

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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NO NAME.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN IN WHITE," &c.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE morning of her husband's return to North Shingles was a morning memorable for ever in the domestic calendar of Mrs. Wragge. She dated from that occasion the first announcement which reached her of Magdalen's marriage.

It had been Mrs. Wragge's earthly lot to pass her life in a state of perpetual surprise. Never yet, however, had she wandered in such a maze of astonishment as the maze in which she lost herself when the captain coolly told her the truth. She had been sharp enough to suspect Mr. Noel Vanstone of coming to the house in the character of a sweetheart on approval; and she had dimly interpreted certain expressions of impatience which had fallen from Magdalen's lips, as boding ill for the success of his suit—but her utmost penetration had never reached as far as a suspicion of the impending marriage. She rose from one climax of amazement to another as her husband proceeded with his disclosure. A wedding in the family at a day's notice! and that wedding Magdalen's! and not a single new dress ordered for anybody, the bride included! and the Oriental Cashmere Robe totally unavailable, on the occasion of all others when she might have worn it to the greatest advantage! Mrs. Wragge dropped crookedly into a chair, and beat her disorderly hands on her unsymmetrical knees, in utter forgetfulness of the captain's presence, and the captain's terrible eye. It would not have surprised her to hear next, that the world had come to an end, and that the only mortal whom Destiny had overlooked in winding up the affairs of this earthly planet, was herself!

Leaving his wife to recover her composure by her own unaided efforts, Captain Wragge withdrew to wait for Magdalen's appearance in the lower regions of the house. It was close on one o'clock before the sound of footsteps in the room above, warned him that she was awake and stirring. He called at once for the maid (whose name he had ascertained to be Louisa), and sent her up-stairs to her mistress for the second time.

Magdalen was standing by her dressing-table, when a faint tap at the door suddenly roused her.

The tap was followed by the sound of a meek voice, which announced itself as the voice of "her maid," and inquired if Miss Bygrave needed any assistance that morning.

"Not at present," said Magdalen, as soon as she recovered the surprise of finding herself unexpectedly provided with an attendant. "I will ring when I want you."

After dismissing the woman with that answer, she accidentally looked from the door to the window. Any speculations on the subject of the new servant in which she might otherwise have engaged, were instantly suspended by the sight of the bottle of laudanum, still standing on the ledge of the window, where she had left it at sunrise. She took it once more in her hand, with a strange confusion of feeling—with a vague doubt even yet, whether the sight of it reminded her of a terrible reality or a terrible dream. Her first impulse was to rid herself of it on the spot. She raised the bottle to throw the contents out of the window—and paused, in sudden distrust of the impulse that had come to her. "I have accepted my new life," she thought. "How do I know what that life may have in store for me?" She turned from the window, and went back to the table. "I may be forced to drink it yet," she said—and put the laudanum into her dressing-case.

Her mind was not at ease when she had done this: there seemed to be some indefinable ingratitude in the act. Still she made no attempt to remove the bottle from its hiding-place. She hurried on her toilette; she hastened the time when she could ring for the maid, and forget herself and her waking thoughts in a new subject. After touching the bell, she took from the table her letter to Norah and her letter to the captain; put them both into her dressing-case with the laudanum; and locked it securely with the key which she kept attached to her watch-chain.

Magdalen's first impression of her attendant was not an agreeable one. She could not investigate the girl with the experienced eye of the landlady at the London hotel, who had characterised the stranger as a young person conversant with misfortune; and who had shown plainly, by her look and manner, of what nature she suspected that misfortune to be. But, with this drawback, Magdalen was perfectly competent to detect the tokens of sickness and sorrow, lurking under the surface of the new maid's

activity and politeness. She suspected the girl was ill tempered; she disliked her name; and she was indisposed to welcome any servant who had been engaged by Mr. Noel Vanstone. But after the first few minutes "Louisa" grew on her liking. She answered all the questions put to her, with perfect directness; she appeared to understand her duties thoroughly; and she never spoke until she was spoken to first. After making all the inquiries that occurred to her at the time, and after determining to give the maid a fair trial, Magdalen rose to leave the room. The very air in it was still heavy to her with the oppression of the past night.

"Have you anything more to say to me?" she asked, turning to the servant, with her hand on the door.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," said Louisa, very respectfully and very quietly. "I think my master told me that the marriage was to be to-morrow?"

Magdalen repressed the shudder that stole over her, at that reference to the marriage on the lips of a stranger, and answered in the affirmative.

"It's a very short time, Miss, to prepare in. If you would be so kind as to give me my orders about the packing, before you go down stairs—?"

"There are no such preparations to make as you suppose," said Magdalen, hastily. "The few things I have here, can be all packed at once, if you like. I shall wear the same dress to-morrow which I have on to-day. Leave out the straw bonnet, and the light shawl; and put everything else into my boxes. I have no new dresses to pack—I have nothing ordered for the occasion, of any sort." She tried to add some common-place phrases of explanation, accounting as probably as might be, for the absence of the usual wedding outfit, and wedding-dress. But no further reference to the marriage would pass her lips, and without another word she abruptly left the room.

The meek and melancholy Louisa stood lost in astonishment. "Something wrong here," she thought. "I'm half afraid of my new place already." She sighed resignedly—shook her head—and went to the wardrobe. She first examined the drawers underneath; took out the various articles of linen laid inside; and placed them on chairs. Opening the upper part of the wardrobe next, she ranged the dresses in it side by side on the bed. Her last proceeding was to push the empty boxes into the middle of the room, and to compare the space at her disposal with the articles of dress which she had to pack. She completed her preliminary calculations with the ready self-reliance of a woman who thoroughly understood her business, and began the packing forthwith. Just as she had placed the first article of linen in the smaller box, the door of the room opened; and the house-servant, eager for gossip, came in.

"What do you want?" asked Louisa, quietly.

"Did you ever hear of anything like this!"

said the house-servant, entering on her subject immediately.

"Like what?"

"Like this marriage to be sure. You're London bred, they tell me. Did you ever hear of a young lady being married, without a single new thing to her back? No wedding veil, and no wedding-breakfast, and no wedding favours for the servants! It's flying in the face of Providence—that's what I say. I'm only a poor servant, I know. But it's wicked, downright wicked—and I don't care who hears me!"

Louisa went on with the packing.

"Look at her dresses!" persisted the house-servant, waving her hand indignantly at the bed. "I'm only a poor girl—but I wouldn't marry the best man alive without a new gown to my back. Look here! look at this dowdy brown thing here. Alpaca! You're not going to pack this Alpaca thing, are you? Why, it's hardly fit for a servant! I don't know that I'd take a gift of it if it was offered me. It would do for me if I took it up in the skirt, and let it out in the waist—and it wouldn't look so bad with a bit of bright trimming, would it?"

"Let that dress alone, if you please," said Louisa, as quietly as ever.

"What did you say?" inquired the other, doubting whether her ears had not deceived her.

"I said—let that dress alone. It belongs to my mistress; and I have my mistress's orders to pack up everything in the room. You are not helping me by coming here—you are very much in my way."

"Well!" said the house-servant, "you may be London bred, as they say. But if these are your London manners—give me Suffolk!" She opened the door, with an angry snatch at the handle, shut it violently, opened it again, and looked in. "Give me Suffolk!" said the house-servant, with a parting nod of her head to point the edge of her sarcasm.

Louisa proceeded impenetrably with her packing up.

Having neatly disposed of the linen in the smaller box, she turned her attention to the dresses next. After passing them carefully in review, to ascertain which was the least valuable of the collection, and to place that one in the bottom of the trunk for the rest to lie on, she made her choice with very little difficulty. The first gown which she put into the box, was—the brown Alpaca dress.

Meanwhile, Magdalen had joined the captain down stairs. Although he could not fail to notice the languor in her face and the listlessness of all her movements, he was relieved to find that she met him with perfect composure. She was even self-possessed enough to ask him for news of his journey, with no other signs of agitation than a passing change of colour, and a little trembling of the lips.

"So much for the past," said Captain Wragge, when his narrative of the expedition to London,

by way of St. Crux, had come to an end. "Now for the present. The bridegroom——"

"If it makes no difference," she interposed, "call him Mr. Noel Vanstone."

"With all my heart. Mr. Noel Vanstone is coming here this afternoon to dine and spend the evening. He will be tiresome in the last degree—but like all tiresome people, he is not to be got rid of on any terms. Before he comes, I have a last word or two of caution for your private ear. By this time to-morrow we shall have parted—without any certain knowledge, on either side, of our ever meeting again. I am anxious to serve your interests faithfully to the last—I am anxious you should feel that I have done all I could for your future security, when we say good-by."

Magdalen looked at him in surprise. He spoke in altered tones. He was agitated; he was strangely in earnest. Something in his look and manner took her memory back to the first night at Aldborough, when she had opened her mind to him in the darkening solitude—when they two had sat together alone, on the slope of the martello tower.

"I have no reason to think otherwise than kindly of you," she said.

Captain Wragge suddenly left his chair, and took a turn backwards and forwards in the room. Magdalen's last words seemed to have produced some extraordinary disturbance in him.

"Damn it!" he broke out; "I can't let you say that. You have reason to think ill of me. I have cheated you. You never got your fair share of profit from the Entertainment, from first to last. There! now the murder's out!"

Magdalen smiled, and signed to him to come back to his chair.

"I know you cheated me," she said, quietly. "You were in the exercise of your profession, Captain Wragge. I expected it when I joined you. I made no complaint at the time; and I make none now. If the money you took is any recompense for all the trouble I have given you, you are heartily welcome to it."

"Will you shake hands on that?" asked the captain, with an awkwardness and hesitation, strongly at variance with his customary ease of manner.

Magdalen gave him her hand. He wrung it hard. "You are a strange girl," he said, trying to speak lightly. "You have laid a hold on me that I don't quite understand. I'm half uncomfortable at taking the money from you, now—and yet, you don't want it, do you?" He hesitated. "I almost wish," he said, "I had never met you on the Walls of York."

"It is too late to wish that, Captain Wragge. Say no more. You only distress me—say no more. We have other subjects to talk about. What were those words of caution which you had for my private ear?"

The captain took another turn in the room, and struggled back again into his every-day character. He produced from his pocket-book Mrs.

Lecount's letter to her master, and handed it to Magdalen.

"There is the letter that might have ruined us, if it had ever reached its address," he said. "Read it carefully. I have a question to ask you when you have done."

Magdalen read the letter. "What is this proof," she inquired, "which Mrs. Lecount relies on so confidently?"

"The very question I was going to ask you," said Captain Wragge. "Consult your memory of what happened, when you tried that experiment in Vauxhall Walk. Did Mrs. Lecount get no other chance against you, than the chances you have told me of already?"

"She discovered that my face was disguised, and she heard me speak in my own voice."

"And nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"Very good. Then my interpretation of the letter is clearly the right one. The proof Mrs. Lecount relies on, is my wife's infernal ghost story—which is, in plain English, the story of Miss Bygrave having been seen in Miss Vanstone's disguise; the witness being the very person who is afterwards presented at Aldborough, in the character of Miss Bygrave's aunt. An excellent chance for Mrs. Lecount, if she can only lay her hand at the right time on Mrs. Wragge—and no chance at all, if she can't. Make your mind easy on that point. Mrs. Lecount and my wife have seen the last of each other. In the mean time, don't neglect the warning I give you, in giving you this letter. Tear it up, for fear of accidents—but don't forget it."

"Trust me to remember it," replied Magdalen, destroying the letter while she spoke. "Have you anything more to tell me?"

"I have some information to give you," said Captain Wragge, "which may be useful, because it relates to your future security. Mind, I want to know nothing about your proceedings when to-morrow is over—we settled that when we first discussed this matter. I ask no questions, and I make no guesses. All I want to do now, is to warn you of your legal position, after your marriage; and to leave you to make what use you please of your knowledge, at your own sole discretion. I took a lawyer's opinion on the point, when I was in London, thinking it might be useful to you."

"It is sure to be useful. What did the lawyer say?"

"To put it plainly, this is what he said. If Mr. Noel Vanstone ever discovers that you have knowingly married him under a false name, he can apply to the Ecclesiastical Court to have his marriage declared null and void. The issue of the application would rest with the Judges. But if he could prove that he had been intentionally deceived, the legal opinion is that his case would be a strong one."

"Suppose I chose to apply on my side?" said Magdalen, eagerly. "What then?"

"You might make the application," replied the captain. "But remember one thing—you would come into Court, with the acknowledgment of your own deception. I leave you to imagine what the Judges would think of that."

"Did the lawyer tell you anything else?"

"One thing besides," said Captain Wragge. "Whatever the law might do with the marriage in the lifetime of both the parties to it—on the death of either one of them, no application made by the survivor would avail; and, as to the case of that survivor, the marriage would remain valid. You understand? If he dies, or if you die—and if no application has been made to the Court—he the survivor, or you the survivor, would have no power of disputing the marriage. But, in the lifetime of both of you, if he claimed to have the marriage dissolved, the chances are all in favour of his carrying his point."

He looked at Magdalen with a furtive curiosity as he said those words. She turned her head aside, absently tying her watch-chain into a loop and untying it again; evidently thinking with the closest attention over what he had last said to her. Captain Wragge walked uneasily to the window, and looked out. The first object that caught his eye was Mr. Noel Vanstone approaching from Sea View. He returned instantly to his former place in the room, and addressed himself to Magdalen once more.

