in New York: what did you say his name was?"

"Oh, you mean Hugh Anstruther? I hope I spoke no ill of him; for an enthusiastic patriotism such as his is really something to admire in these days. A capital fellow, Hugh; until I fell across him in New York I did not know that I had one virtue transcending all the other virtues, and that was simply my being a brother Scot."

"What did you say was the name of the paper that he edits?"

"The *Western Scotsman*."

"And it was he who gave Mr. Bethune a letter of introduction to you?"

But here Lord Musselburgh's manner instantly changed: he had been answering these questions in a careless way, looking out of the carriage window most of the time: now he turned to his companion, and regarded him with some scrutiny.

"Why do you ask, Vin?" he said. "Do you want to find out something further about the old man?"

Vincent's forehead flushed; and his eyes gloomed dark.

"I do not," he made answer, in distinct tones. "I thank goodness my nature is not so suspicious. It seems to me extraordinary that two human beings who

have done nothing in the world to deserve it should be regarded with a constant mistrust and doubt. Why? Do you suspect everybody else in the same way?"

"Oh, don't say that I suspect them," Lord Musselburgh exclaimed at once—for he was an exceedingly good-natured young man and had no wish to offend. "I don't know them well enough—don't know anything at all about them, in fact."

"You told me yourself that my aunt and you had been talking them over; and I gathered enough from what you said," was the younger man's retort.

"Mrs. Ellison is naturally anxious about anything that concerns your future, Vin—or seems likely to concern it," Musselburgh said. "And you should be the last to object."

"But I do object," he said, stiffly. "I object altogether to her canvassing the character of any friends of mine; and to her putting her doubts and suspicions and hints about them into any third person's imaginations. Oh, yes, I could make out quite clearly what she had been saying. That night at Henley she came on a visit of inspection; it was perfectly obvious. And what is more, she came with the hope of having her suspicions confirmed; and I suppose she was horribly disappointed that Maisrie Bethune did not drop her *h*'s, and that Mr. Bethune did not beg the loan of a sovereign from her!"

"Why so passionate, Vin—why so indignant?" his companion put in, glancing at him curiously.

"Because I say it is a shame—a monstrous shame," the young man said, with flaming eyes, "that anyone should be insulted so! Is it their fault that they have no friends, that they are unknown, that they are poor? To be wealthy is to be virtuous, of course; if you have a long balance at your bankers', you are above suspicion then; if you have house-boats, and four-in-hands, and gold plate, you're all right. I suppose," said he, altering his tone, "that it was on that very evening—the evening of her inspection—that my aunt was kind enough to talk over those two friends of mine with you, and tell you of all the portentous things she suspected of them. But I presume she did not repeat to you the very last words she used to me as she said good-night?"

"About what?"

"About Miss Bethune," said Vincent—though it cost him an indescribable effort to pronounce her name.

"Well, I believe she did," Lord Musselburgh admitted. "For she had just come away from hearing Miss Bethune sing some Canadian song or another; and she was very much struck; and she said she had confessed as much to you. Oh, more than that—I don't precisely remember the words. But really, Vin, when you come to think of it, you must acknowledge that there is not much guidance as to character, or antecedents, or any thing else, in the mere singing of a song. Mrs. Ellison, who is always posing as a callous woman of the world, is really very

sympathetic and generous, and warm-hearted; and she was quite taken captive by the charm and simplicity of this *Claire Fontaine*—is that the name of it?—but at the same time I should not place too great a value—"

"I quite agree with you," the younger man said, interrupting without apology. "I place no more value on my aunt's acquittal and commendation than on her previous suspicions. And—and—if you don't mind, Musselburgh, I would rather not have the question discussed further, nor Miss Bethune's name mentioned in any way whatsoever."

"Oh, but remember I said nothing against her," Lord Musselburgh finally added, in perfect good humour. "How could I? I hope your new friends are all you think them; and as for the young lady, it is difficult to believe any harm of so refined and sweet a face. But I hope you won't concern yourself too much with them, Vin; you have other, and perhaps more serious, interests in life; and it seems to me that everything promises well for you. Why, at this moment, man, don't you know what ought to be occupying all your attention?"

"What?" his companion asked—perhaps glad enough to get away from that delicate topic.

"At least I know what I should be thinking of if I were in your shoes. I should be wondering how much space the editor of the *Mendover Weekly Guardian* was going to give me on Saturday morning next."