"Here is Mr. Noel Vanstone," he said. "One last caution before he comes in. Be on your guard with him about your age. He put the question to me before he got the License. I took the shortest way out of the difficulty, and told him you were Twenty-one—and he made the declaration accordingly. Never mind about *me*: after to-morrow, I am invisible. But, in your own interests, don't forget, if the subject ever turns up, that you are of age. There is nothing more. You are provided with every necessary warning that I can give you. Whatever happens in the future—remember I have done my best."

He hurried to the door, without waiting for an answer, and went out into the garden to receive his guest.

Mr. Noel Vanstone made his appearance at the gate, solemnly carrying his bridal offering to North Shingles with both hands. The object in question was an ancient casket (one of his father's bargains); inside the casket reposed an old-fashioned carbuncle brooch, set in silver (another of his father's bargains)—bridal presents both, possessing the inestimable merit of leaving his money undisturbed in his pocket. He shook his head portentously when the captain inquired after his health and spirits. He had passed a wakeful night; ungovernable apprehensions of Lecount's sudden reappearance had beset him, as soon as he found himself alone at Sea View. Sea View was redolent of Lecount: Sea View (though built on piles, and the strongest house in England) was henceforth odious to him. He had felt this all night; he had also felt his responsibilities. There was the lady's-maid, to begin

with. Now he had hired her, he began to think she wouldn't do. She might fall sick on his hands; she might have deceived him by a false character; she and the landlady of the hotel might have been in league together. Horrible! Really horrible to think of! Then there was the other responsibility—perhaps the heaviest of the two—the responsibility of deciding where he was to go and spend his honeymoon to-morrow. He would have preferred one of his father's empty houses. But, except at Vauxhall Walk (which he supposed would be objected to), and at Aldborough (which was of course out of the question), all the houses were let. He would put himself in Mr. Bygrave's hands. Where had Mr. Bygrave spent his own honeymoon? Given the British Islands to choose from, where would Mr. Bygrave pitch his tent, on a careful review of all the circumstances?

At this point the bridegroom's questions suddenly came to an end, and the bridegroom's face exhibited an expression of ungovernable astonishment. His judicious friend, whose advice had been at his disposal in every other emergency, suddenly turned round on him, in the emergency of the honeymoon, and flatly declined discussing the subject.

"No!" said the captain, as Mr. Noel Vanstone opened his lips to plead for a hearing, "you must really excuse me. My point of view, in this matter, is, as usual, a peculiar one. For some time past, I have been living in an atmosphere of deception, to suit your convenience. That atmosphere, my good sir, is getting close—my Moral Being requires ventilation. Settle the choice of a locality with my niece; and leave me, at my particular request, in total ignorance on the subject. Mrs. Lecount is certain to come here on her return from Zurich, and is certain to ask me where you are gone. You may think it strange, Mr. Vanstone—but when I say I don't know, I wish to enjoy the unaccustomed luxury of feeling, for once in a way, that I am telling the truth!"

With those words, he opened the sitting-room door; introduced Mr. Noel Vanstone to Magdalen's presence; bowed himself out of the room again; and set forth alone to while away the rest of the afternoon by taking a walk. His face showed plain tokens of anxiety, and his particoloured eyes looked hither and thither distrustfully, as he sauntered along the shore. "The time hangs heavy on our hands," thought the captain. "I wish to-morrow was come and gone."

The day passed and nothing happened; the evening and the night followed, placidly and uneventfully. Monday came, a cloudless lovely day—Monday confirmed the captain's assertion that the marriage was a certainty. Towards ten o'clock, the clerk ascending the church steps, quoted the old proverb to the pew-opener, meeting him under the porch: "Happy the bride on whom the sun shines!"

In a quarter of an hour more, the wedding party

was in the vestry, and the clergyman led the way to the altar. Carefully as the secret of the marriage had been kept, the opening of the church in the morning had been enough to betray it. A small congregation, almost entirely composed of women, was scattered here and there among the pews. Kirke's sister and her children were staying with a friend at Aldborough—and Kirke's sister was one of the congregation.

As the wedding party entered the church, the haunting terror of Mrs. Lecount spread from Noel Vanstone to the captain. For the first few minutes, the eyes of both of them looked among the women in the pews, with the same searching scrutiny; and looked away again with the same sense of relief. The clergyman noticed that look, and investigated the License more closely than usual. The clerk began to doubt privately whether the old proverb about the bride, was a proverb to be always depended on. The female members of the congregation murmured among themselves at the inexcusable disregard of appearances implied in the bride's dress. Kirke's sister whispered venomously in her friend's ear, "Thank God for to-day, for Robert's sake!" Mrs. Wragge cried silently, with the dread of some threatening calamity, she knew not what. The one person present who remained outwardly undisturbed was Magdalen herself. She stood with tearless resignation in her place before the altar—stood, as if all the sources of human emotion were frozen up within her. What she suffered that morning, she suffered in the secrecy which no mortal insight can divine.

The clergyman opened the Book.

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It was done. The awful words which speak from earth to Heaven were pronounced. The children of the two dead brothers—inheritors of the implacable enmity which had parted their parents—were Man and Wife.

From that moment, events hurried with a headlong rapidity to the parting scene. They were back at the house, while the words of the Marriage Service seemed still ringing in their ears. Before they had been five minutes in-doors, the carriage drew up at the garden gate. In a minute more, the opportunity came for which Magdalen and the captain had been on the watch—the opportunity of speaking together in private for the last time. She still preserved her icy resignation—she seemed beyond all reach now of the fear that had once mastered her, of the remorse that had once tortured her to the soul. With a firm hand, she gave him the promised money. With a firm face she looked her last at him. "I'm not to blame," he whispered eagerly; "I have only done what you asked me." She bowed her head—she bent it towards him kindly, and let him touch her forehead with his lips. "Take care!" he said. "My last words are—for God's sake take care when I'm gone!" She turned from him with a smile, and spoke her farewell words to his wife. Mrs. Wragge tried hard to face her loss bravely—the loss of the friend whose presence had

fallen like light from Heaven over the dim pathway of her life. "You have been very good to me, my dear; I thank you kindly, I thank you with all my heart." She could say no more—she clung to Magdalen, in a passion of tears, as her mother might have clung to her, if her mother had lived to see that horrible day. "I'm frightened for you!" cried the poor creature, in a wild wailing voice. "Oh, my darling, I'm frightened for you!" Magdalen desperately drew herself free—kissed her—and hurried out to the door. The expression of that artless gratitude, the cry of that guileless love, shook her as nothing else had shaken her that day. It was a refuge to get to the carriage—a refuge, though the man she had married stood there waiting for her at the door.

Mrs. Wragge tried to follow her into the garden. But the captain had seen Magdalen's face as she ran out; and he steadily held his wife back in the passage. From that distance the last farewells were exchanged. As long as the carriage was in sight, Magdalen's face looked back at them—she waved her handkerchief, as she turned the corner. In a moment more, the last thread which bound her to them was broken; the familiar companionship of many months was a thing of the past already!

Captain Wragge closed the house-door on the idlers who were looking in from the parade. He led his wife back into the sitting-room, and spoke to her with a forbearance which she had never yet experienced from him.

"She has gone her way," he said, "and in another hour we shall have gone ours. Cry your cry out—I don't deny she's worth crying for."

Even then—even when the dread of Magdalen's future was at its darkest in his mind—the ruling habit of the man's life clung to him. Mechanically, he unlocked his despatch-box. Mechanically, he opened his Book of Accounts, and made the closing entry—the entry of his last transaction with Magdalen—in black and white. "By Rec^d from Miss Vanstone," wrote the captain, with a gloomy brow, "Two hundred pounds."

"You won't be angry with me?" said Mrs. Wragge, looking timidly at her husband through her tears. "I want a word of comfort, captain. Oh, do tell me—when shall I see her again?"

The captain closed the book, and answered in one inexorable word:

"Never!"

Between eleven and twelve o'clock that night, Mrs. Lecount drove into Zurich.

Her brother's house, when she stopped before it, was shut up. With some difficulty and delay the servant was aroused. She held up her hands in speechless amazement, when she opened the door, and saw who the visitor was.

"Is my brother alive?" asked Mrs. Lecount, entering the house.

"Alive!" echoed the servant. "He has gone holiday-making into the country, to finish his recovery in the fine fresh air."

The housekeeper staggered back against the wall of the passage. The coachman and the servant put her into a chair. Her face was livid, and her teeth chattered in her head.

"Send for my brother's doctor," she said, as soon as she could speak.

The doctor came in. She handed him a letter, before he could say a word.

"Did you write that letter?"

He looked it over rapidly, and answered her without hesitation,

"Certainly not!"

"It is your handwriting."

"It is a forgery of my handwriting."

She rose from the chair, with a new strength in her.

"When does the return mail start for Paris?" she asked.

"In half an hour."

"Send instantly, and take me a place in it!"

The servant hesitated; the doctor protested. She turned a deaf ear to them both.

"Send!" she reiterated, "or I will go myself."

They obeyed. The servant went to take the place: the doctor remained, and held a conversation with Mrs. Lecount. When the half-hour had passed, he helped her into her place in the mail, and charged the conductor privately to take care of his passenger.

"She has travelled from England without stopping," said the doctor; "and she is travelling back again without rest. Be careful of her, or she will break down under the double journey."

The mail started. Before the first hour of the new day was at an end, Mrs. Lecount was on her way back to England.

THE END OF THE FOURTH SCENE.

BLIND BLACK TOM.

[WE have received the following remarkable account from a valued friend in Boston, Massachusetts. It will be published in that city, within a few days after its present publication in these pages.]

Some time in the year 1850, a tobacco-planter in Southern Georgia (Perry H. Oliver is his name) bought a likely negro woman with some other field-hands. She was stout, tough-muscled, willing, promised to be a remunerative servant; her baby, however, a boy a few months old, was only thrown in as a make-weight to the bargain, or rather, because Mr. Oliver would not consent to separate mother and child. Charity only could have induced him to take the picaninny, in fact, for he was but a lump of black flesh born blind, and with the vacant grin of idiocy, they thought, already stamped on his face. The two slaves were purchased, I believe, from a trader: it has been impossible, therefore, for me to ascertain where Tom was born, or when. Georgia field-hands are not accurate as Jews in preserving their genealogy; they do not anticipate a Messiah. A white man, you know, has

that vague hope unconsciously latent in him that he is, or shall give birth to the great man of his race, a helper, a provider for the world's hunger: so he grows jealous with his blood; the dead grandfather may have presaged the possible son; besides, it is a debt he owes to this coming Saul to tell him whence he came. There are some classes, free and slave, out of whom society has crushed this hope: they have no clan, no family names among them, therefore. This idiot boy, chosen by God to be anointed with the holy chrism, is only "Tom"—"Blind Tom," they call him in all the Southern States, with a kind cadence always, being proud and fond of him, and yet—nothing but Tom? That is pitiful. Just a mushroom growth—unkinned, unexpected, not hoped for, for generations, owning no name to purify and honour and give away when he is dead. His mother, at work to-day in the Oliver plantations, can never comprehend why her boy is famous; this gift of God to him means nothing to her. Nothing to him, either, which is saddest of all; he is unconscious, wears his crown as an idiot might. Whose fault is that? Deeper than slavery the evil lies.

Mr. Oliver did his duty well to the boy, being an observant and thoroughly kind master. The plantation was large, heartsome, faced the sun, swarmed with little black urchins, with plenty to eat, and nothing to do.

All that Tom required, as he fattened out of baby into boyhood, was room in which to be warm, on the grass patch, or by the kitchen fires, to be stupid, flabby, sleepy,—kicked and petted alternately by the other hands. He had a habit of crawling up on the porches and verandahs of the mansion, and squatting there in the sun, waiting for a kind word or touch from those who went in and out. He seldom failed to receive it. Southerners know nothing of the physical shiver of aversion with which even some Abolitionists of the North touch the negro: so Tom, through his very helplessness, came to be a sort of pet in the family, a playmate, occasionally, of Mr. Oliver's own infant children. The boy, creeping about day after day in the hot light, was as repugnant an object as the lizards in the neighbouring swamp, and promised to be of as little use to his master. He was of the lowest negro type, from which only field-hands can be made,—coal-black, with protruding heels, the ape-jaw, blubber-lips constantly open, the sightless eyes closed, and the head thrown far back on the shoulders, lying on the back, in fact, a habit which he still retains, and which adds to the imbecile character of the face. Until he was seven years of age, Tom was regarded on the plantation as an idiot, not unjustly; for at the present time his judgment and reason rank but as that of a child four years old. He showed a dog-like affection for some members of the household—a son of Mr. Oliver's especially—and a keen, nervous sensitiveness to the slightest blame or praise from them,—possessed, too, a low, animal irritability of temper, giving way to inarticulate yelps of passion when provoked. That is all, so far; we find no other outgrowth of intellect or

soul from the boy; just the same record as that of thousands of imbecile negro children. Generations of heathendom and slavery have dredged the inherited brains and temperaments of such children tolerably clean of all traces of power or purity,—palsied the brain, brutalised the nature. Tom apparently fared no better than his fellows.

It was not until 1857 that phenomenal powers latent in the boy were suddenly developed, which stamped him the anomaly he is to-day.

One night, some time in the summer of that year, Mr. Oliver's family were wakened by the sound of music in the drawing-room,—not only the simple airs, but the most difficult exercises usually played by his daughters were repeated again and again, the touch of the musician being timid, but singularly true and delicate.

Going down, they found Tom, who had been left asleep in the hall, seated at the piano, in an ecstasy of delight, breaking out at the end of each successful fugue into shouts of laughter, kicking his heels and clapping his hands. This was the first time he had touched the piano. Naturally, Tom became a nine days' wonder on the plantation. He was brought in as an after-dinner's amusement; visitors asked for him as the show of the place. There was hardly a realisation, however, in the minds of those who heard him of how deep the cause for wonder lay. The planters' wives and daughters of the neighbourhood were not people who would be apt to comprehend music as a science, or use it as language; they only saw in the little negro, therefore, a remarkable facility for repeating the airs they drummed on their pianos—in a different manner from theirs, it is true—which bewildered them. They noticed, too, that, however the child's fingers fell on the keys, cadences followed, broken, wandering, yet of startling beauty and pathos. The house-servants, looking in through the open doors at the little black figure perched up before the instrument, while unknown wild harmony drifted through the evening air, had a better conception of him. He was possessed; some ghost spoke through him—which is a fair enough definition of genius for a Georgian slave to offer.

Mr. Oliver being indulgent, Tom was allowed to have constant access to the piano; in truth, he could not live without it; when deprived of music now, actual physical debility followed; the gnawing Something had found its food at last. No attempt was made, however, to give him any scientific musical teaching; nor—I wish it distinctly borne in mind—has he ever at any time received such instruction.

The planter began to wonder what kind of a creature this was which he had bought, flesh and soul. In what part of the unsightly baby-carriage had been stowed away these old airs, forgotten by every one else, and some of them never heard by the child but once, but which he now reproduced, every note intact, and with whatever quirk or quiddity of style belonged to the person who originally had sung or played them? Stranger still, the harmonies which he

had never heard, had learned from no man; the sluggish breath of the old house, being enchanted, grew into quaint and delicate whims of music, never the same, changing every day. Never glad: uncertain, sad minors always, vexing the content of the hearer,—one inarticulate, unanswered question of pain in all, making them one. Even the vulgarest listener was troubled, hardly knowing why,—how sad Tom's music was! At last the time came when the door was to be opened, when some listener, not vulgar, recognising the child as God made him, induced his master to remove him from the plantation. Something ought to be done for him: the world ought not to be cheated of this pleasure—besides, the money that could be made! So, Mr. Oliver, with a kindly feeling for Tom, proud, too, of this agreeable monster which his plantation had grown, and sensible that it was a more fruitful source of revenue than tobacco-fields, set out with the boy, literally to seek their fortune.

The first exhibition of him was given, I think, in Savannah, Georgia; thence he was taken to Charleston, Richmond; thence, to all the principal cities and towns in the Southern States.

This was in 1858. From that time until the present, Tom has lived constantly an open life, petted, fêted, his real talent befogged by exaggeration, and so pampered and coddled that one might suppose the only purpose was to corrupt and wear it out. For these reasons this statement is purposely guarded, and restricted to plain known facts.

No sooner had Tom been brought before the public than the pretensions put forward by his master commanded the scrutiny of both scientific and musical sceptics. His capacities were subjected to rigorous tests. Fortunately for the boy: for, so tried, harshly, it is true, yet skilfully, they not only bore the trial, but acknowledged the touch as skilful; every day new powers were developed, until he reached his limit, beyond which it is not probable he will ever pass. That limit, however, establishes him as an anomaly in musical science.

Physically, and in animal temperament, this negro ranks next to the lowest Guinea type: with strong appetites and gross bodily health—except in one particular, which will be mentioned hereafter. In the every-day apparent intellect, in reason or judgment, he is but one degree above an idiot—incapable of comprehending the simplest conversation on ordinary topics—amused or enraged with trifles, such as would affect a child of three years old. On the other side, his affections are alive, even vehement, delicate in their instinct as a dog's or an infant's; he will detect the step of any one dear to him, in a crowd, and will burst into tears, if not kindly spoken to.

His memory is so accurate that he can repeat, without the loss of a syllable, a discourse of fifteen minutes in length, of which he does not understand a word. Songs, too, in French or German, after a single hearing, he renders not only literally in words, but in notes, style, and

expression. His voice, however, is discordant, and of small compass.

In music, this boy of twelve years old, born blind, utterly ignorant of a note, ignorant of every phase of so-called musical science, interprets severely classical composers with a clearness of conception in which he excels, and a skill in mechanism equal to our second-rate artists. His concerts usually include any themes selected by the audience, from the higher grades of Italian or German opera. His comprehension of the meaning of music, as a prophetic or historical voice which few souls utter, and fewer understand, is clear and vivid: he renders it thus, with whatever mastery of the mere material part he may possess, fingering, dramatic effects, and so forth; these are but means to him, not an end, as with most artists. One could fancy that Tom was never traitor to the intent or soul of the theme. What God or the Devil meant to say by this or that harmony, what the soul of one man cried aloud to another in it, this boy knows, and is to that a faithful witness. His deaf uninstructed soul has never been tampered with by art-critics who know the body well enough of music, but nothing of the living creature within. The world is full of these vulgar souls that palter with eternal Nature and the eternal Arts, blind to the Word who dwells among us therein. Tom, or the demon in Tom, is not one of them.

With regard to his command of the instrument, two points have been especially noted by musicians: the unusual frequency of occurrence of tours de force in his playing, and the scientific precision of his manner of touch. For example, in a progression of augmented chords, his mode of fingering is invariably that of the schools: not that which would seem most natural to a blind child, never taught to place a finger. Even when seated with his "back to the piano," and made to play in that position (a favourite feat in his concerts), the touch is always scientifically accurate.

The peculiar power which Tom possesses, however, is one which requires no scientific knowledge of music in his audiences to appreciate. Placed at the instrument with any musician, he plays a perfect bass accompaniment to the treble of music *heard for the first time as he plays*. Then, taking the seat vacated by the other performer, he instantly gives the entire piece, intact in brilliancy and symmetry, not a note lost or misplaced. The selections of music by which this power of Tom's was tested, two years ago, were sometimes fourteen and sixteen pages in length; on one occasion, at an exhibition at the White House, after a long concert, he was tried with two pieces; one, thirteen; the other, twenty pages long; and was successful.

We know of no parallel case to this in musical history. Grimm tells us, as one of the most remarkable manifestations of Mozart's infant genius, that at the age of nine he was required to give an accompaniment to an aria which he had never heard before, and without notes.

There were false accords in the first attempt, he acknowledged; but the second was pure. When the music to which Tom plays *secondo* is strictly classical, he sometimes balks for an instant in passages; to do otherwise would argue a creative power equal to that of the master composers; but when any chordant harmony runs through it (on which the glowing negro soul can seize, you know), there are no "false accords," as with the infant Mozart. I wish to draw especial attention to this power of the boy, not only because it is, so far as I know, unmatched in the development of any musical talent, but because, considered in the contest of his entire intellectual structure, it involves a curious problem. The mere repetition of music heard but once, even when, as in Tom's case, it is given with such incredible fidelity, and after the lapse of years, demands only a command of mechanical skill, and an abnormal condition of the power of memory; but to play *secondo* to music never heard or seen, infers the comprehension of the full drift of the symphony in its current,—a capacity to create, in short. Yet such attempts as Tom has made to dictate music for publication do not sustain any such inference. They are only a few light marches, galops, and the like, simple and plaintive enough, but with easily detected traces of remembered harmonies. Very different from the strange, weird improvisations of every day; one would fancy that the mere attempt to bring this mysterious genius within him in bodily presence before the outer world, woke, too, the idiotic nature to utter its reproachful, unable cry. Nor is this the only bar by which poor Tom's soul is put in mind of its foul prison. After any too prolonged effort, such as those I have alluded to, his whole bodily frame gives way, and a complete exhaustion of the brain follows, accompanied with epileptic spasms. The trial at the White House, mentioned before, was successful, but was followed by days of illness.

Being a slave, Tom never was taken into a Free State; for the same reason his master refused advantageous offers from European managers. The highest points North in which his concerts were given, were Baltimore and the upper Virginia towns. I heard him some time in 1860. He remained a week or two in the town, playing every night. The concerts were unique enough. They were given in a great barn of a room, gaudy with hot soot, stained frescoes, chandeliers, and walls splotted with gilt. The audience was large, always; such as a provincial town affords. Not the purest bench of musical criticism before which to bring poor Tom! Beaux and belles, siftings of old country families, whose grandfathers trapped and traded and married with the Indians,—the savage thickening of whose blood told itself in high cheek-bones, flashing jewellery, champagne-bibbing, a comprehension of the tom-tom music of *schottisches* and polkas; money-made men and their wives, cooped up by respectability; taking concerts when they were given in town, taking the White Sulphur or Cape May in summer, taking beef for dinner,

taking the pork-trade in winter,—*toute la vie en programme*; the débris of a town, the roughs, the boys, school-children. The stage was broad, planked, with a drop-curtain behind,—subject, the Doge marrying the sea, I believe; in front, a piano and chair. Presently, Mr. Oliver, a well-natured looking man (one thought of that), came forward, leading and coaxing along a little black boy dressed in white linen, a little black boy somewhat fat and stubborn in build. Tom was not in a good humour that night; the evening before, he had refused to play altogether; so his master perspired anxiously before he could get him placed in rule before the audience, and repeat his own little speech, which sounded like a Georgia after-dinner gossip. The boy's head, as I said, rested on his back, his mouth wide open constantly; his great blubber lips and shining teeth, therefore, were all you saw when he faced you. He required to be petted and bought, like any other weak-minded child. The concert was a mixture of music, whining, coaxing, and promised candy and cake.

He seated himself at last before the piano, a full half yard distant, stretching out his arms full length, like an ape clawing for food; his feet, when not on the pedals, twisting incessantly, he answering some joke of his master's with a loud "Yha! yha!" Nothing indexes the brain like the laugh; this was idiotic.

"Now, Tom, boy, something we like from Verdi."

The head fell further back, the claws began to work, and those of the composer's harmonies which you would have chosen as the purest exponents of passion began to float through the room. Selections from Weber, Beethoven, and others whom I have forgotten, followed. At the close of each piece, Tom, without waiting for the audience, would applaud himself violently, kicking, pounding his hands together, turning always to his master for the approving pat on the head. Songs, recitations such as I have described, filled up the first part of the evening; then a musician from the audience went up on the stage to put the boy's powers to the final test. Songs and intricate symphonies were given, which it was most improbable the boy could ever have heard; he remained standing, utterly motionless, until they were finished, and for a moment or two after; then, seating himself, gave them without the break of a note. Others followed, more difficult, in which he played the bass accompaniment in the manner I have described, repeating instantly the treble. The child looked dull and wearied during this part of the trial, and his master perceiving it, announced the exhibition closed, when the musician (who was a citizen of the town, by the way) drew out a thick roll of score, which he explained to be a fantasia of his own composition, never published.

"This it was impossible the boy could have heard; there could be no trick of memory in this, and on this trial," triumphantly, "Tom would fail."

The manuscript was some fourteen pages

long,—variations on an inanimate theme. Mr. Oliver refused to submit the boy's brain to so cruel a test; some of the audience even interfered, but the musician insisted, and took his place. Tom sat beside him,—his head rolling nervously from side to side,—struck the opening cadence, and then from the first note to the last, gave the *secondo* triumphantly. Jumping up, he fairly shoved the man from his seat, and proceeded to play the treble with more brilliancy and power than its composer. When he struck the last octave, he sprang up, yelling with delight.

"Um's got him, massa! um's got him!" cheering and rolling about the stage.

The cheers of the audience—for the boys especially did not wait to clap—excited him the more. It was an hour before his master could quiet his hysteric agitation.

That feature of the concerts which was the most painful, I have not touched upon. The moments when his master was talking, and Tom was left to himself, when a weary despair seemed to settle down on the distorted face, and the stubby little black fingers, wandering over the keys, spoke for Tom's own caged soul within. Never by any chance, a merry, childish laugh of music in the broken cadences; tender or wild, a defiant outcry, a tired sigh breaking down into silence—whatever wearied voice it took, the same bitter, hopeless soul spoke through all.

"Bless me, even me, also, O my Father!"

A something that took all the pain and pathos of the world into its weak, pitiful cry.

Some beautiful caged spirit, one could not but know, struggled for breath under that brutal form and idiotic brain. I wonder when it will be free! Not in this life; the bars are too heavy. But (do you hate the moral to a story?) in your own back alley there are spirits as beautiful, caged in forms as bestial, that you *could* set free if you would. Don't call it bad taste in me to speak for them. You know they are more to be pitied than Tom—for they are dumb.

THE STORY OF MAJOR STRANGWAYS.

A VERY extraordinary criminal investigation took place in the time of the Commonwealth, of which the chief facts have been handed down in the Harleian Miscellany (vol. iv.). In the following narrative we have kept strictly to the circumstances of the case:

An old oak-panelled room—dusky, yet lustrous—rises before our sight out of the darkness of more than two centuries ago. A sense of far-reaching silence out of doors seems to indicate that the house to which this room belongs is situated somewhere in the country; and the fire-arms, whips, cudgels, foxes' heads, and stags' antlers, suspended over the mantelpiece, tend to confirm the impression thus produced. Huge, solid logs of wood, which have burned to an intense red, fill the great gap of the fireplace; and from the centre of this sleepy brightness comes, every now and then, when some of the

smaller logs tumble together noiselessly, scattering their grey and stealthy ashes underneath, a sudden shaft of flame, which seems to lift the darkness of the room like a heavy pall, and, before it dies away, is reflected all down the panels of the opposite side, as in a row of shadowy mirrors.