It was another editor whom Vincent had in his mind at that moment. As soon as he got back to London he wrote and despatched the following letter, which was addressed to "Hugh Anstruther, Esq., *Western Scotsman* Office, New York, U.S.A."

"DEAR SIR,

"I hope you will be so kind as to consider the contents of this note as strictly private and confidential. In a recent conversation with Lord Musselburgh he informed me that it was you who had given a letter of introduction to him to Mr. George Bethune; and from Mr. Bethune himself I learn that he, Mr. Bethune, is about to bring out a volume on the Scottish poets in America, as soon as he can conveniently get the materials together. But to this end it would appear that he must revisit the United States and Canada, to obtain particulars of the lives of the various poets and verse-writers, and perhaps, also, examples of their work. Now I wish to ask you, as a friend of Mr. Bethune's, whether all this fatigue and travel might not be spared him, supposing there were some person or persons in this country willing to defray the cost of having those materials collected for him. To speak plainly, do you, sir, know of any writer, connected with the press or otherwise, who would undertake, for a sufficient consideration, to bring together biographical memoranda of the authors in question, along with specimens

of their work, which could be sent over here to Mr. Bethune, for him to put into shape and issue in book-form? Mr. Bethune, as you know, is an old man, who must surely have had enough of travelling; moreover he has in mind a leisurely ramble through Scotland which, while also leading to literary results, would involve much less fatigue than a voyage to the United States and Canada. I should be greatly obliged if you would tell me whether you consider it practicable to collect those materials by deputy; also, if you know of anyone capable of undertaking the task; and what remuneration he would probably require. I beg you to forgive me, a stranger, for thus appealing to you; but I know you will not grudge a little trouble for the sake of a friend and a fellow Scotchman.

"**Yours faithfully and obediently**, "VINCENT HARRIS."

After sending off that letter the young man's spirits lightened considerably; he saw there was still a chance that Maisrie Bethune, her grandfather, and himself might together set out on that coveted perambulation of the legend-haunted districts of the North. And now he and they had returned to their ordinary mode of life—which perhaps pleased him better than the ostentatious festivities of Henley. Here was no staring crowd, here were no suspicious friends, to break in upon their close and constant companionship. He rejoiced in this isolation; he wished for no fourth person at the quiet little dinners in the restaurants; he had no desire that anyone should share the privacy of the hushed small parlour where old George Bethune loftily discoursed of poetry and philosophy, of ancient customs and modern manners, and where Maisrie played pathetic Scotch airs on the violin, or sang in her low clear voice of *le pont d'Avignon* or perhaps of *Marianson, dame jolie*. Moreover, he could not fail to perceive, and that with an ever-increasing delight, that her old expression of sad and wistful resignation was gradually being banished from her eyes; and not only that, but a quite fresh colour was come into her cheeks, so that the pale sun-tinge was less perceptible. Perhaps it was the companionship of one nearer to her own age that had made a difference in her life; at all events much of her former shyness was gone; she met his look frankly, sometimes with a touch of gratitude, sometimes with simple gladness, as if his mere presence was something that pleased her. When she was watering the flowers in the little balcony, and caught sight of him over the way, she nodded and smiled: he wondered whether it was that faint-sun-tinge of the complexion that made her teeth seem so clearly white. He began to forget those dreams of a wide intervening sea: this present existence was so peaceable, and contented, and happy. And in spite of Maisrie's injunction, those dreams of Scotland would recur: he saw three newly-arrived strangers walking along Princes

Street, Edinburgh, in the silver glare of the morning; and the middle one of the three—looking away up to the dusky shadows of the Castle rock—was no other than Maisrie Bethune herself, with light and gladness shining in her eyes.

And what had old George Bethune to say to this constant association and this fast friendship between the two young people? Well, old George Bethune had an admirable capacity for enjoying the present moment; and so long as the dinner was fairly cooked and the claret to his taste, so long as he had a small and faithful audience to listen to his rhapsodies about Scottish song and Scottish heroism, and so long as Maisrie's violin was in tune and her hand as sensitive as ever on the trembling strings, he did not seem to pay much heed to the future. Perhaps it was but natural that one who had wandered so far and wide should welcome a little peace at last; and perhaps he intentionally blinded his eyes; at all events the young people were allowed the utmost freedom of companionship—it was as if these three formed but one family.

One night, as Vincent was about to leave, the old gentleman said to him—

"About to-morrow evening: I presume we dine at Mentavisti's?"