In the silence of this chamber, thus rendered dimly visible, two persons are sitting—a brother and a sister. The man, Major Strangeways, is a rough soldier, who has now settled down to the peaceful occupation of farming some land left him by his father, of whose will the major's sister, being the elder of the two, is executrix. Hitherto they have lived together happily; but, as we observe them now, in the fluctuating light of the fire, we see that there is some quarrel between them. The aspect of the man is wild and threatening; that of the woman, quiet and subdued—somewhat alarmed indeed, but firm. Presently, their conversation, which has been broken off for a time, is resumed; and then we gather that the sister has consented to marry a certain Mr. Fussell, a lawyer, and that the brother disapproves of the match. He is loud and coarse in his language, taking no heed of what is due to the susceptibility of a woman's mind; but on the face of that woman we see written the records of a love which cannot falter, and which knows it must not yield. We behold the violent and fiery man writhing in his passion, as though he were an agony to himself, and the woman remaining calm and steadfast, because she knows that she is true.

He is endeavouring to persuade her to break her engagement; but in vain. At length he rises from his seat, and declares with an oath that, if ever his sister marries Mr. Fussell, he will kill him, either in his chamber or elsewhere. A look of speechless horror comes upon the face of the sister, and contrasts, in its stillness and rigidity, with the fluctuating passions which agitate the features of the man; and, as we glance alternately at both, a dimness passes over the scene, and it has vanished.

Some months elapse before we again see the principal figures in this drama. The brother and sister have parted, and in so doing have disagreed about the division of their property. The sister is by this time married; and Mr. Fussell, her husband, has, in consequence of these disagreements, entered into law proceedings against Strangeways. The former has come up to London, in order to attend personally to the litigations; and, like his shadow, Strangeways follows him.

Another room rises to our sight—a town room, as we infer from its dinginess, and from the noise of the great city's life which falls upon our ears. In this room we behold the lawyer, Fussell, seated at a table covered with papers. He has pen and ink before him, and is continually making notes, and turning over, in an anxious and thoughtful way, the documents that lie scattered about. He is so absorbed in his occupation that, although the table at which he sits is close against the window, he never glances

out: otherwise, he might perhaps observe that half-shrouded figure at the window of the house immediately opposite; for the street (like almost all London streets at that period, the Great Fire not having yet come to clear the way for a more modern style of building) is very narrow, and it is no difficult task for a man to look from his own casement into the dark, cave-like rooms on the other side of the way, with their winking little lattice-windows, glancing like evil eyes below the overhanging brows of the upper stories. Not that the figure is very conspicuous; for it lurks to a great degree behind the curtains, and is evidently not there for publicity. Beyond saying that the form is that of a man, the most intimate friend could not venture an opinion; for the whole face, as well as much of the body, is hidden by the curtain. But, whatever he may be, one cannot look long at him, in his muffled obscurity, without a feeling of horror—the whole aspect is so crouching, cat-like, and deadly.

The lawyer, however, sees nothing of this. He is deep in his papers, thinking of his fierce brother-in-law, Strangeways, and planning how he shall defeat his claims. Very profound is he in these matters, his whole intellectual existence being quite absorbed in their contemplation. To him, at the present moment, there is nothing else in all this boundless universe worthy of meditation; and yet he is standing on the very brink of that abyss into which all such temporary arrangements are being continually swept, and reduced to naught. For does not the obscure figure opposite keep fatal watch on him?

Nevertheless, temporary arrangements must be attended to, in this temporary state of being; so the lawyer works on.

Suddenly there is the report of a musket; a pane of glass in the window beneath which Mr. Fussell is sitting is shattered; and at the same instant the lawyer falls back from his chair, with two death-wounds from two bullets through his body. The temporary arrangements are at an end with *him*. Looking instinctively to the window of the opposite house, we see the grey smoke curling lazily away from there. But the figure of the shrouded man has vanished, like a Fate fulfilled.

The murder makes a great sensation all over town, and everybody is wondering how it can have been committed, and who can be the assassin. Poor Mrs. Fussell has a double grief to bear: the loss of her husband, and the suspicions which in her mind cannot fail to attach themselves to her brother. These suspicions getting abroad, Strangeways is arrested; but, as there is no direct evidence against him, some must be sought. The magistrates of those days are no flippant scoffers at what irreverend wits are wont to call the lingering superstitions of the dark ages. They are not infected with the spirit of an audacious philosophy. They are grave, elderly, retrospective men; fond of what is based on authority and prescription; full of a religious veneration for their great-grandfathers. A method

of obtaining indubitable testimony is in their power, and they will make use of it. Let the prisoner, on the day of the inquest, be conveyed to the room where the body lies; and let him be made to take his dead brother-in-law by the hand, and to touch his wounds; for, according to an old opinion, there are certain particles belonging to our mortal frame which, "when hurried from the actions of vitality by a violent death, do, as endeavouring to revenge their wrongs, fly in the face of the murderer, and, though in such minute parts as are too subtle for the observation of sense, keep still hovering about him, and, when he is brought to touch the murdered body which was their former habitation, by the motion of sympathy call from the sally-ports of life some of those parts of life which yet remain within it:"* the result being that the wounds will commence bleeding afresh. Therefore let the prisoner be taken under a strong guard before the honourable coroner and jurymen.

Again we stand in the room where Mr. Fussell was murdered. The dead body lies, covered with a white sheet, upon a table; and the jurymen, who have just been viewing it, are standing round. To them enters Major Strangeways, handcuffed and guarded, and is straightway ordered, in the name of the law, to take the corpse by the hand, and to touch the wounds. The cloth is thrown back, and he does so—with a visible shudder, as they all think, passing over his whole frame; but the blood about the ragged bullet-holes has grown thick and black, and it does not start to sudden redness, nor flow forth to meet the manacled hand that rests upon it. To the confusion of all great-grandfathers, and the discomfiture of hereditary wisdom, the experiment is a manifest failure; unless, indeed, the prisoner should in fact be innocent. But, although all present would have hailed the success of the attempt as an incontestable proof of the man's guilt, they will not accept its failure as any sign of the contrary. So Strangeways is led into an adjoining chamber, to be present during the inquest. His face is very pale and grave, and his lips are very white; but there is a certain confidence in his manner, which did not exist when he was brought in, and which is probably induced by the negative result of the ordeal he has just passed through.

Before any witnesses are called, and before the court adjourns to the inquest-room, the foreman of the jury stands up, and says he has a proposal to make; which is to the effect that all the gunsmiths' shops in London and the suburbs should be visited, with a view to ascertaining what muskets had been lent or sold on the day of the murder, as a clue might thus possibly be obtained, by which the perpetrator might be discovered. Thereupon one of the jurymen, who is himself a gunsmith—a Mr. Holloway—observes: "Gentlemen, the thing is not to be done with any amount of diligence,

on account of the great number of my trade in and about London. Besides, several may have lent guns on that day, and yet not to the murderer of Mr. Fussell. Indeed, I myself lent one, though I do not know to whom."

Here the coroner interposes: "Let the musket which was found in the prisoner's possession when he was taken be produced, and shown to Mr. Holloway." The weapon is brought forward, and handed to the gunsmith, who examines it closely. By the Lord, he thinks he recognises it! Yes, he is now very sure that he does, by reason of a certain mark which distinguishes this from other guns in his shop. Beyond a doubt, this is the very musket he lent on the morning of the murder: he can swear to it.

He lays it down with an expression of awe and wonder, which passes from face to face of every one in the room. And while they are gazing at each other silently, they hear the prisoner, in a loud, strange voice, exclaiming from the inner chamber that the hand of God is in the matter, and that he is guilty.

The room grows indistinct to our sight; the coroner, jurymen, and constables (obliged to acknowledge, mentally, that their great-grandfathers might possibly in some small matters be in the wrong), pass from the scene, and the scene itself is changed.

For now we behold Major Strangeways standing at the bar of the Old Bailey, this 24th of February, 1659. He is charged with murder, and, on being required to plead, replies that he will do so only on condition of being allowed to die the same death as his brother-in-law, in the event of his being found guilty; but that, if this be refused, he will refrain from pleading, and thus, according to the law as it then stood, preserve his estates, to bestow them upon his friends, instead of suffering them to pass to the Crown. However, the law in those days was not to be lightly balked of anything it might consider its due. It dealt much in revenge and torture; was not calm and dignified, but irritable, petulant, full of perpetual references to brute violence and rage. Does the prisoner persist in his determination? Yea, then, since he is so hardy, there is a way of trying his fortitude, of which he shall not lack a specimen. The wisdom of the before-mentioned ancestors is again brought into operation, for they have happily transmitted to their posterity, as to children incapable of managing their own affairs, a mode of punishing such stiff-necked criminals. Harken to the Lord Chief Justice Glynn:

"The prisoner shall be put into a mean house, stopped from any light, and be laid upon his back, with his body bare; and his arms shall be stretched forth with a cord, the one to the one side, the other to the other side, of the prison, and in like manner shall his legs be used; and upon his body shall be laid as much iron and stone as he can bear, and more; and the first day shall he have three morsels of barley-bread, and the next shall he drink thrice of the water in the next channel to the prison-door, but no

* Account of the case in the Harleian Miscellany. Bacon, in his Natural History (Century X., par. 958), mentions the same opinion, apparently with some degree of belief in its truth.

spring or fountain water: and this shall be his punishment till he die."

How now? Does he falter? Will he plead? No. He answers the judge with a look of sullen pride and resolution, and is borne away.

Another change of scene, and we stand, a few mornings later, in the Old Bailey Press Yard, so called from its being the place where refractory criminals used to be subjected to the terrible *peine forte et dure*—"the strong and hard pain."* Several persons are standing about this dismal yard, closed in by high prison walls, from which the narrow strip of sky above looks alien and far off. The sheriffs are here, in all the solemnity of their robes and chains; for the work of torture, as by law established, must be conducted ceremoniously. Some officers from the adjacent Newgate are here also; as well as three or four gentlemen in deep black clothes, who support another gentleman in their midst. These latter are Major Strangeways and his friends, who, notwithstanding the heinousness of the criminal's offence, have gathered round him in this last bitter trial, and will not desert him in his agonies. From them he is delivered to the sheriffs, who conduct him to a dungeon on one side of the yard, his friends following closely. In the obscure light of this cell we see a heavy wooden framework, of a triangular shape, lying upon the floor; and beside it are several iron weights.

We now hear one of the sheriffs speaking: "If the prisoner has any arrangements to make, or wishes to go through any devotions, he must do so quickly, for the time is growing short." He answers that he wishes to say his prayers, and he requests his friends to join him. Presently, a murmur of subdued voices is heard in that stony place; and then, after a brief pause, the criminal says that he is ready. At the same moment he takes off a long mourning cloak, and exhibits himself clothed from head to foot in a white garment, which, answering to his colourless face and lips, gives him a solemn, almost spectral, appearance. But otherwise he is altered for the better. His violence has given place to a quiet and grave bearing, and his eyes have something of the prophetic grandeur of death.

The terrible instrument (purposely constructed with a view to pressing on the region of the heart, and so expediting death, for in this, as in other respects, the severity of the sentence is mitigated) is now placed on the breast of the sufferer, and the signal previously agreed to for laying on the weights is given. "Lord Jesus, receive my soul!"

Turn away your heads, for this is no fit sight for human eyes! Has no one got a sheet to throw over that face which passes from white to black so quickly, and changes every minute? Lay on more weights, that he may die the sooner! These are too light. More weights!

* This form of torture, with some mitigations, continued in use until near the middle of last century.

There are no more weights to be had. The sufferer is a strong man, who fights a desperate fight with death, and can bear more than most persons. In this extremity, his friends mount upon the press, and add their own weight to the wood and iron; averting their faces from *his* face, and remaining there for several minutes.

Enough! All is over. Gentlemen, you may stand down. Officers, remove the press, and the thing that lies beneath it; for the heart of Major Strangeways is crushed, and the wisdom of our ancestors is once more apparent.

THE GIRL FROM THE WORKHOUSE.

WHAT have we to show for the thirty thousand a year spent on the teaching of the young in workhouses? Instruction without education. Next to nothing in the case of boys. Worse than nothing in the case of girls. There the girls are—not young criminals as in a reformatory, but simply destitute of means, and dependent upon those who undertake to teach them how in after years they may earn bread for themselves and be of some use in the world. These children are poor without blame; they cannot help having been born dependent upon parents unable, whether through misfortune or misconduct, to give them requisite support. They cannot help their orphanhood. Still of the age when nature makes them dependent upon adult help for maintenance and education into the future duties of their lives, the charge of them, dropped from private hands, falls into those of the guardians of the poor. No young girl can be rightly trained into a woman's sense of work and duty, under conditions that exclude all part in home affections, all perception of the varied duties of family life. Where nothing is done to cultivate into strength, wholesome affections; where washing is done by machinery, where cooking is done upon a great system having nothing in common with the pot on the cottage fire, and where the thriftless vicious talk of the elder ne'er-do-weels of their sex is common in their ears, girls are ill bred into the power of self-help. They leave such a place with little sober thought of becoming useful earnest happy wives. They must come back as their lives draw to a close, to live again upon the rates. The number of girls who do so return is twice that of the boys. There were more than thirteen thousand illegitimate children in the English workhouses last New Year's Day—ten thousand five hundred and more of them under three years old and with their mothers: the rest motherless—and their number never will be less, until destitute young girls get something like real aid out of the rates.

A little has been done here and there by the good sense of ladies. Miss Twining, for example, has, at Number Twenty-two New Ormond-street, not far from the Hospital for Sick Children, an Industrial Home for Young Women, in which girls between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five, either taken from the workhouse or withdrawn as they are about first to cross its threshold, are received, and in which

they are trained for service at home or in the colonies, taught household work in kitchen and laundry, needlework, and where they even—by help of the infant nursery connected with the children's hospital close by—receive initiation in the art and mystery of nursing. Here, with more than the mere name of a Home to characterise the wisely-devised little institution, sixty or seventy girls are trained and aided in the course of a twelvemonth. Many of them, not only rightly prepared for service and for honest marriage, but saved also from the contamination of the adult ward of the workhouse, may owe to this home the future happiness and usefulness of all their lives. A young girl, by loss of situation or bereavement, is sometimes driven to the temporary shelter of the workhouse; on the way thither it is desired that the doors of a house like this should be opened to her; that she should have something really a little like a home to go to—as like a home as the warm sympathy of strangers can succeed in making it. Through such an institution, helping hands may be stretched to the young, the weak, and honest, to sustain them and deliver them from evil.

In the hamlet of Brockham, not very far from Dorking, where a pretty rivulet flows into the Mole, and a bridge crosses the smooth river that reflects the old oaks and tall beeches on its bank, there has been established for the aid of workhouse girls about fourteen years old, another sort of Home. The founder and the chief support of it is the Honourable Mrs. Albert Way. This lady has for the last fourteen years paid active attention to the subject of the education of pauper girls. Bred in the workhouse, eight out of ten remain essentially paupers; many do, and more must hereafter, return again and again to parish care from vain efforts to maintain themselves. A large majority of the children in workhouses, she considers to be orphan children of parents who have been hard-working and industrious, and who never received parish money. Sixty per cent are so in the district schools, but in the workhouses it is not quite so, though bad enough. The number of the children in our workhouses last New Year's Day, was above fifty-two thousand. Of these, eleven thousand three hundred and eighty-five were fatherless and motherless. Three thousand four hundred and forty-six children of widows in the workhouse with their mothers. It is in the workhouse that these children—to whom the stigma of being workhouse-bred ought not to attach—are made paupers for life.

If they could enter their first service under fair conditions of comfort, to receive the friendly care of a mistress wise and kind, the chances for their future would be very, very different. As a common rule, girls of fourteen are hired out of the workhouse by persons who are in need of a cheap drudge. They get wages that will scarcely buy them clothes; are overworked; are left untaught or ill-taught, to become weary, slovenly, and out of heart with life; are often left much alone, while their employers, who themselves

must drudge, are absent at their place of work. These poor little girls break down and are discharged: they sink under temptations to vice, that disguise under the false names of rest and pleasure, its unrest and misery. And so they come back to the workhouse, not seldom with illegitimate children in their arms, and there receive as young mothers a consideration which has been found suggestive to girls who have not yet passed from the workhouse into the world, of an ambition to come back to the house young mothers too.

Such considerations led Mrs. Way to the establishment of her Brockham Home for pauper girls, which has now been in existence three years and some months. It was two years old when its plan was described by Mrs. Way one day last year to the Poor Relief Committee of the House of Commons. At that time forty girls, all taken at the age of about twelve out of the workhouse, had passed through its discipline. Thirty of the forty were orphans of parents—bricklayers, painters, carpenters, farm-labourers, gentlemen's servants—who had never been upon the parish. Generally the mother had died when they were young, and the father, with a large family, had not afterwards thriven. In the Brockham Home, the design is that these girls shall have "just the training that they would receive from a very good mother." They are entirely cared for at the institution, which is chiefly maintained by voluntary subscriptions—some Unions, however, paying what would have been the cost of workhouse food and clothing—three shillings a week; and it is a Home to which they may come back, as to a parent's house, whenever they are out of service. Two matrons and a school-mistress find not the smallest difficulty in the management of such a place by moral influence alone. The cost at Brockham is seven shillings a week for the whole expenses of each person. In a workhouse, including also whole expense of staff, &c., it is eight shillings. In the detached district schools for pauper children, isolation of the children to the utmost possible degree from the demoralising influences of the workhouse is essential. The children fresh from the workhouse should not, as they pour in with steady flow, be instantly mixed up with those under better training. There should be a probationary ward for the due preparation of new comers. There should be removed from the district school, and that in the utmost degree, all appearance of mere training by the machinery of paid officials; the children must not be taught to consider themselves so much stiff clay in course of being worked up into bricks, but as being helpless themselves among friends who are strong to help, with some people about their daily path who have a loving way with them that can unlock the treasury within their desolate hearts, and teach them how to become rich in the spending of their young affections. Moreover, for those who have left the district school and gone to service, there should be, in some corner of it, a refuge—established partly,

perhaps, by voluntary aid, and in part only by the parish—for those who may afterwards need temporary shelter. Instead of thrusting them upon the workhouse, let the friendship at the school that has supplied the love of father to the fatherless, find them again and sustain them in their hour of need. Let there be somebody there, who does not find the faith and friendship of the young and poor a burden and vexation; somebody to whom an old pupil may come at any turning-point of life, and tell its trouble, confident of receiving sympathy and counsel. Mrs. Way, with whose views we are here coinciding, would like to see, but does not hope to see, well-managed workhouse nurseries in which within the workhouse walls children younger than eight might be prepared for the homes and district schools. She would have Homes like her own multiplied by voluntary exertion, and assurance of law to boards of guardians that they may legally pay out of the rates for pauper children maintained in such places as the Brockham Home. As to the shameful character of the present workhouse training of the young, and especially of girls, she thus heaps evidence together:

“I have evidence here from some of the poor-law inspectors. One of them says, ‘Children who enter the workhouse vicious, become worse.’ Another, ‘So bad are workhouse children considered at this moment, that even reformatories and penitentiaries are in a great measure closed against them.’

“At Dalston, a rule has been passed that they will not receive any girls who have ever been in the workhouse, as they find that they are hopeless and irreclaimable. A lady, who is a friend of mine, has been trying to get a girl of nineteen years of age, who was educated in the workhouse, and fell into crime, into the Magdalen; but the treasurer said, ‘Of all cases, those from workhouses are the most hopeless, so that we have now determined not to receive any.’ That lady had a great deal of trouble to get this girl admitted. I myself have seen a letter from the master of the reformatory at Exeter, who says, ‘We find workhouse children who come to us, almost hopeless; they have never had any softening influence exercised over them, and we do not like taking them.’ The lady superintendent at Bussage, which is a large penitentiary, said that, out of eight workhouse girls, there was only one that was at all hopeful. The master of Stafford jail told me that of all females under his care, the worst were those that had been trained or educated in workhouses. The chaplain of Newgate has said that all the worst cases that came under his notice were cases of those who had been workhouse children. Mr. Leyland, the master of a large boys’ reformatory at Wandsworth, said, ‘I can do anything with the street children, but I cannot manage workhouse children.’ My own experience in a large penitentiary in London (at Pentonville) is, that if a girl is sent by anybody there, and they find she has been in the workhouse, they say, ‘We will have none of

those workhouse cases, they are quite irreclaimable.’

“I am only speaking of those who have been in the workhouse from the time when they were seven or eight years old. What I have stated refers only to children who have fallen into crime simply from having gone into the world as paupers, and who, from having no friend to look after them, after leaving the workhouse school, have fallen into vice. One of these girls I myself found, and I traced her history. She had been in the Sutton district school for three years. I found her in the penitentiary. Her history was that she got into very bad places; she could not do the work which she was set to do, which was much too hard for a young girl of fourteen years of age. She said, ‘My master swore at me all day. I did what I could, but I could not do the work, and then I ran away. I met with companions who tempted me to evil.’ She committed some small offence, and was taken by the police, and afterwards sent to a penitentiary. I have taken that girl out, and she has proved a most respectable servant, and has been now in service for a year. She said to me, ‘Until you spoke to me, I never felt that any one cared for me. I have been in the workhouse school, but I never felt that I had a friend. When I went wrong, I had no one to go to or to advise me, and I could not help myself.’ I mention that, as one out of at least thirty cases that have come within my own knowledge.”

It is only fair here to observe that the corruption by example in workhouses is rather more the ordinary fault of local management which fails to supply any effectual classification, than of the regulations of the Poor-law Board, which distinctly require all practicable classification according to character, as well as according to sex and age. Thus, in the first report of the poor relief committee for the present year, we find the chairman of a board of guardians, questioned about an asserted compulsion of innocent daughters of respectable working men to associate with girls who are the offscourings of the streets, thus explaining himself: “I presume we have to do with them as inmates of the workhouse, and, if they are orderly there, I do not know that we dissect their character to that nicety; at the same time, if they are disorderly in any respect, we have a refractory ward for individuals of that sort.”

The report of the Royal Commission upon Education, presented to parliament last year, declaring workhouses to be places in which children are brought up in vice and idleness, saw no remedy but the encouragement of district and separate schools. Some of its conclusions were, “that the workhouse schools are generally so managed that the children contained in them learn from infancy to regard the workhouse as their homes, and associate with grown-up paupers, whose influence destroys their moral characters, and prevents the growth of a spirit of independence. That the arrangements of workhouses are unavoidably such as to make it extremely difficult to procure

or retain competent teachers." The only sure remedy was said to be, the compulsory establishment of district and separate schools, and compulsion upon guardians to make them use the power they now have—and do not use—of teaching children of the out-door paupers, with consent of their parents. Such education, paid for from the rates, should be made the condition of out-door relief. Such were the conclusions in this matter arrived at last year by the Education Commission, and they have led to the taking this year, by the select committee upon poor relief, of exculpatory evidence by poor-law inspectors.

We will give a sketch of the rebutting argument. In the first place, it is urged that much of the ill character of workhouse schools dates from before the year 'forty-seven, or is founded on reports and statements made before that date, when the system of workhouse education, one year in advance of Europe as to that matter, was revolutionised. In that year the grant obtained by Sir Robert Peel's government, of thirty thousand a year for the salaries of teachers in workhouse schools, came into play, under supervision of the Committee of Councils on Education. Reform of the schools was got in this way by reform of the teachers, and the general tone of inspectors' reports has been for the last fifteen years growing more and more favourable. It was in the year 'forty-eight that the first district schools were established. As good an intellectual education is now given in an in-door workhouse school, as in a national or district school. As to advantages of workhouse society and morals of the taught, Mr. Doyle, inspector for the Midland district, who is a strong and able advocate of the workhouse as against the separate or district schools, scouts the idea of workhouse contamination, and considers it a triumph to show by investigation that on a given day about three-fourths of the adult women in all the workhouses of his district were mothers of illegitimate children, and that of these one in each dozen had been in a workhouse school. Mr. Doyle shows quite satisfactorily that while the intellectual results at the workhouse school are certainly not below those of the district school, the district schools, as now constituted, have their full share of complete failure in results. In the workhouse school the number of children under one teacher is small, and regular attendance is assured; this approximates it in one respect to the family system; but Mr. Doyle objects also to all association of homes established by benevolent persons with the poor-law administration. Any connexion with the poor-law system, like the payment by a board of guardians of three shillings a week—the cost of workhouse maintenance—towards the care of a pauper orphan in the Brockham Home, Mr. Doyle thinks "entirely unsound in principle, and quite impracticable. . . . There can," he says, "be no greater mistake, I think, than to mix up the operation of two totally distinct principles—the principle of charity, and the principle of poor-law administration."

There is, no doubt, a notion in some minds, obtained (however it may seem to an official mind unsound and impracticable) from the highest source, that the principle of Charity is the principle which should animate all human actions, and that, whatever is totally distinct from it, is nothing worth. There is a notion that by the best machinery, if it be machinery alone, it is not in man or nation rightly to consider the poor, and be a father to the fatherless. There is a notion that the principle of Charity is to the principle of poor-law administration very much as soul to substance; and if that notion be true, it is bold doctrine that tells us soul and body cannot be kept too much apart.

But, after all, Mr. Doyle has to admit of the workhouse girls pretty much what Mrs. Way asserts, and what daily common experience shows to be true; he acknowledges it to be "true to a great extent" of workhouse girls, as a very intelligent union clerk had said to him, that "when put out to service they only find places with persons who are little better than the class they take as servants; the consequence is, there is no prospect or even chance for a girl to get on with such people; they give them bare wages to find them shoes and stockings, and sometimes refuse to give them any at all; they keep them six or twelve months, during which time the whole of the clothing they took with them is worn out, the mistresses then quarrel with them, and there is often no place for them but the workhouse again, or they are perhaps driven to something worse." Well, do we not come back then, even with the advocate of an impeccable impassive poor-law, to the need of that spirit of human Charity which we find working at Brockham and in Great Ormond-street? Let there be from the advocates for the thorough drying of the pauper's crust, license for *some* womanly help to the poor girls at any rate. The boys, no doubt, fight their way up when there is stuff in them. If he have cunning and greed enough, the workhouse boy sent out to sweep an office may learn how to sweep money by the dustpanful out of his neighbours' tills, may learn to be a famous "operator" in the money market, and to die in the blessed assurance that he is bequeathing a plum to his heirs.