"Oh, yes, certainly: we've tried a good many places, and we can't do better than Mentavisti's," the young man answered—as if it mattered one brass farthing to him what sort of dinner there was, or where he got it, so long as Maisrie was at the same table!

"Ah, very well. For this is how I am situated," said Mr. Bethune, gravely and grandly as befitted the seriousness of the theme. "I have an appointment in Jermyn-street at six o'clock. I may be detained. Now I can undertake to be at Mentavisti's Restaurant at seven—and when the dinner-hour is once fixed, to play shilly-shally with it seems to me abominable—but I am not so sure that I shall have time to return home first. It will be better, therefore, and everyway safer, for Maisrie to come down by herself in a cab—"

"But mayn't I call for her?" the young man suggested at once. "You know she would much rather walk down than drive."

"Oh, very well, very well, if you don't mind," said Mr. Bethune, with a lofty condescension—or indifference; while Maisrie, instead of being in the least confused by this proposal, looked up with perfectly frank and pleased eyes, apparently giving him a little message of thanks.

Nor was she in the least embarrassed on the following evening, when he was ushered upstairs by the landlady's daughter. Maisrie was alone in the little parlour, ready-dressed except as regarded her gloves, and she was putting a final touch to the few flowers with which she had adorned the table.

"Good evening," said she, quite placidly. "I will be with you in a moment, as soon as I have dried my fingers."

She disappeared for a second, and returned. He hesitated before accompa-

nying her to the door.

"Won't you give me one of those flowers?" said he, rather breathlessly.

She seemed a little surprised.

"Now that I think of it," she said, "I have never seen you wear a flower in your coat, as other gentlemen do. And I'm afraid there isn't one here nearly fine enough—"

"If you were to give me a flower, I should not destroy it by wearing it in my coat!" said he.

"Oh, merely a flower?" she asked. She went to the table. "Will this one do?"

It was a white geranium that she handed him, simply enough: he took out his pocket-book, and carefully placed it between the leaves. For the briefest instant she regarded him as if in wonder that he should seek to preserve so worthless a trifle; but she made no remark; and then unconcernedly and cheerfully she led the way downstairs, and together they passed out into the open street.

It was a marvellous and bewildering thing to think that he should be in sole and complete charge of her, here in the midst of the great and busy world of London. Did these hurrying people guess at his proud elation, his new-found sense of guardianship and responsibility, his anxiety that all things should be pleasant to her; or had they hardly time even to notice this beautiful young creature, her step light as a fawn, fresh colour in her fair cheeks, happiness radiant in her eyes? Perhaps they heeded her and the tall and handsome youth by her side as little as she heeded them; for indeed she seemed to be entirely engrossed in her companion, talking, smiling, replying to him without a shadow of self-consciousness or restraint. To him this new relationship was an amazing kind of thing: she did not seem even to perceive it. To him it was an epoch in his life, to be for ever remembered: to her—well, nearly every evening she walked out in similar fashion with her grandfather, and she did not appear to notice any difference: at least she showed no sign.

But all at once Maisrie altered her manner; and that was when he in the lightness of his heart informed her that there was still a chance of their setting out on that long contemplated pilgrimage to the various poetic shrines of Scotland.

"Mr. Harris," she said, proudly, "you made me a promise—"

"Yes, I know I did," he said; "but things have changed, and I'm going to explain to you; and I think you'll find everything satisfactory. But first of all, before I begin, I wish you wouldn't call me 'Mr. Harris.' It sounds detestable. You who are so natural and straightforward in all your ways—why don't you call me Vincent?"

"Don't you think that Mr. Vincent might be a fair compromise?" she asked gently, and with her eyes lowered.

"I've called you Maisrie once or twice, by accident, and you didn't seem to

mind," he pointed out.

"I am sure I did not notice," she made answer at once. "How should I? I am used to nothing else."

"Then I am to be allowed to call you Maisrie?" said he, clutching eagerly at this new-found privilege. "And you will call me Vincent—when you find Mr. Vincent become too formal: is it a compact?"

"Yes, it is—Mr. Vincent—if you like," said she, with a smile. "But why do you make it so very serious?"

"Because," said he, gravely, "when any solemn bargain is completed, people shake hands to make it secure."

"Not in the middle of Oxford-street?" she said.