Mr. Weale, another poor-law inspector, reports to the committee his inquiry into the facts which induced the chairman of the board of guardians at Birmingham, to declare to the board, four years ago, "that the system of bringing up children in the workhouse had utterly failed in rendering them useful members of society;" that "independently of their ignorance, they were untruthful and dishonest;" and that his visit to the disorderly girls' ward on that very day "afforded a lamentable confirmation of the fact that the guardians were bringing up their girls in a manner that would only tend to increase pauperism, and he might say prostitution, in the town." The chairman of the board was not speaking at random; he founded his statement on inquiries made, without exception, into the cases of all the girls sent from the

workhouse into domestic service, between April, 'fifty-six, and May, 'fifty-eight—that is to say, for the two years preceding his complaint. The whole number was thirty-four, and the poor-law inspector finding this reason for not counting some of the cases, that reason for not counting others, and another reason for not counting others again, consents to join issue only upon sixteen, and then argues that two of them turned out well, one of the two being returned to the workhouse only for ill-health. The others he manipulates and tabulates into degrees of badness, but it is clear enough that the official rebutter is a substantial corroboration of the statement made by the chairman of the board whose poor were in question, that there was no fit training of the young girls in the workhouse. Mr. Weale thinks that much of the admitted evil might be obviated if the casual pauper children, some of them demoralised to an incredible extent, were separated from the permanent inmates.

Mr. Lambert, an inspector of sixty-one rural unions—while testifying that the workhouse schools are unjustly decried, and that the overcrowded homes of the out-door poor in his district are of worse influence on the morality of the young than workhouse training—produces a return for one week last year, showing that in the workhouses inspected by him there are two thousand two hundred and thirty-five women, of whom he arranges nearly a thousand as bad, under unpleasant heads that represent degrees in vice, three hundred and sixty-three are imbecile, one hundred and fifty are deserted wives, thirty-one are wives with husbands in jail, eighty-seven are wives with husbands in the workhouse, and respectability is confined to three hundred and sixty-three old women, one hundred and eighty-nine women and girls incapable of getting their own living by reason of bodily defect or infirmity, and—not counting those crippled by vice—against the nine hundred who are profligate and able-bodied, there are only seventy-five women and girls to be set who are able-bodied and respectable!

Among the witnesses upon this subject, we have the Rev. J. Armitstead, vicar of Sandbach, Cheshire, who has been long in his parish, where he has rebuilt one large church, built two new churches, and established several schools. During the whole lifetime of the new poor-law, this gentleman has been a guardian, attentive to the needs of the poor in a well-managed union. But in all his experience he has never known of a girl passing out of the workhouse school, to service in a gentleman's family. The stigma of the workhouse stands in the girl's way. Mr. Armitstead offered himself as a witness for the compatibility of the principle of Charity with the principle of poor-law administration, for he has seen the misery and profligacy into which girls with starved undisciplined affections, fall, after quitting either the workhouse or the district school, for want of help from anything that has the aspect of a home. He is not deluded by the fallacies of

returns that report all well with those who are out of sight, and lead to pen and ink conclusions contradicted by the commonest experience of common life. Mr. Armitstead thinks that in dealing with destitute children, orphans and others, towards whom it stands in place of a parent, the State should make the nearest practicable approach to the fulfilment of a parent's duty. For the last nine years, and with the greatest possible success, the system has been tried in his own parish of seven thousand people, of taking pauper orphans by two or three at a time from the workhouse, and placing them with respectable dames in their own district: the dames being under the superintendence of the clergyman, the guardians, and the relieving officer. The orphan children are thus placed in homes, with childless couples and others, who with small pay for their maintenance are glad of their service and companionship. Experience has proved that strong domestic attachments arise out of such relations. The well-selected household guardian usually becomes a lasting friend. The child, dressed in no workhouse clothes, and its relation to the workhouse almost unknown to itself, goes to the national school, in due time goes out to work with a fair chance of getting good situations, and when out of work, the orphan girl knows where to find a chimney-corner where she may look for a welcome. Upon some such system, Mr. Armitstead believes that the radical defect in poor-law administration as applied to the young, may in all country and some town districts be greatly softened.

Meanwhile, let us, in God's name, increase the influence and power—let us hope for increase also in the number—of the few who are labouring to add from without that element in the case of the young, the friendless, and the most helpless poor, which it is so hard and so difficult to get recognised from behind the official desk!

THE DUCHESS VERONICA.

IN EIGHT CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER IV. THE PORTRAIT.

ON the morning after the interview between the Contessa Cecilia and Signor Carlini, the duchess was sitting in her chamber, while two lady's-maids were assisting her in the various operations of the toilette. A seat in front of a mirror is a position conducive to good humour and a pleasant state of mind in the case of many a woman. With the Lady Veronica it was not so. She was about twenty-six years old at that period, and already time and suffering had done their defacing work on the never-comely features. The looking-glass offered no consoling picture to the unhappy duchess. She was just then particularly sore at the duke having joined one of the far-famed companies of flagellants.

It is an historical fact, that Salviati made himself a member of one of these bodies, whose place of meeting was conveniently near Caterina's house, in the Via dei Pilastrì. They were popularly called "buche"-holes, or dens, that is, and especially

about the time at which the events here related took place, they played a very conspicuous part in the social life of the period and its irregularities. They took their origin from the well-known mediæval madness of the flagellants; and mutual "discipline" was the real object of the meetings in their earlier day. They always met by night, and professed to pass the whole of the vigils of the Church in devotion. This specialty of their rules made membership of them so extremely convenient a portion of the social life and manners of the seventeenth century, that the number of societies of this nature, which had been seventy-five in the year 1527, had increased to the extraordinary number of one hundred and forty-nine in Florence alone! They were finally suppressed at the extinction of the Medicean dynasty.

Among all the members of the hundred and forty-nine confraternities, it must be supposed that some, at least, proposed to themselves, if not a literal compliance with the original "discipline" of the institution, at all events some sort of practice, such as probably the recitation of interminable litanies, which was according to the ideas of that day deemed to possess prophylactic virtues against the spiritual consequences of sinful lives. But very few persons in Florence could have been persuaded to believe that the gay and pleasure-loving young Duke of San Giuliano was among these. Least of all would it have been possible to induce his own wife to attach a moment's faith to anything of the sort. That the duke was really enrolled on the list of one of these brotherhoods was likely enough; that he even presented himself at the place of meeting, and was noted as so present, was very possible; that he might have pushed his regard for appearances so far even as to have been seen at the end of the pious mummeries, divesting himself of the sort of white domino and hood worn by the members, was also possible. But who could know what had become of the figure thus masked, during the many intervening hours, save the faithful Luigi? And that nothing was to be gained by interrogating *him* either personally, if she could have condescended to do so, or indirectly, by means of her serving-women, the Lady Veronica well knew.

The practice of disguising themselves which was adopted by all these confraternities, ostensibly that their good deeds might not be seen of men, was one of the circumstances which made enrolment among them invaluable to those who had matters of any sort on hand which required concealment. It would seem as if nothing had been neglected by which these professedly religious institutions could be made perfectly adapted to every purpose of social disorder and vice. The long white gown reaching to the heels, and the capacious hood, with its two holes for the eyes, descending below the shoulders, formed a disguise which set at defiance all possibility of recognition. The well-known costume was far too common to excite either

surprise or remark let it be seen where it might; and was, of course, equally available and equally convenient for the libertine whose object was another man's wife, as for the street-thief whose aim was another man's pocket-handkerchief; for the gallant bent on scaling a nunnery wall, or the burglar intent on breaking into a dwelling-house; for the abduction of a damsel, or the murder of a rival.

The sombre humour and never-sleeping jealousy of the Duchess Veronica were, as may easily be imagined, not a little deepened and exacerbated by the new and sudden fit of devotion which had shown itself by leading her lord to enrol himself a member of the "Buca di San Antonio," in the Borgo Pinti. Her imagination pictured to her the perfectly disguised white figure, unobtrusively attended by the trusty Luigi, gliding out from the assembled congregation, and betaking himself—whither?—to spend the intervening hours before stealing back in the morning's dawn to leave his gown and hood at the "buca," and starting thence for his deserted home. Where were those long hours spent?

"Have you learned from Luigi at what hour his master returned home last night, or this morning rather, Francesca?" she asked of the maid, who was arranging her thin and scanty hair.

"It wanted some three hours to dawn, my lady, old Bindo, the porter, says when he opened the doors for his excellency. Luigi is heavy-headed with his night watch, and is yet a-bed, being sure that his excellency will not yet need his attendance. The pious brotherhood, my lady, which my lord has lately joined, do prolong their saintly exercises, Luigi says, beyond all reason, begging your ladyship's pardon. He says, saving your ladyship's presence, that if godliness keeps such hours, he had rather have any master than a devout one."

"Know you where the confraternity, whose devotions my lord attends, holds its meetings?" demanded the duchess, frowning heavily.

"In Borgo Pinti, my lady, near the church of Sant' Ambrogio. It is under the invocation of the holy hermit St. Anthony. They do say, my lady, that the thongs of the 'disciplines' are stiff with blood by the time they give over their holy exercises."

"Silly tales for such silly women as you, Francesca. Tell Luigi, when he next fools you with any such stories, that you know better than to believe him."

The Duchess Veronica felt an uncontrollable desire to know more. Who was the woman for whose love the proud and pleasure-loving Salviati could submit to association with a rabble of absurd or hypocritical devotees, and to participation in their mummeries? The unhappy lady, brooding gloomily and bitterly, was pondering, as she sat listlessly before her glass, on the possibility of making this discovery, when the packet, despatched overnight by the Contessa Cecilia, was brought into her chamber, and placed in her hands by one of her tire-women.

"A packet, my lady, which was left early this morning before any of your ladyship's women were up. Porter Bindo has just given it to me. The bearer said that he was instructed not to wait for any answer."

The duchess looked at the large coarse writing of the superscription, and concluded that the envelope contained the petition of some mendicant for charity. She felt but little inclined at that moment to do aught to relieve the sorrows of any human being. She tore off the cover, with a savage satisfaction at the prospect of an opportunity of revenging, even on an unknown beggar, the smart which made her at enmity with all the world; and read greedily, breathlessly, while a ghastly paleness spread itself over her face, and her heart seemed to suspend its action. She had read but the first line or two, when, with a ferocious and cruel smile, her fingers clutched the little miniature in its case, and closed over it with a grasp as convulsing as if the throat of her enemy were beneath their pressure. But the letter was read with the intensest avidity to the last word. The miserable woman then let it fall from her hands, and threw herself backward on the cushion of the large chair in which she sat, while the violent heaving of her bosom, the rapid contraction and distension of her nostrils, and the rush of the returning blood to brow, cheek, and neck, indicated the agony of passion that swept over her like a tempest wind. And all the while she held the fatal portrait at arm's length before her, staring at the unopened case, which she seemed to lack courage to unclose.

By degrees the violence of the storm in her blood and brain subsided to a treacherous calm, and she remained for a few minutes as if lost in abstraction. Then silently motioning her women to leave her, she glanced round her as they left the chamber, as if to be sure that she was indeed alone, and then with a sudden spring forward, rapid and fierce as the bound of a tigress on its prey, she tore open the case of the picture, and fixing her distended eyes on the beautiful face in the pride of its youthful bloom, remained staring at it, as if it had blasted her sight like the head of a Medusa. Once again all the blood ran back to her bursting heart, as she gazed, and left a ghastly and livid paleness on her features, reflected in the glass before her in horrible contrast to the soft peach-bloom on the lovely girlish face in the fatal picture.

Notable was the difference of the effect produced in the two women, the Duchess Veronica and the Countess Cecilia, by the comparison of their features with the disastrous beauty of that same portrait which had been made by each of them. No illusion softened to the despairing wife the truth of her discomfiture. The stake in her case was too tremendously great to permit any self-love or vanity to conceal for an instant the blasting truth. It was with her no mere triumph of coquetry, no itch for admiration, no question of whistling back a fickle lover to the lightly-worn

allegiance of an hour. It was her all, her life, the wreck of heart and soul that were doomed by the fatal beauty of those girlish features.

She began walking rapidly to and fro across the large chamber, muttering from time to time:

"Not this! no! it shall not be I, the daughter of a princely line! sweep her from my path, as I spurn her image" and she dashed to the other end of the floor with her foot the miniature, as she passed it in her walk; ". . . . robbed of my husband's love by a peasant in right of a painted cheek Caterina Canacci! beware, beware! Be warned! Yes; so it shall be," she continued, after a long pause, during which she had ceased from her hurried walk, and stood deep in thought: "so it shall be! There *shall* be a warning. There shall be yet a door for repentance opened both to him and to her!"

With these words she recommenced her walk somewhat more calmly. But the thin bloodless lips were closely compressed; there was a dangerous gleam in the fierce hard eyes, heavy gloom upon the lowering brow. And for several hours she continued thus apparently in deep thought.

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About three weeks later in the year, towards the latter end of November, a little after the hour of the Ave Maria, the thick dusty cloud-curtain of two centuries rises on the next scene of this drama, as the contemporary diarists and chroniclers have preserved it for us.

Very few of the many thousand visitors of all nations who every year pass under Vasari's fine colonnade of the "Uffizi," on their way to the world-famous gallery above it, are aware that between the entrance nearest the Palazzo Vecchio and the door at the foot of the grand stair leading to the gallery, they pass the former entrance of one of the oldest, and once one of the most famous, churches in Florence. Many Florentines even, whose whole lives have been passed within the walls of their native city, would be unable to tell, if asked, the whereabouts of the once celebrated church of St. Peter the Greater, otherwise called San Pietro in Scheraggio, or St. Peter in the Ditch. Yet if Dante had been told that a day would come when a stranger might ask in vain his way in Florence to San Pietro Scheraggio, he might have replied, perhaps, that the time might well come, nay, not improbably was at hand, when Florence should become even as Babylon, by reason of the wickedness of its people; but it assuredly would have appeared incredible to him that a free Tuscan senate should be sitting in the council-hall of the almost adjoining palace, not a few of whose members would have been puzzled to point out the site of one of the principal churches and monasteries of the city, still in part existing almost within a hundred yards of them. But Messer Giorgio Vasari, when planning for his patron Cosmo the building of the new "Uffizi," which was to contain and reunite all the "offices"

and magistracies of the city, thought more of the regularity and fair proportions of his own work, than of preserving the work of his predecessors. And the venerable old church, once glorious with its three grand naves, its cloister, its cemetery, its infinite number of sepulchral monuments inscribed with the records of the old fathers of the republic, was pared away, and hustled, and built up, and effectually hidden by the fine new Palladian, or rather Vasarian front of the new building. The door of the diminished church—now church no more—fashioned to match the other doors under the colonnade, and like them opening off it, is rarely opened now. When the persons of this history were living and making the misery of each other by their vices, passions, and follies, the new door of the old church more frequently stood open, and St. Peter in the Ditch, though hidden as now, was sufficiently well known to the Florentines; church-going made a much larger part of the daily life in Florence in those days than it does in these.

It was the vigil of some festival. A few long slender candles on the principal altar, and here and there the glimmer of a lamp hanging before an image of the Virgin, barely prevented the church from being in total darkness. Yet there was a congregation of worshippers, and a drowsy hum of litanies rose and fell on the ear in the cadences of a monotonous chant. In the immediate vicinity of the scattered shrine-lamps there was a little oasis of feeble light, within the circumference of which the features of some hood-shadowed face were rendered visible, or the bald crown of some aged penitent glistened white as the twinkling ray rested on it. But the remoter parts of the church lay in deep shadow; infinite were the capricious effects of light and shade produced by the multiform irregularities, projecting pilasters, receding chapels, and isolated columns of the building; and strangely picturesque the uncertain outline of groups and figures in the dim chiaroscuro. The majority of those present were doubtless there for a religious object, for the earning that is—cheaply enough, inasmuch as no domestic circle or pleasant occupation was deserted for the purpose, and lamp-oil was saved the while—of the indulgences promised as the reward of attendance there. But the social habits of that period were such as to amply justify the statement that many of the dimly visible figures who lurked behind pillars, or crouched on the steps of distant altars, were intent on matters calculated to make future penance necessary, rather than on performing that due for former sins. In either case it was all good for the trade of the place, and these chiaroscuro services, despite the notorious scandals to which they gave rise, were accordingly much in favour with the priesthood.

Among those who were evidently not there to pray, nor even to take part in the mechanical routine which passed for praying, was, on the evening in question, a thickly-veiled female figure, which had posted itself in the shadow of a column

just outside the edge of one of the light-circles that have been described. There were several places vacant on the faldstools, on which the light fell just in front of her; but she preferred to remain standing in the obscurity. It was observable, too, that she was entirely alone; a solecism in the etiquette of the period, which no woman of respectable position, whatever her general conduct or special errand, permitted herself. It seemed, too, as if she had ventured on this step for the purpose of meeting some one, for her glance was continually turned towards the door with a movement indicative of nervous expectation. Many quitted the church, or entered it, and passed on to places in distant parts of it. Still the veiled figure kept her post impassibly in the shade of her column; so it was evident that, if she were really waiting for somebody, she was sure that the expected person would come to the spot at which she had taken up her station.

At length two women entered, and came straight to the seats in the light in front of the veiled figure. No sooner had they reached the spot where the light fell on their features, than it became evident that they were, or that one of them was, the object of her watch. Both the new comers, the mistress and the maid, for such they clearly were, were young and handsome, the former very eminently so. Crossing themselves, they kneeled at one of the faldstools, and at once proceeded methodically to recite the appointed offices; while the woman who had been awaiting their coming, stretching forward her head from out the shadow, gazed intently on the lovely face before her. For a while she seemed entirely absorbed in the contemplation of it. Then suddenly drawing up her figure, and throwing up her eyes with an expression of earnest prayer, her lips moved with some words of eager supplication that assuredly were not written in hymn-book or missal; and suddenly, with a swift movement, she knelt by the side of the beautiful young woman she had been observing with so strange an expression. And turning her face towards her so that her lips were within a few inches of the other's ear, but still keeping her veil down, in a deep whisper she said through her closed teeth:

“Caterina Canacci, daughter of Pasquale Bassi, the dyer, I, Veronica, Duchess of San Giuliano, am here to warn you. In mercy I warn you, though no mercy have you deserved from me, and none shall you find, if the warning be in vain. Base-born! You have dared to contaminate with your mercenary love a noble family. Now listen! If the duke come again to your house of infamy, so use the meeting that it be the last. Should he come a second time, and you admit him within your door . . . pass quickly to your shrift, for your doom will have been signed. I, the wife of Jacopo Salviati now pronounce it, and will execute it.”

Having thus spoken, she rose from her knees and hurried from the church.

CHAPTER V. THE FIRST ACT OF THE LADY
VERONICA'S "LITTLE COMEDY."

CATERINA had slunk back to her home, as soon as her accuser had vanished, overpowered with shame and terror. She was well aware that Salviati had taken careful precautions to secure the secrecy of his visits to the Via dei Pilastri, and that he attached much importance to the concealment of their intimacy from the world. And of course it was not difficult to divine that the duchess was of all persons the last whose ears he would have wished the guarded secret to reach. What power of working woe to her, or perhaps even to Jacopo himself, this great and lofty lady might possess,—what shape the vengeance of an outraged wife, of such high place and rank, might take,—was all misty and uncertain to Caterina, and more terrible from its undefined vagueness. She felt keenly enough the greatness of her unpardonable offence against the duchess; and could not help wondering at the moderation which was content to warn before it struck. But, that the dreadful discovery of her relations with the duke must have the effect of putting an end to them, she could not doubt. And she contemplated with an agony almost equal to that felt by the duchess herself, the certainty that her next interview with her lover would be the last,—with an agony almost equal, but not quite, for some of the elements which intensified the bitterness of the cup to the duchess, were absent from that of Caterina.

The Lady Veronica had wronged her humbly-born rival in one phrase of the passionate denunciation she had hurled against her in the church. Her love for Jacopo was not "mercenary." It may have been that those first profoundly corrupt corruptors of her early innocence had, as one of them cynically avowed, brought Salviati to the Casa dei Canacci from purely mercenary motives. But the love which had grown up between her and Jacopo Salviati was not a mercenary, but—though an unhallowed—a true love on either side. When the Duca di San Giuliano married the Lady Veronica Cybo, and when Caterina Bassi accepted the hand of old Signor Canacci, both had been guilty of mercenary love,—in such sense as mercenary motives can ever be predicated of that much-misused word; they had both, from mercenary motives, pretended to love. If no princely marriages, and no "assured bed and board," no "great matches," in short, had come in the way, the love of Jacopo and Caterina might have been a heaven-blessed union. But there was the fatal error in the top line of the sum, and the whole column of figures was necessarily, therefore, irremediably wrong to the end!

That next visit of the duke to Casa Canacci followed very shortly upon the terrible one from the duchess; and, as may be easily imagined, was *not* the last. Caterina was astonished at the smallness of the effect which the terrible tidings she had looked forward with such dread to telling, produced upon her lover. Jacopo appeared

to be more angry than alarmed. He muttered something about his precautions of secrecy having been more for the duchess's own sake, than for his own. As for Caterina's share in the matter, it did not seem to strike him that any harm either in fame or fortune could come to her from its being known that she was the favoured and exclusive mistress of so great a Sultan as the Duca di San Giuliano. And as things ordinarily went in the world in which they were both living, he was probably not far wrong in so deeming of her position. The Lady Veronica Cybo was, it must be admitted, a phenomenon much out of place in that world, and one calculated to throw its usual reckonings and ways not a little out of their ordinary track. The extent, however, to which it was capable of doing so, the Florentine world and Salviati himself had yet to learn. And he had little difficulty in soothing Caterina's alarm, and teaching her to look on the threats of the duchess as the impotent ill-temper of an unreasonable woman.

So the duke's visits to the Casa Canacci were as frequent as ever; and the sole result of the extraordinary step taken by the duchess appeared to be that they were less carefully guarded from the suspicions of the world. To Salviati himself, his wife had said no word alluding to Caterina, to her discoveries respecting her, or to her own visit to the church of San Pietro Maggiore. She was only more than ordinarily gloomy and silent; and the fits of violent passion, upbraiding, and entreaty, which had from time to time made his home intolerable to the light-hearted libertine, altogether ceased. There was a dead lull in Casa Salviati, which led him to think, that, per Bacco! it would have been better never to have attempted any concealment from his wife at all.

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One morning, about the middle of December, still in that same year 1638, the Duchess Veronica said to her tire-woman, Francesca, as the latter was about to leave the room after having completed her mistress's toilette:

"Is thy brother Beppo the fringe-maker still in the same house he occupied last year, Francesca?"

"He is, so please you, signora, and his business thrives well there."

"That is well. I am pleased to hear it. Now listen to me. To-day thou wilt go down into the city to pay a visit to thy brother; say to him that I have need of a private chamber in which to receive the visit of a person whom it does not suit me to see here, or at the palazzo in town. I know that I can trust both him and thee. Thou mayst fancy, if thou wilt," she added, with a dreary attempt at a smile, "that I, too, have a love affair a-foot, and need a trysting-place to meet my cavalier; but that is no business of thine or of thy brother. I need the accommodation but for an hour, say, at the Ave Maria to-morrow evening, and I am sure he will manage to provide me with it."

"Assuredly, my lady. Beppo will be only too proud to do your ladyship's bidding in that or any other thing your ladyship may condescend to order him. Your ladyship will excuse the meanness of the chamber. He will do his best, as in duty bound; but I doubt he has no accommodation fit to offer to your ladyship."

"Let him not put himself to any trouble. Four bare walls, my child, even if there be not so much as a chair in them, so they secure privacy, will suffice for my need. Now go! Let me hear this has been arranged when you return to the villa. The sole object of your going is to visit your brother by my permission—you understand."

"I understand your ladyship. Many thanks to your ladyship for the holiday!" added the well-drilled waiting-woman, as if to show her readiness to act out a lie in all its details at the shortest notice.

"And, Francesca!"

"Yes, my lady."

"Tell Pippo Carrarrese to come to me here. I wish to speak to him."

"Yes, my lady." Francesca vanished to don in all haste her best skirt and mantle for her welcome trip to Florence, wondering much on what business her mistress could possibly be bound.

In a few minutes Pippo Carrarrese stood before his mistress. Philip was, as that nickname of his—the only name he had beyond his baptismal one—indicated, a native of Carrara; and as such a born subject of the Prince of Massa, the Lady Veronica's father. He was one of those retainers, half military, half menial, who were to be found in every princely house attached to the more immediate service of their lords—men whose whole pride and self-respect consisted in believing themselves, as well as their despot masters, to be superior to and exempt from laws, which were made, according to their theory, only for the subject herd who lived outside ducal and baronial castles—men whose sole virtue was hound-like fidelity to their keepers, and perfect readiness to obey their behests, let them be what they might, from carrying a billet to murdering a bishop before the altar. Philip of Carrara had been "given" to the Lady Veronica by her noble father, when she left his court as Salviati's wife, and he was considered in the Salviati household as her especial retainer and servitor. He was a grey and grisly looking man of some sixty years of age; and now stood, cap in hand and silent, before the duchess, waiting her commands.

"Get thee into the saddle, Pippo, and make the best of thy way to the Osteria del Giardino, in the Via dei Pilastri. There give the host this paper, and bid him point out to thee the man named thereon. When thou hast assured thyself that only two ears are listening to thee, say to that man that a person of quality—a lady, thou mayst say—wishes to speak with him on matters concerning his interest. Give him these gold pieces, as earnest of more to be had from the

sender of them. Bid him hold himself in readiness to accompany thee when thou shalt call for him to-morrow evening about the Ave Maria. This done, return hither to me. Have you understood?"

"Perfectly, your ladyship. I take for certain that I am to speak no word as to the person I serve, and to wear no badge of the house."

"Right, my friend. Also let none here know the scope of thy errand. Here is money to drink a cup with the host. Now go!"

And the second messenger to the city from the Villa Salviati departed on his errand.

The duchess, when left alone, began walking to and fro in her chamber, as she has been described to have done on a former occasion. But her frame of mind was now a very different one.

"Now let me think!" she muttered to herself, as she pressed the ends of the fingers of one hand on her heavily frowning forehead. "Or rather," she continued, "let me not think, but act. Of thinking there has been, Heaven wots, enow! The course before me is straight—straight and clear! The judgment has been pronounced—surely a righteous judgment. I am henceforward but the minister for its execution. What next is to be done? Ay, doing! that is the thing needed. Would that the hours could all be filled with action! The letter to my brother! That may be done at once. The letter to my noble and trusty brother!"

She sat down at a writing-table, and having written rapidly a few lines, placed them in an envelope, and addressed it to "The most Illustrious and Noble Prince Don Carlo Cybo, his own hands."

And then the nervous weary walking was recommenced; and the disobedient brain would think over and over again the thoughts which the will had decided on dismissing; and it seemed as if the hours which must elapse before the next step in the action for which the duchess was so eager could be taken, would never wear themselves away.