"We will postpone the ceremony, if you prefer it; and now I will begin and tell you how it is still possible we may have that long ramble through Scotland together. You were anxious that before anything of the kind were attempted, your grandfather should go back to the United States to get materials for his book on the Scottish poets in America. Well, now, it seems a pity to make such a long voyage if it can be done without; and so I have taken the liberty of sending over to New York to see if there isn't some handy young fellow there—some clerk or reporter—who would undertake to collect all the necessary materials, and send them over here for your grandfather to work up. Then we could go to Scotland all the same—that is, if you will let me accompany you."

"Someone to collect the materials and send them over?" she repeated; and then she said: "But would that be fair, Mr. Harris—Mr. Vincent—would that be honest? Surely not! The book would not be my grandfather's book at all; properly it would belong to the young man in New York."

"I beg your pardon," said he, with decision. "He only supplies the bricks; he does not build the house. When a Chancellor of the Exchequer produces his budget, of course he claims it as his own; but he has got his facts from the heads of departments, and most likely his quotations have been hunted out for him by his private secretary. It would be your grandfather's book, solely and wholly."

"But the cost?" she said, after a second. "Supposing it were practicable, the expense—"

"Oh, never mind about that," said he, lightly. "It will be next to nothing—you needn't mind about that. Our deputy in New York will find very little difficulty in getting the memoranda that he wants. There is no sort of unnecessary modesty about minor poets; they will be glad enough to give him specimens of their work, as soon as it is known what he aims at. And in Scotland," he continued (grown suddenly bold), "don't you see how it would work? Your grandfather must have an occasional morning to give to his MSS; then you and I could leave him in absolute peace and quiet; and we might go away for a stroll up to

Arthur's Seat, or round the ramparts of the Castle, and return to him by lunch-time. Wouldn't that be an excellent arrangement?"

"Yes, that would be very nice indeed," said she, with a pleased expression: she seemed to look forward to this close and constant companionship as the most natural thing in the world.

And in fact so sanguine was the young man about the success of his new scheme that, when the three of them were seated at a small table in Mentavisti's Restaurant, he ventured to hint to old George Bethune his fond hope that he might be allowed to join in that prolonged excursion through Scotland; and the old man at once acquiesced.

"Yes, yes, why not?" he said; and then he went on, absently: "Yet my nerve is not what it was. Sometimes I hesitate. It would grieve me more than I can say if Maisrie here were to be disappointed. It is a long time since I was in the country; perhaps I remember only the beautiful things; and it is only of these she has heard me talk. When Sturrock thinks of the old home, the dappled hills shine for him: you remember, Maisrie?—

'Oh native land! Oh cherished home,
I've sailed across the sea,
And, though my wandering footsteps roam,
My heart still turns to thee!
My thoughts and dreams are sweet and bright
With dew which love distils;
While every gleam of golden light
Falls on the Scottish hills.'

He forgets the mists and the rain and the darkened days. And you, Maisrie, you have been brought up under fair blue skies; you have never learnt how sombre days and wild and driving clouds stir the imagination; perhaps, if you stood in the very street where the 'bonnie Earl o' Moray came sounding through the town,' you would see only the wet pavements and the dull windows; and you might turn to me and say 'Is this what you have talked about to me, grandfather?'" Then all of a sudden he seemed to throw off this despondent fit as by a violent effort. "No, no!" said he, in quite a different tone. "I will not believe but that there are still yellow cornfields and silver lakes in bonnie Scotland, and the lark singing as high in the heavens as when Tannahill, or Hogg, or Motherwell paused to listen. I will show you the red rowans hanging from the mountain crag, and the golden bracken down by the side of the burn; and if we go still further away—to the lonely islands of the western seas—then you must learn to forget the soft prettiness of the sunnier south, and to let the mysterious charm of isolation

hold you, and the majesty of the darkened mountains, and the pathetic beauty of the wandering veils of rain. I would sooner forget the mother that bore me," he said, with a proud ring in his voice, "than believe that bonnie Scotland had lost her glamour and wonder and fascination. And you would be no holiday-tourist, Maisrie; you belong by blood to the 'land of wild weather'; and imagination is part of the dowry of youth. No, no; I do not fear. I—I made a mistake when I said I was afraid—I am not afraid of you, Maisrie—not afraid of you—you have the fine sympathy, the intelligence, the quick imagination that I can trust—I am not afraid of you, Maisrie——"

"You need not be afraid, grandfather," the girl said, gently—for she saw that he was somewhat disturbed. "Why should you be afraid, grandfather? I shall be looking with your eyes."

But the curious thing was that despite all this talking about the projected pilgrimage, it never seemed to come any nearer. No mention of a date or even of any approximate time, was ever made. In like manner, their return to America, though the old gentleman spoke of it now and again as a fixed and definite and necessary thing, kept receding backwards and backwards into a perfectly nebulous future. The present moment was everything to old George Bethune, whether he was engaged with a roe-deer cutlet at a restaurant in Regent-street, or lighting his pipe and mixing his toddy on his return home, while he was descanting on Barbour, and Drummond, and Sir David Lindesay, or Ramsay, and Ferguson, and Burns. People were beginning to leave town; Vincent had received, and declined, an invitation to join a big house-party in Argyllshire, notwithstanding that it was to the same house that Mrs. Ellison and Lord Musselburgh were going; but old George Bethune and his granddaughter appeared to pay no heed to the changing times and seasons; their placid, uneventful life seemed quite enough for them. And was it not enough for this young man also, who had been admitted to be their constant associate and friend? Why should he vex himself about literary schemes that were none of his devising? Day by day he waved a good-morning to Maisrie as she came to water her flowers, and an answer came from her smiling eyes; sometimes he walked out into the parks in the afternoon, with her grandfather and herself, and ever he rejoiced to see that the fine peach-bloom on her cheek was surmounting the sun-tinge that had been left there by travel; then in the evening they had all London to choose from, as to where they should dine, with a quiet stroll homeward thereafter, to music, and dominoes, and careless talk. What more? The great outer world might go on its way, and welcome.

But Master Vin was about to be startled out of this dreamful ease. At last there came an answer to the communication he had sent to the editor of the Western Scotsman, with many apologies for unavoidable delay: Mr. Anstruther, it appeared, had been in Canada, taking his annual holiday among his kinsmen

and countrymen there.

"I must say your letter has astonished me beyond measure," the writer went on, "and I would fain believe that there is some great mistake somewhere, which is capable of explanation. It is quite true that when I gave my venerable friend Mr. Bethune a note of introduction to Lord Musselburgh, I was aware that he had in view various literary projects—in fact, his brain teems with them as if he were a young man of five-and-twenty—the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum* in his case has taken hold of his imagination; but I cannot understand how he could have included in these the publication of a volume on the Scottish poets in America, for the simple reason that he must have known that such a work was not only in progress here, but that it was near completion. Why, I myself showed Mr. Bethune proofs of the early sheets of this volume; for the author is a particular friend of mine; and as it was being set up, he used to send me the sheets as they were printed; and Mr. Bethune being in the habit of calling at my office, I not only showed them to him, but I fancy I let him take some of them away, that he might read them at his leisure. How he should now propose to bring out a similar work—and bespeak Lord Musselburgh's patronage for it, as I presume he did—passes my comprehension, except on the ground that, being an old man, he may have suffered from some temporary attack of mental aberration and forgetfulness. I would rather believe this than that a man whom I had taken for a thorough Scot, loyal and true to the backbone, and proud of his country and of his own name and lineage, should be endeavouring to supplant another worker who is already in possession of the field. However, no actual harm can be done; for the volume I speak of is on the eve of publication, and no doubt it will be issued simultaneously in England. That is all I have to say, on a subject which at present seems to me to have something of a painful aspect—though I hope a satisfactory explanation may be forthcoming. In conclusion may I beg of you to keep this letter private? The facts are as I have stated; but I would rather Mr. Bethune did not know you had them from me.

"**Yours faithfully**, "HUGH ANSTRUTHER."

For some time Vincent sat with this letter in his hand, in a sort of stupefaction. Curiously enough his first question to himself was—What if Mrs. Ellison should get to know?—would she not triumphantly declare that her worst suspicions had been confirmed? That was but a first thought. There must be some explanation!

He had not associated so continually with George Bethune—he had not heard the old man's voice thrill with proud emotion as he spoke of Scotland's hills and dales—he had not seen his eyes fill with unbidden tears as he talked of his granddaughter and the loneliness that might be in store for her—all for nothing: not at once could he be convinced that this old man was a mere charlatan, a thief, a begging-letter impostor. But he had been startled; and when he reached his lodgings in that small thoroughfare, he hardly dared look across the way: he knew not what to think.

END OF VOL. I.

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