At length the close of the following day was reached, and the duchess, closely veiled, and attended only by Pippo, proceeded to the house of the fringe-maker, where she was obsequiously but silently ushered into a small room at the back of the house on the first floor.

"Now," she said to her follower, as she alighted at the door of the obscure house, "go to your appointment in the Via dei Pilastri, and bring the man here. Tell him he will see no one, save a lady alone, and that money is to be had for the coming to fetch it."

Then began again the restless pacing backwards and forwards of the few steps possible in the little room in which she found herself.

In about half an hour, which seemed to her impatience three hours at least, there came heavy steps up the stair and a tap at the door, and Pippo silently ushered into the room the drunkard son of Caterina's aged husband, Bartolommeo Canacci.

If the five years which had passed between Signor Giustino Canacci's marriage and the year 1638 had changed him from a hale old man to a half bedridden dotard, the alteration for the worse which they had worked in his son was yet greater. He was already at thirty years of age a mere wreck. Long continued habits of intemperance had so seasoned and yet at the same time shaken his nervous system, that he could hardly be said to be ever drunk, or ever sober. With trembling legs and palsied hands, blear-eyed, haggard, bloated and blotched in face, he was as unprepossessing an object as it is possible to imagine. And as he shuffled into the room where the duchess was awaiting him, with a stupid look of half-awakened curiosity mixed with a would-be defiant swagger, it needed an effort on her part so far to overcome the disgust he occasioned her, as to enter on the business with him which had brought her there.

Motioning him with her hand to sit on the opposite side of a little table in the centre of the room to that at which she seated herself as he entered, "Signor Bartolommeo Canacci," she began, in a slow, clear, magisterial kind of voice, "are you aware that the good name of your respectable and honourable house has been destroyed and made a byword in Florence?"

"Shouldn't wonder, lady fair, whoever you are. They are a bad lot in Casa Canacci, the old father and the young mother-in-law—a bad lot, fit to break an honest man's heart. But you know the song

When there's sorrow in thinking,
Then there's wisdom in drinking.

If it was not for practising that wisdom I should have gone to the church, heels foremost, long ago. But what have you got to say in the matter?"

"This I have to say, Bartolommeo Canacci. The vile abandoned woman whom your doting father made his wife, and who has made the shame of his life and the misery of yours, has also been the bane of mine."

"You don't mean that! Does she lock away every farthing of money—money that should be your own—where you can't get at it? Does she keep you out of your own house? Does she drive you to drink to get rid of care?"

"I tell you she has done worse than all this to me. Homeless! Yes, has she not made me homeless too? For what is my home to me! Man! I hate Caterina Canacci as no human being ever hated another yet!"

"Well, I am not much behind you in that matter, I'll warrant me. We are two in a boat, so far. But the worthy gentleman who brought me here to your ladyship said something, if I am not mistaken, about some transaction in current coin to take place here this evening. Now, I don't think it likely, upon the whole, that he could have alluded to any disbursement to be made by me to your ladyship."

"Are you in want of money?"

"A pretty question! Why, who the devil is not in want of money? Is not the grand-duke

always wanting money? Don't I look as if I had as princely or saintly an appetite for coin as any duke in the land, or saint in the calendar?"

"Do you like revenge on those who have injured you?"

"Why, what a question again! Do you like victuals when you are hungry? Have you any taste for rest when you are weary? Haven't I told you already that I hate . . . one . . . or two mayhap? Yes!" and his half-bantering, half-maudlin manner changed suddenly to an expression of brutal ferocity, while a dangerous gleam lighted up for a moment his dull dead eyes. "Yes, I *do* like revenge: perhaps, if I got a taste of it, should like it better than anything else to be had in this dog-hole of a world."

"Right, friend! I like it best of anything in all the world." The duchess returned fixedly the cruel wolfish glare that shot from under his sullen overhanging brow, looking into his eyes with a gleam of hate, as fierce and deadly as his own. "And," she continued, after a pause, "we hate the same person."

The bloodshot eye of the common-place ruffian deadened and fell beneath the intensity of vindictive passion concentrated in the face of the duchess. The lower nature and deteriorated organisation of the man was dominated and almost daunted by the superior energy and strength of will of the woman. The wretched drunkard wanted sundry things, after all, more than gratification of his hatred. Hatred is a spiritual passion. The body has no craving for it. And with the degraded sot, his body and its cravings had to be served before any needs of the spirit, however low and ignoble in their nature, could be heard. Drink, and wherewithal to procure it, was infinitely more necessary to him than the luxury of revenge. With the Lady Veronica it was otherwise. She spoke less than the whole truth, when she said that she loved revenge better than anything else in all the world. She might, with truth, have said that it was the only thing for which she cared and lived; that all else had become vanity, emptiness, and indifference. And yet the Lady Veronica was a mother, and had been a passionately loving wife. But it may be doubted whether she would *now* have bartered the prospect of revenge on her rival, even for the restoration of her husband's affection. For in such organisations as that of the duchess, vindictive hate is like the serpent which was generated from the rod of the prophet. No sooner has it been quickened in the soul, than it grows with awful rapidity to monstrous stature, and devours every other passion, and desire, and affection.

The flame of passion, therefore, that the lady's words had suddenly kindled in Bartolommeo's heart sunk down again as suddenly; cowed and quenched by the intenser passion that blazed in her own.

"But, may be," continued the duchess, perceiving the quick burning out of the straw fire she had raised, "may be you feel inclined to be

indulgent to this gay young mother-in-law? Perhaps you can not only forgive her for rendering your present life one of shifts and poverty, and making you a homeless vagabond, but are content that she should play out her game successfully to the end, be mistress of the old man's house and property while he lives, and inherit all when he dies? Perhaps your feeling is, that after all it will be best to content yourself for the remainder of your days with such alms as the bankrupt dyer's daughter and her paramours may throw you from time to time out of the contents of the old man's coffers? I thought I saw something in your eye a moment since, which looked as if you were not exactly the man to bend your neck to such a lot, and lick the hand which flings you a grudging pittance out of your own goods. But perhaps I was mistaken in my estimate."

A blacker scowl settled heavily on Bartolommeo's repulsive features, as the duchess spoke; but the fierce blaze of passion did not return to them. A long pause ensued, during which he seemed to be thinking, as far as his besotted and shattered mind was capable of thought. At last he answered:

"If your ladyship has no particular objection, I think we had better understand a little what the business in hand is, before we talk any further. I was brought here to you. I did not seek you. You know what you want. I don't. You know who I am. You may be the Queen of Sheba, for all I know of you. You want something of me. I have still to learn what it is. You did not bring me here, I suppose, merely to ask if I liked money and if I liked revenge. And as to what you say about my cursed mother-in-law—a bad death and a short shrift to her!—inheriting all the property, and my submitting to it; why, look you, the case stands thus; and as there are only four eyes* here present, there is no good reason against stating the case plainly. If I had thought it worth my while to cut her throat for the sake of paying off old scores, and preventing her standing between me and the old man's money, why I should have done it. You, I take it, for some reason or other, would like to have her throat cut, unless your hate is so dainty-stomached as to look for the treat of burning her alive. But I am not likely to do for you what I did not do long ago for myself. I have no taste for feeling the bargello's fingers about my neck. The game is too dangerous, do you see, for my liking."

The duchess, on her side, paused awhile, considering her reply to this address. She bit her lip, rose from her chair, and took one or two turns up and down the little chamber before she decided on her course of action. Then, seating herself again on the side of the table opposite to him, she said:

"— There is, as you say, no reason why the whole matter in hand should not be plainly spoken

between us. I have no wish to take an unfair advantage of you by remaining unknown to you, while I know you. I am the Duchess of San Giuliano."

Bartolommeo started, and lifted his hand to his hat, rising as he did so, and striving to remember whether he had said anything that could be dangerous to him—said in such a presence. The duchess motioned to him to reseal himself, and continued:

"I have told you that I hate Caterina Canacci, and you may probably be now at no loss to comprehend why I hate her. But you have mistaken me in supposing that my anger against her would lead me to take, or to wish taken, any such measures as you have alluded to. They are too dangerous, as you well remark, even if one wished to be guilty of murder. No. My project of revenge limits itself simply to the infliction of shame, and exposure, and the consequent cessation of—relations, which— are — loathsome to me." A choking sensation in her throat made the utterance of the last words difficult to the Lady Veronica. "I purpose," she went on, "introducing a number of persons into the house, good friends of mine, at an hour when she shall be caught in the midst of her infamous revels; when your father will be, shall be, made aware of his own dishonour, and of the character of his wife, and her public shame and disgrace shall become the byword of the town."

"Is that all, my lady? To my mind it seems a rather tasteless dish of vengeance for a hungry stomach. But then I am but a plain man. What is it that your honourable ladyship wants of me in the matter? Now your ladyship has condescended to tell me your ladyship's name, you know, of course, that I am at your service."

"What I want of you, Signor Canacci, is simply this: It would be difficult for the friends I spoke of, to obtain entrance at the right moment without making much more disturbance than is desirable. The door would undoubtedly be shut and barred against them. I look to you to have it opened. My friends shall keep out of sight under the shelter of the wall, while you alone ask admittance; and when the door is opened they will enter with you."

"In all that, your ladyship, I see no difficulty at all. It will, at all events, make la Caterina pass a bad half-hour enough. Egad! I should like the fun. But your honourable ladyship will no doubt understand that, though there be in such a matter no such consequences to be feared as if the question were of throats to be cut, still it is likely enough that my connivance may be called in question, to my loss, and it was probably in view of such a risk that your ladyship was so considerate as to speak, by the mouth of the worthy gentleman who brought me hither, of moneys to be had in recompense for my attendance here?"

"Those who serve me are not wont to remain unpaid, or to grumble at the rate of their payment."

* "A quattr' occhi" is a favourite Tuscan expression for a tête-à-tête.

"No doubt; but it was with reference to that part of the business in hand, that your ladyship condescended to inquire at the beginning of this conversation whether I were in need of money. Permit me, eccellentissima signora,* to repeat, that I am in truth very greatly in need—indeed in urgent need—of some small supply."

"Remember, Signor Bartolommeo, that in carrying out this little scheme you will be in a very important degree serving your own interest. For it is not likely that the old man your father, when he shall have been made acquainted with the conduct of his wife, and shall know that the dishonour she has done him has been made the common talk of the town, will persist in disinheriting his son to enrich his widow."

"Most true, signora mia colendissima!† If Ser Giustino have still sense and self-respect enough to feel his position as he ought—which, alas! may be much doubted—such a result would be likely to follow. But all that is uncertain, very uncertain. . . . And my needs are certain and pressing."

"And I repeat that they shall be cared for liberally. Now, mark me well! The day and hour when this little comedy shall be played out, is not yet fixed. It shall be played very shortly; as soon as I have arranged the matter with the knot of friends who are to be the chief performers. You are to hold yourself in readiness to do your part any evening on which you may be called on. You are in the habit, I suppose, of being seen in the house from time to time?"

"Now and then! . . . Rarely enough, to tell your ladyship the truth. I am not received there in a manner to make my visits very frequent."

"But they are sufficiently so, I presume, for you to be known to the servant, and to be sure of not being refused admittance?"

"Oh! for that matter, yes, your ladyship. They could hadly refuse to open my father's door to me."

"Very good. Perhaps it would be well to drop in two or three times during the next week or so, and comport yourself in a manner to show the woman that she has nothing to fear from you. Be quiet, inoffensive, sober—you understand me? Then you have nothing further to do than to await my summons. It shall be brought you by the man who conducted you hither. My friends will be ready in their hiding-place. A dark night shall be selected. You will cause the door to be opened. That is all that is required of you. My friends will do the rest. Have you marked me?"

* According to the ceremonial of that time, the only personages for whom the title of Eccellentissimo was reserved, in Tuscany, were the Dukes Strozzi and Salviati. It shortly afterwards became almost universal.

† The phrase may be tolerably accurately rendered by "your most worshipful ladyship."

"Every word, your most excellent ladyship. I shall not fail to be ready for your orders."

"Let it be understood, then, that you will be found any evening, without the necessity of any further communication, at the Osteria del Giardino. You will know the man with whom you spoke to-day? To make all certain, he shall say, when he calls for you, 'The comedy for to-night is Love's Revenge.' That shall be your password. Now take this purse. When the trick has been played, you shall not want for more. So it is all understood and agreed?"

"In every point, most gracious lady," said Bartolommeo, rising and making a profound bow. "Doubt not that all shall be done accurately, according to your orders. I shall be found at the Osteria."

"Enough," said the duchess, rising also. "Of course," she added, "it will be necessary to let fall no word of this little plan, or of this interview, till the play has been played out. Afterwards I care not. To speak before, would only spoil the scheme, and lose you many a purse hereafter such as that now in your hand."

"Of course, your ladyship. What am I that such a caution should be needed!"

"Good! Send me the man who called you to me. You will find him below."

And the duchess returned up the hill to the villa, grimly satisfied with the result of her interview, and specially with the change she had made in the mode of conducting it, as soon as she had discovered the manner of man she had to deal with.

As she alighted at the door of her home, she drew a letter from her bosom, the same which she had written and addressed to her brother, and turning to her faithful servitor, Pippo, said:

"Saddle for Massa to-morrow morning. Deliver this into the hands of my brother. Wait for his orders before returning. Speak to none here of your errand."

Old Pippo bowed and took the letter in silence. The duchess mounted to her room to count the hours till the next act in her "little comedy" should be ready for performance.

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